

Gender Equality

Global Annual Results Report 2019



Cover image: © UNICEF/UN0259712/Dejongh Girls at the Asuokaw Methodist School in Eastern Region, Ghana. UNICEF works with its partners in Ghana on a variety of education initiatives including the development of gender-responsive school curricula; gender training for education professionals; gender-responsive approaches to promoting 'safe school' environments; and interventions that target adolescent girls' secondary school completion and skills-development, including in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics).

Expression of thanks

The work of UNICEF is funded entirely through the voluntary support of millions of people around the world and our partners in government, civil society and the private sector. Voluntary contributions enable UNICEF to deliver on its mandate to protect children's rights, help meet their basic needs and expand their opportunities to reach their full potential. We take this opportunity to thank all our partners for their commitment and trust in UNICEF.

UNICEF expresses sincere appreciation to all the partners who have contributed to our work to achieve greater gender equality in our humanitarian and development programming in 2019. It is their support that allows us to provide technical, operational and programming assistance to countries to address gender inequalities and to impact the lives of millions of girls and boys, women and men across the world.

The flexibility of thematic funds provides for sustainability in our programmes and allows UNICEF to offer a full range of support to countries and regions. In this regard, we would especially like to thank the governments of Canada and Luxembourg, and Chloé and Clé de Peau Beauté for their contributions to the 2019 Global Thematic Fund for Gender Equality. UNICEF will continue to explore new ways of enhancing visibility for contributing partners to global-level thematic funding, and we look forward to growing our collaborations in the future.

Partner testimonial

"The last decade has witnessed considerable improvements in development outcomes for girls and boys. Yet, children from the poorest and most marginalized families and communities continue to suffer, and gender-based discrimination and inequality determine whether a child will grow up healthy, educated and safe. Girls, especially in developing countries, face disproportionate threats to their well-being. In fact, millions of girls continue to be subjected to harmful practices and widespread gender-based violence, while facing barriers to access to quality basic social services. The firm commitment to promote gender equality led to Luxembourg being the very first partner to contribute, since 2016, to the UNICEFThematic Fund for Gender Equality. As a founding member and co-chair of the Group of Friends on Children and Sustainable Development Goals, Luxembourg also advocates for children's rights and places children at the centre of Agenda 2030. This thematic priority is consistent with Luxembourg's Development Cooperation Strategy *The Road to 2030*, supporting global efforts towards poverty eradication, environmental sustainability and human rights."

- Paulette Lenert, Minister for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Affairs, Luxembourg

Seventy-three years after UNICEF was established and 30 years since the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the organization's mission to promote the full attainment of the rights of all children is as urgent as ever.

The UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021 is anchored in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and charts a course towards attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals and the realization of a future in which every child has a fair chance in life. It sets out measurable results for children, especially the most disadvantaged, including in humanitarian situations, and defines the change strategies and enablers that support their achievement.

Working together with governments, United Nations partners, the private sector, civil society and with the full participation of children, UNICEF remains steadfast in its commitment to realize the rights of all children, everywhere, and to achieve the vision of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, a world in which no child is left behind.

The following report summarizes how UNICEF and its partners contributed to Gender Equality in 2019 and reviews the impact of these accomplishments on children and the communities where they live. This is one of eight reports on the results of efforts during the past year, encompassing gender equality and humanitarian action as well as each of the five Strategic Plan goal areas – 'Every child survives and thrives', 'Every child learns', 'Every child is protected from violence and exploitation', 'Every child lives in a safe and clean environment' and 'Every child has an equitable chance in life' – and a supplementary report on Communication for Development (C4D, also referred to as social and behaviour change communication, SBCC). It supplements the 2019 Executive Director Annual Report (EDAR/MTR), UNICEF's official accountability document for the past year.

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Executive Summary

Pictured above: Sabirin Nur, 18 years of age, a refugee from Somalia, is captain of the volleyball team at the UNICEF-supported Melkadida primary school for refugee children in Ethiopia. Through a partnership with the non-governmental organization Right to Play, UNICEF is promoting integration between host and refugee primary schools through sports clubs and tournaments.

Recent data reveal a number of positive gains for girls in the 25 years since the Beijing Platform for Action was launched. More girls are able to access and continue their primary education and there have been encouraging declines in child marriage in several high-burden countries. Laws are being reformed to advance gender equality, and concrete actions are being taken to make national systems such as health, education, water and sanitation more responsive to the needs and vulnerabilities of millions of underserved women and girls.

This all remains not nearly enough, however, to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. The scale and scope of the gender inequities that continue to violate the rights and limit the opportunities of women and girls worldwide outpace progress in too many areas. These are rooted in webs of poverty and gendered social norms that perpetuate unequal power dynamics, to the disadvantage especially of the poorest and most marginalized communities.

Even now, one in three adolescent girls will experience female genital mutilation (FGM) in countries where the practice is concentrated, and one in five girls will be married early. Recent data from 51 countries revealed that only 57 per cent of married women and girls aged 15 to 49 years made their own decisions about sexual relations and

the use of reproductive health services.² In humanitarian crises, the risk of gender-based violence (GBV) dramatically increases in frequency and scope. Women and girls also spend roughly triple the amount of time that men and boys do on unpaid care and domestic work³ – directly impacting their learning and employability.

The commitment of UNICEF to an equal future for all girls and boys recognizes that promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls is central to achieving the SDGs and aligns directly with the gender equality results identified in the United Nations 'common chapter', which details the close collaboration between UNICEF, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and UN Women.

The UNICEF Gender Action Plan, 2018–2021 (GAP) both articulates and operationalizes this commitment, providing a road map for promoting gender equality throughout the organization's work. Closely aligned with the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2018–2021, the GAP defines a framework around three priority areas: integrating gender across all programming sectors, emphasizing the well-being and empowerment of adolescent girls, and strengthening institutional strategies and systems.

Highlights of results and challenges in 2019

The year 2019 marked the second year in the implementation of the current GAP, and also its midpoint. The last two years have seen UNICEF substantially increase investment in resources, leadership, capacity and accountability to accelerate results for women and girls.

In terms of integrated gender results, UNICEF continued to contribute to advances in several areas. In the health sector, technical assistance to governments helped to scale up quality maternal and newborn health care. From 2018 to 2019, the percentage of pregnant women receiving at least four antenatal visits increased from 57 to 60 per cent, while mothers receiving postnatal care have already surpassed the 2021 target, reaching 60 per cent (from a baseline of 48 per cent). UNICEF also ramped up the professionalization of community health workers, who are predominantly female, in 25 countries, also already meeting the GAP 2021 target. There are several gaps to be addressed with renewed urgency, however. The global maternal mortality rate is not falling fast enough, HIV infection among adolescent girls remains alarmingly high, and progress in prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV has flatlined.

In education, 5 million more out-of-school children, especially girls, participated in education through UNICEF-supported programmes in 2019. Government partners also received assistance to institutionalize menstrual health and

hygiene (MHH) into education systems. In 2019, some 51 countries had national strategies for water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) in schools that included MHH targets, and UNICEF delivered MHH services to almost 20,500 schools in 49 countries. Furthermore, UNICEF and partners stepped up efforts to end school-related GBV, resulting in 49 per cent of countries having effective mechanisms in place, compared with 38 per cent in 2018. From its midterm review of progress towards meeting Strategic Plan goals, UNICEF has identified uneven progress on learning outcomes as a key area for acceleration, particularly in girls' secondary education, and will intensify investment in confronting systemic barriers to learning.

The need for urgent action to address GBV, including in humanitarian contexts, gained traction in 2019, spurred by powerful global coalitions, such as the Spotlight Initiative. Joint United Nations action has also galvanized support to end child marriage and FGM. Over 2.7 million children who experienced violence were reached by health, social work or justice and law-enforcement services through UNICEF programmes in 2019, compared with 2.3 million in 2018. In emergencies, just over 3.3 million women, girls and boys were provided with risk mitigation, prevention or response interventions through UNICEF-supported programmes, almost triple the number reached in 2018.



Oumou Keïta, 17 years of age, is a back-to-school child ambassador in Bamako, Mali. The UNICEF-supported programme sends young ambassadors door to door to engage with communities, raising awareness about the importance of education and sending children back to school. In 2019, nearly 4,700 girls and boys visited more than 40,000 families across Mali.

In 2019, some 120 UNICEF country offices in all regions reported programming in the flagship GAP priority of 'positive gender socialization'. Many are using Communication for Development (C4D, also referred to as social and behaviour change communication, SBCC) as a key strategy to engage communities and individuals, including men and boys, as agents of change against discriminatory social norms. Interventions focused on

sector support with new opportunities, resources and visibility for adolescent girl-focused issues.

Critical gaps needing redoubled investment over the next two years – aligned with findings from the midterm review – include trailing health outcomes around HIV and sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, learning outcomes especially at secondary school level, and high

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