



## Facts & Figures on Women Worldwide

The creation by the United Nations General Assembly of the [UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women](#) — or UN Women — will give new impetus to UN system support to Member States in advancing the rights and priorities of the world's women. UN Women will be a dynamic and strong UN champion for gender equality and the empowerment of women, and provide a powerful voice for women and girls worldwide.

The year 2010 is an important time to reflect on progress, as it marks the 15th anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action at the Fourth World Conference on Women (1995), and the 10th anniversary of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security.

Ten years have also passed since the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were launched, with a series of time-bound targets for advancing development and reducing poverty by 2015 or earlier. While MDG 3 focuses on promoting gender equality and empowering women, there is now broad recognition that gender equality is both a goal in itself, as well as a means towards the achievement of all the MDGs. In September 2010, Member States will convene in a High-level Meeting of the UN General Assembly to focus on accelerating progress towards the achievement of all the MDGs.

The work of UN Women will be framed by the 1995 [Beijing Platform for Action](#) and the [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#), which marked its 30th anniversary in 2009. The Convention provides the basis for realizing equality between women and men, and an agenda for action by States parties to guarantee the enjoyment of those rights. As of June 2010, 186 countries are party to the Convention.

### Poverty and the Economy

- The majority of the world's poor are women, with certain groups particularly vulnerable to poverty, such as women farmers, women in the informal sector, migrants, women with disabilities and older women.
- Women's unequal access to financial resources has a negative impact on their well-being and that of their families and communities, and on economic growth and development overall.
- According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), even though women are major producers of food crops, in most of the world, women lag well behind men in ownership of agricultural land and access to income from land.
- According to the UN Millennium Development Goals Report 2010, the share of women in paid employment outside the agricultural sector has increased slowly to 41 percent in 2008. But women in certain regions are lagging behind. In Southern Asia, Northern Africa and Western Asia, women's share of employment outside agriculture is only 20 percent.
- Women are more likely than men to have low-paid, low-status and vulnerable jobs, with limited or no social protection or basic rights. A significant proportion of women continue to work in the informal economy. In 2009, 65 percent of women's jobs were considered to be vulnerable, compared to 58 percent of men's jobs.
- Worldwide, women are typically paid less, and have less secure employment than men, and women's wages are 17 percent lower than those of men.
- Many women workers have been hit particularly hard by the recent global economic downturn. The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that the crisis will result in 18.7 million more unemployed women, pushing many into informal or unsafe jobs at a faster rate than men.

- Women continue to have disproportionate responsibility for unpaid work, such as care-giving, which impedes their full participation in education, the labour market and public life.
- Senior-level jobs are still inaccessible to women. Worldwide, only one in four senior officials or managers are women.

## Education and Training

- Over the last decade, access to education has increased globally for girls at all levels. In 2008, there were 96 girls for every 100 boys in primary schools, and 95 girls for every 100 boys in secondary schools. In 1999, the ratios were 91 girls to 100 boys in primary education and 88 girls to 100 boys at the secondary level.
- Abolishing school fees, providing scholarships and establishing school feeding programmes and safer school environments, including more women teachers, have proven to be beneficial measures for girls' enrolment and retention rates that should be replicated.
- The gender gap in the out-of-school population has narrowed in the last few years: out-of-school girls have decreased from 57 percent to 53 percent globally between 1999 and 2008. But in some regions like Northern Africa, 66 percent of the out-of-school children are girls.
- The percentage of primary school-age girls out of school in rural areas is more than twice that in urban areas. In the richest 40 percent of households, only one in every ten girls is out of school, while in the poorest 60 percent of households, one in every three girls is out of school.
- Women account for nearly two-thirds of the 776 million illiterate adults in the world.

## Health

- Maternal health is one of the areas in which the gap between rich and poor is most pronounced. While almost all births are attended by skilled health personnel in developed countries, less than half of women receive such care when giving birth in parts of the developing world.
- While some progress is being made to reduce maternal mortality rates, every year an unacceptable number of women and girls die as a result of complications during pregnancy, childbirth or following delivery, the overwhelming majority in developing countries. Most of these complications are largely preventable and treatable.
- Since gender inequality makes women and girls particularly susceptible to HIV infection, HIV/AIDS-related policies, strategies and action plans increasingly place specific emphasis on prevention, treatment and care for women. Yet women and girls often have less information about HIV and AIDS and fewer resources to take preventive measures.
- The UNAIDS AIDS Epidemic Update 2009 indicates that:
  - More than 30 million people are living with HIV, and women now account for half of all infections. In sub-Saharan Africa, approximately 60 percent of all adults living with HIV are women.
  - In Asia, the proportion of women to men living with HIV rose from 19 percent in 2000 to 35 percent in 2008.
  - In the Caribbean, women account for almost half of all new infections. HIV prevalence is especially elevated among adolescent and young women, who tend to have infection rates significantly higher than males their own age. In several countries, young women between the ages of 15 and 24 are three to four times more likely to be infected than men in the same age group.

## Violence against Women

- Over the last decade, action to address violence against women has become a priority in many countries. The Secretary-General's 2006 study on violence against women indicated that at least 89 States had some legislative provisions that address domestic violence, and 60 had specific domestic violence laws. Marital

rape was a prosecutable offence in at least 104 states. Ninety-three States had some legislative provision regarding trafficking in human beings. Ninety States had provisions on sexual harassment.

- Despite these advances, violence against women and girls is a global pandemic. The problem remains universal, with women and girls affected by violence in every region and every country. Women who experience violence suffer a range of health problems, and their ability to participate in public life is diminished.
- In a 10-country study on domestic violence by the World Health Organization (WHO), between 15 and 71 percent of women reported physical or sexual violence by a husband or partner.
- Among women aged between 15 and 44, acts of violence cause more death and disability than cancer, malaria, traffic accidents and war combined.
- In 2006, women and girls comprised 79 percent of victims of human trafficking.
- More than 60 million girls worldwide are forced into early marriage before the age of 18.
- It is estimated that 100 to 140 million girls and women worldwide are currently living with the consequences of female genital mutilation/cutting, and 3 million girls are estimated to be at risk every year.
- Impunity for perpetrators, inadequate services for victims/survivors, attitudes and behaviours that perpetuate negative stereotypes and violence against women, and an overall scarcity of resources for implementation of existing measures remain persistent barriers to preventing and ending violence against women.

## **Armed Conflict**

- The nature of conflict has been changing, with civilians — particularly women and children — now the major targets of violence, including widespread and systematic sexual violence. Yet the protection of women and girls during and after conflict, and the provision of services and reparations to the millions of women and girl victims, remains highly inadequate.
- The deliberate use of sexual violence on a large scale as a tactic of warfare has devastating consequences not just for its immediate victims, but also for communities and for national recovery. More than 200,000 cases of rape have been documented in the Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo since 1996; the actual numbers are considered to be much higher.
- Failure to prosecute perpetrators produces a climate of impunity that permits sexual violence to continue after cessation of hostilities, profoundly impairing women's capacities to engage in peacebuilding.
- During the past decade, the UN Security Council has signaled strong support to women's participation in peace processes and the elimination of sexual violence in armed conflict through Security Council resolutions 1325 (2000), 1820 (2008), 1888 and 1889 (2009).
- An increasing number of countries are developing national action plans to better coordinate strategies and activities on women, peace and security. As of June 2010, 24 national action plans are in place, and more are expected to be completed by October 2010.
- Yet, since 1992, women represented, on average, fewer than 10 percent of official negotiating delegations in peace talks, and only 2.1 percent of signatories to peace agreements.
- To date, the UN has never appointed a woman as a chief mediator in an UN-supported peace process.
- As of February 2010, out of 27 United Nations peacekeeping operations, special political missions and peacebuilding support offices, women headed four missions and were deputy heads of five missions.
- There is a persistent shortfall in the financing of women's needs in post-conflict recovery plans and post-conflict disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes. Employment and economic recovery efforts have not included women on an equal basis with men.

## **Power and Decision-Making**

- Globally, women held 19.1 percent of seats in single/lower chambers of parliament in May 2010, compared to 11.3 percent in 1995.
- Only 28 countries have achieved the 30 percent target for women in decision-making positions set in the early 1990s.

- In early 2010, only 15 Heads of State or Government were women.
- Quotas and other temporary special measures, applied in areas such as electoral systems, and corporate and civil service recruitment processes, have played a significant role in increasing the number of women in public life.
- Serious challenges persist to women's full and equal participation in senior decision-making positions, including negative stereotypes about women's leadership roles, lack of commitment by political parties, inadequate funding and training for women candidates and government officials, and high levels of violence and intimidation against women in public office.

## **Institutional Mechanisms**

- Institutional mechanisms, such as ministries for gender equality or equal opportunity commissions, continue to play a key role in the promotion of gender equality. They have become more diverse, and their responsibilities have expanded, including improving accountability for the implementation of legal and policy commitments to gender equality and the elimination of discrimination against women.
- However, institutional national mechanisms still lack political support at the highest level, have limited access to key decision-making processes and struggle with scarce human and financial resources.
- Despite an increased recognition of the importance of statistics on gender equality and the empowerment of women, sufficient data is not yet available to adequately monitor progress towards gender equality.

## **Human Rights**

- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women increasingly has been used as a framework for action for the promotion of the human rights of women. States have made progress in carrying out legal reforms, enhancing equality between women and men before the law.
- In spite of advances, discrimination against women persists in law and in practice. The effective implementation and enforcement of these laws remains an issue. Many women suffer numerous forms of discrimination and limited access to rights, resources and opportunities.
- The goal of universal ratification of the Convention by 2000 was not achieved — as of June 2010, there are 186 States parties to the treaty; 99 States are party to the Convention's Optional Protocol on the right to petition.

## **Media**

- Women increasingly participate in the media sector, and contribute to making the media more inclusive. Yet only about 24 percent of the people interviewed, heard, seen or read about in mainstream broadcast and print news are female; only 16 percent of all stories focus specifically on women.
- Persistent gender stereotypes prevent a balanced and realistic portrayal of women, while media coverage continues to focus on men in most areas. Almost 48 percent of all news stories reinforce gender stereotypes, while 8 percent of news stories challenge gender stereotypes.
- Employment inequalities between women and men still persist in the media. Many women journalists do not enjoy equal status with their male colleagues, earning less and being hired on a part-time basis. Overall, news stories by female reporters are much fewer than news stories by male reporters.
- Women are underrepresented in decision-making positions, such as in advisory, management, regulatory and monitoring bodies of the media industry.

## **Environment**

- Some countries have started to integrate gender perspectives in their national plans or strategies on sustainable development, the environment and rural development and to strengthen the participation of women in environmental decision-making.

- Increased recognition of women's right to access natural resources for their livelihoods has led to measures to support the role of women in agriculture and food security, their access to land and property, as well as their roles as users and managers of water for domestic consumption, subsistence agriculture, health and sanitation.
- The under-representation or absence of women in high-level decision-making organs in the environment sector has seriously limited women's contributions to environmental policy development, including adaptation and mitigation strategies on climate change.

## **Girls**

- Global commitment to achieving universal primary education and gender parity in primary and secondary education has had a beneficial impact on girls' enrolment and retention rates in many countries. However, gender parity in primary and secondary education — an MDG target that was to be met by 2005 — continues to be out of reach for many developing countries.
- Countries are increasingly adopting or revising legislation and policies to address the multiple forms of violence and discrimination against girls.
- There was some improvement in addressing early and forced child marriage, through the implementation of legislation, in some cases accelerated by policy measures and action plans. However, girls do not yet receive sufficient attention in policy and programme development and in resource allocation. Girls continue to have insufficient access to services and information, including on sexual and reproductive health. Many girls continue to face the hardships and risks associated with child labour.

## **Moving Forward**

Political will and leadership are critical for generating sustained action for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls and for progress in development, peace, security and human rights.

Grounded in the vision of equality enshrined in the UN Charter, UN Women will work for the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and girls, the empowerment of women, and the achievement of equality between women and men as partners and beneficiaries of development, human rights, humanitarian action and peace and security.