



Foreign, Commonwealth
& Development Office

International Women and Girls Strategy 2023–2030





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**Presented to Parliament
by the Secretary of State for Foreign,
Commonwealth and Development Affairs
by Command of His Majesty**

March 2023



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On the cover: Young girls use a laptop in Central Ethiopia

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Txai Suruí speaks at the Opening Ceremony for Cop26 at the SEC, Glasgow

Foreword by James Cleverly, Foreign Secretary

The FCDO's first International Women and Girls Strategy is a leap forward for women's and girls' rights.

Women and girls need equal freedoms and rights to reach their full potential. This is a difficult task, but we're in it for the long haul.

Advancing gender equality and challenging discrimination is not just the right thing to do—though of course it is. It's also a policy from which everyone benefits. Greater gender equality brings freedom, boosts prosperity and trade, strengthens global security and builds resilience. Quite simply, it is the fundamental building block of all healthy democracies.

This Government's investment, in partnership with others across the world, is working. More girls are in school, fewer girls are being forced into early marriage and more women are in high political office and leadership positions. Grassroots women's groups are growing too across the world.

But these gains were hard won and need to be defended and extended today.

We support all the brave women around the world who are struggling for their freedoms and rights. In Iran. On the battlefields of Ukraine. On every continent.

I have put women and girls at the heart of the FCDO's work.

That is why I have chosen Bo in Sierra Leone to launch this strategy. It was my mother's birthplace. I am deeply proud of her and my Sierra Leonean heritage. It is thanks to my mother's courage that I am Foreign Secretary of the United Kingdom today. She took a brave decision to leave her home and her life as a teacher behind. And to start a new life, a new career and a new family in London.



Her story—and therefore my story—is at the heart of this Strategy. Because it's about education, health and reproductive rights. And the basic freedoms that must be the birth right of every woman, regardless of where she is born.

I will make sure that the FCDO stands up for women and girls at any opportunity we encounter. And I will urge our partners across the world to do the same.

Foreword by Andrew Mitchell, Minister for Development

It has always been abundantly clear to me that you cannot understand development if you don't see it through the eyes of girls and women, and you cannot achieve development unless you unleash their full potential.

Take the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals, containing ambitious globally agreed targets to ensure that no one is left behind. The 2030 countdown clock for achieving these is ticking, and it is well understood that progress has been stalled by a series of crises including the pandemic, the increasingly crushing impacts of climate change, and the global effects of Putin's illegal war in Ukraine. However, we know progress is also being thwarted by a further crisis: the increasing attack on women's rights and gender equality.

We cannot achieve the Sustainable Development Goals without empowered women and girls. We cannot tackle poverty and hunger in Afghanistan if the Taliban erase women from public life and forbid humanitarian agencies from employing them to deliver aid. Women and girls in Iran cannot realise their academic and economic potential when they are being beaten and killed for simply calling for a full role in society. Women around the world cannot flourish if misogyny goes unchecked, or if they are forced to live with violence, or if they don't have access to good healthcare and sexual health and reproductive services. We also have to overcome concerted and well-funded international efforts to dilute women's rights in the UN and other standard setting bodies.

Our new Strategy stands as a rallying cry for women's freedom, empowerment and prosperity.



In it we re-commit to support the 3 'Es' — education, empowering women and girls and championing their health and rights, and ending violence. We commit to driving forward progress through a major new campaign. We commit to being a genuine and generous partner to grassroots organisations and other allies, old and new. We commit to putting women and girls at the centre of our operations and investments, and we commit to becoming a world leading centre for research, evidence and expertise in gender and development. To ensure we deliver on these commitments, we will hold ourselves to account and report on our progress.

Put simply, women and girls should face no constraints on realising their full potential. They should have control over their own bodies and control their own choices. This Strategy is our commitment to support them, and women's rights organisations, until equality reaches every woman and girl.

Part 1: Context: Prioritising women and girls at a time of global instability

Twenty-eight years have passed since the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action received unanimous support at the UN, to ‘advance the goals of equality, development and peace for all women everywhere in this interest of all humanity’. It set out a visionary agenda and committed UN Member States to taking bold action to remove the systemic barriers that hold women and girls back from equal participation in all areas of life.

There has been positive progress over the last few decades. More girls are in school, fewer girls are forced into early marriage, more women survive through pregnancy and more women serve in high political office and private sector leadership positions. In recent years, over 60 countries have liberalised laws for sexual and reproductive health and

rights (SRHR), including increasing access to safe abortion.

We can only build a fairer, freer, safer, wealthier and greener world, where everyone benefits and no one is left behind, if we put women and girls at the heart of our efforts. The diverse voices, knowledge and leadership of women and girls are essential to local, national and international decision-making. They lead to more effective governance, and more successful businesses and services and, in turn, drive better outcomes that benefit whole economies and communities. The realisation of the rights of women and girls is key to ending extreme poverty and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The benefits, alongside the moral obligation, are clear. A child whose mother can read is 50% more likely to live beyond the age of

Foreign Secretary James Cleverly speaks to mothers and babies who are receiving healthcare as a part of a UK aid programme in Ethiopia



five, 50% more likely to be immunised, and twice as likely to attend school. Girls who have higher education are up to six times less likely to marry as children and less likely to experience violence from a partner. If women had the same role in labour markets as men, an estimated \$28 trillion (26%) could be added to global GDP in 2025. Women with access to sexual and reproductive health services and rights are more likely to complete their education, take up better opportunities and contribute to the growth and prosperity of their families and countries. When women meaningfully participate in peace processes, the resulting agreement is 64% less likely to fail and 35% more likely to last at least 15 years.

Yet these and other gains are under threat amid escalating instability and complex geopolitical competition. In recent years, systematic attempts by regressive actors to roll back on women's and girls' rights have gained momentum at the international, national and community level, and are amplified online. Well-funded and well organised, these actors have sought to disrupt multilateral negotiations, threaten consensus, and block the texts that set the global standard and level of ambition on gender equality. At the national level, laws and policies aimed at curtailing gender equality and human rights are having a real and lasting impact on people's lives, including limiting access to SRHR services, blocking access to financial assets, and condoning gender-based violence.

These attempts at rollback threaten to reverse the gains that have been made since the Beijing Declaration, undermining the global and grassroots progress towards gender equality that the UK has for so long championed and supported. This attack on women's and girls' rights is an attack on our values and the fabric of democracy, and a key part of the broader global trend towards authoritarianism.

Case study: What Works to Prevent Violence

The first phase of this programme generated rigorous evidence across 16 countries in Africa and Asia, which showed that violence is preventable. Over half of our pilots showed significant reductions in gender-based violence of around 50% in under three years. Effective approaches include:

- Combined economic and social empowerment interventions that take a gender-transformative approach;
- Community activism approaches to shift harmful social norms and support survivors;
- School based interventions using participatory approaches to shape norms around gender, relationships, and the use of violence;
- Cash transfers; and
- Gender transformative group-based parenting and couples' programmes.

In 2021 we launched a successor programme to scale up proven approaches—the largest investment by any single donor government to prevent VAWG globally. By meaningfully engaging with people with disabilities and LGBT+ people, disaggregating all data by disability status, and piloting targeted interventions for those most at risk, the programme will also contribute to building the global evidence base on what works to prevent violence for people who have been marginalised who are among those most severely affected by violence and abuse.

This increasing authoritarianism is accompanied by global threats that put women and girls at particular risk. This includes food insecurity and malnutrition,

global health crises, climate change, biodiversity loss, increasing and persistent levels of extreme poverty, migration and forced displacement. COVID has reversed progress and created new barriers. Women have shouldered the unpaid care burden and have experienced deepening poverty. There has been reduced access to sexual and reproductive health services, and an increase in the multiple dimensions of gender-based violence (GBV).

Poverty, conflict, insecurity and humanitarian crises worsen gender inequality and cause long term societal harm. Women and girls are twice as likely to be malnourished as men. Conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) remains widespread, including as a chosen tactic of warfare. Increased reliance on humanitarian, peacekeeping and security interventions put women and girls at particular risk of aid-related sexual exploitation, abuse, and sexual harassment (SEAH).

Rapid technological change brings opportunities to close the gender gap and enable women and girls, but it also brings evolving challenges such as the personal and societal cost of digital exclusion, increasing cyber security threats and online violence and harassment.

Women and girls also face heightened risks when also marginalised in other ways—such as living in poverty, living with a disability, belonging to minority ethnic/racial groups or the LGBT+ community. More than nine in ten of all maternal deaths occur in the world's poorest countries. Multiple, overlapping forms of discrimination increase the levels of extreme disadvantage and vulnerability.

Such multi-dimensional challenges lead to limited and unequal access to opportunities, resources, services and information, at best holding back the potential for progress

but at worst, putting it into reverse. At the current rate, before we even consider the latest headwinds, it will take 132 years to close the gender gap (the gap to achieving gender parity for access to resources and opportunities) worldwide.

The UK is well-placed to step up, defend the gains and drive progress for women and girls, building on a long and strong global track record. We helped secure the dedicated SDG 5 on gender equality, and the mainstreaming of gender equality across Agenda 2030. We use our membership of the UN Security Council, the UN Human Rights Council, and other multilateral organisations to promote women's and girls' rights. We convene global conversations to drive commitments, for example at the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI) Conference in November 2022 and the Global Education Summit in July 2021. We deploy our diplomatic partnerships, development programmes and specialist expertise, alongside targeted investment in world-leading research, technology and innovation to drive progress.

This experience of playing a positive role internationally is matched by our continued delivery for women and girls in the UK through our domestic policies. Under this Government, the gender pay gap has fallen significantly, with more than two million more women in work since 2010, and we have seen an almost 30% increase in entries by girls to science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) A levels in England between 2009 and 2020. Last year, we published the first Government-led Women's Health Strategy for England, marking a reset in the way in which the Government is looking at women's health.

The UK also published a new UK Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy

in 2021 to drive improvements, help better target perpetrators and support victims, followed in March 2022 by the Tackling Domestic Abuse Plan which commits to invest over £230 million of cross-government funding into tackling these terrible crimes. And the UK significantly strengthened domestic law on FGM in 2015 to improve protection for victims and those at risk, and to break down the barriers to prosecution.

We will continue to lead by example and commit to sharing this learning and experience through our international work. We recognise, too, that the UK itself has further to go and will seek to learn from others.

Case study: Girls' Education Skills Programme

Through the Girls' Education Skills Partnership, launched in March 2022, the UK government is working with the private sector to boost girls' access to education in partner countries. The partnership will provide high quality skills training to 1 million girls around the world, with a focus on providing the STEM skills needed to find work in key sectors such as technology and manufacturing. The programme will provide funding to businesses, charities, schools and colleges, initially in Bangladesh and Nigeria, where significant barriers to girls' education remain.

Minister Mitchell meets with workers at an International Rescue Centre in Ouallam, Niger



Part 2: Principles guiding our approach

FCDO will use the full weight of our diplomatic and development offer to put women and girls, in all their diversity, at the heart of everything we do. We will take a life course approach and stay true to our commitment to leave no one behind and tackle poverty, recognising the extreme challenges for those facing multiple dimensions of disadvantage.

Our action will be governed by five principles:

- 1. We will stand up and speak out for women's and girls' rights and freedoms on the global stage and in our bilateral relationships.** We will build agile networks of established allies and include middle-ground powers, with the aim of building international consensus to stop those intent on rolling back on rights and putting hard-won progress into reverse.
- 2. We will embolden and amplify the work of diverse grassroots women's organisations and movements,** championing their role as critical agents for change and backing platforms to ensure they are listened to on the local, national and global stage. This includes the FCDO network taking a locally led approach and tuning into the voices of women and girls, communities when making programme and policy decisions.
- 3. We will target investment towards the key life stages for women and girls** to maximise our effectiveness and secure life-long and intergenerational impact. Priorities will include early childhood, foundational learning, adolescence, pregnancy and childbirth, and the transition into the labour market.
- 4. We will act for and with women and girls impacted by crises and shocks,** including conflict, global health, climate change, violence, food insecurity and malnutrition, and the resulting humanitarian crises. We will ensure that our support locks in safeguarding people and the environment to avoid unintentional harm.
- 5. We will strengthen systems**—political, economic and social—that play a critical role in protecting and empowering women and girls, embracing innovative financing models and technology use to secure long term development, as set out in the 2022 Strategy for International Development.

Case study: Saving Lives in Sierra Leone programme

The UK is committed to supporting sexual and reproductive health rights in Sierra Leone. Through the Saving Lives in Sierra Leone programme we support the training of midwives in three locations—Freetown (National School of Midwifery), Bo and Makeni. The programme supported 1,284 midwives to enter the workforce over the last year, with 100% of them subsequently deployed in Ministry of Health and Sanitation health facilities.

This is complemented by the vital role of the programme's clinical mentorship schemes, which includes the EmONC (Emergency Obstetric & Newborn Care) mentorship scheme, which has provided mentorship to at least 260 healthcare workers in 102 facilities and plays a critical role in building a sustainable health workforce for the future.

Part 3: Priority themes—the 3 Es

These principles will apply across FCDO’s operations. We will channel activity into three inter-related priority themes—Educating girls, Empowering women and girls and championing their health and rights and Ending gender-based violence.

These ‘3 Es’ represent the areas where the challenges are most acute, the potential gains are greatest, and where the UK is best placed to add value and catalyse progress.

Educating girls—the right of every girl everywhere to secure knowledge and skills she needs to reach her full potential.

We stand up for the right of every girl to receive 12 years of quality education. Education is a human right, a gateway to other rights, and one of the most effective

and lasting investments that governments can make.

Although there was improved access to education from 2000 to 2020 with 68 million fewer out-of-school girls, COVID-19 has had a debilitating and devastating impact, disrupting the education of 1.4 billion children. An estimated 244 million children and youth were still out of school in 2021, with girls more likely to be out of school than boys in low-income countries, Sub-Saharan Africa, and settings of conflict and protracted crisis.

But even when in school, most children are not learning. The current global learning crisis is deep, widespread, and growing. The global learning poverty rate—the number of children unable to read and understand a simple text by the age of ten—is estimated at 70% in low- and middle-income countries—up from 57% in 2019. In Sub-Saharan Africa

Earthshot Prize Finalist
Vinisha Umashankar at
the Innovation event at
the COP26, Glasgow



the learning poverty rate is 89%. Based on learning lost during COVID-19 alone, the loss of future lifetime earnings for this generation of children across the globe is estimated at US\$21 trillion.

The situation is compounded by ingrained and simultaneous challenges. Disasters, such as extreme weather events, are already disrupting the education of 40 million children per year. Girls living in countries affected by conflict are almost 2.5 times more likely to be out of primary school and 90% more likely to miss secondary schooling, compared to peers in stable contexts. As seen recently, and tragically, in Afghanistan, the rollback on women and girls' rights can strike education and learning too.

Girls often face a set of interlinked barriers to accessing and remaining in education and learning. The situation is more acute for marginalised groups, such as those with disabilities. Some of these barriers are rooted in gender norms such as preferences for educating boys, domestic responsibilities such as collecting water, accepted high levels of GBV, child marriage, FGM, and early pregnancy, as well as facilities at school during menstruation. Those affected by undernutrition (wasting, stunting) do less well at school and go on to earn less as adults.

Many schools and other education settings also perpetuate harmful gender and social norms that hold girls and women back—including through school cultures, teaching practices and curricula. Both schools and university campuses can often be unsafe for female students, while violence experienced at or en route to education is the reality for many.

Case study: Global Education Summit

In July 2021, the UK co-hosted the Global Education Summit in London with the Government of Kenya. The Summit raised an unprecedented \$4 billion for the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), putting them firmly on track to achieve their five-year target of \$5 billion. The UK remains a key donor to the GPE.

As the world's largest global fund solely dedicated to providing children with a quality education in lower-income countries, a fully funded GPE will help ensure 88 million more children are in school and 175 million more children are learning by 2025. In the longer term, this investment could add \$164 billion to economies in the developing world, lift 18 million people out of poverty, and protect two million girls from child marriage.

The Summit also led to 19 Heads of State committing to spend at least 20% of their national budgets on education, which will lead to more than \$196 billion in education financing over five years.

The UK has demonstrated its place in leading global efforts. In 2021, the UK and UAE co-led a ground-breaking UN Human Rights Council resolution which called for the international community to commit to 12 years of quality education for all girls for the first time in a UN document. We also used our G7 Presidency in 2021 to secure two global objectives for low- and lower-middle income countries by 2026: 40 million more girls in school and 20 million more reading by age ten or the end of primary school. These objectives have been set as ambitious but realistic stepping-stones towards SDG4.

The UK is a founding member and has been the top bilateral donor to the Global Partnership for Education (GPE). The UK

and Kenya co-hosted the Global Education Summit in July 2021, raising a landmark \$4 billion in donor pledges for the GPE and mobilising \$196 billion in domestic financing for education over five years. The UK is also a founding donor to Education Cannot Wait; the only global fund solely dedicated to education in emergencies. On the ground, from 2015 to 2020, we helped support the education of 15.6 million children (of which 8.1 million were girls). We fund bilateral education programmes in 19 countries, and through our Girls' Education Challenge, more than a million girls who were most at risk of dropping out are staying in school and making progress, of which 150,000 are girls with disabilities.

The UK is also a recognised leader on global education research focused on what works to guide bold reforms and improve learning outcomes. Our reputation is further enhanced by the UK's internationally renowned higher education sector. One in ten countries have had a Prime Minister or Head of State who studied in the UK. Through our scholarship programmes, we provide students with a world class education and deep exposure to our values of democracy and openness, and gender equality and other forms of equality.

Our strong focus on quality basic education is complemented by interventions targeting the key transition points from early childhood through adolescence to adulthood, including higher education and employment. Improving foundational learning (basic literacy, numeracy, and socio-emotional skills) is the critical first step to give all children, particularly girls, the best chance to progress through and then beyond education. The UK is working with others to deliver on the Commitment to Action on Foundational Learning, which aims to halve, by 2030, the global share of children unable to read

and understand a simple written text by age ten. We are also generating more research with low-income and lower-middle-income countries on effective early childhood development, including mitigating the impact of COVID-19 on young children's learning and development. Other interventions across key life stages include encouraging greater uptake by girls of STEM subjects at school, building digital and entrepreneurship skills that can secure quality jobs for all, and promoting the skills needed for the growing green economy.

The read-across with the other themes is crucial, including the work to break down the barriers that stop girls going to school, including on SRHR, comprehensive sexuality education in schools, and mainstreaming of actions to prevent GBV into education systems.

Empowering women and girls and championing their health and rights – unlocking their political, economic and social agency

We will support efforts to enable women and girls to take control of their own lives and contribute to society, politics, and economies on an equal basis to others, spanning across three sub-themes.

Sexual and reproductive health and rights

All women and girls have the right to make their own informed decisions about sex and childbearing—to be able to avoid unwanted sexual contact, decide if, and when, to have children, and to face fewer risks during pregnancy and childbirth. Reaching adolescents prior to sexual debut offers protection to make informed choices, positively impacting their future options.

Case study: Reproductive Health Supplies programme

Our flagship Reproductive Health Supplies programme is leading the way to improve reproductive health for women, girls and adolescents through new technology and innovation, supporting access to the lowest prices for public and private sector, and strengthening national health systems.

Around the world, many women and girls want to have more control over whether, when and how many children to have. FCDO funding has been critical to introducing and scaling up a completely new and innovative contraceptive method, DMPA-SC, which women and girls can self-inject every three months. Injectable contraceptives were (and still are) among the most widely used contraceptive globally. However, this new method broke through barriers by allowing women and girls to self-inject. This means that they don't need to travel long distances every 3 months to a clinic and it increases the ease, convenience, and privacy of injectable use. The programme has also expanded the choice of contraceptive methods available to women and girls, especially those in very remote, and conflict or climate-affected areas where proximity to health clinics is a key barrier to access.

Our investment in DMPA-SC also supported a public-private partnership between Pfizer and a consortium of donors to subsidise the price for DMPA-SC for lower- and middle-income countries and guarantee supply from the manufacturer over a longer period of time. Over a 5 year period the results included the expansion of DMPA-SC from 12 to 42 countries and the training of 80,000 health care workers, reaching over 6 million users, averting 4.9 million unintended pregnancies, 17,000 maternal deaths and 1.4m unsafe abortions.

Over 60 countries have liberalised laws for SRHR, and many have moved toward increasing access to abortion since 1990. But despite significant progress, SRHR continues to be inadequate, inaccessible, deprioritised or actively undermined. Over 800 women or girls die every day due to pregnancy or childbirth complications and maternal death is the leading cause of death of women of reproductive age (15-49). Currently an estimated 218 million women in low and middle-income countries want to avoid or delay pregnancy but for many reasons are not currently using modern contraception. SRHR services are key to supporting survivors of GBV. Each year there are 35 million unsafe abortions, resulting in life-changing injuries and the death of at least 23,000 women each year.

FGM is one of the most extreme manifestations of gender inequality. At least 200 million girls and women alive today have undergone FGM, and 45 million more girls are at risk between 2020 and 2030. Efforts to end the practice are being led by grassroots movements within affected communities; the UK supports and helps to build the evidence base and scale up those efforts. We will also support the UN and WHO in their efforts to strengthen laws, policies and healthcare systems, and to care for survivors.

The UK defends, promotes and supports universal and comprehensive SRHR. Our focus is on the long-term, by ensuring women and girls have secure access to quality, respectful, affordable, and inclusive health services through sustainable health care systems. Only through strong health systems and SRHR, alongside interventions to improve nutrition, water and sanitation, will we be able to meet the UK commitment to end preventable deaths of mothers, babies and children by 2030.



Women receiving training and advice about work

Case study: Sudan—Supporting the Africa-led Movement to End FGM—Phase II (seven years)

Since 2013, the UK has worked with the UN to support the Government of Sudan and many committed women and men to end the practice of FGM, the largest ever single-country investment in ending FGM. The programme contributed to a landmark law criminalising FGM in Sudan in 2020.

The programme focuses on changing deeply held beliefs in a country where 87% of girls are cut, and on changing the way FGM is spoken about. The approach has helped reduce social acceptance of FGM by an estimated 18% over a two-year period. These efforts have helped wider discussions about women's rights and girls' empowerment; the second phase of the programme is also working to end the closely related issue of child marriage.

Women's political and social empowerment

Women's full and equal civic and political participation and leadership underpins healthy democracies. It does so by strengthening the legitimacy and sustainability of formal and informal institutions and by creating fairer systems. Women's political empowerment is positively associated with higher human capital, including equality of access to schooling and health. Grassroots women's rights organisations (WROs) and movements offer on-the-ground expertise and the ability to tackle the toughest issues. Reduced civic space is however limiting these organisations' ability to function in many countries and they need more funding—core, flexible and multi-year.

Case study: Increasing our support to women leaders in Ukraine

In March 2022, the UK launched additional funding specifically for women’s rights organisations, women leaders and the wider women’s movement at the forefront of the conflict working to support the critical needs of women and children both inside and displaced outside of Ukraine.

Beyond the immediate response, the UK continues to promote women’s political and civic participation in Ukraine. Our longstanding partnership with the National Democratic Institute (NDI) established gender-focused caucuses (GFCs) in local councils; supported media outlets to raise awareness of women’s accomplishment; and provided training to develop leaders in civic and political life. An external programme assessment conducted in late 2020 found that because of GFCs’ work, women councillors have successfully advocated for key policies, such as adopting the European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life, which institutionalise gender equality at the local level in Ukraine.

Despite improvements in some parts of the world, globally women only make up 26% of representatives in national parliaments and 28% of managerial positions. It is acknowledged that women can play a crucial role in building sustainable peace and security. Yet during peace processes recorded between 1990 and 2018, women made up only 3%, 4% and 13% of mediators, signatories, and negotiators, respectively.

In countries like Iran, where women face discrimination in law and practice, including in relation to marriage, divorce, employment,

inheritance and political office, the consequences of speaking out have proven deadly. In Yemen, a country ranked last in the World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap index for 13 consecutive years, women have been suffering, violently, within a country in deep crisis that has entrenched gender inequality and rigid gender roles.

It is critical also to address the challenge of women being excluded from the increasingly digital world due to an access gap, caused by the absence of affordable connectivity and digital literacy, and by social norms discouraging women’s online engagement. Constraints on freedom of expression such as restrictive laws and internet shutdowns and restrictions, prevent women from engaging in public debate or being at risk if they do. Online violence, particularly directed at politically active women, is highly detrimental to women’s full and equal participation in public life.

We are playing our part on women, peace and security (WPS), as demonstrated by our ambitious new five-year National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (NAP). The NAP sets out our ambition to tackle emerging transnational threats including cyber threats and prepare and implement an agile, gender focused response across all policy and programming in fragile and conflict-affected states. It also has a particular focus on meaningful participation in peace efforts, from peacebuilders to mediators and negotiators, and as leaders in humanitarian operations.

FCDO worked in close collaboration with the Ministry of Defence and other government departments such as Ministry of Justice and the Home Office on the NAP, as well as consulting UK experts from women’s rights organisations, academics and

parliamentarians. The NAP embeds WPS in our development, diplomacy and defence policies. It sets out how we will deliver against our global commitment to UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, and associated resolutions, alongside a suite of commitments to strengthen our own record— from increasing female recruitment in the British Armed Forces, to strengthening women’s inclusion in our diplomatic negotiating teams, to working across government to tackle gender-based violence comprehensively.

Women’s economic empowerment

Women’s inclusion in the economy requires tackling micro and macro-economic, legal, environmental regulatory and social barriers. Our approach promotes skills acquisition, quality jobs and assets (financial, land and digital) along with freedom from restrictive gender and social norms (such as the uneven distribution of unpaid care and domestic work and conservative attitudes towards female employment in certain sectors and other gender stereotypes). We aim to support effective transitions from education to the labour market and enable women to build assets and save for economic security during their working lives and into old age. This gives women greater power and control over life decisions including if and when to have children, what livelihood/career to choose and how to plan their working life around these choices.

Public and private sector investment is critical for women’s economic empowerment. We advocate for gender-focused policies, systems and laws to give women greater political and economic power. Effective social protection systems can underpin women’s economic and financial inclusion, recognise and redistribute unpaid care and

curb barriers of access to essential services throughout the life-course.

Case study: Gender Bond issuances in Africa

The FCDO funds Financial Sector Deepening (FSD) Africa which is building sustainable and inclusive financial markets across Africa. FSD Africa provided technical advice to NMB Bank Plc, a leading bank in Tanzania, on a social bond framework and second party opinion, both vital for the development of the first gender bond in sub-Saharan Africa which issued in February 2022. Through the Jasiri Gender Bond, NMB raised £25.2 million, which will be used to provide: credit facilities and preferential interest rate loans for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) controlled by women, and for SMEs and MSMEs with 30-50% of women in their workforce; plus working capital, credit to balance cash flow and support for unforeseen expenses for SMEs controlled by women; support to businesses that offer products and services that specifically or disproportionately benefit women. The Jasiri Gender Bond attracted a large pool of retail investors, 52% of whom were women.

Ending violence—driving national and international action to end all forms of gender-based violence

Gender-based violence (GBV) is pervasive and universal, rooted in structural gender inequalities everywhere. It includes intimate partner violence, sexual violence including conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), school related GBV, child marriage, female

genital mutilation (FGM), online and offline GBV, modern slavery and trafficking, and sexual exploitation, abuse and sexual harassment (SEAH) in the aid sector. GBV threatens women's lives and wellbeing and prevents access to opportunities that are fundamental to freedom and development.

Global estimates produced by the WHO show that one in three women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence at least once in their lifetime—a statistic that has hardly shifted over the past decade. This violence starts early: one in four young women who have been in a relationship will have already experienced violence by an intimate partner by their mid-twenties; rates are two to four times higher for women with disabilities. 85% of women globally have witnessed or experienced online violence, and 650 million girls and women alive today were married before their 18th birthday. Global studies reveal high rates of violence against LGBT+ people (56% in Southern

and Eastern Africa). Children's exposure to intimate partner violence can also have long-term health and development consequences.

The frequency and brutality of GBV increases in conflict and humanitarian crises. Conflict, environmental disasters, and extreme weather events, alongside poverty and food insecurity, also lead to displacement and migration which heightens the risks of violence, child marriage, and sexual exploitation. Conflict-related sexual violence continues to be perpetrated against women and girls across the world, as the appalling reports from Ukraine and Ethiopia in the last year demonstrate. Meanwhile, SEAH linked to aid programmes and peacebuilding erodes the integrity of our interventions and perpetrates direct harm on the people we aid.

The UK is recognised as a leader in challenging GBV and a pioneer of approaches that have shown reductions in violence of around 50%. Our ground-



Rt Hon James Cleverly, UK Foreign Secretary meets Ukrainian First Lady Olena Zelenska at the 2022 PSVI Conference in London

breaking What Works to Prevent Violence programme will support more countries to implement evidence-based solutions at scale and build a robust evidence base on preventing GBV in conflict and humanitarian crises and for women and girls who have been marginalised, including those with disabilities and LGBT+ people. We will also continue our strong track record of international leadership on eradicating child marriage, to give girls a greater say over their bodies and futures. We place a strong focus on amplifying the voice and leadership of women-led, youth and survivor organisations, and supporting survivors to safely access the support they need and want.

UK humanitarian action responds to the increased risks of GBV and seeks to strengthen the ability of women and girls to recover from crises. UK advocacy led to NATO's first policy

on CRSV in June 2021. The UK recognises the gendered impacts of conflict on children and works with our international partners to reduce the impact of conflict on all children, considering the specific needs of boys and girls.

Our approach seeks to protect the global normative framework on ending GBV, as demonstrated through our 2022 ratification of both the International Labour Organisation Violence and Harassment Convention and the Istanbul Convention on combatting all violence against women.

Promoting responsible inclusive digital space, where women and girls are free to express their opinions, is an important part of our international work to end online GBV, as we tackle online violence, targeted misogynistic content and gendered disinformation aimed at women and girls.

Case study: PSVI Conference

On 28-29 November 2022, the UK hosted the international Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI) Conference in London. Over 1,000 delegates attended, including survivors, civil society, multilateral partners and representatives from at least 57 countries. Following the launch of PSVI 10 years ago, the conference sent a strong message of sustained international resolve to tackle this global scourge.

The UK launched a new Political Declaration at the conference which sends a clear message that these heinous crimes must end and outlines the steps needed to achieve this. 53 countries and Special Representative of the Secretary-General Patten endorsed the Political Declaration, with 40 countries making national commitments detailing the tangible actions they will take to tackle conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV).

The Foreign Secretary launched the UK's new PSVI Strategy, backed by up to £12.5m of new funding, which includes up to £8.6m for a new initiative on survivor-centred accountability—“ACT for Survivors”. The strategy focusses on what the UK will do to deliver a strengthened global response, prevent sexual violence in conflict, promote justice, and support survivors. It outlines HMG's ambition to use our diplomacy, development and defence levers to tackle these appalling crimes.

To help maintain the momentum generated by the conference, the UK launched an International Alliance on PSVI, comprised of governments, civil society and survivors. This will be a key forum for coordinating international action to prevent and respond to conflict-related sexual violence.

Part 4: Goals

FCDO's activities will align with our core principles and be delivered through and across the 3Es, which provide the context on need, opportunity and UK added value. By operationalising these together, we pledge to achieve the following new goals.

Goal 1: Drive the conversation. FCDO will deliver a major global campaign

- Spearhead a series of high-profile global moments and conversations on women and girls, including a new Wilton Park series of five thematic events (March 2023 onwards).
- We will use our standing within the UN Human Rights Council, UN General Assembly, UN Security Council, G7, G20, Commonwealth, OECD, OSCE, international financial institutions and other multilateral groupings to stand up for the rights of women and girls. This includes building a global network of partners committed to pushing back on the rollback of women's and girls' rights and mobilising increased international support for innovative global initiatives and vehicles (e.g. on WROs, education, care, SEAH, GBV, child marriage, ending all forms of malnutrition, PSVI, and online harassment and abuse).
- Tailor the campaign to the local context for maximum impact. Relevant UK missions to develop commitments on women and girls and Heads of Mission to address those complicit in the anti-rights movement, using their political expertise and convening power to raise the most pressing gender issues in their host countries

Case study: Gender-smart British International Investment (BII) investment in Bangladesh

BII, the UK's Development Finance Institution, is a champion of gender-smart investing. It has committed to targeting at least 25% of all new investments as being 2X qualified, for each year of the 2022-26 strategy period.

An example of BII's gender-smart investments includes its recent \$52 million loan to DBL Group for the construction of a greenfield manufacturing facility that will support new business growth within Bangladesh's manufacturing sector. The loan facility will help to create over 1,000 jobs, boost economic opportunities and working standards for the female workforce within the local garment sector. This investment qualified under the 2X Challenge as women will make up more than 50 per cent of the new workforce, and the capital from BII will further support improved working conditions and benefits such as paid maternity benefits, nursery facilities, and 'light duty' work options when pregnant – which support the longer term economic empowerment of women.

Through this investment, BII is supporting Bangladesh's development ambitions by driving more sustainable and inclusive private sector development through job creation, setting new industry standards for improved working conditions for women, and encouraging companies to be greener.

Case study: Women and Girls Wilton Park Series

The Women and Girls Wilton Park Series will create space to interrogate and build consensus on how to effectively tackle five priority issues, progress on which has been seriously undermined in recent times and risks putting women and girls' rights into reverse. Bringing together global experts, political and grassroots actors, the series runs for a year from March 2023 and includes the following themes:

- Women's Economic Empowerment: Stimulating Renewed Global Momentum and Expanding Intergenerational Impact
 - Stemming Global Pushback on Women's Rights and Civic Space with a Spotlight on Sexual Rights and Reproductive Health
 - Leveraging the Evidence on Violence Against Women to Generate New Partnerships to Trigger Global Action at Scale
 - Enabling Women's Rights Organisations and Movements: core and better-quality funding for crisis response.
 - Preventing Violence In and Through Education
- Create and support multiple platforms to amplify grassroots women's and girls' voices, and protect and enable women leaders, activists, human rights defenders and peacebuilders, to enable their safe and meaningful participation in decision making at national, regional and international levels, including as leaders in humanitarian action. This includes a new Humanitarian Framework and designating UK embassies, High Commissions and other FCDO international offices as safe spaces for WROs where possible.
- Spearhead a global Coalition for Learning to draw on the evidence and grow the political leadership needed to address the learning crisis which disproportionately affects girls. We will use our convening power to tackle school related GBV, harness the transformative potential of education to support gender equitable relationships, and end the sexual exploitation of young women pressured to trade sex for grades, education fees, jobs and work experience.
 - 'On the agenda' pledge to raise women's and girls' freedom, power and rights, and reflect the voices of girls and women, in FCDO Ministerial-level meetings and visits. We will work to ensure women leaders are included in UK-led international meetings, particularly on conflict and peace issues, and connect with other UK campaigns, including on ending preventable deaths of mothers, babies and children.

Goal 2: Lead by example. Women and girls at the centre of FCDO's operations, and investment

- Commit to at least 80% of FCDO's bilateral aid programmes having a focus on gender equality by 2030 (using OECD DAC markers). We will also increase the proportion of our International Climate Finance (ICF) that will be gender marked. We will strengthen our monitoring, collection, and use of disaggregated data in support of these commitments.
- Support grassroots WROs and movements to operate and grow in effectiveness, including those focused on disabilities and minority rights, including through a new flagship programme providing core, flexible multiyear funding to grassroots WROs,

delivered in partnership with the Equality Fund. Alongside partners, we will seek to further increase financial and political support for WROs. We will award all innovation grants under our What Works to Prevent Violence Programme to Southern WROs.

- Prioritise the often-neglected issues of safe abortion; comprehensive sexuality education; support for women with disabilities; and SRHR in humanitarian emergencies; and deliver on our commitment to integrate nutrition in investments across multiple sectors in FCDO. Reinforce, by drawing the connections and shared challenges and opportunities, the UK campaign to end the preventable deaths of mothers, babies and children by 2030.
- Step up our international leadership on ending child marriage and give girls a greater say over their bodies and futures. This includes backing efforts to strengthen laws and policies, work with communities to shift harmful social norms, and directly supporting vulnerable adolescent girls.
- With international partners, deliver a step-change in the global response to, and prevention of, CRSV, as demonstrated in the PSVI Strategy. Through our membership of the Global Partnership for Action on Gender-Based Online Harassment and Abuse, build international support and understanding for tackling Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence.
- We will also play an active role in the Call to Action on Protection from GBV in Emergencies to drive system change in humanitarian contexts, and lead the development of a global framework on

tackling SEAH to meet our global ambitions for a more transparent, accountable and cohesive aid system.

Case study: Gender equality provisions in Free Trade Agreements (FTAs)

The UK has successfully included gender provisions in all of our FTAs newly negotiated since leaving the EU, positioning the UK as a world leader in this area. These commitments enable us to work together with our trading partners to support women business owners, entrepreneurs and workers to fully access and benefit from the opportunities created by our Agreements. Our FTAs with Australia and New Zealand contain dedicated Trade and Gender Equality chapters which facilitate cooperation to overcome the barriers faced by women in trade, and which encourage the collection and sharing of gender-focussed trade data and analysis. They complement important provisions secured across the Agreements for example on non-discrimination in the workplace, promoting women's access to digital trade, and supporting women-owned Small and Medium sized Enterprises.

- Grow new partnerships with donors, middle income and lower income countries, the private sector, civil society, and philanthropic organisations, to invest in innovative financing instruments and delivery mechanisms. This will include through British Investment Partnerships, targeted direct bilateral ODA and multilateral agencies, and as a major donor to the World Bank, Global Partnership for Education, Education Cannot Wait and global funds including Gavi, Reproductive Health Supplies and the Global Financing Facility.

- Leverage innovative and private sector funding, including raising capital through gender bonds and gender-smart investing for entrepreneurs and employees, and through the International Finance Facility for Education and the Education Outcomes Funds. This includes ensuring education investments and partnerships support the two global objectives of 40 million more girls in school and 20 million more reading by the age of ten or end of primary school.
- Enable women in politics to be agents of change, through our support for the Westminster Foundation for Democracy and other strategic partnerships.
- Invest in key ‘enablers’ such as access to technology, financial services and social protection. These include British International Investment, the UK’s development finance institution, and continuing to champion gender-smart investing under the ‘2X Challenge’ gender lens.
- Integrate gender and social inclusion objectives into our climate finance, programmes and strategies, enabling women and girls to be drivers of locally led adaptation and supporting their leadership in a just transition to a green, inclusive economy. We will ensure FCDO’s work on trade, infrastructure, agriculture and manufacturing, including in green sectors and in digitally enabled enterprises, supports women’s economic empowerment.
- Make use of UN and UK sanctions regimes, including working with international partners to take direct action against those responsible for CRSV and the trafficking of women and girls, look to international architecture to prosecute the most serious crimes, including the

ICC, and support efforts to strengthen national mechanisms to improve justice for survivors of CRSV.

- Hold ourselves to account for the delivery of the Strategy, including through an External Gender Challenge Board of experts (including representation from women and girls from communities who have been marginalised) who provide advice and expertise on the implementation of the strategy.

Goal 3: Lead through knowledge. A new Expertise, Evidence and Research Offer

- Develop an ambitious and targeted new research offer, directly aligned with our strategic women and girls’ priorities. We will invest in generating and synthesising evidence to fill critical evidence gaps and use it to shape our own programming and investment and to support and influence investment by other key global actors.
- Test innovative new approaches and ‘what works’ programme models, including through our Gender and Adolescence research initiative, our EdTech Hub, and our research into education in conflict settings.
- Invest in research and innovation to generate a rigorous global evidence base on what works to prevent GBV at scale, including testing the integration of GBV into education, health and social protection systems.
- Set up a new UK Gender and Equalities Resources Gateway to provide easier access to technical expertise, guidance and the most current and relevant evidence for decision making. Tapping into UK strategic and thought leadership, the

gateway will help to identify solutions to the greatest challenges, help us learn from our partners and facilitate peer-to-peer learning, creating a wider multi-disciplinary community of practice.

- Establish a new Centre for Expertise on education to share and ensure the use of research and evidence by national government policymakers and other key actors.
- Identify solutions on how to expand women's voice, jobs and income opportunities and share this evidence through our new Green and Inclusive Growth Centre of Expertise.
- Build FCDO's gender and equalities capability by skilling up an enhanced global network of gender and equalities advocates and advisers, across all disciplines, including through the FCDO's International Academy.

We will hold ourselves to account against these Goals and commitments that sit under them by establishing a delivery plan with milestones and tracking our progress through results-focused reporting. This will include a new biennial public report on our progress against the strategy, summarising our reach and impact, lessons learned and the expanded evidence base and offer.

Case study: Work and Opportunities for Women (WOW)

WOW has exercised considerable convening power with private sector partners and grassroots associations over the past 5 years, alongside funding a helpdesk offering expertise and guidance on women's economic empowerment for use by FCDO, companies, experts and countries.

Since 2017, WOW partnerships, including with Marks and Spencer, Waitrose and Twinings, have reached over 100,000 women, providing them with improved access to higher return jobs; more diversified roles and improved working conditions in global value chains. At COP26, WOW launched a Toolkit for climate professionals Women and the Net Zero Economy—A transition toolkit for businesses with global supply chains. This led to three reports on Gender Just Net Zero Supply Chains from ongoing partnerships with business to understand climate change impacts on women workers in agriculture and horticulture. The first set of pilot studies were conducted to support women workers in Kenyan horticulture, in Pakistan to strengthen women farmer's resilience to climate change; and on the gender implications of climate change on women workers in the tea sector in Malawi.

While a fifth of major corporations have pledged to reach Net Zero emissions by 2050, there is an increasing demand from businesses to understand the gendered impacts of climate change. WOW is partnering with businesses to deliver evidence-led initiatives to meet their gender and environmental ambitions.



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