



for every child

Gender Equality and Girls' Empowerment

The Situation for Women and Girls

The spotlight on gender equality has acquired a new urgency in the last two years. Global action, fired by social activism and the immediacy of social media, has turned gender discrimination stories into a mass movement demanding women's and girls' equality. #MeToo and Time's Up, although with roots in the United States of America, occupied the public consciousness across countries and regions, universities and industries, highlighting discriminatory gender norms and attitudes woven deep into the fabric of societies everywhere. Globally, adolescents, especially young girls — from Parkland, Florida to Seoul — rose up as the voice of the next generation, demanding change to existing patriarchal structures.

The year 2019 marked the second year in the implementation of the current UNICEF Gender Action Plan (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.

While strides have been made to close the gender parity gap, at the primary school level, 5.5 million more girls than boys are out of school. The situation is worse at secondary-school level — in low-income countries, only one in three adolescent girls completes lower secondary school.

Millions of women give birth in unsafe conditions, without access to skilled health providers. Over 800 women are dying each day from preventable complications in pregnancy



Best friends Genet and Misra smile after getting back from collecting water, a task that can sometimes take hours in the very hot sun.

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and childbirth. New HIV infections are rising among adolescent girls, the only group for which AIDS-related deaths are increasing. And despite declines, 750 million women and girls alive today were married before the age of 18, and at least 200 million women and girls suffered female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C). These are not only violations of girls' rights to health, education and protection, but they impede development progress.

UNICEF Empowers Girls

UNICEF advocates for the protection of children's rights, to help meet their basic needs and expand opportunities. Promoting the

About UNICEF

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) works in more than 190 countries and territories to put children first. UNICEF has helped save more children's lives than any other humanitarian organization by providing health care and immunizations, safe water and sanitation, nutrition, education, emergency relief and more. UNICEF USA supports UNICEF's work through fundraising, advocacy and education in the United States. Together, we are working toward the day when no children die from preventable causes and every child has a safe and healthy childhood.

For more information, visit unicefusa.org.

equal rights of women and girls and investing in their full participation in political, social and economic spheres are essential to achieving this mission. UNICEF's equity approach ensures that the most marginalized and vulnerable groups are empowered so they can grow up to lead healthy, productive lives. UNICEF's gender work has four pillars: ending child marriage; girls' secondary education; violence prevention in emergencies; and promoting girls' health.

The desire to escape poverty, upholding traditions, the fear of dishonor — these are just some of the complex drivers of child marriage. The UNFPA–UNICEF Global Program to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage is helping to advance such strategies. The global program focuses on 12 priority countries in South Asia, Africa and the Middle East to reach 2.5 million girls who are at risk of child marriage or already married. This program is on track to support targeted countries to develop and implement national action plans, as well as to influence other countries to tackle the issue through policies, legislation and sectoral responses to child marriage. In Niger, it is estimated that three in four young girls are married before the age of 18 years. But the multipronged Illimin program is helping to turn the tide by engaging religious and traditional leaders, as well as expanding village child protection committees. These in turn have organized community dialogues on the harms of child marriage and intervened with parents seeking to marry off their daughters, thereby delaying or canceling 165 pending child marriages in 2018.

Girls' education is a powerful development tool and creates a virtuous cycle. Educated girls are less likely to marry young and are more likely to become healthy women and mothers with healthy babies, escape poverty and influence their communities to empower their own girls. Great progress has been made on girls' education at the primary and secondary levels, but the most vulnerable girls remain out of school. UNICEF is working to increase enrollment for girls, achieve gender parity in secondary education, and increase the number of women in educational leadership positions to ensure sustainable progress.

Adolescent girls face numerous health challenges, including HIV and AIDS, anemia and FGM/C. UNICEF continues to prioritize HIV/AIDS prevention for young people as part of its vision to achieve an AIDS-free generation by 2030 through investing in treatment and

support for people living with HIV, and ensuring that HIV-positive adolescents have access to antiretroviral treatment services, even in times of crisis. UNICEF works directly with young women to develop policies that benefit them — from reproductive health and HIV prevention to the prevention of gender-based violence.

In emergency settings, UNICEF provides violence prevention and support services to millions of girls and women. Whether in protracted conflicts, or the aftermath of a natural disaster, UNICEF is on the ground before, during and after an emergency to reduce risks before a crisis hits and respond quickly to the needs of girls and women.

2019 Gender Equality Snapshot

In 2019, UNICEF:

- Supported some 107 UNICEF country offices to include one or more integrated gender results in their programming in 2019.
- Stepped up efforts to end school-related GBV, resulting in 49 percent of countries having effective mechanisms in place, compared with 38 percent in 2018.
- Provided care and interventions to prevent child marriage for 5.7 million adolescent girls.
- Provided more than 158,000 girls and women with prevention and protection services against female genital mutilation.
- Reached nearly 14 million girls and 10.9 million boys through cash transfer programs.
- Helped 51 countries have national strategies for water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) in schools.
- Delivered MHH services to almost 20,500 schools in 49 countries.
- Trained more than 250 staff on gender-responsive programming through GenderPro, the first globally accredited course on gender equality.
- Helped over 4 million children participate in skills development programs, including 2.3 million girls. ●

With your help,
and your ideas,
we can ensure
that social
protection
programs lift
up these girls
and give them
the power
they need
and deserve
to shape their
own futures.

— UNICEF Executive Director,
Henrietta Fore