

# **POLICY BRIEF**

# WOMEN AND GENDER EQUITY

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Raising Queens Foundation Phetolo organisation Woman and Gender Equity

South African Community Development HerPath Network

University of Witwatersrand and University Marshmallow Daycare Center

House of grace care centre

Women 1000 Women Network/Trust

Serco Group

Give Hope Uganda Independent Xumana Sibambane Organisation

Zama zama Resoketswe Lebiane Foundation

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Northern Suburbs Scholar Transport Association

Ellagence Wellness Boutique Stand-Out Foundation African royal women Ndemande2

Global Forum of Women Entrepreneurs Iskcon

PEN (Participate Envision Navigate) Ikemeleng support group Reaching out and changing lives organisation

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HEALTH COMMS AFRICA

Women's National Coalition

Rise and Shine

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Foton

Hlanganisa Community Fund For Social

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Hurisa

Rewear closet

Empilisweni Him/Aids & Orphans Care

MphoTemo Youth Organisation Matlhodi Organisatio

SARS Be True 2 Me

INHLANSIYETHEMBA COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT NPC

Young and independent





# **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Despite decades of commitment, gender inequality persists across G20 and non-G20 countries. Women and girls continue to face structural barriers in economic participation, political representation, and safety. Gender-based violence (GBV) alone costs the global economy an estimated \$1.5 trillion annually, while persistent wage gaps and the undervaluation of unpaid care work reduce GDP and deepen inequality.

Why the G20 must act: As the world's most influential economic forum, the G20 has both responsibility and opportunity to accelerate gender equality. Aligning with SDG 5, the Beijing Platform for Action, Africa's Agenda 2063 and commitments of the G20 Gender Equality Ministers, bold action on gender equity is a proven driver of economic growth, stability, and social resilience. Policies must also explicitly address the realities of migrant, refugee, and undocumented women and girls, who face compounded exclusion in accessing healthcare, education, safety, and livelihoods. Their inclusion is central to achieving gender equality across G20 and beyond.

### **CORE RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- Mandate gender-responsive budgeting in all G20 recovery and climate finance packages.
- Establish a Permanent G20 Gender Equality Taskforce with measurable accountability.
- Allocate at least 1% of GDP to gender equality initiatives, prioritizing women-led, youth-led disability-led, SOGIESC and grassroots feminist initiatives.
- Enforce ratification and implementation of ILO Convention 190 on workplace violence and eliminate harmful practices, including child marriage and FGM, by 2030
- Fund universal childcare and GBV prevention/response systems, including safe transport, survivor services, and digital protection.
- Ensure inclusion of women and girls of diverse SOGIESC, disability, and rural backgrounds in all policies.
- Guarantee women's access to land, credit, digital technology, and markets to close economic participation gaps.
- Ensure women's leadership in climate action and digital transformation, integrating Indigenous knowledge and tackling online GBV.
- Ensure all gender equality initiatives are fully inclusive and accessible to women and girls with disabilities, by mandating their participation in governance and ring-fencing dedicated financing







## INTRODUCTION

The year 2025 marks a pivotal moment for advancing global gender equality. South Africa's G20 Presidency coincides with major milestones: the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the 25th anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security, and the mid-point review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Yet progress is dangerously off-track: at the current pace, global gender equality will take nearly 300 years to achieve.

International and regional legal frameworks provide a clear mandate for urgent action: The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) sets binding obligations to eliminate discrimination. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) remains the most comprehensive global roadmap for advancing women's rights. The ILO Convention 190 on violence and harassment at work recognizes the right of all women to dignity and safety in employment. Furthermore, UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) Agreed Conclusions consistently reaffirm the need for women's economic empowerment as a driver of development.

Regionally, instruments such as the African Union's Maputo Protocol and the Agenda 2063 provide frameworks that reinforce commitments to women's rights in Africa, directly relevant as South Africa assumes the 2025 G20 Presidency.

Despite these commitments, women continue to face persistent barriers. The economic and social costs of inaction are stark. GBV costs the global economy \$1.5 trillion annually, while the gender pay gap suppresses GDP growth across all G20 economies. Women perform three-quarters of unpaid care work globally, reducing women's participation in formal labor markets. At the same time, women's leadership, grassroots organizing, and traditional ecological knowledge are powerful but underutilized drivers of resilience. Additionally, inconsistencies across legal and policy frameworks perpetuate the criminalization of sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex Characteristics (SOGIESC) that further entrenches violence faced by LGBTIQA+ persons, creating barriers to achieving global gender equality.

This policy brief argues that gender equality is not a side issue, but a core driver of inclusive economic recovery, climate resilience, digital transformation, and sustainable peace. The 2025 G20 Presidency offers a historic opportunity to institutionalise gender equality within global governance, ensuring that commitments are matched with resources, accountability, and transformative policies.





# ECONOMIC INEQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

Women across the G20 and non G20 countries including the Global South continue to face entrenched economic inequality. They are overrepresented in informal and precarious work, concentrated in low-wage sectors such as care, retail, and agriculture, and disproportionately excluded from access to land, credit, and digital tools. Globally, an estimated 60% of women work informally, leaving them without social protection. In India, women comprise roughly 80% of garment workers yet are often excluded from union protections; in South Africa, rural women farmers lack secure land rights, limiting access to climate finance.

The gender pay gap persists in every G20 country, suppressing growth and deepening poverty. Women also shoulder nearly three times more unpaid care work than men, amounting to trillions of dollars in unrecognized economic value annually [3]. Further, unpaid care work for people with disabilities remains invisible. Without structural transformation, recovery and growth models will continue to reproduce inequality and further exclude marginalised groups such as the LGBTIQA+ and women living with disability

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- **Governance Reform:** Mandate gender-responsive budgeting across all G20 economic and recovery packages.
- Establish a Permanent G20 Gender Equality Taskforce with mandatory, funded representation from womenled organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) as well as mandate their inclusion in all national gender council drafting and review processes.
- **Investment Priorities:** Establish dedicated financing for women-led enterprises, including cooperatives, and support inclusive procurement policies.
- **Legal/Policy Instruments:** Enforce equal pay legislation and ratify/implement ILO Convention 190 to address harassment in workplaces.
- **Programmatic Actions:** Expand universal childcare, invest in care infrastructure, and ensure social protection for informal and precarious workers.
- **Digital & Financial Inclusion:** Close the digital divide by investing in women's digital literacy and ensuring equitable access to fintech solutions.





# GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND SAFETY

Gender-based violence (GBV) remains a global epidemic and a systemic barrier to equality. It undermines health, dignity, and participation while also imposing massive economic costs. The World Bank estimates that violence against women costs the global economy about \$1.5 trillion annually ( $\approx 2\%$  of global GDP).

GBV manifests in multiple, overlapping forms: intimate partner violence, sexual harassment, technology-facilitated violence, and harmful practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM) affecting infants, adolescents, and adult women, nonconsensual, medically unnecessary surgeries on intersex persons, infants and children which are a violation of their bodily integrity and reproductive rights. Also, child and forced marriage as well as so called "conversion practices" aimed at erasing LGBTIQ+ identities and hate crimes targeting women and girls of diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) continue to be a challenge.

State-sanctioned violence, particularly through the criminalisation of homosexuality, further exacerbates risks and poses a major threat to the safety of LGBTIQA+ persons. The cumulative effect of these violations is devastating, denying women, girls and LGBTIQA+ persons bodily autonomy, perpetuating cycles of trauma, and excluding them from education, employment, and civic participation. Crucially, GBV is not only a human rights crisis, but also an economic one: it reduces women's labour force participation, lowers productivity, and increases health and justice system costs. No G20 economy can achieve inclusive and sustainable growth while absorbing the social and economic losses caused by GBV.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- **Governance Reform:** Establish a G20-wide accountability mechanism to monitor GBV, harmful practices, and hate crimes, with disaggregated data on SOGIESC.
- **Investment Priorities:** Fund and mandate national survivor-centered services, including trauma-informed healthcare, shelters, legal aid, reintegration programs
- Legal/Policy Instruments: Ratify and enforce ILO Convention 190 on workplace harassment; set and enforce the minimum legal age of child marriage at 18 years without exception, criminalize all forms of FGM (infant, adolescent, adult), conversion practices, urge full implementation and funding of hate crime laws and national strategies with specific protections for women and girls of diverse SOGIESC.





• **Programmatic Actions:** Expand survivor-led advocacy, strengthen digital protections against tech-enabled GBV, and ensure all services are inclusive of LGBTIQ+ persons, women with disabilities, and rural/migrant women. Ensure GBV prevention and response services are accessible to refugee, migrant, and undocumented women and girls, regardless of legal status, including cross-border cooperation to prevent trafficking and exploitation. Establish dedicated funding for safe shelters, legal aid, and psychosocial counseling for displaced women and families.

- Fund and mandate universally accessible, survivor-centered GBV services which cater for the needs of women and girls living with disabilities, including sign language interpreters, accessible shelters, and information in easy-to-read formats. Ensure SRHR services and information are fully accessible and that providers are trained on the rights and needs of people with disabilities.
- Provide capacity-building for police, judiciary, and healthcare workers on SOGIESC competencies and the specific vulnerabilities of LGBTIQA+ persons to GBV.
- **Corporate Accountability:** Mandate workplace GBV prevention policies and require corporations to audit and address GBV across global supply chains.

## POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP

Despite progress in women's representation, political participation gaps remain entrenched across G20 and non G20 countries. Women hold only about 26.7% of parliamentary seats worldwide, and roughly one in four ministerial posts. In many contexts, women who do enter politics or leadership face backlash, harassment, and violence, both offline and online. Importantly, numbers alone are insufficient. The presence of women in parliaments or boardrooms does not automatically translate into gender-responsive decision-making. Structural barriers, from political party financing rules to "masculine" institutional cultures, to meetings scheduled during caregiving hours, systematically exclude women and entrench inequality.

LGBTIQ+ leaders, women with disabilities, young women, and those from rural or migrant backgrounds face compounded exclusion. Hate speech, targeted harassment, and political violence against women in public life, including online "pileons", have become normalized tools to silence them. Refugee and migrant women remain systematically excluded from decision making spaces despite their critical contributions to community resilience. G20 commitments must guarantee their meaningful participation in civic, political, and leadership structures.





### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- **Governance Reform:** Enact and enforce gender parity laws for political representation, and mandate gender balance on corporate boards across G20.
- **Investment Priorities:** Support leadership training, mentorship, and civic participation programs, particularly for young women, women with disabilities, and LGBTIQ+ persons.
- **Legal/Policy Instruments:** Criminalize political harassment and violence against women in public life; implement protections in line with CEDAW General Recommendation 23 and ILO C190.
- **Programmatic Actions:** Fund safe digital platforms for women leaders, create support programs and protective mechanisms for women and LGBTQIA+ human rights defenders (HRDs) and asylum seekers who face targeted violence, and institutionalize family-friendly parliamentary practices (e.g., childcare support, flexible hours).
- **Feminist Foreign Policy:** Encourage G20 members to adopt feminist foreign and development policies that promote inclusive leadership globally.

# GENDER-RESPONSIVE CLIMATE ACTION AND JUST TRANSITION

Climate change is not gender neutral. Women and marginalized genders are disproportionately impacted due to their roles in agriculture, water collection, and informal economies, all highly sensitive to environmental shocks. Limited access to land, credit, technology, and decision-making power amplifies vulnerability. Climate-induced displacement increases risks of trafficking, GBV, and exploitation, especially for refugee, rural, and LGBTIQ+ communities.

Despite these vulnerabilities, women are leaders in climate resilience. From Indigenous ecological practices to grassroots adaptation strategies, women and girls bring invaluable knowledge that is often excluded from formal climate planning. Ignoring these contributions not only perpetuates gender inequality but also weakens global climate responses.

The economic cost is high: the International Labour Organization warns that climate change could displace around 80 million jobs by 2030, while empowering women farmers with equal access to resources could increase agricultural output by up to 30% in some regions.





#### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- **Governance Reform:** Mandate gender parity in climate decision-making bodies and integrate gender in all G20 climate frameworks.
- **Investment Priorities: E**armark funds for women-led climate initiatives and simplify access to climate finance for grassroots, rural, and Indigenous women.
- Legal/Policy Instruments: Protect the rights of displaced women and girls, criminalize climate-related trafficking, and align policies with the Paris Agreement gender action plan. Protect the rights of displaced women and girls, including refugees and undocumented persons, by guaranteeing access to services regardless of status, and align migration, gender, and climate frameworks to address heightened risks of trafficking and exploitation.
- **Programmatic Actions:** Promote gender-sensitive climate technologies and digital access; scale up universal social protection for climate-affected workers; integrate Indigenous and women's ecological knowledge into national adaptation strategies.
- **Just Transition:** Ensure green economy jobs are accessible to women, LGBTIQ+ persons, and other marginalized groups through quotas, vocational training, and safe working conditions.

## **DIGITAL INCLUSION AND SAFETY**

The digital revolution offers unprecedented opportunities, but it also risks entrenching existing inequalities. Women and girls remain about 18% less likely than men to own a smartphone and 20% less likely to access mobile internet globally. For rural women, women with disabilities, and LGBTIQ+ persons, this digital divide is even wider. Lack of digital literacy, cost barriers, and social restrictions limit meaningful access.

At the same time, online spaces are increasingly unsafe. Women, girls, and queer persons are disproportionately subjected to technology-facilitated GBV (TF-GBV), including cyberstalking, image-based abuse, doxxing, and hate speech. Research shows roughly 38% of women globally have experienced online violence, with the rate higher among young women, trans persons, and women human rights defenders.

Digital exclusion is not just a rights issue, it is an economic one. Without closing the gender digital divide, the global economy risks losing over \$1 trillion in GDP by 2025. Moreover, women's exclusion from AI and digital policymaking entrenches maledominated algorithms that reproduce bias.





#### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- **Governance Reform:** Mandate gender parity in AI and digital governance bodies across G20 institutions.
- **Investment Priorities:** Fund digital literacy programs for women and girls, especially in rural and marginalized communities, and support development of accessible technologies.
- **Legal/Policy Instruments:** Criminalize TF-GBV and adopt global standards for online safety, aligned with CEDAW General Recommendation 35.
- **Programmatic Actions:** Develop gender-sensitive AI systems that eliminate bias; establish national/regional TFGBV data repositories; leverage digital platforms to expand access to SRHR information, safe online spaces, and economic opportunities for women and LGBTIO+ persons.
- Invest in scholarships and vocational training for women with disabilities, ensuring universal design in digital platforms and physical infrastructure.
- **Corporate Accountability:** Require tech companies to implement robust content moderation, privacy protections, and survivor redress mechanisms.

# ADOLESCENT GIRLS, HARMFUL PRACTICES & DISABILITY INCLUSION

Adolescent girls continue to face harmful practices that strip them of their rights, health, and futures. Each year, an estimated 12 million girls are married before the age of 18. Female genital mutilation (FGM) affects more than 200 million women and girls alive today, spanning infants, adolescents, and adult women across at least 30 countries. Practices such as "virginity testing", child marriage, and so-called "conversion practices" targeting LGBTQI+ youth persist despite international prohibitions. Crises, from conflict and climate disasters to pandemics, exacerbate these risks. During humanitarian crises, adolescent girls face heightened risks of trafficking, sexual exploitation, and early pregnancy, perpetuating intergenerational cycles of poverty.

Hate crimes and discriminatory practices also target adolescent girls of diverse SOGIESC, silencing their voices and cutting them off from education, health care, and participation in society. For refugee and displaced adolescent girls, these risks are even more acute: separation from families, denial of schooling, and lack of access to SRHR services compound their vulnerability to child marriage, trafficking, and early pregnancy.





#### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- **Governance Reform:** Make elimination of child marriage, FGM (across life stages), virginity testing, and conversion practices a priority in all G20 gender equality agendas.
- **Investment Priorities:** Fund youth- and feminist-led initiatives, including survivor-led campaigns, and allocate resources for adolescent-friendly SRHR services.
- **Legal/Policy Instruments:** Set and enforce laws setting 18 as the minimum age of marriage without exceptions; criminalize all forms of FGM, virginity testing, and conversion practices; strengthen anti-hate crime legislation protecting adolescent girls of diverse SOGIESC; repeal laws criminalizing consensual same-sex conduct and diverse gender identities and expressions.
- **Programmatic Actions:** Scale up comprehensive sexuality education (CSE); expand access to adolescentfriendly health services, including contraception, safe abortion, and mental health support; develop community-based prevention engaging traditional and faith leaders and boys/men.
- **Disability Inclusion:** Ratify and implement the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD); fund inclusive infrastructure; ensure all GBV, health, and education services are accessible to women and girls with disabilities, including through assistive technologies.

# **CROSS-CUTTING PRINCIPLES**

- Intersectionality: Policies must reflect the lived realities of diverse women and girls, rural, Indigenous, disabled, migrant, and LGBTIQ+ communities. Migration and Displacement: Ensure all G20 policies explicitly include migrant, refugee, and undocumented women and girls, guaranteeing access to health, education, safety, and livelihoods irrespective of legal status.
- Disaggregated Data:
  - Collect and analyze data by gender, age, disability, rural/urban status, and SOGIESC to design targeted interventions.
  - Implement mandatory disability-disaggregated data collection across all WEGE indicators. The proposed G20 Gender Equality Scorecard must explicitly track and report outcomes for women and girls with disabilities to ensure accountability
- **Targeted Interventions:** Abandon "one-size-fits-all" approaches; prioritize tailored responses for marginalized groups.
- **Coalition Building:** Build solidarity across feminist, labor, climate, disability, and LGBTIQ+ movements to strengthen advocacy.







- **Global South Solidarity:** Elevate South–South feminist networks and grassroots movements as central actors in policy design and monitoring.
- **Community-Led Solutions:** Invest in women's cooperatives, youth-led initiatives, and survivor-driven campaigns.
- Transparency & Accountability: Establish a G20 Gender Equality Scorecard, with annual public reporting, participatory monitoring, and civil society oversight.

### **CONCLUSION AND CALL TO ACTION**

Gender equality is both a moral imperative and an economic necessity. It is integral to tackling today's most urgent challenges, from economic recovery and digital transformation to climate change and global peace. The cost of inaction is measured in lost lives, suppressed potential, and trillions of dollars in economic losses. The G20, under South Africa's Presidency, must seize this historic opportunity to embed gender equality at the heart of global economic governance. Incremental measures are no longer enough, only transformative change will close the gaps.

The C20 therefore calls on G20 leaders to:

### **GOVERNANCE REFORM**

- Commit to a G20 Gender Equality Pact with measurable targets.
- Establish a Permanent G20 Gender Equality Taskforce.

### **INVESTMENT PRIORITIES**

- Allocate a minimum of 1% of GDP to gender equality nationally, with a specific portion ring-fenced for initiatives benefiting women and girls with disabilities, including grants for OPDs and funding for reasonable accommodations
- Fund survivor-centered GBV prevention and response infrastructure, including shelters, safe transport, and digital protection.
- Invest in universal childcare and care economy systems, recognizing unpaid care as central to economic resilience.







### **LEGAL AND POLICY INSTRUMENTS**

- Ratify and enforce CEDAW, the Beijing Platform, ILO C190, the Maputo Protocol, and the SADC Gender Protocol.
- Eliminate child marriage, FGM, virginity testing, and conversion practices by 2030, through enforcing 18 as the minimum legal age of marriage and fully funded national action plans.

### **PROGRAMMATIC ACTIONS**

- Explicitly include and protect women and girls of diverse SOGIESC and with disabilities in all G20 commitments.
- Expand women's access to land, credit, technology, and markets to close financial inclusion gaps.
- Strengthen women's leadership in climate adaptation and just transition planning, integrating Indigenous and traditional knowledge.
- Close the digital gender gap by expanding rural connectivity, digital literacy, and protection against online GBV.
- Invest in universal childcare and accessible GBV services



