



children first.

# Gender Equality and Girls' Empowerment

## The Situation for Women and Girls

Despite great strides in realizing the rights of women and girls, more than 130 million girls 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. The incidence of HIV/AIDS has increased for women and adolescent girls. Child marriage and gender-based violence are still pervasive in many countries; about one in three women aged 20–24 were married before they turned 18. And every 10 minutes, somewhere in the world, an adolescent girl dies as a result of violence.

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 ensures that the most marginalized and



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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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

## 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).

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. 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.

### **2016 Gender Equality Snapshot**

In 2016, UNICEF:

- Spent \$39 million on girls' education.
- Reached 5.6 million girls with education in emergencies.
- Provided 1.3 million girls with WASH in schools.
- Provided over 3 million women and girls with WASH facilities in emergencies.
- Delivered menstrual hygiene supplies to nearly 1 million girls and women in emergencies.
- Vaccinated 11 million women to protect them and their babies from tetanus.
- Helped over 70% of women living with HIV to receive treatment for the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV, including 34,000 women in emergency settings.
- Reached 4.6 million people with gender-based violence prevention and protection in emergencies.
- Reached more than 1 million girls at risk of marriage with health, education, cash transfers and other services.
- Reached 1.7 million community members with child marriage prevention messages.
- Worked in 25 countries to help stop female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C).
- Provided cash transfers to women in more than 70 countries. ●

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.