

Gender Equality: Why it matters

What is the goal here: Sustainable Development Goal number 5

To achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

Why?

Women and girls represent half of the world's population and therefore also half of its potential. be underrepresented at all levels of political leadership. Across the globe, women and girls perform a disproportionate share of unpaid domestic work.

Inequalities faced by girls can begin right at birth and follow them all their lives. In some countries, girls are deprived of access to health care or proper nutrition, leading to a higher mortality rate.

How much progress have we made?

International commitments to advance gender equality have brought about improvements in some areas: child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM) have declined in recent years, and women's representation in the political area is higher than ever before. But the promise of a world in which every woman and girl enjoys full gender equality, and where all legal, social and economic barriers to their empowerment have been removed, remains unfulfilled. In fact, that goal is probably even more distant than before, since women and girls are being hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic.

How does gender inequality affect women?

Disadvantages in education translate into lack of access to skills and limited opportunities in the labor market. Women's and girls' empowerment is essential to expand economic growth and promote social development. The full participation of women in labor forces would add percentage points to most national growth rates, double digits in many cases.

Are there any other gender-related challenges?

Yes. **Worldwide, 35% of women between 15-49 years of age have experienced physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence. 1 in 3 girls aged 15-19 have experienced some form of female genital mutilation/cutting in the 30 countries in Africa and the Middle East, where the harmful practice is most common with a high risk of prolonged bleeding, infection (including HIV), childbirth complications, infertility and death.**

The COVID-19 lockdown further caused **domestic violence to increase in many countries, showing the critical importance of social protection for women and girls.**

The **Spotlight Initiative**, an EU/UN partnership, is a global, multi-year initiative focused on eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG)

But why should gender equality matter to me?

Regardless of where we live in, gender equality is a **fundamental human right**. Advancing gender equality is critical to all areas of a healthy society, from reducing poverty to promoting the health, education, protection and the well-being of girls and boys.

What can we do to fix these issues?

If you are a girl, you can stay in school, help empower your female classmates to do the same and fight for your right to access sexual and reproductive health services

If you are a woman, you can address unconscious biases and implicit associations that form an unintended and often an invisible barrier to equal opportunity.

If you are a man or a boy, you can work alongside women and girls to achieve gender equality and embrace healthy, respectful relationships.

You can fund education campaigns to curb cultural practices like female genital mutilation and change harmful laws that limit the rights of women and girls and prevent them from achieving their full potential

In 2019, **women only held 28% of managerial positions worldwide.**

Martine Gayon

United Nations Representative, New York

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