

Task Force 6
Accelerating SDGs: Exploring New Pathways to the 2030 Agenda





BEYOND GENDER INEQUALITY: HOW THE G20 CAN SUPPORT A GENDEREQUITABLE FUTURE AND ACCELERATE THE SDGs

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Abstract

ender equality is both a global goal in its own right and a required input to remedy the current 'pluri-crises' and accelerate progress towards the 2030 Agenda. Advancing gender equality, however, necessitates not only addressing gender gaps but also underlying systemic and deeply embedded drivers. There are five potential pathways of action for the G20 that do so: equitable livelihoods and economic empowerment; equitable

decision-making; integrated data systems and informed policy; secure and operationalised rights; and transformative change. More broadly, to 'leave no one behind' and be effective in building on the G20's important commitments to date, policy and investments should include targeted consideration of how gender and social inequities interact and must keep pace with how the concept of gender is evolving in societies.

The Challenge

Gender and the SDGs

Gender^a equality is embodied by Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5, which aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Equality is both an end and a means. It is "not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world."¹

Persistent inequalities gender hamper the progress of SDGs. For example, discrimination in land rights and property ownership negatively affects land and water resources management (SDG-14, SDG-15)2 and undermines climate resilience (SDG-13).3 Conversely, gender equality in economic opportunities reduces poverty (SDG-1)4 and contributes to growth and food security (SDG-2);5 gender-responsiveness in social protection contributes to these as well as educational outcomes (SDG-4).6 Moreover, progress towards the SDGs is clearly gendered, including in terms of poverty (SDG-1),⁷ food (SDG-2),⁸ water, sanitation, and hygiene (SDG-6),⁹ energy (SDG-7),¹⁰ and climate (SDG-13).¹¹ Given this interdependence, if G20 nations do not effectively address gender inequities, the risk is not only to SDG-5 but to the entire 2030 Agenda.

G20 2023 is a critical moment to leverage recommitment to the 2030 Agenda's core mission to 'leave no one behind'. Based on learning from the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing 'pluri-crises', policy dialogue and commitments need to be bolder and more nuanced than previous G20 events. This can be achieved through more consistent operationalisation of the G20's commitments to equality and through addressing the underlying, interconnected gender, social, and historical drivers that underpin who is 'left behind'.

THE CHALLENGE 5

a Gender is broadly understood as socially constructed identities, roles, and power relations associated with being a man or woman. While gender identity was previously understood as binary in some contexts, it is now recognised in most G20 countries that gender identity is a multidimensional spectrum, including women, men, and an array of gender-diverse, nonbinary or 'third' identities. In Germany, Argentina, Mexico, Brazil, and Australia, up to 4 percent of individuals identify as neither women nor men, but as transgender, non-binary, gender-fluid, or non-conforming. Gender minorities face multiple additional barriers and discrimination, from legal identity to harassment and safety issues.

Where things stand

Gender equality has been unravelling "in the face of 'cascading' global crises—such as the COVID-19 pandemic, conflict, and climate change—coupled with the backlash against women's sexual and reproductive rights." While progress was already slow, the world is now *further* from equality than it was pre-pandemic. On the current path, it will take 140 years to achieve gender equal representation in leadership positions in the workplace and 286 years to close gender gaps in legal protection and remove discriminatory laws against women.

Moreover, gender and socioeconomic discriminations, barriers and exclusions intersect and compound (known as 'intersectionality'). This leads to intensified marginalisation of women (and gender minorities) from indigenous or ethnic minority, migrant, or other groups, or those who are living with disabilities.

The urgency to address gender inequality is paramount in G20 countries; none of the 20 nations are on track to achieve SDG-5 by 2030.¹⁵ Despite extensive commitments, gender- and interrelated social inequalities continue or have

worsened, reflecting the persistence of historical, systemic power imbalances, and underlying challenges that need specific recognition and action.

Unpacking the challenges: Manifestations and drivers

Gender inequalities and inequities in and across G20 nations manifest in a multitude of ways. These include:

- the disproportionate amount of unpaid domestic and care work performed by women compared to men (which ranges from 1.5 times more in Canada, Germany, and US to nine times more in India¹⁶);
- exclusions from equitable livelihoods and incomes (women's labour force participation for instance, is lower in every G20 country with data¹⁷);
- gendered gaps in financial access and information and communication technology (for instance, in G20 countries, women are less likely than men to have bank accounts, credit, or savings for a farm or business¹⁸);
- stereotypes regarding decisionmaking capacities (for example, 72

percent of the population in one G20 country indicated that "on the whole men make better political leaders than women" 19); and

persistently high rates of gender-based violence (GBV) in G20 countries (where more than one in four women have experienced intimate partner violence²⁰), which undermines all areas of life, wellbeing, and economic prosperity, with intergenerational consequences.

The evidence demonstrates that manifestations of inequality are perpetuated and entrenched by systematised barriers and deep, underlying drivers. These include formal (policy) and informal (gender norms and beliefs) drivers. Even when legal frameworks exist, these are often not effectively operationalised, reflecting the largely unnoticed informal 'rules' shaping society. Restrictive gender norms (social expectations regarding how women, girls, men, and boys should behave and roles they should play in society) and implicit assumptions regarding the value of different genders in society have profound effects. These reinforce an implicit hierarchy in which women and nonbinary people are less important or 'correct' than men-translating into them being less represented and served by institutions and systems²¹. These norms also rationalise GBV and entrench unhealthy patterns for men, and are so deeply embedded in daily life that they go unseen, appearing to be 'the natural order'. This normalises who are seen as 'real' leaders, decisionmakers, and breadwinners versus who are made responsible for unpaid domestic and care work. Figure 1 visualises the layered nature of inequalities and deeper systemic and structural drivers.

Weakened progress in all SDGs Access to and control Less resilient economies and food SDG initiatives and investments are less over food, water, sanitation and energy women and girls systems effective than needed living in poverty than men and boys are inequitable Gender inequitable individual and collective agency and intergenerational effects Manifestations Girls drop out of school during Women and girls face disproportionate gaps Lower women's socio-economic shocks, do not participation in the climate impacts workforce return Wellbeing of survivors and their families undermined compounding socio-gender Social Gender inequities inequality primarily responsive to men's perspectives, less to Lower priority placed on women's health, wellbeing, Social protection, women's, gender diverse and marginalised groups worsens during matized inequities, imbalanced relations and practical barriers infrastructure lacking and/or weakly reproductive and maternal healthcare restrictions gender-responsive Barriers Gender inequitable leadership and entrepreneurship and growth of women-led from equitable paid work, especially 'Glass ceiling' and 'sticky floor' in governance at all anagement and leadership land rights and distribution of unpaid domestic and care work, Gender reotypes and invisible financial and ICT gaps undervaluing of care work Persistently high gender-based Gender-blind data systems Underlying drivers Gender equality as a right 'on paper', but not operationalized through policies at all scales, Constraining gender norms (including men as decisionmakers, breadwinners, leaders and women Implicit social acceptance of a as caregivers; acceptability of gender-based violence) hierarchy between

Figure 1: Drivers, barriers, and manifestations of gender inequalities

Source: Authors' own

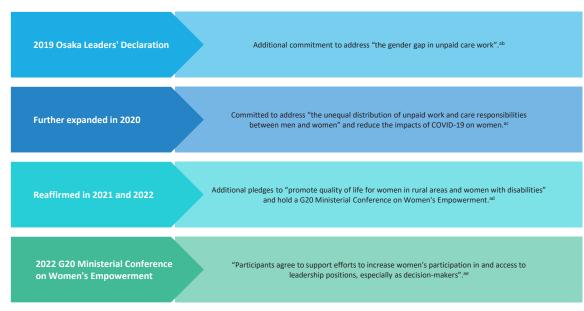
The G20's Role

G20 significantly he influences economic and associated policies of member countries — notably those driving (or failing) SDGs. The G20 also sets the SDG 'pace' for non-G20 middle and low-income countries, including those which tend to progress even more slowly towards SDG-5 and gender equality. As such, it is significant to note that G20 2023 stands on a decade-strong foundation of commitments to gender justice (see Figure 2).

However, the G20 track record on implementing these commitments is weak, contributing to the slow progress and declines in equality; compared to 71 percent compliance for all issues, compliance for gender commitments averaged at only 62 percent.²² Moreover, follow-through is inconsistent among G20 nations, which reduces the coherence and integrity of the G20 and weakens overall influence on advancing the SDGs.

Figure 2: G20 gender equality commitments (2012 to 2023)





Source: Authors' own

Recommendations to the G20

policies and programmes need to address the manifestations of gender inequality. More fundamentally, G20 nations need to transform the underlying systemic causes and structural drivers of gender inequality. Outlined here are five evidence-based pathways for G20 action, each with specific recommendations.

Pathway 1: Equitable livelihoods and economic empowerment

Explicitly value unpaid care and domestic labour within G20 economies and set up incentives and systems to reduce inequitable unpaid work: Develop or enhance national/subnational accounting systems that better take into account the contribution of care and domestic work. Additionally, consistent investment in the care economy is required across all G20 nations. This includes affordable and quality childcare,23 targeting single-parent households for social benefits (following Germany and Japan),24 paid paternity leave (following Italy, Turkey),25 and strengthened labour laws incentivising men's participation in care work.26

Double down on the G20's '25x25' goal to reduce the gender gap in labour force participation by 25 percent by 2025 and its principles to improve the quality of women's employment across all G20 nations: Address the substantial gender pay gap that continues in most G20 countries²⁷. Invest consistently in policies and practices that break the 'glass ceiling' and 'unstick' the 'sticky floor' keeping women in lower-paid work such as removing identifiers in hiring processes,²⁸ consistently enforce non-discrimination and anti-harassment laws, continue investing in girls in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics,29 fund and capacitate collective entry points, including women's cooperatives and self-help groups,30 and, mandate an equitable balance of women-owned businesses in public and corporate procurement.31

Leverage legal and programmatic options to end GBV³²: Policy and programming that engage men and boys in breaking the GBV cycle are essential in investments for economic justice.³³ More broadly, public planning for safe, inclusive public transport and spaces is required for equitable labour force engagement, and to be effective,

planning requires inputs from those it is meant to serve.^{34,35}

Engage with the informal sector and capitalise on pandemic innovations:

Take immediate policy action based on

lessons about 'what works' to support desirable aspects of informal work (e.g., flexibility), while reducing risks. This is especially important in relation to indigenous and young women who disproportionately exposed to risks and inequities of informal work. Such policy actions would include protections for vulnerable workers (e.g., domestic workers in Argentina and the self employed in Italy), provisions to counter false subcontractors (e.g., in Türkiye), and insurance provisions for home workers (e.g., Indonesia).36 Moreover, there is a need to capitalise pandemic-inspired innovations, especially continuing to "strengthen, adapt and extend social protection systems to informal employment."37

Protect rights and wellbeing of migrant workers of all genders both in transit and at their destinations: To advance justice and support economic outcomes, G20 leaders need to prioritise cooperation and enforcement to prevent illegal human trafficking and

ensure full transparency and thus safety and wellbeing along migration routes. Dedicated national and cross-national task forces to identify and address gender-blind aspects of migration policies and programmes are important to address the distinct risks for women, girls, boys, men, and gender minorities who migrate.³⁸

Pathway 2: Equitable decision-making

Secure gender-balanced representation in decision-making, including for climate policy and land and resource rights: Accelerate follow-through on representation targets within G20 nations, such as gender balance in elected and appointed positions. However, representation is not sufficient, as the relationship between numbers and substantive equity in decision-making is complex.39 Complementary measures, including strengthening of processes, are essential to avoid backlash and move past token engagement.

Invest in capacity development for groups working to advance gender equality: Prioritise support for women's and gender minorities' opportunities and capacities to engage in local to national decision-making processes. Invest in

multifaceted capacity development of civil society that is working to advance gender equality and rights, including in relation to climate and financing. Build capacities of public sector actors of all genders—specifically, convenors and facilitators of policy processes at all scales—to (co)design, support and act on inclusive processes.

Address underlying constraints and unrecognised hinderances in decision-making systems and processes: SDGs will accelerate when G20 nations can strengthen policy processes such that they enable fuller and more meaningful engagement with and of civil society organisations. Beyond better representation and

capacities of marginalised groups to voice their needs and interests (above), success relies on policy actors and implementors more pro-actively and effectively recognising these groups as rights holders, adapting systems for equitable voice, and effectively incorporating and responding to inputs.^{40,41}

Pathway 3: Integrated data systems and informed policy

Break the 'cycle of invisibility' via data systems: G20 nations can demonstrate global leadership by accelerating the closing of pernicious gender data gaps. Global, national, and subnational statistical systems need to be assessed

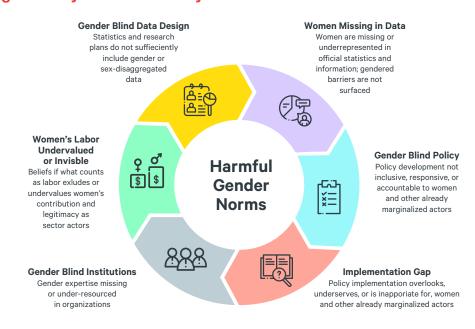


Figure 3: Cycle of invisibility

Source: Adapted from McDougall et al. 2021, 4.43

and updated to break the 'cycle of invisibility' (see Figure 3). Ensure that sex- or gender-disaggregated data are consistently generated—otherwise inequalities are masked.⁴²

Review and upgrade sectoral and social policies to be more effectively and consistently gender-integrated: National and subnational G20 agencies can redress gender weaknesses in social protection systems, and climate and sectoral policies and programming. Nationally determined contributions are moving in the right direction, but more is needed in terms of gender capacity, clear targets, gender-disaggregated data, and routine engagement between environment, climate, and gender ministries and civil society. 44 Significantly more is needed for consistent, quality gender integration in sectoral and climate policies, moving from 'add women and stir' to 'transformative' (address underlying barriers) action.⁴⁵

Catalyse more systematic national and subnational gender budgeting across the G20: Gender budgeting "recognizes that government budgets impact men and women differently.... [It] uses fiscal policies and public financial management tools to promote gender equality. It incorporates a gender lens into the budget process to ensure that governments are acutely aware of the impact of their choices on gender outcomes."⁴⁶ This essential strategy needs to be consistently institutionalised and applied in G20 nations (see Figure 4).

Legal and institutional framework Legal framework on gender responsive budgets Institutional framework Fiscal data disaggregated by gender **Budget preparation** Ex-ante gender impact assessment of proposed policies Budget circular containing guidelines on gender objectives Linking gender goals to programs and performance indicators Budget classification incorporates a gender perspective **Budget execution and monitoring** Budget execution reports incorporate gender perspective Ex-post gender impact assessment of proposed policies Audit and parliamentary oversight Gender-related audits Parliamentary oversight No practice Limited practice Good practice Advanced practice GBI = 1.1 - 2.4 GBI = 0.1 - 1

Figure 4: Gaps in gender budgeting practice in G20 nations

Source: Adapted from Alonso-Albarran et al., 2021,17

Pathway 4: Secure and operationalised rights

Build on the momentum of feminist foreign policy: Feminist policies are human-centred, based in respect for rights, and seek equality for all people. Sustainability as well as peace may depend on furthering these across G20 nations, as "trade and economic policies that are not feminist and not striving to pro-actively eradicate inequalities are likely to perpetuate injustice and consequently fuel conflict."47 Canada, Mexico, France, Germany, and Sweden have paved the way by being the first to adopt feminist foreign policy agendas. More broadly, the G20 can demonstrate leadership through evidence-based dialogue around the risks of conflating economic growth and social progress.⁴⁸

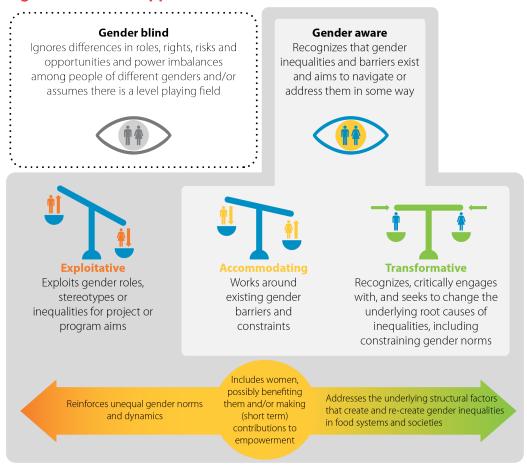
operationalise international commitments, including implementation of land rights and eradication of GBV: Immediate action is needed to consistently secure the rights of women and marginalised genders. This includes G20 nations evenly operationalising existing international commitments, such as the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Focusing on GBV, the G20 should consider integrating its '25x25'

goal with collective strategies translating CEDAW commitment into action. G20 policy narratives recognising all SDGs as fundamentally intertwined with women's rights—and more broadly human and environmental rights—will add needed fuel to SDG acceleration. Accordingly, governance, access to and control over services, food, water, and education can immediately be made more accountable (regarding rights) and gender equitable, to balance historic prioritisation of growth.⁴⁹

Pathway 5: Transformative change

Complement but go beyond 'business as usual' mainstreaming and women's empowerment; invest in a gender-transformative approach: Since gender inequalities persist in G20 nations due to systemic factors underlying and drivers, relies on operationalising a gendertransformative approach at all scales. Build on the evidence-based success of the United Nations and nongovernmental organisations through gender-transformative investing in programming and strategies from local to national scales. Systematically address norm-related constraints (and unconscious bias, gender hierarchy) within government, private sector, and other organisations.50

Figure 5: Gender approaches



Note: Rather than working around barriers and focusing on empowering women, a transformative approach addresses underlying formal and informal drivers of inequality. As well as policy- and systems-change, it engages men and boys in shifting harmful norms, such as masculinities that drive GBV and underpin inequitable labour and decision-making.

Source: McDougall et al., 2021

To accelerate progress towards SDG-5—thus all SDGs—model men and boys as co-owners of the gender equality agenda: Include people of all genders, including men and boys as stakeholders of gender equality. This requires direct role modelling and

accountability by men in leadership, as well as investing in programming to support this as a wider shift. G20 leaders' role modelling this in *G20 2023* is critical. The G20 should follow this through by inspiring and requiring coownership from national to local levels.

Attribution: Cynthia McDougall et al., "Beyond Gender Inequality: How the G20 can Support a Gender-Equitable Future and Accelerate the SDGs," *T20 Policy Brief*, July 2023.

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