



HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM
ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

2025



2025 HLPF Thematic Review

Expert Group Meeting

21-22 January 2025

Meeting Summary for SDG 5¹

1. Introduction

The 2025 High Level Political Forum (HLPF) is focusing on “Advancing sustainable, inclusive, science- and evidence-based solutions for the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs for leaving no one behind”. The 2025 HLPF will conduct an in-depth review of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3 – Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages, SDG 5 – Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, SDG 8 – Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all, SDG 14 – Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development, and SDG 17 – Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development.

At the 10th anniversary of the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, the HLPF will provide an opportunity to assess progress on these goals, and identify transformative actions to radically accelerate progress on SDG implementation in the remaining five years, connecting with other intergovernmental processes such as the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Beijing+30), the 3rd UN Ocean Conference, the 4th International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD4), and the Second World Summit for Social Development, thus creating synergies that underscore the interconnectedness of the SDGs.

In preparation for the review of SDG 5 – and its vital role in advancing sustainable development across the 2030 Agenda, the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Division for Sustainable Development Goals (UN-DESA/DSDG) and UN Women, organized an Expert Group Meeting (EGM). The EGM brought together a diverse range of experts, from civil society, private sector, academia, philanthropists, government, international organization and international financial organizations, with a common goal: accelerating progress towards gender equality, and ensuring the rights and the empowerment of all women and girls around the world. Experts explored actionable measures to uphold the rights of women and girls, amplify their voices, and ensure their contributions are to global development efforts including the HLPF 2025. The EGM’s insights will be available to Member States, for consideration while shaping the HLPF Ministerial Declaration.

Achieving SDG 5 requires concrete actions in multiple related areas. These include eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices, preventing and addressing sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), eliminating harmful

¹ The recommendations expressed in this report are a summary of the contributions made by experts in the meeting and do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations.

practices like child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM), and guaranteeing universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights. Advancing women's economic empowerment is essential, including securing equal access to financial services, ownership and secure rights to land and property, and economic resources, while also recognizing the crucial role of women and girls as agents of change in all aspects of sustainable development. Strengthening gender-responsive policies and budgeting, bridging the digital divide, and leveraging technology for women's empowerment are equally vital. The HLPF provides a unique opportunity to advance science-based decision-making and forge global solidarity around gender equality, guiding Member States and the UN system toward a sustainable, resilient, and inclusive future, including strengthening mechanisms to monitor the impact and ensuring the practical implementation and enforcement of these policies and laws

2. Stocktaking and challenges

With just five years remaining until the 2030 deadline for achieving the SDGs, gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls is off track. The last review of SDG 5 at the HLPF in 2022 highlighted the immense burdens women faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, including loss of employment, increased gender-based violence, and disruptions to health services. While there have been positive developments since then, such as new laws protecting reproductive rights and increased women's labour force participation, these gains are insufficient to achieve SDG 5 by 2030. Moreover, progress has been uneven across different regions, with marginalized communities facing the greatest setbacks. As the Gender Snapshot 2024 revealed, there are significant costs of not achieving gender equality² and delivering the promises of the 2030 Agenda, underscoring the urgency of decisive action.

None of the targets under SDG 5 have been fully met, with persistent challenges continuing to stall progress. Parity in women's participation in public life remains elusive, and at the current pace of progress, achieving parity in management positions, is projected to take an additional 176 years (SDG 5.1)³. Gender-based violence persists in all countries of the world, regardless of income, race, age, religion or other characteristics, and disproportionately affects forcibly displaced and stateless women and girls and women with disabilities (SDG 5.2). Though, harmful practices targeting women and girls are decreasing, the current pace of change remains too slow (SDG 5.3). The burden of unpaid care and domestic work traps women in cycles of poverty and inequality (SDG 5.4). Women's representation in decision-making spheres remains low, and structural barriers continue to limit their access to leadership opportunities. Women's participation continues to lag in political representation and the labour market (SDG 5.5). While there have been positive trends, far too many women still lack access to sexual and reproductive health services (SDG 5.6). Reforms in some areas have not been sufficient, as many countries still lack adequate legal protections in inheritance and land laws. Women continue to face disparities in land ownership, control, and decision-making, particularly in agricultural households where they are disproportionately affected by insecure land rights (SDG 5.a)

Since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 1995, progress has been made, but it has been slow and fragile, undermining broader development gains. Urgent action to accelerate the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action is essential to realizing the 2030 Agenda and ensuring that no woman or girl is left behind.

Between 2019 and 2023, 56 legal reforms were enacted to advance gender equality⁴. However, no country has closed the legal gaps necessary to secure women's rights, with critical shortcomings in areas such as unpaid care work, access to sexual and reproductive health services, and gender parity in political and corporate leadership.

The outlook for financing for gender equality also portrays a bleak picture, with projections indicating that if current government spending trends persist, the annual funding shortfall to close the gender gap will reach \$360 billion⁵. This

² <https://www.unwomen.org/en/resources/gender-snapshot>

³ The data are from United Nations [The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2024](#) unless otherwise stated.

⁴ <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-09/progress-on-the-sustainable-development-goals-the-gender-snapshot-2024-en.pdf>

⁵ [The costs of achieving the SDGs: Road to gender equality | UNCTAD](#)

shortfall hinders critical gender-responsive programs, including those focused on combating violence against women and girls (VAWG), improving maternal health, and increasing women's economic participation.

These challenges are further exacerbated by data gaps that hinder comprehensive, intersectional monitoring—an essential tool for driving transformative change.

The failure to translate the commitments of the Beijing Platform for Action into tangible results—coupled with chronic underfunding for gender equality—has been exacerbated by the ongoing polycrisis. As highlighted in the last review of SDG 5 at the HLPF in 2022, the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, armed conflicts, and economic instability have deepened gender disparities, jeopardizing hard-won gains. Moreover, the 30-year review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action finds that in 2024, one in four countries report backlash on women's rights⁶.

To meet the 2030 deadline, gender equality must be placed at the heart of global efforts, marked by concrete investments, multi-stakeholder partnerships and strong political will driving lasting transformative change.

3. Key considerations for the future

In terms of progress on gender equality, it is a mixed picture. This year's HLPF provides the unique opportunity to leverage the agreement reached by world leaders at the Summit of the Future. The Pact for the Future clearly stipulates that gender equality, and the empowerment of women and girls are essential components for achieving sustainable development - not only as a standalone goal but also as a way to advance progress across all SDGs⁷. Looking to the next five years and beyond, experts in the EGM identified several trends that are likely to shape progress toward achieving SDG 5 and must be taken into consideration by policymakers.

Expanding women's participation in the technological future. Women drop out from science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education and STEM careers at high rates ("leaky pipeline"). Women account for only 35 percent of all STEM graduates⁸. Stereotypes regarding women's lower interest in science, gender pay gaps, and limited opportunities for growth and promotion lead to the underrepresentation of women in digital sectors. Online harassment discourages women from entering technological fields or taking on leadership roles. Globally the share of female researchers, at 31.5 per cent, has barely changed since 2011⁹. This lack of women's participation is reflected, for example, in the advances in Artificial Intelligence (AI) and machine learning, in how models are biased against women and minorities and how in large language models, sexist language abounds. Robust and inclusive policy framework are essential to fostering a more equitable tech landscape. In addition, promoting the participation of more women in AI development and integrating gender-transformative design principles in technology can mitigate these biases

Empowering women to adapt to climate change. Climate change disproportionately affects women, particularly informal sector workers and small-scale farmers reliant on weather-dependent agriculture. Improving local-level access to climate financing for women remains a persistent challenge. A Global Climate Resilience Fund (GCRF) could address these challenges, by providing an enabling financial environment for strengthening climate action, accessing renewable energy equipment, climate-related loans, and building financial resilience. Gender equality remains a contested issue within the UNFCCC COP processes, leading to setbacks in integrating women's rights and gender considerations into global climate policy and action. Additionally, national implementation of gender-responsive

⁶ <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2025/03/womens-rights-in-review-30-years-after-beijing>

⁷ <https://www.un.org/en/summit-of-the-future/pact-for-the-future>

⁸ <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-09/progress-on-the-sustainable-development-goals-the-gender-snapshot-2024-en.pdf>

⁹ <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-09/progress-on-the-sustainable-development-goals-the-gender-snapshot-2024-en.pdf>

climate policies is slow, with gaps between global, regional, and national commitments, requiring greater harmonization to ensure more effective and coordinated action.

Including women in the workforce with equal compensation. Removing barriers to women's labour force participation would increase GDP by 20 percent¹⁰. Women must be empowered to be productive members of the economy who are fairly compensated for their contribution. There are many barriers, not least financing. Gender transformative investments and policies can operate at the intersection of SDG 5 and SDG 8 including equal pay for equal work, universal social protection, access to affordable childcare, and work environments free from gender-based violence and harassment. Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) and many other organizations promote women's entrepreneurship and advocate for women owned businesses as a practical way forward, without additional gender discrimination or additional administrative burdens. Effective implementation depends on an adequate supporting framework—for example, a system for tracking gender-related pay disparities and the availability of budgets and services for women who survive violence and other forms of gender-based discrimination in the workplace.

Closing persistent financing gaps that hold women back. Multiple experts highlighted financing gaps and their effect on women including the persistent gendered nature of poverty, which is being exacerbated by climate change. The decline in official development assistance (ODA) to reduce gender equality was noted and several participants referenced the need for innovative financing models such as gender lens investing, blended finance and gender budgeting. Despite being gender responsive in several key aspects, the absence of a gender perspective was noted in regard to international development cooperation, climate and humanitarian finance, financing for startups and businesses, alongside other areas. Experts emphasised opportunities to address these in the upcoming Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD4) though some questioned the extent to which high-level political processes have a direct impact on women's everyday lives and emphasised the importance of participatory policymaking. Limited accountability and tracking, with an intersectional analysis, of government spending on (and results of) policies were also noted. The gender-responsive allocation of international climate finance remains a challenge, with only a fraction of resources directly benefiting women and girls. Financing must be directed to policies with the greatest impact for gender equality, but the lack of data is a barrier to identifying these. As for philanthropic actors and other social impact investors, a complex operating environment is a challenge in the context of current politics, coordination challenges and fluctuations in the market.

Strengthening grassroots women's movements and organizations which stand to drive progress on gender equality. Women's movements and organizations are leading on innovations that could enhance gender equality with additional financial investments and scale up. Promoting self-reliance and the formalization of women-led businesses as well as expanding digital and financial inclusion are issues highlighted by these organizations around the globe. Moreover, women-led local innovative social protection initiatives, including pooled savings schemes, shared land access and effective ownership and control of land, and food-sharing networks have been shown to address immediate challenges while building community resilience. At the same time, experts indicated that in many contexts, harmful gender norms are being reinforced, limiting women's opportunities for leadership and decision-making. Regional or national backsliding in gender norms, and the ongoing challenge of sustaining feminist movements in the face of regressions was discussed. Backlash against women's empowerment and regressive views of rights are major challenges.

¹⁰ [Women, Business and the Law 2024](#)

4. Policies and actions to maximize synergies, mitigate trade-offs and drive transformation

Achieving SDG 5 is a foundational issue for the entire 2030 Agenda and for all the sustainable development goals. In this context, experts identified innovative solutions, good practices, and global and national policies that show potential for accelerating progress and reversing losses from multiple crises. There was a particular focus on solutions that leave no one behind, and leverage interlinkages with other goals including especially the SDGs under review at the 2025 HLPF (3,5,8,14,17).

Prioritize regional and national implementation of existing human rights and legal frameworks. Governments are accountable not only for the SDGs but also to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and other global human rights instruments which are key tools to monitor and drive gender equality initiatives. Stronger partnerships between grassroots, national, and international organizations are essential to ensure unified efforts towards implementation. Experts emphasized the importance of legal equality as the cornerstone of broader gender equality efforts, noting that not a single country has yet achieved full legal equality as per indicator 5.1.1. Despite 56 positive legal reforms between 2019 and 2023, no country has all relevant laws in place. Policymakers are urged to build on the progress achieved through collaborative efforts and to advance legal reforms that support gender equality. At the same time, gender gaps persist not only in the laws but also in practice calling for better monitoring of laws as well as policies designed to implement them. It is important to measure the implementation of the law, for example, by tracking policies on allocating resources, providing training, and collecting sex-disaggregated data. In fact, less than 40% of the supportive frameworks needed to implement gender-equal laws have been established globally.¹¹

Dismantle discriminatory laws, stereotypes, and unequal norms. Achieving SDG 5 requires strong political leadership, dismantling discriminatory laws, and targeted investment in women and girls. Access to sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) must be recognized as a critical aspect of poverty eradication and achieving SDGs, with a focus on integration of SRHR into healthcare systems, leveraging the synergy with SDG 3. Experts urged for an integrated approach towards addressing gender-based violence, sexual exploitation of women and girls, trafficking and the SDGs. Speakers highlighted examples of impactful initiatives with multiplier effects, including the provision of SRHR services in marginalized regions and countries. The adoption of the first UN resolution on intersex rights was also viewed as a milestone. Gender issues have primarily been considered women's and girls' issues, placing the responsibility for solving them primarily on women and girls. Changing attitudes and behaviors, and working with men and boys, have been increasingly recognized as important strategies, essential to transforming social norms and institutional practices that perpetuate gender inequalities. Rigid gender norms socialise men and boys to discriminate against women, girls, and LGBTQI individuals, among others.

Ensure participatory data collection and policymaking. Participants emphasized the need to enhance representation or voice, and the context of data, through comprehensive approaches. These included addressing barriers to gender data, including disaggregation across all levels of the data value chain, expanding age brackets in surveys, fostering meaningful stakeholder engagement—particularly for marginalized groups—and embracing diverse data sources to accurately capture the lived experiences of women and girls. It is important to design initial surveys with these dimensions incorporated into collection frameworks from the start. Diving below the national level is essential to uncover disparities within countries, such as those affecting rural or underserved populations. Disaggregating data by gender, age, disability, ethnicity, location and other relevant characteristics to understand the realities of vulnerable and marginalized groups should be considered a default requirement and disaggregated data should be considered in each stage of the data value chain. Successful practices include integrating citizen and community-led data into national systems, which can help fill critical gaps and provide evidence for policy actions, and these should be scaled up.

¹¹ [Women, Business and the Law 2024 Report](#)

Ensure data and analysis serve as tools to drive tangible improvements in people's lives and achieve the SDGs. There is a need to move beyond data silos and fragmented databases, advocating for a more integrated approach that aligns gender data efforts with the overarching objectives of the SDGs. Relying on quantitative data alone can obscure broader realities. A mixed-methods or multi-sectoral approach of integrating qualitative data, triangulation of data collected or space for anecdotal information to contextualize numbers, provide a deeper understanding of lived experiences and fill in gaps where quantitative data cannot be collected. Expanding frameworks like the Data Value Chain to incorporate feedback loops, ethical considerations, and qualitative insights offers a more inclusive and contextual approach to data collection and analysis. It is important for governments to partner with different actors and stakeholders, including civil society organizations, to discuss and align on definitions to be incorporated into national systems and to build trust with communities more broadly.

Adopt an intersectional approach to "Leave No One Behind." Data plays a key role and using intersectional data to identify policy gaps and align SDG 5 with other goals, such as health, education and climate, provides a pathway to build synergies. Experts advocated for extending or including different age brackets in surveys, in particular, to ensure older women are not left out of data collection methods, considering they are a quarter of the population. Participants discussed how frameworks like CEDAW and Beijing+30 address the intersectionality of disability with other identities, shaping experiences and governmental acceptance. Women with disabilities require policies that view disability as an integral part of identity rather than a condition needing aid. A key concern raised was the existence of severe restrictions on bodily autonomy for women with disabilities, including forced sterilization and restricted access to reproductive health services. Women in informal employment are also often overlooked, leaving them excluded from government schemes and subsidies.

Scale up programs for a holistic approach to address Violence against Women and Girls While there are laws against VAWG in place in most countries, they are often not substantively implemented due to traditional norms and weak buy-in. Unclear definitions of VAWG exacerbate the problem – for instance, some governments do not define FGM as VAWG. There is real potential for impact and sustainability, both in vertical (through existing infrastructure and ministries) and horizontal (on geographic levels) programmes on eliminating VAWG, including through strengthening women's rights movements (including financially), and working closely with different sectors such as education and health. Women's economic empowerment and access to decent work are key to protecting women from becoming victims, and to enable them to escape harmful situations. Legal protection, enforcement mechanisms, and access to justice for survivors must also be strengthened. Media can be an ally in reshaping the narrative around GBV. At the same time, technological advances and social media also heighten the risk of violence and harassment in the online space. Several participants highlighted the need to work with boys and men, from a young age, to dismantle harmful patriarchal norms and stereotypes to turn them into allies in the fight against GBV. An example of a successful mechanism is targeting men in parenting programmes, as research has shown that men are most open to changing their beliefs about gender norms when they are on the cusp of change in their lives. Another important set of actors in interventions, such as awareness raising, are religious and traditional leaders, especially as VAWG often involves harmful cultural practices such as child marriage and FGM. The need for consistent and coordinated action by the UN system was underlined by experts. Participants urged that elimination of VAWG needs to be mainstreamed across all targets and recommendations for the HLPF as it intersects with all the SDGs.

Address caregiving burdens to alleviate poverty as experienced by women and girls. Recognizing and supporting unpaid caregivers through targeted interventions, such as formal childcare or cash transfers, can ease women's workload and enhance their ability to participate in the economy. Investing in national care infrastructure is crucial to reducing the disproportionate burden on women. Flexible working arrangements and the provision and uptake of maternity, paternity and shared parental leave and other social benefits linked to parenthood in workplaces should be provided across all sectors, including in the public sector. These should be encouraged and supported in the private sector and in decision-making spaces through effective gender policies and International Labour Organization (ILO)

standards and guidance. Strengthening partnerships with local organizations, CSOs, and international entities offers a pathway to improving service delivery, particularly in rural and indigenous communities where formal mechanisms are often lacking.

Support targeted interventions and gender-responsive social protection systems (SPS) that break the intergenerational cycle of feminization of poverty. There is a critical need for comprehensive, sustainable, and state-owned social protection systems designed to address the diverse needs of women and girls. These systems must cater to specific groups, such as young women, single mothers, caregivers, and marginalized populations. Experts emphasized the importance of flexibility and accessibility, suggesting strategies like bringing services closer to communities, establishing one-stop shops for holistic service delivery, and creating tailored opportunities to meet varied needs. Accountability is vital for progress, with clear, measurable targets to track the impact of gender-responsive SPS. By pairing measures with strong accountability frameworks and measurable targets, social protection initiatives can become more effective and inclusive.

Promote community-driven, inclusive solutions for environmental challenges including in agricultural systems. The intersection of climate change and gender equality presents unique challenges and opportunities for advancing sustainable development and building resilience. Successful initiatives included training women in Distributed Renewable Energy (DRE) systems and providing entrepreneurial support – so that women do not just remain users but become owners, managers, distributors and users of energy. Ensuring access to apprenticeships in local energy companies further enable hands on training. To encourage rural women to take up adaptive farming practices and technologies, gender-based constraints to accessing and mobilizing resources need to be addressed. Enhancing access to gender-responsive advisory services to promote climate resilience among rural women is important. As is promoting participatory extension methodologies, such as farmer field schools, allowing women to experiment with climate-adaptive practices in a low-risk setting, and increasing the number of female extension agents to improve women's comfort in seeking advice and adopting sustainable practices. Such approaches can empower rural women to make informed decisions and translate their adaptive actions into meaningful improvements in their agricultural systems. To ensure these efforts are fully effective, gender-transformative approaches that challenge discriminatory norms limiting women's economic agency need to be promoted.

Expand access to STEM education for women and girls and improve digital literacy for women of all ages. STEM education and digital empowerment can enable women to contribute across the SDGs. This includes ensuring access to digital devices and internet connectivity, data analytics and human resources, especially for rural and marginalized women. Increasing access to finance, markets and skills building and technology would advance women's economic opportunities. Digital training can be channelled through women's organizations, bundled with the provision of mainstreaming literacy classes. Other ideas from the experts included - strengthening gender inclusiveness and awareness among service providers and policy makers while ensuring women benefit from digital extension services, financial products and e-commerce platforms; and promoting digital entrepreneurship programmes and establishing innovation hubs targeting women to support them to start and grow their own businesses in the digital economy.

Foster women's leadership in technology. Training, mentorship, and networking for career growth were emphasized as imperative for gender equality and women's empowerment. Women in leadership roles are important to address biases and non-representation in AI and other advanced technologies. For human-centered and gender-responsive approaches to AI, better regulation and oversight of AI are needed. Participants emphasized the need for supporting gender transformative digital technology research and development through increased funding and prioritization. They also underscored the implementation of gender equality commitments in the Global Digital Compact, including through a new CEDAW General Comment on technology and digital rights.

Develop initiatives and programming that engage men and boys in the promotion of gender equality and to challenge gender stereotypes and negative social norms. Participants emphasized the need to sensitize boys and young men about their behaviours both online and offline, addressing toxic masculinity and harmful narratives spread through technology. This can encourage men and boys to take an active part in efforts to prevent and eliminate SGBV in the digital sphere. The engagement of men and boys is essential to address misogynistic narratives being spread in the digital context, which reinforce discrimination and incite violence against women and girls.

5. Means of implementation: Mechanisms and partnerships to accelerate progress

Achieving progress on SDG 5 requires solutions that can be adopted and scaled up through collaboration among all stakeholders and sectors - governments, business, individuals, civil society, the science and technology community. Strong partnerships stand at the centre of accelerating progress.

Partnerships

Building resilient and inclusive societies requires strong collaboration across local, national, and international levels. Strengthening coordination among grassroots, community, national, and international organizations can unify efforts to promote legal reforms and ensure systemic and lasting progress. By bringing together ministerial and high-level representatives of governments, as well as a wide range of expertise and stakeholders, the HLPF presents a key opportunity to advance science-based decision-making and global solidarity on gender equality, guiding Member States and the UN system toward a sustainable, resilient, and inclusive future.

Partnerships with local organizations, civil society, and international entities are critical in ensuring that no one is left behind. The EGM highlighted that multi-stakeholder partnerships enhance service delivery, particularly in rural, local and Indigenous communities where formal mechanisms are often lacking. These collaborations not only meet immediate needs but also build long-term community resilience. Governments must support and scale up community-driven social protection initiatives, such as pooled savings schemes, shared land access and effective ownership and control of land, and food-sharing networks, ensuring that those most affected by inequality have a voice in shaping solutions.

Engagement with parliamentarians, coupled with inclusive consultations with various stakeholders—especially with marginalized groups—and strategic public communication, are key in generating broad support for gender equality. While travel grants for participation in global decision-making hubs are important to ensure inclusivity, policies must also reflect on-the-ground realities, including those of women with disabilities and those affected by multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination.

Cross-sector collaboration is also instrumental in generating innovative and sustainable solutions. Partnering with the private sector to share data, such as mobile usage statistics, can inform gender-responsive policies. Feminist journalists can help shift media narratives to focus on perpetrators of VAWG, preventing revictimization. Trade unions play a crucial role in advocating for laws addressing VAWG, particularly in collective bargaining agreements and national laws on third-party violence.

Global Standards

Harmonized global standards are essential for advancing gender equality as is ensuring policy coherence across all global intergovernmental processes. Strengthening frameworks like the Copenhagen Framework on Citizen Data can inform policies and lead to the acceleration of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable development by contributing to the integration of qualitative and grassroots data into national frameworks, ensuring data is consistently disaggregated by

factors such as gender, age, disability, and ethnicity. International standards should recognize the value of data from local communities and civil society and the importance of their integration in the data ecosystem in countries.

Adopting clear and universally recognized definitions, including on VAWG and harmful practices such as female genital mutilation which some governments fail to classify as such, is crucial to closing legal gaps in protection. Such efforts should be complemented by the full implementation of legal frameworks, such as ILO Convention 190, including in areas like technology and social media.

Accountability

Holding governments accountable to gender equality, rights and the empowerment of women and girls' commitments requires leveraging global mechanisms beyond the SDGs, including the Beijing Platform for Action, CEDAW, and other human rights instruments. The HLPF can play a key role by urging CEDAW ratification, strengthening human rights mechanisms with technical and financial support, and promoting initiatives like UN Women's *Equality in Law for Women and Girls by 2030*.

The experts emphasized the need for governance reforms to ensure women's full, equal, and meaningful participation in decision-making. They underscored that merely having women present is not sufficient and that their voices must be actively integrated into policymaking and agenda-setting across all sectors and spheres, including climate action, trade and financing matters. To drive progress, well-funded indicators should be established to track advancements in women's political and economic leadership, providing a basis for informed next steps.

Within the context of effective gender-responsive budgeting, institutional accountability and public monitoring were highlighted as critical. Experts urged for governments to publish regular reports, enabling civil society to hold them accountable. The experience of some countries shows that despite the existence of multiple tools for assessing feminist foreign policy, weak accountability has led to poor implementation. Integrating feminist foreign policy frameworks into ministry-level mechanisms was proposed as a solution to enhance tracking and enforcement.

Strong accountability mechanisms must also address abuses, particularly harassment and discrimination, both offline and online, against women, girls and activists. Strengthening monitoring, reporting, and enforcement measures ensures that governments fulfil their commitments, making gender equality a tangible and measurable reality. The importance of leveraging the commitments made under the Global Digital Compact was also underscored in the context of closing the gender digital divide while ensuring the safety of women and girls.

Transforming harmful norms and capacity building

The EGM underscored the importance of engaging diverse actors, including religious and community leaders, men, and boys as essential to transforming harmful social and gender norms and to fostering more equitable environments. Educating boys and young men about their online and offline behaviour was highlighted as crucial to dismantling patriarchal norms, challenging toxic masculinity, and countering harmful narratives.

At the same time, actively involving young women and local communities in the design and implementation of digital tools was emphasized to ensure these technologies are people-centered, inclusive, and accountable. To bridge the gender digital divide, experts recommended tailored digital literacy programs for women of all ages, affordable internet access through public-private partnerships and dedicated funding for gender-responsive innovation. These efforts should prioritize evidence-based, long-term prevention strategies in schools and communities.

Experts also stressed that accelerating progress toward the SDGs requires scaling up successful digital initiatives. They cited the use of self-reporting apps to identify GBV hotspots and the potential of AI to combat online gender discrimination by detecting and blocking harmful content in real time while enabling anonymous reporting

mechanisms. Integrating technology, education, and prevention strategies can drive systemic change and create safer, more inclusive digital and physical spaces.

Financing

Experts underscored the importance of innovative financing models in closing funding gaps highlighting the potential of gender lens investing, blended finance, and cross-sector collaboration—including partnerships with the private sector, civil society, governments, and workers' organizations—to unlock new funding opportunities for women and girls. Expanding gender bonds and dedicated investment portfolios for women-led enterprises was emphasized as a strategy to enhance economic empowerment. Experts emphasized the need for the international financial system to support national governments in financing social protection initiatives by leveraging innovative global funding mechanisms, such as reinvesting returns from social security funds. Expanding efforts like the Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection, and sharing lessons and best practices from pathfinder countries, was highlighted as an example that can strengthen global learning and inform evidence-based policy-making. Additionally, expanding access to finance through blended finance models can empower women entrepreneurs and enhance economic resilience. The importance of fostering more sustainable nonprofit models and improving donor coordination was also emphasised as essential to maximizing long-term impact.

The active participation of trade unions in the design and monitoring of financing agreements, loans, and projects was also recognized as important to ensuring accountability. Their involvement helps safeguard labour rights and ensures that funding supports gender equality policies. Strengthening financial systems, fostering cross-sector collaboration, and prioritizing gender-transformative investments are critical to driving long-term, systemic progress toward a more equitable global economy.

Experts also noted that achieving gender equality requires sustained investment and the adoption of an intersectional approach by policymakers to ensure funding decisions are data-driven, responsive to diverse needs, and accountable through clear, measurable outcomes. Investing in gender-sensitive statistical systems and ensuring that national statistical offices have the resources to produce robust, disaggregated data were therefore highlighted as key steps in this direction.