



Foreign, Commonwealth
& Development Office



UK International Strategic Framework on Women and Girls

2026

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Plan on a page

Vision

Every woman and girl has the right to live free from violence, discrimination and oppression; to participate fully in her economy, politics and society; and to make the decisions that affect her life.

Safety

Tackling violence and abuse

Driving global action through new partnerships and coalitions

Tackling online and tech-facilitated abuse and improving online safety

Leading efforts against conflict related sexual violence

Prosperity

Growth and shared prosperity

Championing women’s economic leadership and participation

Enhancing opportunities through trade and investment

Improving digital and AI inclusion and skills

Conflict

Climate

Crisis

Voice

Women’s political and civic participation

Building a global alliance of women parliamentarians

Amplifying the leadership of women’s rights organisations

Demanding full, equal, meaningful and safe participation in peace processes and conflict resolution

Choice

Health and education

Improved maternity, sexual and reproductive health and rights services

Increased access for women and girls to education

Reform to multilateral systems to deliver better education and health outcomes for women and girls

How we will deliver

Diplomatic influence

Multilateral partnerships

Long-term partnerships

Mainstreaming across all our work

Engaging men and boys



The UK is a committed champion for the rights of all women and girls around the world. Our vision – for a world in which women and girls live free from violence and discrimination, participate fully in their economies, politics and societies, and make the decisions that affect their lives – will be ingrained in all our work, bilaterally and multilaterally, as we engage with partners across the world. At a time when women and girls face a multitude of challenges – including a 25% rise in sexual violence in conflict, 133 million girls out of school, and a woman dying every two minutes from pregnancy or childbirth complications – the Foreign Secretary has made women and girls one of the FCDO’s foreign policy priorities, recognising the importance of this agenda to the UK’s international action.

Why women's and girls' rights matter

1. Women's and girls' rights matter for each individual woman and girl. They matter for their independence and autonomy, for their families, for their economies, for the governance of their country and for the health of their society. They bring lifelong benefits for women and girls that span generations and benefit everyone in society. Across the world, women and girls have common aspirations and strive for dignity, safety and equal opportunities.
2. Advancing these rights is not just about transforming the lives of individual women and girls but progress also drives prosperity, security and sustainable development at a national and international scale. If women participated in the workforce at the same rate as men, GDP could increase by as much as 20% in emerging markets and developing economies. Persistent gender gaps across all G7 economies continue to undermine innovation, productivity and long-term growth. Peace agreements are 35% more likely to last at least 15 years, when women meaningfully participate in peace processes. And women's political participation and fair access to climate finance are linked to lower deforestation, reduced carbon dioxide emissions and stronger resilience to climate and nature crises.
3. Yet, despite significant progress in recent decades, we are still failing to realise these benefits. In many places around the world, from high- to low-income countries, the picture that emerges is stark. Only half of women worldwide are in the workforce compared with 80% of men. One in three women has experienced physical or sexual violence in their lifetime. Shockingly 164 million women and girls still have an unmet need for contraception. Women are less likely to have mobile internet access, and at least 885 million women remain offline. The consequences of these failures can be catastrophic for individual women and girls, and the societal costs are astronomical. Globally, the price of inaction on violence against women and girls was last estimated at \$1.5 trillion through lost productivity and wages and the burden on healthcare and justice systems. On average, the world loses about \$23,620 per person because women do not have equal earning opportunities, and the financial hit is even higher in richer countries. And failing to ensure girls complete secondary school costs countries between \$15 and \$30 trillion in lost lifetime productivity.

4. But the returns from meaningful investment are unambiguous too: in low- and middle-income countries, each extra \$1 spent on modern contraception saves \$2.48 in healthcare costs and prevents thousands of maternal deaths. Education multiplies these benefits: children with educated mothers are less likely to die before the age of five and girls who attend secondary school are up to six times less likely to marry as children. Closing the digital divide between men and women could add \$1.5 trillion into the global economy by 2030. States where women hold more political power are less corrupt, less likely to go to war and less likely to commit human rights abuse and the existence of active feminist movements is the single greatest predictor of progressive legislation on violence against women and girls.
5. Women's and girls' rights are also key commitments under international law. From the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, rights are enshrined in key international doctrines to which the UK is a party and this government is determined to uphold.
6. But pioneering progress for women and girls is not just an expression of this government's values and commitments. The advancement of women's rights, the reduction in violence against women and girls, and women's full and equal economic and political participation at home and abroad will have a tangible and positive impact on the delivery of key domestic and international priorities: from growth and prosperity, to security, climate and migration. That is why advancing the rights of all women and girls will be a top priority for this government and is now a standalone priority for the FCDO across all our foreign policy.

The state of rights today

7. Over recent decades, women have made progress towards equality around the world. This progress has touched every corner of their societies. Since 1995, the share of seats held by women in parliaments worldwide has more than doubled to 27%, and laws have shifted too: 1,531 legal reforms have strengthened women's rights, from protection against violence to greater economic and political freedoms. Millions of girls have been educated through global efforts. These changes have transformed lives. Child marriage has dropped by 15%, sparing 25 million girls from early marriage in the last decade, and a girl is around one-third less likely to undergo female genital mutilation than 30 years ago. Maternal deaths have fallen by around 40% and over 100 million more women now have access to modern family planning compared to 2012.
8. This progress stands on a broad global consensus. In 1995, governments set the direction through the Beijing Declaration, then moved from agreement to action through a range of international frameworks, from the International Commission on Population and Development Programme for Action to United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women Peace and Security, the United Nations Global Digital Compact and Sustainable Development Goal 5 on gender equality.¹ Today, that collective effort is anchored in international law, with 189 countries committed to ending discrimination against women.²
9. Together, these gains show what is possible when the world stands with women and girls.
10. But there is still further to go, and, in many areas, progress has slowed or gone backwards. In Sudan, we are witnessing widespread sexual violence during the ongoing conflict. Women and girls are subjected to rape, abduction and sexual slavery, often as a deliberate tactic to terrorise communities and punish perceived opposition. In some areas, this violence has been described as among the worst in the world. Afghanistan is an extreme example of restrictions on women's rights. Taliban measures limit women's and girls' access to secondary and higher education, employment, and public life, and tightly control their movement and access to medical and other essential services. This is deepening poverty, fuelling child and forced marriage, and increasing the risk of maternal death, with serious consequences for stability and development. In Iran, authorities have intensified surveillance of women and girls, including as a means to

1 UN goal to achieve gender equality by 2030 – end discrimination/violence, end harmful practices, value unpaid care, ensure leadership and sexual and reproductive health and rights, strengthen laws.

2 189 countries have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.



Inclusive Family Planning project workshop with married women in Kaduna State, Nigeria
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enforce the mandatory hijab, and executions of women are rising at an alarming rate. Penalties for abortion in Guatemala were increased in 2022, meaning that undergoing, assisting with or promoting access to abortion where the pregnant women's life is not at risk can carry prison sentences of up to twelve years. Authorities in Honduras have further entrenched the total abortion ban, making any possibility of reform extremely limited.

11. Across the world, women and girls continue to face unequal rights in work, marriage, and political life, and authorities have failed to legally protect against femicide or domestic violence. These are not isolated examples. In recent years, more than one billion women and girls have seen their autonomy restricted, their legal protections weakened, or the threat of violence and discrimination increase.³ In too many countries, women still lack equal rights to men in law and in practice.

³ According to the **2024 SDG Gender Index** by Equal Measures 2030. This assesses progress on gender equality across 56 indicators aligned with 14 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals in 139 countries, providing a multidimensional snapshot of global and regional trends.

Across the world:

- 840 million women have been subjected to physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence
- Women still earn up to 22% less and do 2.5 times more unpaid work than men.
- 102 countries have never had a woman leader and only 15% of current world leaders are women
- 133 million girls are not in school, and women represent nearly two-thirds of illiterate adults
- Every two minutes a woman dies from pregnancy or childbirth complications and 45% of abortions are unsafe

12. Violence against women and girls affects all countries and the United Kingdom is not exempt. One in eight women experience domestic abuse, stalking or sexual assault with 3.2 million women experiencing this violence in the year ending March 2025. To respond to this national emergency, we have set out an unprecedented domestic mission to halve levels of violence against women and girls in a decade.

13. The scale and nature of the barriers women and girls face can vastly differ. Women and girls with disabilities, LGBT+ women and girls, those from minority communities, and those in profoundly patriarchal societies face multiple challenges and a greater risk of violence, exclusion and discrimination. Women and girls with disabilities face some of the starkest inequalities and are up to four times more likely to experience violence. Around 15% of the world's indigenous peoples live in extreme poverty on the frontlines of climate change, with indigenous women earning four times less than men, having fewer land and forest rights and facing higher poverty and malnutrition. LGBT+ women also face distinct and acute risks, with 40 countries explicitly criminalising consensual same-sex relationships between LGBT+ women and 13 countries specifically outlaw being transgender. In some regions, up to 83% experience identity-based violence, including the horrific practice of 'corrective rape'. Inequality is not influenced by a single factor but is a combination of barriers that make life harder, less safe and less fair for millions of women and girls.



Women with disabilities attending a convening of organisations of persons with disabilities in Uganda
© Disability Rights Fund

The challenges putting progress at risk

- 14.** We are living through a time of rapid change. A shifting economic global order, rising multipolarity, the rapid pace of technological change and rise in populist movements present new challenges to the rights of women and girls. Global conflict is at a high point. Humanitarian crises and climate change are forcing millions from their homes and increasing levels of need. These shocks damage health services, interrupt education and push communities into poverty and hunger. They leave women and girls more exposed to violence, exploitation, and the loss of hard-won rights.
- 15.** Violence against women and girls increases during crisis, and the risks of trafficking, child, early and forced marriage and sexual exploitation rise. Women and girls, especially those with disabilities, face the greatest risk from climate change and nature loss. Existing inequalities leave them more at risk when disasters hit. By 2050, climate change may push up to 158 million more women and girls into poverty and see 236 million more face food insecurity. Biodiversity loss increases domestic work burdens, reduces income opportunities, threatens food and water security and erodes cultural and traditional knowledge systems. Humanitarian responses often overlook women's specific needs, and those with disabilities or LGBT+ women are often even further neglected.

- 16.** Economic shocks undo years of progress on gender equality. Although men often lose more jobs at the start of a recession, the longer-term impact hits women harder, especially when public spending is cut. When funding for welfare, childcare and social services is reduced, women take on more unpaid care at home and have fewer opportunities to earn a stable income. These impacts are even greater for women from minority communities, who already face more challenges in the job market.
- 17.** The COVID-19 pandemic made these inequalities clear. Women were more likely to lose work, to stop working to care for others, and many worked in the sectors hit hardest by lockdowns from hospitality to retail and domestic work, health and social care. By late 2021, 26% of women had lost employment compared with 20% of men, and women were twice as likely to take on unpaid care.
- 18.** New technologies can offer women and girls opportunities to connect and participate in the economy and society. While almost three-quarters of the world is online, women are still less connected and less represented in the digital world, with around 280 million more men than women online. Women are underrepresented at every level in the technology sector, where women hold only 35% of jobs across 74 countries. 'However, online abuse is also rising. Women and girls are increasingly targeted through tech-enabled harms such as harassment, stalking, and the creation and sharing of non-consensual intimate images. Many countries still do not have policies, laws and regulation to protect against this that are fit for purpose in the digital age, the technology sector does not sufficiently design with safety in mind, and citizens need to be upskilled to understand and navigate these harms.

Sudanese refugees who have fled the conflict in Sudan register for food aid in Chad



- 19.** Women's, girls' and LGBT+ rights are also increasingly used in public debate to divide communities. False narratives spread quickly online, boosted by social media algorithms that reward polarising content and through organised campaigns and funding. These narratives sit alongside climate denial or anti-vaccine movements and can erode trust and deepen tensions in society. In Moldova, President Maia Sandu was regularly targeted through sexist Facebook posts and attacked for being unmarried and child-free with a widespread fabricated story that falsely alleged that she purchased sperm from gay celebrities to have a child. These posts aimed to undermine her credibility and suitability to lead, driving division and weakening public confidence in democratic institutions.
- 20.** A growing backlash against equal rights is slowing progress as far right and conservative views that once sat on the fringes now reach large audiences, shaping attitudes and undermining public support for women's rights. The impact of these trends is already visible. Across G7 countries, support for gender equality is declining among those aged between 18 and 34, especially young men. They are more likely than older generations to doubt women's suitability for leadership, marking the first time younger people have taken a more conservative view than the generation before.
- 21.** Persistent cultural, traditional and religious beliefs continue to limit women's and girls' opportunities, especially in areas such as reproductive rights and protection from violence. For example, in Egypt, almost nine in ten girls and women, aged 15 to 49 years, have undergone female genital mutilation, and over half believe it is required by religion. Despite a ban and government efforts, this practice remains common and deeply rooted in tradition.
- 22.** Pushback against gender equality is growing at the global level with some governments and alliances weakening standards and defunding or sidelining institutions to reverse progress on women's rights.
- 23.** These international and regional trends are often reflected inside countries, where some governments are reducing funding and challenging commitments to women's and girls' rights. The rise of authoritarian states and populist movements is also limiting progress and making it harder for civil society to operate in many parts of the world. In Georgia and Russia, laws restrict the funding and activities of civil society groups, limiting their ability to advance human rights and threatening those challenging repression, disinformation, and rising misogyny both online and offline.
- 24.** If the world is to be safer, fairer, and more prosperous, advancing the rights of women and girls must sit at the heart of global action.

Our framework – The four foundations

25. Our framework focuses on ensuring women and girls live free from violence, access and benefit from economic opportunity, exercise political and civic freedoms and achieve the highest standards of health and education. These are fundamental human rights and issues that matter to all women and girls, wherever in the world they live. Together, they are the foundation of our vision for a more equal society where our actions can deliver the greatest impact.

Tackling violence and abuse

26. Every woman and girl should be able to live free from harm. Safety, dignity and freedom from violence are essential for equality.

27. Violence against women and girls is a global emergency. The scale of violence cannot be ignored. In 2024, a woman was intentionally killed by a partner or family member every ten minutes. Millions of children experience violence in and around school and over 230 million girls and women alive today have undergone female genital mutilation. Violence against women and girls escalates in conflict and is exacerbated by biodiversity loss, climate change and humanitarian crises. Sexual violence in conflict is rising sharply, with a reported 25% increase in cases in 2024 alone, affecting mostly women and girls, but also men and boys. Technology is being used to carry out abuse and enabling new forms of violence

against women and girls, at scale and across borders. Irregular migration, and in some cases poorly managed regular migration, can expose women and girls to heightened risks of exploitation, violence and abuse, including trafficking and modern slavery. Women and girls are disproportionately affected by certain forms of exploitation, including sexual exploitation, child, early and forced marriage and domestic servitude. Women environmental human rights defenders, many of whom are indigenous peoples, are targets of threats, violence and abuse.

28. Tackling violence against women and girls in all its forms demands action at the local, national and international level. Evidence on effective interventions to prevent violence against women and girls, including in conflict settings, has grown significantly over the last decade, and pioneering approaches around the world have proved that violence is not inevitable. There is now an opportunity to learn from these proven approaches to stop this blight overseas and at home where this government have set out an unprecedented mission to halve levels of violence against women and girls in the UK in a decade. We want to use this effort, not only to improve the lives of women and girls in the UK, but to work with other countries – learning from our partners to bring the best evidence and practice into our plans and encouraging others to set ambitious goals of their own. We will:



Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper meets Sudanese refugee families in Adré, Chad

- drive coordinated international action, convening new partnerships and coalitions with countries around the world committed to tackling violence against women and girls
- bring together pioneering women from across the world to tackle violence against women and girls, through 'All In', a major new global coalition launched on 2 December 2025 and cofounded by UK, Ford Foundation and Wellspring.
- support national action to scale up proven prevention strategies, based on latest global evidence and learning through our long term 'What Works to Prevent Violence Programme' to stop violence before it starts.
- tackle online and tech-facilitated abuse against women and children by bringing governments and technology companies together to strengthen digital protections, improve accountability and address online harms, including misogyny, disinformation and child sexual abuse, while improving cyber-security for vulnerable groups.
- drive global efforts to prevent and respond to conflict-related sexual violence and support survivors through the UK-founded International Alliance on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict, and funding survivor-centred justice and accountability, including specialist investigators on sexual and gender-based violence.⁴

⁴ The Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI) is the UK government's flagship policy to prevent and respond to conflict-related sexual violence, strengthen accountability, and support survivors.

- strengthen protection for women and girls in crisis and humanitarian settings, through reform of the UN-led humanitarian system and continued action under the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies and the Common Approach to Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment (**CAPSEAH**). For example, the UK is funding trusted humanitarian partners in Gaza to deliver survivor-centred assistance, including women and girls' safe spaces, dignity kits, and psychosocial support.
- reduce the risks of exploitation and trafficking by raising awareness of safe and legal migration routes; for example, through our Better Regional Migration Management Programme, women migrating from Africa to the Gulf can do so safely and benefit fully from the experience.
- embed women's and girls' rights in the delivery of our National Security Strategy responding to efforts to divide communities, violent misogyny, and disinformation; this includes improving our understanding and response to the full spectrum of threats, from both hostile and non-state actors, and supporting organisations on the frontline.

Stopping the spread of intimate image abuse online

Technology-facilitated violence against women and girls is an escalating threat, including the use of AI technology to create non-consensual deepfake imagery and videos. Available evidence suggests that the majority of deepfakes available online are pornographic and disproportionately target women. To tackle this rapidly evolving threat, the UK is partnering with SWGfL, a charity that works to ensure everyone can benefit from using technology free from harm. Our efforts focus on preventing the non-consensual sharing of intimate images by working with victims and participating platforms to block harmful content before it appears and removing material already online. We are building a common global platform and supporting national cyber-abuse helplines to reduce harmful content. This will enable rapid identification and removal of harmful content, reducing harm to victims and strengthening accountability among online platforms, and laying the foundation for a safer digital environment.

Growth and shared prosperity

- 29.** Every woman should be able to participate freely and safely in the economy. This is essential to ensuring that every woman and girl can shape her own future and contribute fully to society.
- 30.** Economies cannot grow or sustain themselves without the equal participation of women. At current rates, it will take 152 years for women to have equal chances to participate in the economy. Around 3.9 billion women face legal barriers that affect their economic participation. Unpaid care is the main barrier to women's equal economic participation and opportunity – they complete more than three-quarters of unpaid care work adding up to 16 billion hours per day globally. Too many women are excluded from the benefits of trade, concentrated in informal and low-paid work, or in micro and small businesses that struggle to scale because they lack access to finance, markets and trusted networks. Meanwhile, new technologies are reshaping the economy and AI is changing everyday life. They offer new ways for women and girls to learn, work, access services, and improve their economic outcomes. But it can also reinforce existing inequalities. Women hold fewer than one-third of jobs in technology and AI related fields and occupy a disproportionate number of roles in clerical and administrative work. This risks being left behind in the sectors driving future growth and at higher risk than men from the automation of jobs.
- 31.** Lasting growth depends on women having equal access to jobs, employment rights, trading opportunities, finance, markets, affordable and effective care options, and access to technology. The UK can play a leading role in shaping international rules and standards that make this possible. Our approach will share UK expertise and support local leadership to drive change and break down the barriers that women face. Women's economic empowerment and participation will sit at the heart of our work on jobs and growth, trade and investment, working alongside women across business, trade unions, consumers and investors. We have committed that by 2030 at least 90% of FCDO ODA programmes will contribute to gender equality, and this includes programmes across our growth portfolio. We will:
- secure more and better jobs for women, promoting the safety and prosperity of women in supply chains; for example, we have partnered with key multinational companies to support smallholder tea farmers to adopt agricultural practices that enhance resilience to climate change and tackle discrimination and harassment on tea farms.
 - increase the quantity and quality of care provision through global systems change – the UK is advancing this agenda through the Global Alliance for Care and Sevilla Platform for Action and by supporting Women Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative's call for investments into businesses in the care economy.

- champion women's economic leadership and participation across UK investments in economic growth and climate finance, including through British International Investment (BII) – BII has outperformed its 25% gender finance target, improving jobs for women, supporting women's leadership and investing in products and services that benefit women and girls.⁵
- ensure bilateral and multilateral agreements, such as our new free trade agreements (FTAs), enhance women's rights and economic opportunities – this means upholding non-discrimination commitments and promoting equal access to skills, finance, networks and markets in our trade partnerships.
- expand women's access to jobs in the green and blue economies through investment in women's training, skills, leadership and entrepreneurship, ensuring women benefit from emerging opportunities in renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, fisheries and ocean-based sectors.
- improve digital inclusion for women and girls through making it easier to get online affordably and sustainably and increasing women's representation and leadership in the technology sector – this includes expanding access to digital and AI skills and innovation opportunities, so women can use technology safely and productively and participate in the digital economy.

Fair trade and equal opportunity in the UK-India deal

The newly negotiated UK-India Free Trade Agreement (FTA) contains a comprehensive, dedicated chapter on trade and gender equality which commits both countries to undertake activities together that support women as workers, business owners and entrepreneurs. These include exchanging experiences and best practice on analysing the impacts of trade on women and girls, and sharing information on support for women entrepreneurs. It also promotes labour practices that help retain and advance women in the job market and includes provisions on non-discrimination in the workplace. The FTA encourages and supports women-owned small- and medium-sized enterprises, to increase exports through digital channels such as e-commerce and to access financing to help them take advantage of trading opportunities. Together, these provisions in the FTA ensure it supports women in the UK and India to participate fully in domestic and global economies.

⁵ British International Investment is the UK's development finance institution, investing to support productive, sustainable and inclusive economic growth in developing and emerging countries.



A grandmother and two teenage girls tend their family crop of seaweed, Jambiani, Zanzibar, Tanzania

Women's political and civic participation

- 32.** Every woman and girl should have a voice in the decisions that shape her life. Equal participation in public and political life is essential for lasting equality and stronger, more representative societies.
- 33.** There are significant barriers to influence and leadership. Women remain underrepresented in parliaments, cabinets and peace processes and many experience harassment, intimidation and violence when they seek public roles. Despite strong evidence on the critical role women's rights organisations play in driving progress on human rights, peacebuilding and sustainable development, they receive less than 1% of total global Official Development Assistance (ODA) focused on gender and in 2019 only 2.4% of climate-related ODA was directed towards projects with gender equality as the 'principal' objective. Many organisations are at
- risk of closure, weakening the support systems that protect and advance women's and girls' rights.
- 34.** Women's participation in politics, government and civil society is one of the most legitimate and sustainable ways to achieve progress. Our efforts will support women and girls to achieve the aims they set themselves. Their priorities will be at the centre of our decision-making on finance and investment, peace and security, climate and nature, and humanitarian action and development. Advancing their participation in the decisions that affect their lives will strengthen the role of women as decision-makers, advocates and leaders. Responding to their needs and perspectives will help create fairer access to resources and opportunities, building resilience for individuals, families and communities. Although funding for women's rights organisations is a critical component of our partnerships, it is one of multiple tools we can use to support them. We will:

- build a global alliance of women parliamentarians to champion women's and girls' rights, harnessing their collective power to drive progress and lead reforms that make systems fairer and more inclusive under the leadership of the Special Envoy for Women and Girls.
- demand women's full, equal, meaningful and safe participation in conflict prevention, resolution, mediation, peacebuilding and tackling transnational threats through our continued commitment and leadership on the Women, Peace and Security agenda through our National Action Plan. In Ukraine, the UK is supporting the inclusion of women-led organisations in reform processes, mainstreaming gender across social protection and community services to ensure women's voices shape humanitarian and recovery priorities and providing flexible funding to women-led and women's rights organisations to strengthen their role in peacebuilding and recovery.
- bring in new partners, collaborations and funding to secure sustainable, long-term finance for women's rights organisations and feminist movements, strengthening the impact of movements themselves.
- champion the leadership and expertise of diverse women's rights organisations, women-led organisations, indigenous women leaders, and feminist movements, amplifying their voices and priorities across our diplomacy and supporting their efforts in peace and security, climate, growth, and humanitarian work. For example, working with our multilateral partners, including the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women and Girls, the UK supports women-led grassroots groups whose vital work helps prevent violence in their communities.

Sustainable and feminist financing for women's rights organisations

The Equality Fund, a global women's fund, provides a sustainable source of funding for women's rights organisations, using returns from its investments to support grant-making. Since its launch in 2019, the Equality Fund has mobilised £43million from investments alongside £52.6 million from philanthropic and government donors. The funding supports vital work by 1,500 women's rights organisations, across 100 countries, leading vital work to protect and promote women's, girls' and LGBT+ rights. Its financial investments support products and services that benefit women and girls, champion women's leadership, including through supporting women-owned small- and medium-sized enterprises and generate sustainable funding.



Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper hosts “Hearing her voice” session in New York as part of the UK UN Presidency

Health and education

35. Every woman and girl should be able to access the healthcare and education they need to live safely and with autonomy. Access to sexual and reproductive health and rights and education provides the foundation to live with dignity, stay safe, and make her own choices.

36. These rights are under increasing pressure. In many places, women and girls face growing restrictions on access to contraception, sex education, and safe abortion. Adolescent girls are especially affected, and LGBT+ women face specific barriers and threats. Countries affected by humanitarian emergencies and crises account for the majority of maternal and newborn deaths and 54% of girls in these contexts are out of school. In sub-Saharan Africa, only 79 girls complete secondary school for every 100 boys. Without access to essential health and education services, there are increased risks of gender-based violence, child marriage, early pregnancy, HIV transmission, and unsafe abortion. This can derail education, undermine health and restrict future opportunities.

37. Our approach will be anchored by three key shifts: strengthening systems rather than delivering services; influencing the multilateral system and working with domestic governments; philanthropists, the private sector and multilateral development banks to leverage more finance for sexual and reproductive health and rights and education. At the centre is a focus on the women and girls who face the greatest barriers, improving how services are delivered to reach those most excluded and supporting the most marginalised children who are least likely to be in school. This includes young women, adolescents, those with disabilities, LGBT+ women, the poorest communities and those affected by crisis, conflict or climate change. We will:

- back the leadership of Global South governments to build more inclusive and resilient health and education systems; this includes in fragile and conflict-affected states, and planning and preparing for climate shocks through anticipatory risk reduction – for example, we will co-lead a ministerial taskforce on the prevention of violence in and around schools, and through our flagship programme, WISH Dividend,

we will continue to transform service delivery to reach those most excluded from sexual and reproductive health and rights.

- expand access to maternal and newborn health medicines, high-quality contraceptives, and abortion products for millions of women and adolescents, partnering with governments and UNFPA – we will make markets for essential sexual and reproductive health products work better, helping governments introduce and scale access to new products faster through our CHOICES Accelerator programme.
- mobilise innovative finance to unlock resources for health and education, supporting governments to plan, innovate and resource their services – for example, through the International Finance Facility for Education, every dollar of UK ODA, unlocks \$7 of new lending from the multilateral development banks to support national education reforms in lower-middle income countries.

Midwives in Beni, eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo supported by UK aid and UNFPA



- reform the multilateral system to keep girls safe and learning in emergencies and protracted crises, while standing firm to defend rights, including agreed sexual and reproductive health and rights, and push for progress.
- support grassroots and national civil society movements to widen access to sexual and reproductive health and rights and to resist efforts to reverse progress on women's rights, especially for the most marginalised groups.

Mobilising movements to defend and advance sexual and reproductive health and rights

In December 2024, the Prime Minister announced a new global programme to defend and advance sexual and reproductive health and rights. Political hostility and stigma around sexual and reproductive health are barriers to healthcare, particularly for marginalised women and girls and on contested issues such as female genital mutilation and safe abortion. The programme supports national and local organisations working in their own communities to improve accountability and expand access to vital services, including HIV services. Frontline organisations also work in their own communities to shift public opinion, to influence laws and policies, and to strengthen their networks to resist increasingly intensified global opposition to women's, girls' and LGBT+ rights.

Responding to a changing global context

38. Across all our work, we must recognise that women's and girls' ability to enjoy these rights depends on the world around them. Climate change, biodiversity loss, rising conflict and insecurity, and crises shape women's and girls' daily lives and can make progress fragile. That is why we will put the needs and experiences of women and girls at the heart of everything we do, to deliver their priorities in every context.

39. Equally, our responses to climate change, insecurity, conflict and crisis will only be fully effective when women and girls are at the centre of our solutions. Their leadership, knowledge and resilience make peacebuilding, conflict resolution and climate action more effective and helps protect hard-won rights even in times of shock. We must recognise how security threats target and affect women and girls differently, and how some groups use narratives on gender and intimidation to pull communities into their influence. Putting women and girls at the heart of crisis and climate disaster responses ensures humanitarian action meets real needs on the ground, as seen in contexts such as Sudan.

Life-saving support in Sudan

Conflict in Sudan has left women and girls at extreme risk. Over 12 million people now face violence, with widespread reports of rape during attacks and displacement. The UK has acted to expose these abuses, press for a ceasefire, and strengthen justice through the UN Fact-Finding Mission, funding a specialist investigator on sexual and gender-based violence. Alongside our diplomatic engagement, the UK is working with women's and feminist funds, which are directing resources to communities, providing food and safety for displaced women and girls. New FCDO funding will scale up this locally led, life-saving work and a new programme will work with communities, including men and boys, to prevent violence against women and girls and support survivors of conflict-related sexual violence.

How we will deliver

- 40.** We will embed women's and girls' rights at the heart of our diplomatic, security, trade and development work, using the full weight of our foreign policy levers to drive progress.
- 41.** Deep-rooted inequalities hold women and girls back. We must address these barriers and transform institutions and systems, so they uphold rights and expand choice and opportunities. There are many different pathways to progress on equality for women and girls. Each country has its own context and priorities, and we will tailor our approach accordingly – choosing the right entry points and working with partners to reflect their journey and local realities.
- 42.** We will focus on the disadvantages facing the most marginalised women and girls, who are at greatest risk, so solutions are fair, effective and sustainable. We will also ensure that women and girls, including those at the grassroots, understand what we do and how it affects them. Too often, our approach and language can feel exclusionary. Communicating clearly and removing jargon will strengthen accountability and create a fairer and more equal system where women and girls can participate meaningfully and shape the actions that impact their lives. We will continue to lead internationally on survivor-centred practice, for example through UK funded tools such as the Murad Code, ensuring survivors are engaged safely, ethically and with dignity.
- 43.** Evidence will underpin all our work. We will invest in world-leading research and data, generating vital insights into what works to support women and girls across all priority sectors. We will apply this learning throughout our global network and use it to influence governments, multilateral institutions, private sector partners, and civil society – shaping effective action for women and girls everywhere. All FCDO Communities of Expertise will adhere to minimum requirements to mainstream gender, equalities and safeguarding across their work. We will also establish a Women and Equalities Community of Expertise, which will broker international expertise and provide tailored technical advice, tools, and training to teams across the FCDO and external partners.
- 44.** We will advance and protect women's and girls' rights through five interconnected strands of action.

Deploying our diplomatic influence

45. The UK has major global influence. We will use this influence on behalf of women and girls worldwide. Our diplomatic network will champion and amplify the role of women in their own countries and on the regional and international stage. The increasing number of women in leadership and decision-making roles

presents us with a new interface through which to conduct our diplomacy. Across our embassies, high commissions, governors' offices and in international forums, the UK will build relationships and influence decisions to promote women's and girls' leadership and protect and advance their rights.

Diplomatic engagement powering growth in Oman

Oman's Vision 2040 is advancing gender equality. Women now make up to 60% of university graduates and hold senior public roles, including three ministers. However, private sector inclusion is limited, and rural women still face many barriers. Our ambassador and UK officials have raised women's rights at the highest levels, highlighting the importance of equality to Vision 2040, with over 48,000 women-owned small- or medium-sized enterprises driving growth. Using our diplomatic influence, a small team and limited resources, we have worked with the Omani government to deliver policy reforms and embed women and girls within Oman's economic agenda. We deliver impact through existing workstreams and innovative approaches such as the Tamkeen mentoring programme, which supports 300 women toward leadership roles. Our partnerships with female CEOs, digital innovators and a nationwide girls' sport initiative demonstrate how UK diplomacy can build coalitions for change while respecting cultural sensitivities.

Delivering through the multilateral system

46. The UK believes in multilateralism and supports its vital role in advancing the rights and equality of women and girls. The UN and other multilateral organisations are essential to advancing rights. While most international agencies and organisations have made commitments to gender equality, these promises are often not prioritised. Following our recent return to the United Nations Human Rights Council, we will leverage our membership to protect hard-won freedoms and advance the rights of women and girls. As penholder on Women, Peace and Security at the United Nations Security Council, the UK has a unique opportunity to reinvigorate the agenda, 25 years on from its formation, and drive global focus to champion meaningful participation, protection, prevention and relief and recovery.

47. We will use our voice and votes to raise standards and build coalitions for delivery, including through the UN80 reform and Humanitarian Reset process, with stronger accountability for how decisions, financing and programmes affect women and girls. We will also build coalitions with a broad range of partners to respond to emerging threats and accelerate progress on shared priorities. This will include forging alliances to defend sexual and reproductive health and rights, and to tackle online and tech-facilitated abuse. We will leverage our position on the boards of the multilateral development banks to accelerate the integration of women's and girls' rights into their lending programmes.

Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper hosts the UN Security Council in New York for the UK UN Presidency



Developing new partnerships

48. As the UK shifts from a donor to a long-term partner and investor, our approach will focus on strengthening the systems countries rely on, so progress can be sustained over time. We will work with countries to help them generate and use their resources more effectively, building stronger systems for health, climate resilience, education and jobs, and enabling countries to thrive without relying on aid. The journey to self-sufficiency is only possible by working with women and girls to shape and deliver progress within their own countries, ensuring solutions are locally driven and reflect their priorities.

49. This includes partnering with local organisations, so solutions are designed and delivered by those closest to the communities they serve. Women's rights organisations and movements provide essential services and act as first-responders in humanitarian crises and help build peace in conflict; as leaders in climate resilience and nature-based solutions; and as frontline defenders of human rights and democracy. Evidence shows their efforts have increased women's economic opportunities and reduced gender pay gaps, and driven progressive policies including legislation on preventing violence against women and girls.

Mainstreaming across all our work

50. We have high ambitions to make gender equality a defining feature of UK foreign policy and programmes. From 2026, all new ICF programmes will contribute to gender equality and an increasing portion will target gender equality as a 'principal' objective. By 2030, at least 90% of FCDO bilateral ODA programmes will contribute to gender equality. The FCDO already considers gender equality before spending on development and humanitarian programmes, but this target takes it further. It requires 90% of programmes to integrate gender equality meaningfully across design and delivery, in line with OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) standards. Programmes qualify where gender equality is a 'principal' or 'significant' objective. Reflecting that women and girls is one of FCDO's six refreshed priorities, both bilateral and multilateral posts across our global network will include objectives in country and business plans that advance women's and girls' rights, and we will strengthen integration across all our work, including business cases. We will also promote the development of innovative, targeted interventions within programmes and policies.

51. We are committed to strong accountability across the FCDO. Rigorous reporting and governance will monitor delivery against country and Business Plan goals covering the women and girls priority. We will track how well women's and girls' rights are embedded across all our work and make this visible inside and outside the organisation. A delivery plan will set out how this framework is implemented across the FCDO and how progress is monitored. Public Sector Equality Duty assessments will remain a core component of our assurance and compliance processes so that major decisions reflect our equalities commitments. The External Gender and Equalities Board will provide independent scrutiny and hold us to account for delivering our ambitions. Together, these measures will ensure transparency, drive improvement, and show whether our actions are translating into meaningful change for women and girls.

Engaging men and boys

52. Men and boys need to both challenge the ideology and beliefs that underpin women's inequality and stand up as active allies for women's and girls' rights and self-defined priorities. This means taking action to promote equality, while creating space for women and girls to lead and ensuring their voices are heard and amplified in decisions that affect them. Harmful expectations of masculinity can undermine progress for everyone. Supporting men and boys to model healthy, respectful behaviours and challenge harmful norms is essential to building societies where women and girls can participate safely and equally. In FCDO, we will build a culture where women and men are on equal terms.

Minister of State for Development Baroness Chapman visits GSK



Deliverables

53. Deliverables will be defined through iterative planning and agreed collaboratively across FCDO.

For example, we will:

- build broad coalitions for progress, finding common cause with new and existing partners, including our membership of the Feminist Foreign Policy Plus group and the network of gender envoys – for example, our work with South Africa to tackle violence against women and girls, the Philippines on Women, Peace and Security, with Ukraine on seeking accountability for conflict-related sexual violence, with Canada to support women’s rights organisations, and with Colombia to advance sexual and reproductive health and rights.
- strengthen delivery and accountability across multilateral institutions, using their voice and funding to drive progress – in negotiations and boardrooms, across United Nations agencies, international financial institutions, climate funds and trade bodies, we will advocate for the prioritisation of women and girls.
- support the ‘All In’ initiative and develop new and existing partnerships to accelerate progress in tackling violence against women and girls and leverage momentum and expertise to build on UK’s domestic commitment to halve violence against women and girls in a decade.
- deliver impactful activities at embassies, high commissions and UK missions to mark key international days, including International Women’s Day; 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence; Women, Peace and Security week; and International Day for Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict.
- agree communiqués and Memoranda of Understanding on women’s and girls’ progress between the Special Envoy for Women and Girls and partner governments and parliamentarians.
- develop a network of male allies and support initiatives that engage men and boys as allies for equality, such as the HeForShe commitment by police forces in the British Overseas Territories to address gender imbalances and remove sexism and misogyny in police culture.
- defend the global consensus on women’s rights in international conventions and agreements, working with partners across the G7, G20, United Nations General Assembly, Human Rights Council and Security Council and elsewhere to uphold and advance international standards – for example, in July 2025, UK and France agreed ambitious commitments to uphold and defend our values on gender equality on the international stage, and resist efforts to erode women’s rights, including sexual and reproductive health and rights.
- support women and girls to advance rights and equality, whether in women’s rights organisations, politics, government, or the economy – UK ambassadors, high commissioners and governors will ensure those with the least access to power and visibility are heard, recognised, and included.
- champion women’s and girls’ rights in all Foreign Secretary, ministerial and Special Envoy for Women and Girls visits and engagement.



Foreign, Commonwealth
& Development Office

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