



Beijing + 20: Follow-Up Recommendations

Recognising the significance and necessity of all 12 areas of concern from the Beijing Platform for Action, the International Federation of University Women (IFUW) and the co-sponsoring partner organisations below identify **six** specific issues for follow-up action:

Women and the Economy

“Women and the Economy” extends from the need for concrete policy requirements that recognise legal protection for economic rights of women to culturally and traditionally motivated change, to help women realise financial independence and empowerment. Academic and practical, institutional and informal quality education must be provided to all girls and women to ensure equal opportunities to access employment across all sectors. Despite being enshrined in international law since 1951 (Convention on Equal Remuneration [No. 100], International Labour Organisation), the principle of equal pay for work of equal value has still not materialised across all sectors and States. Barriers giving rise to gender inequality in pay include:

- different perceived roles and careers for women;
- lack of social infrastructure to allow women to balance work life with domestic commitments;
- less emphasis on, and tradition of, preparing women for leadership and decision-making roles.

States must prioritise financial literacy in the education system, which is critical to empower women to take charge of their own economic independence and must be fostered from an early age as part of school curricula. From managing personal and household budgets to knowing how to become entrepreneurs, this skillset tackles the financial vulnerability of women, which is often a direct result of outdated norms that see men as the main bread-winners and providers in society.

Certain groups of women face increased marginalisation from economic participation, especially women with disabilities and those from indigenous, minority or migrant backgrounds or those displaced by war. States must ensure that women with disabilities are provided with tailored education and training, while legislation must prevent employers from discriminating in hiring practices. It is critical that indigenous and minority women are not practically prevented from accessing learning – be it due to linguistic, geographical or other barriers – where States should incorporate technology and non-traditional means and forums of education to allow indigenous women to access the job market. Women migrant workers are a distinctly vulnerable economic group, with increased exposure to long hours, low pay, poor working conditions and lack of support infrastructure. These women are under-represented in professional and skilled jobs, despite often being educated to a higher level than nationals. To increase economic protection of female migrant workers, the empowerment of women should be a specific target in all migration policies. This can be achieved by:

- recognising equivalent foreign qualifications or by providing transfer programmes to align foreign with national qualifications;
- investing in free language programmes to assist in integration and access to the job market;
- providing evening, part-time or other tailored courses to allow women migrant workers the opportunity to access formal education, skills training and work-ready programmes;
- legislating for equal workers’ rights for domestic and migrant workers, including access to trade unions and standard working conditions.

Education and Training of Women

IFUW and its partners share a vision where 100% of girls and women in the world will achieve quality education beyond primary school. This is a critical step in securing sustainable development, female empowerment and substantive gender equality – the latter principle as adopted by the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (General Recommendation No. 25, 2004). At the secondary level, IFUW and its partners call for states and education sectors to ensure universal access to free, quality secondary education, including providing financial incentives and support to keep girls from the poorest families in school. School policies must halt gender-stereotyping and streaming of girls into certain disciplines of learning. Girls should be actively encouraged to study science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and information and communications technology (ICTs), which increase innovation and closes the current gender gap within the professions. Tertiary education must also be accessible to all women, including encouraging higher education institutions to provide part-time or evening study programmes to allow women to balance family and other commitments. Lifelong education must also be provided to girls and women, including professional, vocation and other non-traditional types of learning, including acquiring knowledge and skills through methods that extend beyond formal means, institutions and sectors.

The Girl Child

The girl child - from the earliest stages of life, through her childhood and adolescence - must stay a priority in the local, national, regional and international agenda given the continuing increased vulnerability of girls in many societies. This is particularly so where girls have a rural or indigenous background, are displaced by armed conflict or are disabled. Child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM) are specific issues particularly suffered by the girl child, and these carry serious health risks and even possible death, as well as being significant barriers to accessing education. The statistics reveal just how worrying and widespread these trends are; of the girls and women alive today, 250 million girls were married before the age of 15 (United Nations Children's Fund, 2014), while 125 million have been subjected to FGM (World Health Organisation, 2014).

Violence against Women

Girls and women are exposed to greater incidents and risks of physical and sexual violence, as well as harassment and mental abuse, in all societies across all countries and regions. It occurs in domestic, professional and public settings. Gender-based violence also increases the risk of exposure to HIV (Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, 2013). In addition, the threat of violence at schools and institutions of learning - including while in transit or due to non-segregated toilet facilities - is a distinct cause of many girls and women not receiving an education. IFUW and partners insist that states must implement concerted plans of action to tackle violence against girls and women, including adopting criminal legislation that penalises the perpetrators and acts as adequate social deterrents.

Women and Health

Certain health issues are in need of particular attention amongst the female population, including maternal, reproductive and sexual health, which should be promoted from a young age. Gender specific medicine is also an important factor to be recognised by healthcare providers in the sense that diagnosis and treatment must take into account physiological, psychological or other material differences between men and women. Providing girls and women with a quality education results in tangible, long-term benefits to the family and society as a whole. If all mothers completed primary education, maternal deaths would be reduced by two-thirds, saving 98,000 lives, while if all women had a secondary education, child deaths would be cut in half, saving 3 million lives (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, 2013).

Women in Power and Decision Making

Women are often systematically discriminated against in terms of salaries and professional advancement when compared with male colleagues. This is despite studies which show that companies with more women in senior positions perform significantly better (Catalyst, 2004), yet women only account for 18.3% of top-level management (The World Bank, Gender Enterprise Surveys). Similarly, though women only accounted for 21.8% of national parliamentarians (as of July 2014, Inter-Parliamentary Union), it has been shown that parliaments with more women consider a broader range of issues and adopt more legislation on health, education, anti-discrimination and child support (UN Women, 2014). Academic and practical, institutional and informal quality education is critical to empower girls and women with the qualifications, skills, training and determination necessary for pursuing and accessing higher paid careers and positions.

Summary of recommendations for Beijing + 20:

IFUW and the undersigned partner organisations call on all States, education sectors and policy makers to take concerted action to address the challenges and obstacles which remain for girls and women in achieving substantive gender equality:

- Recognise and realise the quintessential role of quality, life-long education of girls and women in sustainable development, social change and economic advancement;
- Develop and introduce tailored, accessible life-long education and training for marginalised women including disabled women and those of indigenous or rural background or displaced by war;
- Incorporate protective measures for migrant women in national migration policies to mitigate the risk of exploitation; introduce qualification transfer systems and accelerated certification programmes to recognise foreign qualifications; and provide linguistic and vocational training to facilitate access to the job market;
- Implement universal access to free, quality secondary education;
- Design tertiary education curricula to incorporate flexible learning options including part-time, evening or online classes;
- Introduce national legislation and ratify international commitments to prioritise the protection of the girl child from harmful practices including child marriage and female genital mutilation;
- Expressly criminalise all acts of violence against women in national legislation; train law enforcement officers and the judiciary in how to appropriately address cases of gender-based violence;
- Provide accessible clinics and healthcare for girls and women including appropriate facilities for maternal care, sexual health and mental wellbeing;
- Formally adopt legislation to prohibit gender discrimination in the workplace, with particular focus on applying the principle of equal pay for work of equal value.

Co-signatures:

Center for Women's Global Leadership (Rutgers University)
Soroptimist International