



children first.

# Gender Equality and Girls' Empowerment

## The Situation for Women and Girls

Despite great strides in realizing the rights of women and girls, 5 million more girls of primary school age than boys are out of school globally. Maternal mortality reduction has been uneven; more than 800 women die every day from complications related to pregnancy and childbirth. New HIV infections are rising disproportionately among adolescent girls, the only group for which AIDS-related deaths are increasing. And despite declines, 12 million girls are still married every year, and in countries where it is practiced, around a third of girls between 15 and 19 have undergone female genital mutilation (FGM).

These are not only violations of girls' rights to health, education and protection, but they impede development progress. The fifth Global Goal for Sustainable Development is to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Achieving this will require ending discrimination, violence and harmful practices such as forced marriage, child marriage and female genital mutilation. It also means investing in women's and girls' health and protection, and ensuring equal participation of women and girls in political, economic and public life.

## UNICEF Empowers Girls

UNICEF advocates for the protection of children's rights, to help meet their basic needs, and expand opportunities so they can reach their full potential. Promoting the 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



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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## 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, clean 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](http://unicefusa.org).

ensures that the most marginalized and vulnerable groups, especially girls, are empowered so they can grow up to lead healthy, productive lives.

UNICEF's gender work has four pillars: violence in emergencies; girls' secondary education; ending child marriage; and promoting girls' health. Each of these issues cuts across UNICEF's core programs of health, HIV and AIDS, WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene), nutrition, education, child protection and social inclusion.

UNICEF is a founding partner of the Global Program to Accelerate Action to End Child

Marriage. Child marriage denies girls the right to a childhood, limits girls' right to education, perpetuates cycles of poverty, and heightens the risk for complications from pregnancy and childbirth for mothers and babies. The global program focuses on 12 priority countries in South Asia, Africa and the Middle East to reach 2.5 million girls by 2019 who are at risk of child marriage or already married. UNICEF is also working at the national level in 48 additional countries to prevent child marriage through advocacy, new legislation and enforcement of existing laws to establish the legal age of marriage at 18.

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. Twice as many girls as boys will never start 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. For example, the 'Let Us Learn' program in Madagascar provided cash transfers to more than 100,000 girls in seven regions, enabling over 21,000 out-of-school girls to access catch-up classes and re-enter formal schooling. Education programs are closely linked with WASH programs to reduce the barriers adolescent girls face in attending school and managing menstrual hygiene, by ensuring separate latrines. UNICEF also supports social protection programs, including cash transfers to help cover the cost of school fees, books, transportation and uniforms.

Adolescent girls face a number of health challenges, including HIV and AIDS, anemia, and female genital mutilation/cutting (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.

UNICEF is a leader when it comes to data and evidence on the situation for girls and women. Knowing where the most vulnerable groups are and what is driving their exclusion shapes UNICEF's evidence-based policies and programs.

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.

### **2017 Gender Equality Snapshot**

In 2017, UNICEF:

- Spent \$46 million on girls' education.
- Ending child marriage and early unions was a targeted priority for UNICEF in 64 countries.
- Directly supported 7,800 schools with girl-friendly WASH programs, bringing the total number of schools covered from 2014–2017 to more than 50,000.
- Supported 50,000 schools to build girl-friendly sanitation facilities in 58 countries.
- Increased implementation of menstrual health management in WASH in Schools programs, doubling from 22 to 44 countries.
- Over 25 million live births were delivered in health-care facilities supported by UNICEF programs that provided technical and financial assistance.
- Supported more than 46,000 pregnant women living with HIV to continue antiretroviral therapy.
- Reached 10 million women and children with services to prevent and respond to GBV in crises.
- 25 million child marriages were averted in the past decade through the strong support and commitment of resources from UNICEF and partners.
- Worked in 90 countries prioritizing gender-responsive adolescent health.
- Provided life skills and educational support for 2 million adolescent girls, to help them stay in school and pursue alternatives to early marriage. ●

UNICEF works with governments and community actors in 157 countries to advocate for girls, promote gender equality and realize the rights of girls and women.