



UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

2019 Annual Report

Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2021



Contents

Foreword	5
UNDP 2019 Highlights	6
Progress on the Gender Equality Strategy	8
The Inequality of Poverty	11
Speeding Up Structural Transformation	13
Building Resilient Societies for All	15
The Power of Partnerships	16
Innovation for Gender Equality: We are #NextGenUNDP	17
Walking the Talk	19
Our Global Gender Expertise	20
Thought Leadership to Promote Gender Equality	21
The COVID-19 Crisis and Gender Equality	22
Looking Ahead	24
Endnotes	26

Foreword

Building a More Gender Equal World

As I write this foreword, like many of my United Nations (UN) colleagues around the world, I continue to work from home due to the COVID-19 crisis. However, while the pandemic has changed how the UN operates, it has not changed our commitment to realising a more gender equal world.

Gender equality and women's rights have advanced immensely since the adoption of the [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#) 25 years ago (Beijing+25). Some of the major success stories include progress in education and health. Between 1995 and 2018, for example, the number of girls of primary and lower-secondary school age who are out of school nearly halved.¹ The global maternal mortality ratio declined by 38 percent from 2000 to 2017.²

However, the [2019 UNDP Human Development Report](#) shows that overall progress on gender equality has been mixed. Progress has occurred faster for basic capabilities such as voting and self-employment than for enhanced capabilities, where there is more power at stake – such as women's leadership in business and politics.³ There isn't just a gender gap – this is a power gap.

We see these gender inequalities every day. Political violence towards women is at its highest level ever.⁴ Climate change may increase the risk of violence against women⁵ while the COVID-19 pandemic has triggered a massive spike in gender-based violence.⁶ As the world shut down in the face of the pandemic, it had a marked effect on the 92 percent of women workers in developing countries who are employed informally with limited social protection.⁷ Indeed, public trust in governments is decreasing⁸ and 2019 was marked by an unprecedented mobilization of women's movements.

Against this global background, and together with our UN sister agencies and other partners, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) places gender equality at the very heart of our development efforts. As the largest UN organization in the field, with operations in 170 countries, UNDP plays a key role at the global and national levels to advance women's rights and gender equality – offering effective, value-for-money development support to countries and partners.

This work is guided in part by our [Gender Equality Strategy, 2018-2021](#). In 2019, UNDP made large strides in implementing this strategy, with transformative work in areas such as governance and gender-responsive climate action. UNDP is now working to ensure that gender is strongly integrated into all of our COVID-19 response and recovery efforts.

This annual report highlights key achievements made by UNDP in closing gender gaps in 2019, as well as emerging trends and challenges that lie ahead. Learning from these lessons will be vital to accelerate progress towards gender equality at the speed and scale now needed.



Achim Steiner

Administrator,
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

UNDP 2019 Highlights

Closing Gender Gaps



48 percent of all registered voters in **39 countries** supported by UNDP electoral assistance were women




74 countries integrated gender into their environmental and climate policies, plans and frameworks



97 countries strengthened women's leadership and decision-making in natural resource management



UNDP ranked among the **13 highest** scorers on the Global Health **50/50** Gender and Health Index




With UNDP support, **23.4 million** women gained access to basic services, financial services and non-financial assets



UNDP worked in **26 countries** to ensure that **1.7 million** women in crisis or post-crisis settings benefitted from jobs and improved livelihoods



80 countries supported to tackle gender-based violence, including through the EU-UN Spotlight Initiative



UNDP is now a **50/50** gender-balanced organization



Women accounted for **50 percent** of beneficiaries of UNDP's economic recovery programmes in **15 countries**



UNDP rated one of the best-performing UN organizations, meeting or exceeding requirements for **88 percent** of the relevant indicators in the United Nations System-wide Action Plan

Progress on the Gender Equality Strategy

UNDP's Gender Equality Strategy is aligned with our Strategic Plan 2018-2021:



In 2019, UNDP redoubled its efforts to close gender gaps, making strong progress on implementing the Gender Equality Strategy. Here are some highlights under each of the three development outcomes.



The Inequality of Poverty

Extreme poverty has declined globally but continues to affect women disproportionately. Women and girls are 4 percent more likely than men and boys to live in extreme poverty, and the risk rises to 25 percent for women aged 25 to 34.⁹ These inequalities are being further exacerbated during the COVID-19 crisis, as economies shut down and unemployment soars.

In 2019 UNDP continued to play a strong role in supporting women's access to basic, financial and non-financial services, provided policy support on gender-responsive social protection and gender budgeting and strengthened gender equality in national planning. We also made greater strides in removing structural barriers to women's economic empowerment, including in critical areas such as the higher burden of unpaid work on women.

Tackling gender-based violence is also crucial to ending poverty. Globally, 1 in 3 women have experienced gender-based violence.¹⁰ Last year, UNDP made strong progress in addressing this violence across all regions, including through assisting countries to establish frameworks to prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence and raising awareness through research and media campaigns. UNDP also tested new approaches in seven countries to address the linkages between gender-based violence and climate change, improving livelihoods, and building peaceful societies.

2019 highlights



With UNDP support, **23.4 million** women gained access to basic services such as water, health, education and nutrition; financial services including bank accounts and credit; and non-financial assets such as land.



UNDP's work helped **1.4 million** women-headed households in **16 countries** access clean energy. For example, in **Sierra Leone** women in nearly 2,000 poor households now use energy-efficient cook stoves, which has contributed to less time spent on cooking, greater protection of the environment and decreased health risks.



Twenty countries are supporting governments in implementing gender-responsive social protection, including the creation of national social protection institutions and policies, and the expansion of existing services that integrate gender equality.



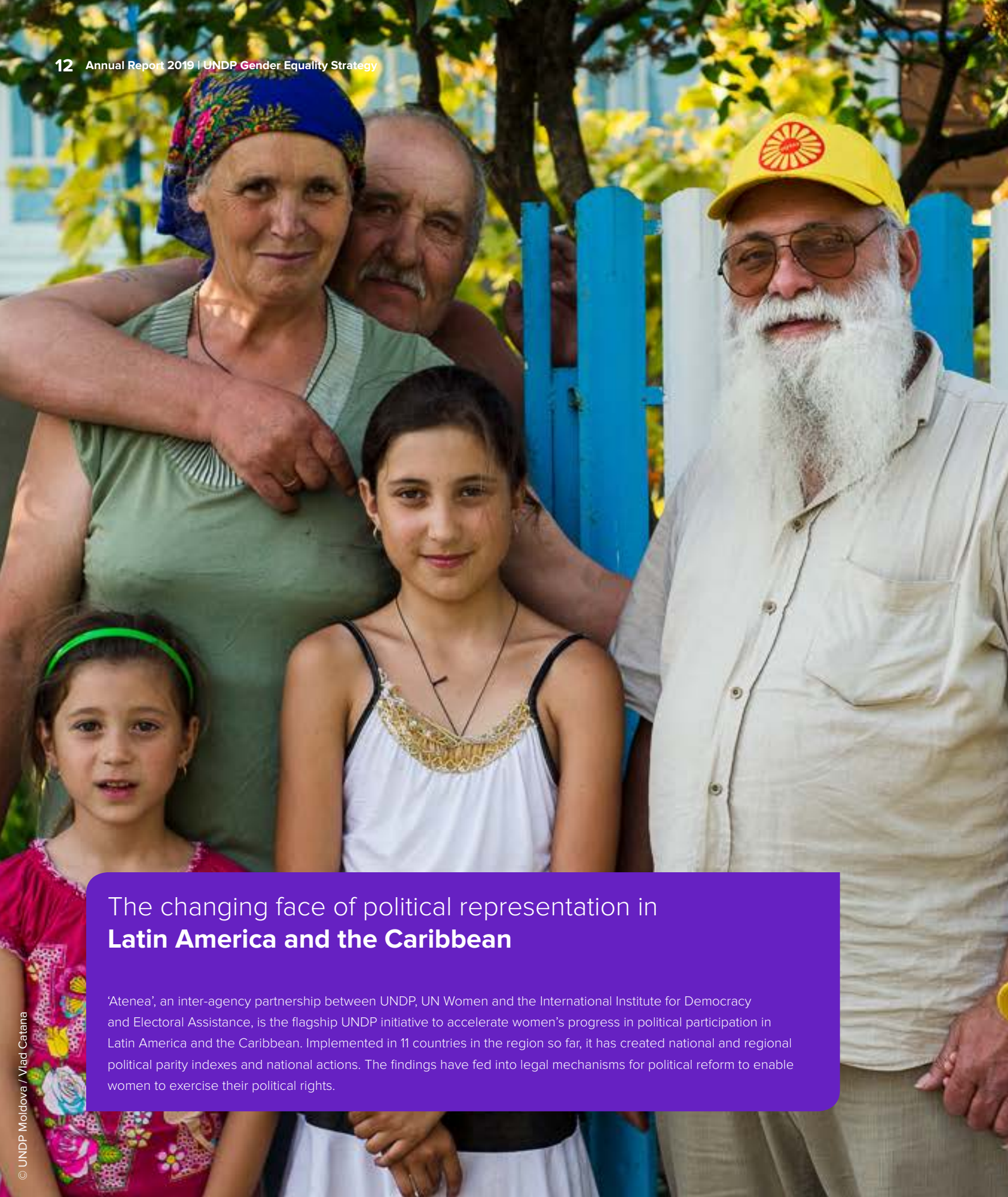
In **Asia and the Pacific**, the 'Transforming the Future of Work for Gender Equality' initiative is a platform linked with financial inclusion that works with policymakers, business leaders, regulators and civil society. Thanks to interventions in the **Pacific Islands**, nearly a **million** women have improved access to digital agriculture and financial service delivery among market vendors and rural women micro-entrepreneurs.

The Spotlight Initiative: Leading the United Nations reform



The Spotlight Initiative lies at the heart of United Nations development system reform and embodies a new way of delivering on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in an integrated way. This is a global multi-year partnership between the European Union and the United Nations to help eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls. In 2019, the Spotlight Initiative started implementation in five countries in Latin America (Argentina, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Mexico) and eight countries in Africa (Liberia, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Uganda, and Zimbabwe). Initial activities are promising. In Mozambique, for example, UNDP is implementing the United Nations essential services package to work with traditional courts on preventing and addressing gender-based violence. UNDP is leading on strong justice and police components in the Spotlight country programmes in El Salvador, Honduras, Liberia, Malawi, Mali, and Niger.





Speeding Up Structural Transformation



In recent years, women's rights demonstrations across the world, such as #MeToo and #UnVioladorEnTuCamino, are signaling that it's time for faster change and for women to have more power. While men and women vote at similar rates, for example, only 24 percent of parliamentary seats worldwide are held by women and there are only 10 female heads of government.¹¹ Women's leadership is crucial for effectively responding to the COVID-19 crisis and ensuring a more equitable recovery.

UNDP works to amplify women's voices. Democratic governance continues to be our most transformative work to help build more gender-equal and peaceful societies. UNDP works in all regions of the world to promote women's participation and leadership in public institutions, parliaments, the judiciary, and the private sector. With our support, 180 measures – from electoral quotas to gender-smart business policies – were put in place in 2019.

UNDP also works to promote women's participation and leadership in natural resource management and climate action initiatives. Women are differently and often more affected by climate change and disasters, in part because they are the primary users and managers of natural resources. However women are also powerful agents of change, well-placed to identify and adopt appropriate adaptation and mitigation strategies. In 2019 UNDP continued to support 17 countries to integrate gender equality into their nationally determined contributions process, as part of the 'NDC Support Programme'. In 2020, UNDP committed to assisting 50 countries in integrating gender equality into the revision process of nationally determined contributions as part of its '[Climate Promise](#)'.

2019 highlights



UNDP strengthened inclusive political processes and ensured that **48 percent** of all registered voters in **39 countries** supported by UNDP electoral assistance were women. In **Moldova**, for example, UNDP reached over **2,200 women** to equip them with skills to participate in elections and run as candidates.



UNDP assisted countries in adopting legal, policy and institutional reforms to remove barriers to women's empowerment. In 2018-2019, UNDP increased the number of women accessing justice from 1.6 million to **3.7 million** in **34 countries**.



With UNDP support, **74 countries** integrated gender into their environmental and climate policies, plans and frameworks.



97 countries strengthened women's leadership and decision-making in natural resource management.

The changing face of political representation in Latin America and the Caribbean

'Atenea', an inter-agency partnership between UNDP, UN Women and the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, is the flagship UNDP initiative to accelerate women's progress in political participation in Latin America and the Caribbean. Implemented in 11 countries in the region so far, it has created national and regional political parity indexes and national actions. The findings have fed into legal mechanisms for political reform to enable women to exercise their political rights.



Building Resilient Societies for All

While crises affect everyone, women and girls can be disproportionately impacted. At the same time, as seen with the COVID-19 pandemic, women are often on the frontlines during and after crises, playing a key role in ensuring the well-being and resilience of their families and communities. As countries recover from the COVID-19 crisis, it will test their peace, stability and the rule of law.

As one of the largest operational entities in humanitarian contexts, UNDP continues to work to improve women's resilience and participation in economic recovery and in building social cohesion. In 2019, UNDP worked in 26 countries to ensure that 1.7 million women gained access to jobs and improved livelihoods in crisis or post-crisis settings. In Yemen, for example, at least 34 percent of direct beneficiaries of job creation and conditional cash transfers were women.

However, advancing women's leadership in humanitarian settings is one area that remains a challenge. In 2019, the share of women holding leadership positions in social dialogue and reconciliation mechanisms in 15 countries increased to 35 percent but leadership positions within prevention and recovery mechanisms held by women remain dramatically low. To help address this, last year we launched the [UNDP Gender and Recovery Toolkit](#), which provides in-depth guidance on advancing gender equality in crisis and recovery settings.

2019 highlights



Last year UNDP's global programme on strengthening rule of law and human rights supported nearly **40** conflict and crisis-affected contexts to adopt non-discriminatory laws, promote women's access to justice, and address sexual and gender-based violence.



In 2019, women made up **50 percent** of beneficiaries of UNDP's recovery programmes in **15 countries**. UNDP also began development of the 'Year 1,000,000 Women in Crises' initiative, which aims to economically empower one million women in **24 countries** in crisis and post-crisis situations.



The N-Peace initiative '[Engage for Equality, Access, Community and Empowerment](#)' in Asia builds capacity and expands peacebuilding activists' networks to implement UN Security Council resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325). The civil society grants component of the initiative supported over **8,000 women** through leadership programming in 2019.

Parliaments and Civil Society Support the Women, Peace and Security Agenda

UNDP's flagship 'Global Project on Parliaments and Civil Society as Partners Supporting the Women, Peace and Security Agenda' assisted members of parliament in seven countries in 2019 to promote accountability for their commitments by developing and implementing parliamentary 'women, peace and security' road maps. Sierra Leone, for example, adopted a resolution on women, peace and security and developed a complementary parliamentary women, peace and security national action plan, paving the way for gender-responsive law making, policies and budgets.



The Power of Partnerships

UNDP's transformative work on gender equality is only made possible because of strong partnerships. UNDP is often the partner of choice in promoting global gender equality, and last year we further expanded our collaborations, including with UN sister agencies, the private sector, international financial institutions, civil society, women's organizations, and academia. For example, UNDP established **74 partnerships** with governments and other partners to address discriminatory gender and social norms.

UN Women remains one of UNDP's biggest partners in this work. In line with a memorandum of understanding signed with UN Women in 2019, we collaborated together in 102 countries last year. The biggest areas of collaboration are in advancing legal and policy reforms, women's political participation, and economic empowerment.

The Tunis Forum on Gender Equality

In 2019, UNDP collaborated with Sweden, Tunisia, and UN Women to organize the Tunis Forum on Gender Equality. The Forum was the first global meeting leading up to the commemoration of Beijing+25 and the 20th anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security. The hallmark of the Forum was co-creation, with intergenerational dialogue, inclusiveness, youth engagement, strong participation from civil society, and high-level political support. More than 590 participated in Tunis, and there were 15 million-plus online viewers.

Our Partnerships with the Private Sector

There has been an evolution towards more strategic partnerships with the private sector. The Gender Equality Seal for the Private Sector programme operates in 16 countries, supporting more than 750 companies and impacting 1.5 million workers. For example, through this programme the BHD Bank in the **Dominican Republic** implemented a gender-smart business strategy, leading to an increase in women's financial contribution by nearly 40 percent over three years.

Strengthening Women-Led Community Associations

UNDP worked in **57 countries** in 2019 to strengthen women-led community-based associations and supported **10 more countries** in enabling women's groups to function in the public sphere than in the previous year. In **Ethiopia**, for example, UNDP contributed to establishing the CSO Peace Forum, targeting women-led community service organizations under the umbrella of the Union of Ethiopian Women Charitable Association with 80 member organizations. The forum focuses on capacity-building for women leaders to engage in peacebuilding and conflict resolution.

Partnering with Academia

In 2019, UNDP continued its partnership in the Gender Equality in Public Administration initiative, resulting in a memorandum of understanding with the University of Pittsburgh. Cutting-edge research conducted under this collaboration showed the critical relationship between women's inclusion in formal peace talks and their participation in public administration, as well as the effectiveness of gender quotas and targets in conflict-affected countries. These findings are more relevant than ever as we respond to the COVID-19 crisis.

Innovation for Gender Equality: We are #NextGenUNDP

UNDP has invested in building a next generation network of innovation and digital solutions across its global team, including for its gender work, to more effectively respond to the complex development challenges of today and remain relevant to a new generation demanding change. We are managing complexity better by joining the dots across sectors, communities and countries and by expanding development choices, finding whole-of-society solutions, and harnessing the power of data tools and analytical models. Our Accelerator Lab Network, for example, is sensing on-the-ground changes and sourcing local solutions for improved development outcomes.

Advancing gender equality also requires innovative approaches, from community conversations to behaviour change campaigns, from breaking traditional patriarchal supply chains of information, resources and power to pushing for a new generation of policies that address gender biases and norms, as through our new Gender Social Norms Index.

UNDP has been reinventing the ways in which it invests, thinks and works, focused on creating innovative solutions globally – from coalition-building in political participation in Latin America to transforming the future of work in Asia and the Pacific or designing survivor-centred approaches to addressing gender-based violence in Europe and Central Asia.

Some examples of this work from around the world:

- In **Kyrgyzstan**, grassroots-level partnerships with religious leaders resulted in their support for community awareness against bride kidnapping, exemplifying innovative advocacy and collaboration with civil society to help change discriminatory stereotypes and practices.
- In **Azerbaijan**, UNDP supported the creation of the Women's Resources Centres initiative, which equips women entrepreneurs and women's community groups with tools and resources to exercise their rights to participate and achieve greater access to employment opportunities.
- With the support of the UNDP Innovation Facility and in partnership with the National Council of Justice, **Brazil** employed artificial intelligence to evaluate gender policies, using a gender-gap analysis tool, and improve the effectiveness of courts, resulting in improved data on judiciary system activities and stronger monitoring and planning tools.

Walking the Talk

UNDP continues to walk the talk as an organization, sustaining efforts to address gender equality among our staff and within our organization. **UNDP was rated one of the best-performing organizations within the United Nations system in 2019**, meeting or exceeding requirements for 88 percent of the relevant indicators in the UN System-wide Action Plan for Gender Equality (UN-SWAP).

- **Strong Leadership:**

This success is due in part to strong leadership for gender equality. In 2019, the UNDP Administrator continued to chair the two annual meetings of the Gender Steering and Implementation Committee (GSIC) and UNDP heads of offices, including deputy directors, now have a mandatory goal to effectively implement the Gender Equality Strategy.

- **Gender-responsive policy, planning and programming:**

UNDP is improving integration of gender perspectives and ensuring gender-responsive policies and programming. In 2019, two-thirds of UNDP country offices reported having gender equality strategies and time-bound action plans with clear deliverables. UNDP country programme documents are also integrating gender analyses.

- **Accountability and oversight:**

UNDP has deepened its accountability and oversight for gender equality results. For example, UNDP has one of the strongest institutional reporting mechanisms in the United Nations system. In 2019, country offices reported on gender-specific achievements and organizational results and UNDP used artificial intelligence to analyse raw data for this report.

- **Financing for gender equality:**

UNDP invests more in gender equality on average than other development actors. In 2019, almost 60 percent of our total expenditures contributed to gender equality, for a total of \$2.6 billion.

While the gender marker shows a steady increase of UNDP resources to gender equality, we recognize that to achieve even better results as an organization we need financial investments, time, and stronger architecture. To ensure adequate financing for gender equality, UNDP will implement the recommendations of the High-level Task Force on Financing for Gender Equality, established by the UN Secretary-General, including to create financial targets for gender. UNDP will also continue to invest in methods and instruments to ensure that gender analyses are at the centre of our policy, advocacy and programming work.

- **Gender parity:**

Overall UNDP is a 50:50 gender-balanced organization, in part thanks to initiatives under our Gender Parity Strategy, 2018-2021. As a result of two major recruitment drives in 2019, this parity now also extends to UNDP's top and deputy leadership positions across 140 countries and territories.

- **Inclusive and safe working environment:**

UNDP remains committed to preventing and addressing sexual harassment and sexual exploitation and abuse. In 2019, UNDP's actions to address sexual harassment in the workplace focused on prevention, reporting and response, survivor support, and accountability.

Gender Equality Seal

The innovative [Gender Equality Seal](#) is working to incentivize UNDP country offices to integrate gender equality into all aspects of their development work. The evidence-based initiative, launched nine years ago, has been improving standards and building transformative organizational change. The Seal has contributed to increasing funding for gender equality, better partnerships, and gender-responsive programming. At the end of the 2019-2020 round, 79 country offices will be certified by the Seal, impacting more than 10,000 UNDP personnel.

Our Global Gender Expertise

UNDP has gender expertise across the organization, in every region of the world. Last year we launched the Global Policy Network, which remotely connects 8,800 UNDP specialists, including gender experts, combined with some 5,000 other vetted, high-quality development professionals who can be mobilized quickly to support UNDP's work at the country level.

UNDP also has multidisciplinary gender focal teams in country offices and a Gender Team in headquarters and regional hubs focused specifically on this work. From 2017 to 2019, approximately 70 percent of country offices had gender focal teams.

Last year UNDP also invested significantly in knowledge sharing and capacity building internally through our vibrant gender community of practice (CoP). The gender CoP has over 1,000 members and facilitators organized seven e-discussions and eight chats in 2019 to address the thematic priorities outlined in the Gender Equality Strategy. This year, through the recently launched [SparkBlue](#), members of the gender CoP can now connect with external experts and stakeholders to help bridge the gap between decision makers, the development community and citizens.

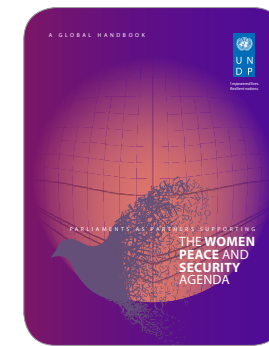


Thought Leadership to Promote Gender Equality

UNDP produced numerous flagship publications in 2019 to advocate for gender equality and women's empowerment, and to demonstrate the linkages between gender equality and improved development outcomes, including in the context of Beijing+25, UN Security Council resolution 1325, and the 2030 Agenda. Here are some examples:



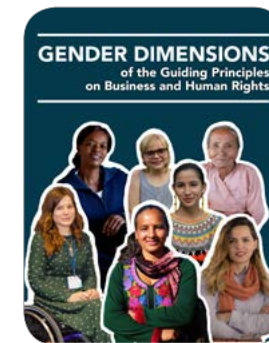
At the global level, the seminal Human Development Report, 2019, 'Beyond income, beyond averages, beyond today: Inequalities in human development in the 21st century'. This was followed by the Gender Social Norms Index.



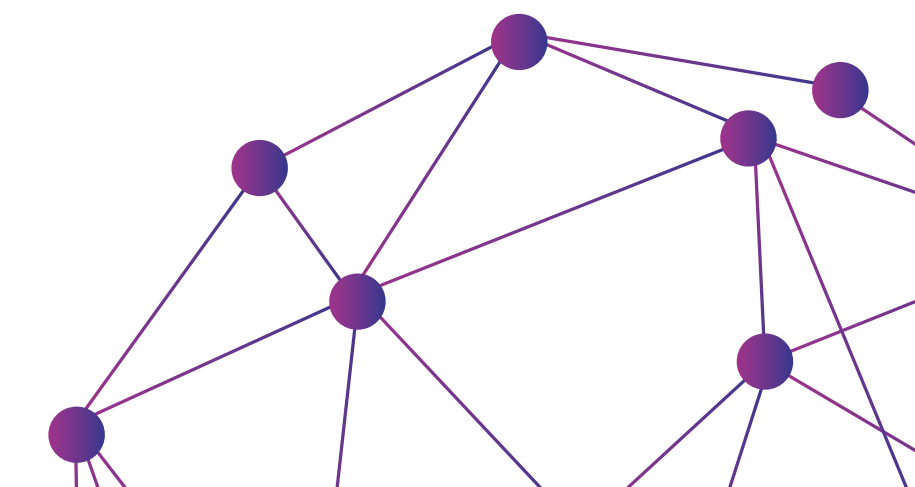
UNDP produced the 'Parliamentary Handbook on the Women, Peace and Security Agenda' in recognition of UN Security Resolution 1325.



In the Arab States UNDP advocated for gender equality through the flagship report 'Gender Justice and Equality Before the Law in the Arab States Region.'



In Asia and the Pacific, UNDP and UNHCR published 'Gender Dimensions of the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.'



The COVID-19 Crisis and Gender Equality



Understanding the gender-differentiated impacts of the COVID-19 crisis is essential for an effective response and recovery. While the crisis affects everyone, women and girls face specific and often disproportionate economic, health and social risks, from worsening rates of gender-based violence to an increased burden of unpaid care work. This is due to deeply entrenched inequalities, social norms, and unequal power relations.

Building on our 15 years of experience in mainstreaming gender into our development work, UNDP is working with our partners to ensure that gender equality is an integral part of our COVID-19 efforts, including by pushing for sex-disaggregated data, the inclusion of women in decision-making, and addressing the high prevalence of gender-based violence. As part of this, UNDP has integrated gender equality across the key pillars – governance, social protection, green economy, and digital disruption – of [phase 2 of our COVID-19 recovery plan](#).

Social Protection



As a co-leader of the UN system's socio-economic response UNDP has prioritized gender-responsive social protection and women's economic recovery in over **41 countries**, including through cash transfers and supporting women-led micro, small, and medium enterprises. For instance, in **Nepal** UNDP, with ILO, IOM and UNESCO, is supporting women informal workers, migrants and women's cooperatives through cash transfers, livelihoods support and reskilling. UNDP has also launched a [Briefing Note on the economic impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on gender inequalities](#), which includes recommendations for policy makers.

Governance



Under the governance pillar, UNDP is working to address the rising rates of gender-based violence due to the pandemic. We are providing support to more than **80 countries**, including through adapting dedicated gender-based violence services and widely integrating a gender-based violence lens into COVID-19 efforts. This includes **26 country** offices that are implementing the EU-UN Spotlight Initiative. UNDP has also published a [Brief on gender-based violence and COVID-19](#), which provides concrete actions and strategies to prevent and address GBV in the context of the crisis.

Digital disruption



UNDP is working to close the gender digital divide as digital transformation accelerates during the pandemic. For example, in Fiji UNDP and UNCDF are expanding access to digital agriculture and financial products and services for rural women farmers with PacFarmer App, a service delivery platform with **42% female users**. In **Uganda** and **Egypt**, UNDP is providing support to women-run micro, small, and medium enterprises through upgrading digital financial services, value chains, and connecting with customers via digital platforms.

Green economy



UNDP is also integrating gender equality into our work on the green economy. In **Cambodia**, for example, UNDP is working with Action Aid to create a Women's Resilience Index as part of our project on "Strengthening Climate Information and Early Warning Systems to Support Climate-Resilient Development." Insights from the index are enabling more gender equitable policy development, advocacy, and programming. The project also supports women's leadership and decision-making in community-based disaster risk reduction, a critical area in the COVID-19 recovery.



Looking Ahead

While there has been significant progress in advancing gender equality and in implementing UNDP's Gender Equality Strategy, the COVID-19 crisis is threatening these gains and other challenges also remain. From a lack of women's leadership in humanitarian settings and not enough financial resources for gender equality in development organizations to the need to better address new forms of inequalities, there's still work to be done.

Acting on lessons learned will help us accelerate progress on gender equality in the coming years.

- **Changing social norms:**

One of UNDP's primary challenges is to move faster to help governments transform patriarchal institutions and structures and tackle discriminatory social norms and collective behaviours through programmes and policies. To do this, UNDP is reshaping our agenda on gender equality and putting the changing of discriminatory social norms, including those around the redistribution of unpaid care work, leadership, and the digital sphere, at the centre of our work.

- **Strong collaboration and partnerships:**

New partnerships are crucial to realizing the implementation of the Gender Equality Strategy. While the COVID-19 crisis has created uncertainty around the commemorations of Beijing+25 and the 20th anniversary of UN Security Council resolution 1325 this year, UNDP remains committed to working collaboratively to implement the principles outlined in these landmark initiatives. For example, UNDP is co-leading the Generation Equality Action Coalition on Feminist Action for Climate Justice. We also remain committed to developing inclusive, green economic COVID-19 recovery strategies and improving the relationship between climate, nature and development.

- **Scaling up transformation:**

Investing in scaling up transformation in key areas of our work is a priority. UNDP will implement a next-generation offer on poverty and inclusive growth, including through gender-responsive social protection and addressing how the 'fourth industrial revolution' and the digitalization of the labour market differently impact women and girls. We will also work to tackle new forms of inequalities and invest in our capacities to ensure that gender equality is addressed systematically in crisis and post-crisis contexts, including in the COVID-19 crisis.

- **Thorough gender analysis:**

Our evaluations have revealed that thorough, systematic gender analysis is crucial to achieving strong performance on gender equality, and good practices from our Gender Equality Seal show how programme portfolio reviews contribute to transformative results and offer a way forward. UNDP will continue investing in methods and instruments to ensure that gender analysis is at the centre of our policy, advocacy and programming work.

As we continue our work to tackle the unprecedented impacts of the COVID-19 crisis, UNDP is focused on helping our partners look beyond recovery, towards 2030. We are firmly committed to reaching our global gender goals and to the 2030 Agenda. But to make this a reality, we must work together faster and on a larger scale. We know that gender equality is a choice, and the time for change is now.

Endnotes

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