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### **Annual report on the implementation of the UNICEF Gender Action Plan, 2022–2025**

#### *Summary*

The UNICEF Gender Action Plan, 2022–2025, outlines how UNICEF is driving progress on gender equality and the empowerment of girls and women across the five Goal Areas of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025 and within its institutional systems and operations. This document, which serves as the third and penultimate annual report on the implementation of the Gender Action Plan, 2022–2025, assesses progress against its indicators and benchmarks.

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*Note:* The present document was processed in its entirety by UNICEF.



## I. Overview

1. As the world commemorates the thirtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 2025, the progress made in realizing the human rights of women and girls remains far too slow. Despite gains in education and health, millions of adolescent girls still face barriers to quality schooling, economic opportunity and essential services, leaving them at higher risk of violence and abuse, pregnancy and harmful practices such as child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM). Overwhelmingly, girls are less likely than boys to be in any form of education, employment or training, and more likely to be at risk of acquiring HIV and being anaemic. With just five years remaining to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, no countries with available data have met even half of the 16 targets that are most crucial to adolescent girls' well-being.

2. Together with Governments and other partners, including adolescent girls, UNICEF is determined to disrupt these intergenerational patterns of inequality and discrimination. While there is much additional progress to be made, the UNICEF Gender Action Plan, 2022–2025, as demonstrated by a 2024 independent evaluation of the UNICEF Gender Policy and Gender Action Plans, has driven significant progress in several areas, as follows:

(a) More well-trained front-line community workers are delivering critical health and nutrition services. UNICEF, alongside a range of partners globally, has expanded coverage of services for anaemia, HIV prevention and treatment, and human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination for girls and women, including a near doubling of HIV treatment for pregnant and breastfeeding women since 2010. Additionally, the availability of tailored mental health services for girls, as well as for boys and women, continues to grow.

(b) In response to new data on sexual violence that show that over 370 million girls and women have been subjected to rape or sexual assault as children, UNICEF has expanded violence prevention and protection services, including in humanitarian settings.

(c) Global partnerships, such as the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage and the UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation, remain as critical as ever, with over 10 million girls benefiting from services.

(d) UNICEF has seen strong results for adolescent girls through its skills-building programmes, expanded HPV vaccination coverage and large-scale public communication campaigns, including Girl Goals, which has reached 15 million adolescents and 90 million parents and caregivers. The organization's collaboration with girls' and women's rights organizations is growing and helping girls to influence policies and programmes more directly.

(e) At the organizational level, UNICEF has strengthened the use of gender equality analyses to inform country programming, including in humanitarian contexts, and has increased gender equality-focused expenditures from 11 per cent to 14 per cent of total expenditure for programmes. This is on track to meet the United Nations system's 15 per cent benchmark.

3. Despite these gains, systemic barriers continue to hold girls back. Gender-based violence, economic exclusion and limited access to education and healthcare remain widespread. Scaling up effective programmes remains a challenge, particularly in low-income and humanitarian settings.

4. Through its gender action plans, UNICEF remains committed to bold, evidence-driven action to accelerate progress and ensure that every girl and woman can thrive.

As UNICEF develops its next Strategic Plan, 2026–2029 and Gender Action Plan for the same period, it will focus on sustaining and scaling up progress in several key areas. This will result in more deliberate and targeted efforts to influence financing and policy reforms to drive impactful programmes for girls and women at scale. A particular focus will be placed on improving access to high-quality immunization, HIV and nutrition services, as well as continuing to expand social protection coverage for the world's most marginalized girls and women. Recognizing the positive leadership by many countries to advance programmes and policies for and with adolescent girls, UNICEF will prioritize efforts in this area, including ensuring the protection and well-being of adolescent girls.

## II. Programmatic results

5. The Gender Action Plan employs a two-track approach that both advances gender equality and girls and women's empowerment throughout the life course and promotes targeted actions to advance the leadership and well-being of adolescent girls. UNICEF programmatic gender equality priorities are supported by the organization's work in advocacy, innovation, partnerships, data, research and analysis.

Figure I  
Gender Action Plan, 2022–2025: Programmatic priorities



## **A. Integration of gender equality and the empowerment of girls and women across the life course**

### **1. Maternal health and nutrition, including HIV testing, counselling and care**

#### **(a) Quality and dignified maternal care and nutrition**

6. Despite significant gains in maternal and newborn health since 1990, progress has stagnated over the past decade and preventable maternal deaths, stillbirths and newborn deaths remain high. The latest published estimates show a combined 4.5 million deaths globally, with sub-Saharan Africa and Central and Southern Asia experiencing the largest numbers of fatalities.<sup>1</sup> Maternal complications are the leading cause of death for adolescent girls.

7. UNICEF remains committed to scaling up priority maternal and newborn health interventions in high-burden countries and enhancing key partnerships with the World Health Organization (WHO), UNFPA and the World Bank. The Every Woman Every Newborn Everywhere initiative is harnessing evidence, tracking progress and fostering learning so that every pregnant woman, new mother and newborn has the best chance of survival, health and well-being, no matter where they are. UNICEF supports countries to scale up essential packages of high-quality, equitable maternal and newborn services. These are delivered through primary healthcare services, including home visits, by equipped and knowledgeable front-line health workers with referrals and linkages to secondary and tertiary care. In 2024, UNICEF strengthened systems for primary healthcare in 135 countries across all regions, in both development and humanitarian settings, demonstrating a steady increase from 97 countries in which primary healthcare systems were strengthened in 2021.

8. Globally, progress has plateaued across several maternal health indicators, demonstrating the need for more investment to meet the 2025 targets. In 2024, some 67 per cent of pregnant women received at least four antenatal care visits, compared to 66 per cent in 2021. Similarly, 66 per cent of pregnant women received postnatal care in 2024, slightly lower than the baseline of 68 per cent in 2021. Access to essential health services while pregnant is critical to help to prevent and manage complications that could arise during pregnancy, birth and after birth, as well as to reduce maternal and newborn morbidity.

9. Through UNICEF-supported programmes, 35.6 million live births were delivered in health-care facilities in 2024 (154.9 million cumulative since 2021), consistently meeting the milestones set for each year and on track to reach the cumulative target of 179 million by 2025. The percentage of live births attended by skilled health personnel was 83 per cent in 2024, compared to 81 per cent in 2021.

10. Globally, more than 1 billion adolescent girls and women suffer from undernutrition, deficiencies in essential micronutrients and anaemia, with devastating consequences for their lives and well-being.<sup>2</sup> UNICEF supports proven strategies to reduce the impact of discrimination on the nutrition of women, girls and children, especially in humanitarian contexts when national systems fail or are insufficient. Forty-five per cent of pregnant women benefited from UNICEF-supported programmes for anaemia prevention in 2024, an increase from 37 per cent in 2021. In

<sup>1</sup> World Health Organization, United Nations Children's Fund and United Nations Population Fund, *Improving Maternal and Newborn Health and Survival and Reducing Stillbirth: Progress report 2023*, WHO, Geneva, 2023.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Children's Fund, *Undernourished and overlooked: A global nutrition crisis in adolescent girls and women*, UNICEF Child Nutrition Report Series, 2022, UNICEF, New York, 2023.

2024, UNICEF published global guidance on gender equality programming in nutrition for the first time, promoting increased investments in anaemia prevention among other priorities for nutrition.

11. UNICEF launched several initiatives at the end of 2023 through to 2024 to prevent malnutrition in girls and women. The Improving Maternal Nutrition acceleration plan, for example, aims to combat malnutrition and anaemia during pregnancy by supporting 16 million girls and women across 16 countries with essential nutrition services. In Rwanda, the launch of multiple micronutrient supplementation for pregnant women marked a significant shift from iron–folic acid supplementation, benefiting 65,000 women in seven districts. A new partnership was established with several organizations aiming to scale up supplementation nationally in the coming years.

**(b) Community health workers**

12. UNICEF scaled up support for front-line health workers in 2024, supporting capacity development programmes for these invaluable workers in health, nutrition and HIV in 74 countries (up from 50 in 2021). Community health and nutrition workers, the majority of whom are women, play an essential role in delivering critical health services and information, often in hard-to-reach communities and during emergencies. In 2024, one year into implementation, the UNICEF-supported Community Health Delivery Partnership accelerated access to equitable, high-quality essential health services through community-based primary healthcare. Some 1.2 million health workers received skills and support for delivering essential maternal, newborn and child health services through UNICEF-supported programmes, reaching a total of 3.6 million workers since 2021. In Afghanistan, UNICEF strengthened the capacity of 30,000 front-line community health and nutrition workers (49 per cent women) to proactively augment their service delivery in ways to mitigate the harmful impacts of women's and girls' restricted movements. This included supporting referrals to life-saving services and adapting care to the unique vulnerabilities and needs of women, men, girls and boys. In coordination with key national and local stakeholders, this initiative covered 2,400 health facilities, including 96 fully equipped hospitals in 34 provinces. In the Central African Republic, community health workers do more than just distribute therapeutic food to malnourished children, they also offer early screening to ensure that children are referred to the right services, raise awareness among mothers about the importance of good nutrition, carry out home visits to ensure that treatment is being followed and actively search for absentees to reduce dropouts from the treatment programmes.

**(c) Gender-responsive adolescent health**

13. In 2024, upon requests from Governments, UNICEF supported 44 countries to integrate adolescent health priorities, in national programmes, in primary healthcare services or through school and digital platforms, up from 27 countries in 2021. Multi-country programmes (like the Laaha virtual safe spaces, a digital platform designed by and for women and girls) were expanded to additional countries in 2024 and are now available in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Czechia, Ecuador, Iraq, Lebanon, Poland, the Republic of Moldova, Slovakia, the State of Palestine, and Ukraine, with new modules on mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) and gender-based violence.

14. In 2024, UNICEF supported 60 million children, adolescents, parents and caregivers, of whom nearly 23 million were in humanitarian contexts, with community-based MHPSS services. In Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka, UNICEF worked closely with national stakeholders and partners to support the

integration of MHPSS into national efforts to support vulnerable groups, including victims of gender-based violence and child labour, and children receiving social protection services in communities. In Peru, working with the Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations and the Ministry of Development and Social Inclusion, a comprehensive package of sessions covering topics like MHPSS, gender-based violence and empowerment benefited more than 3,000 vulnerable adolescent girls, complementing the conditional cash transfer programme that reaches 400,000 vulnerable adolescent girls. Early findings suggest that girls' decision-making and access to information have improved by up to 80 per cent.

**(d) Gender equality and immunization for all children**

15. To address gender equality-related barriers to immunization and as part of a global collaboration with Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, and Global Affairs Canada, UNICEF is investing in gender equality analyses in 55 countries and supporting corresponding government-led immunization workplans. In the Papua Province of Indonesia where immunization rates have been consistently low, UNICEF has made inroads in promoting shared caregiving responsibilities within families to improve health outcomes for children. After six months of implementation, there was already a tangible impact whereby fathers were adopting more active roles in their children's health and well-being, such as taking their children to vaccination clinics and ensuring their immunization schedules were followed. Similar initiatives in the Plurinational State of Bolivia have already resulted in expanded vaccination coverage, reaching 87 per cent of eligible children across 64 municipalities against the most prevalent childhood illnesses – diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis.

**(e) HIV prevention and care**

16. Globally, about 84 per cent of pregnant and breastfeeding women living with HIV now receive antiretroviral drugs to prevent vertical transmission of HIV to their children, up from 48 per cent in 2010.<sup>3</sup> Yet there are still significant gaps. Over 40 per cent of the estimated 1.4 million children aged 0–14 years living with HIV worldwide are not receiving antiretroviral drugs, with coverage remaining extremely low in some regions.<sup>4</sup>

**2. Gender-responsive education systems and equitable education access for all**

17. Girls and young women worldwide face persistent challenges in access to education, employment and training. While the gaps between boys and girls in primary education have narrowed in many regions, approximately 122 million girls remain out of school. The numbers are concentrated in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia where poverty, child marriage and discrimination continue to present major obstacles.<sup>5</sup>

18. In 2024, UNICEF continued to prioritize equitable access to high-quality education. UNICEF supported 26 million out-of-school children and adolescents (12.4 million girls) to access education, including 8.9 million children living in emergency situations, 3.7 million children on the move and 72,875 children with disabilities. In 2024, a joint UNICEF initiative with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization built the technical capacity of Ministry of

<sup>3</sup> Global AIDS Monitoring and UNAIDS 2024 estimates.

<sup>4</sup> UNICEF and UNAIDS estimates, available at <https://data.unicef.org/topic/hivaids/global-regional-trends/>, accessed on 9 April 2025.

<sup>5</sup> United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *2024/5 Global Education Monitoring Report: Leadership in education – Lead for learning*, UNESCO, Paris, 2024.

Education staff, civil society representatives and young feminists across 36 countries. In the Central African Republic, this resulted in the Ministry of Education requesting UNICEF to perform an assessment of its education system to identify areas of gender inequalities and led the Government to begin developing its first national policy on girls' education.

19. In 2024, 56 per cent of countries had gender-responsive systems for education access, compared to 38 per cent in 2021. UNICEF also supported 18.3 million children (51 per cent girls) to access education through digital platforms, reaching nearly 50 million children (51 per cent girls) since the beginning of the current Strategic Plan, 2022–2025. The National Girls' Empowerment Initiative (Dawwie) in Egypt has helped to improve the digital capacities of more than 50,000 adolescents (75 per cent girls) and engaged 1.8 million people in community dialogues to end harmful practices against girls. This national initiative is being scaled up with valuable domestic resources in collaboration with UNICEF and other partners.

### 3. Addressing violence against girls, boys and women

20. Violence against women and girls remains a pervasive global challenge. One third of women and nearly one in four ever-married or ever-partnered girls aged 15–19 years have endured physical or sexual partner violence in their lifetime. According to global estimates on sexual violence in childhood published by UNICEF in 2024, 650 million – or one in five – girls and women alive today have been subjected to sexual violence as children, including over 370 million who have experienced rape or sexual assault in childhood.<sup>6</sup> These statistics underscore the urgent need for intensified efforts to prevent and respond to all forms of violence against children and women.

21. In 2024, UNICEF and partners, through multifaceted programmes in 110 countries, supported 6.2 million children (58 per cent girls) experiencing violence with access to health, justice and social welfare services, an increase from 4.9 million children reached in 2021. In addition, 27.6 million people were engaged in community dialogue programmes to address discriminatory social norms and harmful practices that affect girls and women.

22. In fragile settings, the prevalence of sexual violence in childhood is over two times higher than the world average.<sup>7</sup> In 2024, UNICEF scaled up efforts and reached more than 100 per cent (16.7 million) of the number of women, girls and boys in humanitarian situations it aimed to reach with risk mitigation, prevention and response interventions to address gender-based violence. Working with key partners, UNICEF is also advocating for greater investments in violence prevention. In November 2024, UNICEF and WHO co-organized the first-ever Global Ministerial Conference on Ending Violence against Children hosted by the Governments of Colombia and Sweden. The conference resulted in over 120 pledges from various countries and organizations (as at 8 April 2025) to accelerate efforts to realize every child's right to freedom from all forms of violence, including gender-based violence.

23. Parenting and caregiver programmes are proven to reduce violence against girls, boys, women and men. In 2024, UNICEF supported 18.5 million parents and caregivers across 96 countries with carefully tailored caregiving programmes tackling violence, a more than five-fold increase since 2021. In China, UNICEF partnered with the Government to embed programming on positive parenting practices in the nationwide family education system, reaching more than 30,000 caregivers across 11

<sup>6</sup> United Nations Children's Fund, *When Numbers Demand Action: Confronting the global scale of sexual violence against children*, UNICEF, New York, 2024.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

provinces through an expanded low-cost model, indirectly benefiting over 3 million children.

### **Ending female genital mutilation**

24. One third of men and one quarter of women globally still support FGM, and prevalence remains high, with over 230 million girls worldwide having undergone FGM.<sup>8</sup> In 2024, UNICEF worked across 19 countries to eliminate FGM, engaging with girls, families, communities and institutions to support lasting change. Collective efforts under the UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation provided prevention and protection services to 758,000 girls and women in 2024, a more than 300 per cent increase since 2021. Given that over 70 million girls in South-East Asia have experienced FGM, UNICEF and UNFPA have launched a new four-year regional programme, with support from the Government of Australia, to gather data, advocate for change and raise awareness.

25. A pivotal moment in 2024 was an attempt to repeal the Women's (Amendment) Act, 2015 against FGM in the Gambia, which brought global attention. UNICEF, in collaboration with UNFPA and many other partners, including girl leaders and the Children's National Assembly of the Gambia, rapidly scaled up advocacy for the protection of the rights of women and girls, preventing the repeal. In the Sudan, UNICEF advanced efforts to combat harmful practices by establishing 430 girls' clubs that reached 450,000 adolescent girls with life skills and awareness about FGM and facilitated access to child protection services. Community engagement initiatives mobilized 386,424 individuals, while 8,797 people received specific training to address harmful practices.

## **4. Equitable water, sanitation and hygiene systems**

26. Millions of people around the world still lack access to basic drinking water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). In 2024, in more than 100 countries, UNICEF continued to drive progress on providing equitable access to safe WASH facilities, exceeding Strategic Plan milestones. In 2024, through UNICEF-supported programmes, over 18 million people gained access to at least basic sanitation services, over 33 million to safe water, and over 20 million to basic hygiene. More than half of those reached were women and girls. In humanitarian settings, UNICEF-supported WASH programmes responded to several large-scale emergencies in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Lebanon, Somalia, the State of Palestine, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Ukraine and Yemen. In Ukraine, UNICEF facilitated safe and equitable water and/or sanitation access for almost 5.2 million people, including approximately 2.3 million women and 417,000 girls. Water, sanitation and hygiene interventions were integrated with gender-based violence risk mitigation and awareness-raising efforts through the addition of thematic leaflets in hygiene kits and making information materials available in all rehabilitated WASH facilities.

27. In 7 out of 10 households with water off premises, women and adolescent girls aged 15 years and older are primarily responsible for water collection away from the home.<sup>9</sup> Recognizing the disproportionate burden of water collection on women and girls, UNICEF installed more than 2,100 solar-powered water supply systems across 69 countries in 2024, enhancing the reliability and proximity of water access. Women

<sup>8</sup> United Nations Children's Fund, *Female Genital Mutilation: A global concern, 2024 Update*, UNICEF, New York, 2024

<sup>9</sup> United Nations Children's Fund and World Health Organization, *Progress on Household Drinking Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene, 2000–2022: Special focus on gender*, UNICEF and WHO, New York, 2023.



are disproportionately affected by poor WASH services yet constitute the minority of decision-makers and leaders in the WASH sector. UNICEF is working with women and girl leaders to advocate for more equitable, climate-friendly WASH services. In India, UNICEF and the Government worked together to provide an opportunity for rural women in the State of Jharkhand to participate in the WASH sector. As a result, 29,000 women have become “Jalsahiya”, who are responsible for water quality testing and communicating the decisions of the water sanitation committees to the rest of the village. The women serve as treasurers and joint signatories of these committees, with many of them taking on new roles and becoming elected leaders in village administration.

28. Throughout 2024, UNICEF championed gender equality in WASH by supporting 13 countries to create strategies that ensure that women and girls are included and actively take part in decision-making. In several countries, including Egypt and Nigeria, UNICEF helped to develop policies to support women and girls and empower them to speak up for better facilities, take advantage of leadership opportunities and improve access to menstrual health products.

## 5. Gender-responsive social protection systems and care work

29. Social protection is vital to address the causes and consequences of child poverty, which hits girls and female-headed households the hardest. Child poverty is a known risk associated with child marriage, for example. The United Nations estimates that more than 1.8 billion children worldwide lack access to social protection benefits.<sup>10</sup> To address this gap, UNICEF works to support more gender-responsive social protection systems that respond to the specific needs of girls and women. In 2024, nearly half of all UNICEF-supported countries (60 of 136) supported such programmes, a nearly three-fold increase from 22 in 2021. In Bangladesh, UNICEF has worked with partners to support direct cash transfers with complementary social services for adolescent mothers, which is helping to improve access to health services and nutrition for mothers and their children. In Ghana, UNICEF leveraged the national Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty cash transfer programme to identify households with girls at risk of child marriage and support them with a package of interconnected services, including social protection and violence-response services.

30. Women and girls spend nearly three times more of their day on domestic chores and care responsibilities than boys and men; interrupting their learning and participation in the labour market.<sup>11</sup> In 2024, with UNICEF support, 42 countries took action to support care policies such as parental leave, affordable childcare and child benefits – an increase from 13 in 2021. In the Republic of Moldova, UNICEF facilitated a national dialogue on the European Union Child Guarantee to enhance childcare policies and support for families, including for families with children with disabilities. As a result, a comprehensive road map was developed and approved by the Government for implementation. UNICEF is also partnering with the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to disseminate the results of a significant evidence base of more than 60 publications, including 11 studies and 6 evaluations, to enhance evidence-informed policymaking and research uptake on gender-responsive social protection at the global, regional and country levels.

<sup>10</sup> International Labour Office, *World Social Protection Report 2024–2026: Universal social protection for climate action and a just transition*, ILO, Geneva, 2024.

<sup>11</sup> Hanna, Taylor, et al., ‘Forecasting Time Spent in Unpaid Care and Domestic Work’, *Technical Brief*, University of Denver, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), 2023.

## B. Adolescent girls' leadership and well-being

31. Today, the 641 million adolescent girls worldwide represent a vast reservoir of untapped potential of leadership innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship. In 2024, UNICEF introduced and expanded girl-focused programmes (designed with and for adolescent girls) in 63 countries, in keeping with the UNICEF Adolescent Girl Programme Strategy. Over 18 million people were reached with new, girl-centred and multifaceted programming during the year. The scope of the challenges confronting girls is significant, however, and there is a need to ramp up these interventions with more dedicated financing and impactful partnerships with Governments and other stakeholders.

### 1. Adolescent girls' health and nutrition, including HIV prevention

32. Nearly 12 million adolescent girls (aged 15–19 years) and more than 325,000 girls (aged 10–14 years) are expected to give birth in 2025.<sup>12</sup> Access to maternal healthcare continues to be a challenge for adolescent girls. In 2024, maternal health results for adolescent girls (aged 15–19 years) were the same or slightly below baseline figures: 57 per cent of pregnant adolescents received antenatal care (with the same percentage in 2021); 75 per cent of live births were attended by skilled health personnel (also with the same percentage in 2021); and 61 per cent of adolescent mothers received postnatal care (versus 62 per cent in 2021).

33. UNICEF and partners continued to support integrated programming for adolescent girls on the prevention of anaemia and other forms of malnutrition. In 2024, UNICEF supported 81.2 million girls aged 5–19 years with nutrition programmes tackling anaemia and malnutrition in over 50 countries – an increase from 28 countries in 2021.

34. For many adolescent girls, vulnerability to HIV is part of a cycle that is difficult to escape. In Eastern and Southern Africa, girls are six times more likely than boys to acquire HIV. Adolescent girls are disproportionately held back by the “triple threat” of early pregnancy, HIV and gender-based violence. Compared to older women, adolescent girls also tend to have poorer adherence to HIV treatment and are less likely to be virally suppressed than adult women living with HIV. In Eastern and Southern Africa, about one quarter of all pregnant women or mothers living with HIV and needing treatment are aged 15–24 years.<sup>13</sup> UNICEF is supporting young women and girls, including pregnant and parenting adolescents, through integrated strategies and programming. These include peer-led and community-based interventions using networks of adolescents and young people who promote HIV testing and access to care, treatment and mental health services. In 2024, of 37 UNICEF priority countries, 33 implemented combination HIV-prevention interventions that focused on adolescent girls and young women and/or young key populations.

35. In Eswatini, UNICEF and partners developed and launched a youth-friendly service provision model through a mobile application focused on promoting the accountability of service providers and improving services so that they are accessible, free from stigma and of good quality. This enabled real-time quality assurance and improvements, with 55 per cent of issues raised resolved in 2024, supporting local evidence-based decision-making and enhancing accountability to affected populations. In Namibia, UNICEF-supported skills programming, which covered life skills, financial literacy and HIV awareness, reached vulnerable girls (90 per cent of

<sup>12</sup> United Nations Children's Fund, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Plan International, *Girl Goals: What has changed for girls? Adolescent girls' rights over 30 years*, UNICEF, New York, 2025.

<sup>13</sup> Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, 2024 estimates.

whom were out of school, pregnant, breastfeeding or parenting), with positive results. At the end of the programme, results suggested that over 80 per cent of the girls had acquired new skills and had increased HIV awareness.

36. UNICEF, Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance and other partners renewed efforts in 2024 to revitalize access to the HPV vaccine that helps to prevent cervical cancer and aimed to reach 86 million adolescent girls by the end of 2025. In addition to supporting Governments on procurement of the vaccine, UNICEF is promoting demand for the vaccine through partnerships with girls' and women's organizations and broader community-based efforts. In the Lao People's Democratic Republic, the Government and UNICEF have partnered to achieve 100 per cent HPV vaccination coverage through an ambitious community-based campaign focusing on 127,586 girls aged 10 to 13 years who had never been vaccinated against HPV.

## **2. Adolescent girls' leadership, learning and skills, including digital skills**

37. Adolescent girls face unique barriers to education, skills development and economic opportunities. In 2023, 28 per cent of adolescent girls and young women (aged 15–24 years) were not in any form of employment, education or training compared with 13 per cent of adolescent boys and young men.<sup>14</sup> To address this challenge, the UNICEF Skills4Girls partnership is being implemented in over 20 countries with the support of public and private sector partners like the Government of Iceland, Clé de Peau Beauté, Chloé and Max Factor and, in the past year, by new partners Sylvamo and the Lind Foundation. In 2024, Skills4Girls equipped over 6.4 million adolescent girls with the skills and opportunities they need to join the workforce of the future and contribute to solving global challenges. The initiative also reached over 6.7 million adolescent boys and young men, teachers, caregivers, community members and other key stakeholders to create enabling environments in which girls can learn. In the Plurinational State of Bolivia, over 600,000 girls were reached with such skills training opportunities in 2024, and technical guidelines for teacher training in digital education are now being developed for long term programme sustainability and integration into the education system. In Bangladesh, UNICEF is working with the Ministry of Education and a range of private sector partners to support out-of-school adolescent girls to acquire skills in science, technology, engineering and mathematics for their future employment in key sectors like the mobile phone industry. This initiative has a high learning-to-earning ratio – over 80 per cent of girls are recruited directly from their training into employment. The programme is also having a positive effect on reducing the number of school dropouts and reducing child marriage in affected regions. At the same time, UNICEF is pioneering a revised teacher training programme in schools to improve access to essential skills like experiential learning and problem-solving focused on encouraging girls to pursue science, technology, engineering and mathematics studies and, in 2024, some 50,000 teachers were trained as part of this programme. Overall in 2024, 5.3 million girls have benefited from the support provided to improve education systems in Bangladesh.

## **3. Eliminating child marriage**

38. UNICEF and partners sustained efforts to keep the global spotlight on ending child marriage, including through the UNFPA–UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage and other initiatives. While the prevalence of child marriage continues to decline – in 2023, one in five young women (aged 20–24 years) were married in childhood versus nearly one in four 10 years ago – progress remains uneven globally

<sup>14</sup> International Labour Office, *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2024: Decent work, brighter futures*, International Labour Office, Geneva, 2024.

and is not fast enough to achieve target 5.3 of the Sustainable Development Goals. Nearly half of all child brides live in South Asia (45 per cent) with the next largest cohort live in in sub-Saharan Africa (20 per cent). To achieve the Sustainable Development Goal target of eliminating child marriage by 2030, a twenty-fold acceleration is required.<sup>15</sup>

39. In 2024, UNICEF supported prevention and care interventions to address child marriage across 33 countries, benefiting 10.6 million adolescent girls; a significant increase since the baseline (7.6 million in 2021).

40. In Benin, as a measure to prevent child marriage and advance girls' education, UNICEF supported 130,000 vulnerable girls at risk of marriage to stay in school through a multipronged programme approach that included cash transfers, parenting support and community outreach. UNICEF also supports national strategies to end child marriage, for example in Malawi, the organization is working with the Ministry of Gender, Community Development and Social Welfare on a national strategy to end child marriage.

#### **4. Accessible, dignified menstrual health and hygiene**

41. Barriers to accessible, dignified menstrual health and hygiene (MHH) can limit girls' access to education. UNICEF actively works to improve policies that promote widespread access to affordable menstrual supplies and reduce the stigma surrounding the MHH needs of girls and women. In 2024 in 63 countries, UNICEF-supported MHH services and information benefited more than 11.9 million girls and women. Of these, 3.7 million, including girls and women with disabilities, were in humanitarian contexts. Cumulatively, the number of women and adolescent girls whose MHH needs are being met reached 37.8 million by the end of 2024, which is on track to meet the Strategic Plan, 2022-2025 target of 40 million. In 2024, UNICEF also expanded equitable access to WASH services in institutions, reaching over 8,600 schools in 88 countries and 3,800 healthcare facilities in 76 countries. This included providing clean water, hygiene education, accessible single-sex toilets and MHH facilities. In Senegal, UNICEF supported the menstrual health of 113,700 girls through the provision of separate toilets in nearly 5,000 schools, 20,000 hygiene kits and access to washable sanitary pads, including those produced locally through vocational training for young women.

### **III. Institutional strengthening for gender equality and the empowerment of girls and women**

42. UNICEF continues to strive towards workplace practices and policies that model its commitments to gender equality and the empowerment of girls and women. In 2024, this "whole-of-institution" approach helped UNICEF to maintain a strong performance on the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, achieving 94 per cent of all benchmarks (and matching the rating from 2023).

#### **A. Programming for gender equality results**

43. UNICEF uses the Gender Action Plan institutional standard, which is a composite index with benchmarks for country offices to track their efforts to more effectively deliver gender equality results. The benchmarks apply to areas such as resourcing, partnerships, capacity for delivering on gender equality, gender equality

<sup>15</sup> United Nations Children's Fund, *Is an End to Child Marriage within Reach? Latest trends and future prospects, 2023 Update*, UNICEF, New York, 2023.

analyses and management accountability for gender equality programming. In 2024, some 46 per cent of country offices (59 of 129) met the standard, up from 12 per cent in 2022. UNICEF country offices are also advancing programmes that more explicitly address the systematic barriers facing girls and women. A total of 79 country offices (61 per cent) reported positive gender equality results, addressing power dynamics and structures driving negative outcomes for children, girls and women. A total of 70 country offices developed gender equality action plans, up from 57 in 2023, and 86 offices had conducted gender equality programmatic reviews to inform their country programme documents and workplans.

44. As pointed out in the 2024 evaluation of the UNICEF Gender Policy and Gender Action Plans, there is a need to improve the scale and scope of UNICEF gender equality actions in humanitarian settings. In 2024, 62 countries conducted rapid analyses on gender equality, outlining priority actions for girls and women. Eighty-seven per cent of country offices (112 of 129) ensured a core package of gender-based violence mitigation services were available – a critical humanitarian intervention. These results reflect a significant upward trend during the current Gender Action Plan period, 2022–2025, demonstrating the steadfast commitment of UNICEF to place girls and women at the heart of emergency response and preparedness.

## **B. Data, research and evidence to support gender equality results**

45. UNICEF continued to strengthen the evidence base for gender equality policy and programming in 2024. New household survey modules were introduced in the seventh round of the UNICEF-supported Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys to aid understanding of the situation of girls and women in the countries where UNICEF works. These modules, covering, among other issues, time use, health and experience of intimate partner violence among girls and women, will help to inform policy advocacy and prioritization within UNICEF country programmes. Also in 2024, UNICEF produced the first-ever global and regional estimates of sexual violence against children. A new study on adolescent girls' life satisfaction and happiness is also available.<sup>16</sup> UNICEF continues to make significant contributions to gender equality statistics, including as custodian or co-custodian of several Sustainable Development Goal indicators, such as those on skilled birth attendance, child marriage and FGM. Throughout 2024, UNICEF actively engaged with the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Gender Statistics and is currently serving as a member of the advisory group on mainstreaming the gender perspective into the United Nations Statistical Commission's work on climate change and statistics. UNICEF played a key role in developing the Guide to Producing Statistics on Time Use,<sup>17</sup> by contributing its expertise in collecting data on how children spend their time, particularly in relation to unpaid work and education.

46. In 2024, the second independent evaluation of the UNICEF Gender Policy and Gender Action Plans was completed in a consultative process with country and regional offices, external partners and young people. The results, including the management response, were shared with the Executive Board at its first regular session in February 2025.

<sup>16</sup> United Nations Children's Fund, *In Pursuit of Happiness: Girls' striking optimism in a time of crisis: A data and policy brief on adolescent girls' life satisfaction and happiness*, UNICEF, New York, 2024.

<sup>17</sup> United Nations Statistics Division, *Guide to Producing Statistics on Time Use: Measuring paid and unpaid work*, ST/ESA/STAT/SER.F/93, UNSD, New York, 2023.

## C. Financing

47. UNICEF uses a gender equality marker and tags for tracking expenditures on activities that promote gender equality. In 2024, an estimated 29 per cent of total expenditure went towards activities integrating gender equality objectives into programmes across the Goal Areas of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022–2025. Gender equality expenditures were at 14 per cent of total UNICEF programme expenditure for 2024, nearly reaching the 15 per cent United Nations systems benchmark for 2025. This indicates a progressive increase since the beginning of the current Gender Action Plan cycle, with figures rising from 6.2 per cent in 2022 and 10.6 per cent in 2023. In emergency contexts, expenditures for gender equality were higher, at 17 per cent, demonstrating the commitment of country offices to priorities for girls and women despite challenging operating environments. Expenditures directly related to the adolescent girl priorities in the Gender Action Plan reached 3.8 per cent in 2024, which is low. Efforts are needed by sectors and country offices to invest in girl-focused programming and to ensure timely reporting of resources.

## D. Strategic partnerships and communications

48. UNICEF works closely with other United Nations agencies and partners to advance critical priorities for girls and women. For example, UNICEF is a member of the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Gender Reference Group. UNICEF works with Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance on HPV vaccination and joint programmes with other United Nations agencies, such as the UNFPA- UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage and the UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation continue to yield powerful results.

49. Partnerships with women- and girl-led organizations are critical to resourcing local efforts by girls and women, especially in humanitarian action. In 2024, UNICEF transferred \$2.4 billion to partners in development and emergency contexts, of which local civil society organizations led by women received 6 per cent (\$142 million). In 2024, some 82 country offices had established partnerships with grass-roots girls and women's rights groups, 30 more than in 2022.

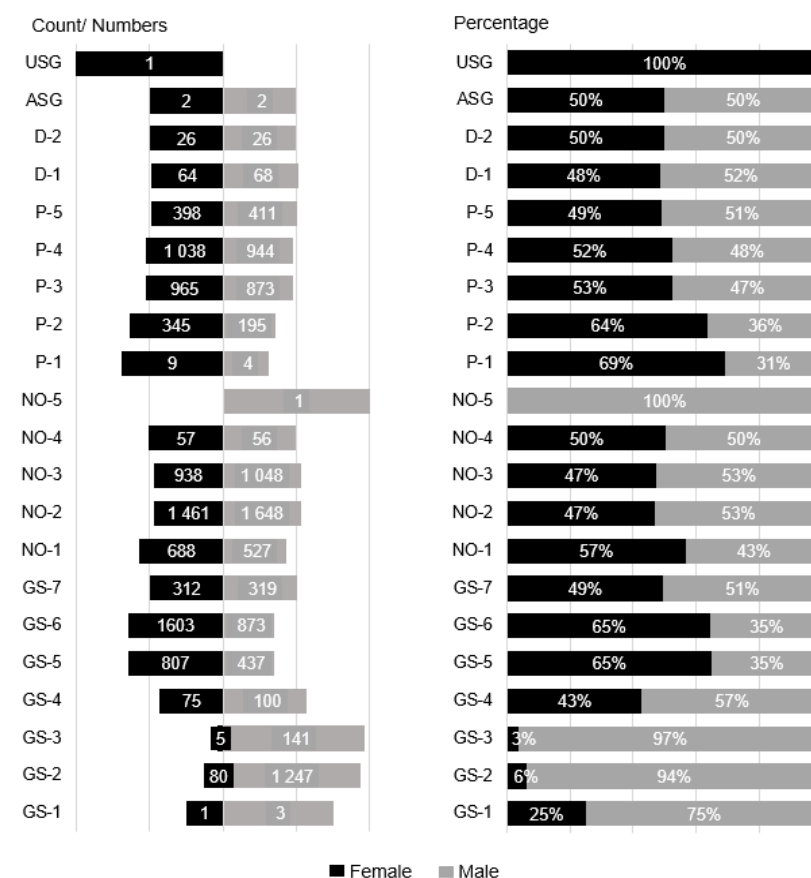
50. UNICEF continued to emphasize the voices and agency of adolescent girls and women in its media and communications activities, producing hundreds of topical media assets, knowledge products, articles and events, both in its headquarters locations and around the world. UNICEF social media channels saw an increase of 50 per cent of audiences viewing gender equality-focused content from 2022 to 2023. Of note, the Girl Goals campaign launched at the 2024 International Day of the Girl Child reached 15 million teenagers and 90 million parents and caregivers globally with messages on the leadership, power and advocacy of adolescent girls.

## E. Organizational culture, leadership and accountability and gender parity

51. UNICEF is committed to workplace practices and policies that facilitate implementation of organization-wide commitments to gender equality and child rights. Gender parity in staffing has been achieved across categories of staff members, including senior levels (P-5 and above), with 49.9 per cent women and 50.1 per cent men, in line with virtual gender parity (53/47) as defined in the United Nations System-wide Strategy on Gender Parity (see figure 2). Gender parity has now been attained at the Director level, with 50 and 48 per cent women at the D-2 and D-1 levels, respectively. Unfortunately, the underrepresentation of women in emergency duty stations persists (31.4 per cent women in 2024 compared to 33.1 per cent women

in 2023). Measures to address gender parity imbalances include targeted outreach to recruit women, the creation of junior trainee positions and other pipelines for talented women to transition into staff employment. This includes enhancing the geographical diversity and number of women in the UNICEF Leadership Talent Group, the main source of candidates for senior posts such as Representatives and Deputy Representatives (P-5 and above), as well as Directors and Associate/Deputy Directors (D-1 and above); the Leadership Talent Group comprised 56 per cent women in 2024.

Figure II  
UNICEF staff composition by sex, as of December 2024



Note: USG: Under-Secretary-General; ASG: Assistant Secretary-General; D-1 and D-2: Director level; P-1 to P-5: Professional level; NO-1 to NO-5: National Officer level; GS-1 to GS-7: General Service level.

52. The higher rate of separation from UNICEF by women than men continued in 2024, with women accounting for 53 per cent of all resignations, driven by more resignations by women in the General Service and International Professional categories of staff. In response, UNICEF continues to revise its policies to address concerns around career mobility, relocation, workplace safety and manager support for a work-life balance. In 2020, the UNICEF procedure on breastfeeding was updated to reflect the latest programmatic priorities on early childhood development and in 2023, the UNICEF procedure on family and parental leave was expanded to include a staff member's caretaking obligations towards a close family member and to consider the retention of caregivers more broadly. UNICEF continues to take action to improve gender parity and equality in emergency duty stations, including by providing mandatory sensitization training on gender equality, support to pregnant

women in emergencies and relocation of families closer to the locations where staff are serving.

53. Positive progress has also been achieved in relation to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations staff and related personnel. By the end of 2024, some 78 per cent of UNICEF country offices (100 of 129) had a high-quality system in place for protection and response to sexual exploitation and abuse, nearly double the 2021 baseline (41 per cent). The evaluation of the UNICEF Gender Policy and Gender Action Plans noted, however, that there is a need to improve efforts to address sexual harassment, including to ensure a thorough review of reporting and follow-up mechanisms. Staff surveys conducted in 2024 revealed that there are still gaps between women and men – particularly among senior leaders – in their perceptions about UNICEF as a workplace. Of note was the gender gap in reported well-being, where women consistently reported less satisfaction in key areas related to bias, career development, accountability and work-life balance. To address this imbalance, UNICEF is working towards improving transparency around promotions and recruitment, conducting annual pay gap assessments and continuously monitoring gender parity in recruitment, promotion and retention.

54. Global and regional accountability mechanisms, such as the Gender Equality Steering Committee, help to provide guidance to UNICEF country offices on implementation of the Gender Action Plan and ensure adherence to minimum standards. In 2024, some 109 country offices had appropriate management oversight to support gender equality results, and 70 country offices had clearly defined accountability mechanisms within their programme management plans. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for example, UNICEF has activated a governance mechanism within the country office to oversee programme targets for gender equality and ensure sufficient resourcing of programme priorities and leadership accountability for gender equality across sectors and in the office.

## IV. The way forward

55. As this report highlights, UNICEF is reaching more girls and women with quality services and opportunities for empowerment than ever before. Strong and lasting partnerships with Governments, civil society and girls are driving progress in education, health and protection, while dedicated resources are being channelled to girls' and women's organizations on the front lines of change, particularly in humanitarian settings. Momentum is growing, with national Governments and private, public and philanthropic allies rallying behind programming that advances gender equality and the empowerment of girls and women.

56. Yet much remains to be done. As UNICEF looks ahead to its new Strategic Plan and Gender Action Plan, both for the period 2026–2029, it will be critical to preserve and scale up foundational investments in girls' and women's empowerment. Key priorities include the following:

- (a) Expanding health and nutrition initiatives for women and girls, while centring and supporting growing cohorts of female community front-line workers;
- (b) Scaling up proven solutions for girls' skills development and transition to meaningful employment, including targeted social protection measures to remove financial barriers to learning;
- (c) Sustaining UNICEF leadership and strong partnerships for gender equality within the United Nations system, ensuring continued high performance and progress in prioritizing gender equality within country programmes and financing, and tracking and reporting on impact.



57. Systemic change is within reach – but only with concerted, determined action. At a time when global development assistance is shrinking and threats to the rights of girls and women are mounting, the world needs a clear, unwavering path to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. UNICEF is committed to doing its part to help to lead that charge as a strong and vibrant partner. Because when girls and women rise, everyone thrives.

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