

## Dutch civil society's recommendations

### 69th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women and Beijing +30



The year 2025 will mark the 30th anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995). The forthcoming CSW will focus on the review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Beijing Platform for Action (BPFa) over the past 30 years. What progress has been made in the past 5 years? And what challenges lie ahead?

In recent years, progress on gender equality has been made globally in several areas, such as education and the share of women in politics. In the Netherlands the representation of women in top positions in large companies has increased, the abolition of the mandatory minimum reflection period for abortion has been abolished and the National Action Programme to combat sexually transgressive behaviour and sexual violence (*Nationaal Actieprogramma Aanpak seksueel grensoverschrijdend gedrag en seksueel geweld*) has been developed.

In many areas, however, progress has been slow and uneven, stagnating or even backsliding. According to Global Gender Gap Index (2024), no single country has yet managed to close the gender gap. Since measurement began in 2006, gender equality has increased by merely 0.1% globally. At the current rate, it will take another 134 years to close the global gender gap. In 44% of the 146 participating countries, the gender gap is increasing.<sup>i</sup> Only 2% of the EU population lives in a country where the gender gap is more than 80% closed (Sweden).<sup>ii</sup> According to the SDG Gender Index 2024, no country is on track to meet the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goal 5 for gender equality. Without gender equality, 74% of the SDG goals cannot be met. Reducing the gender gap could have brought the world up to \$12 trillion in economic growth between 2015 and 2025<sup>iii</sup>.

The world faces significant challenges. We are facing multiple, mutually reinforcing crises, including a climate crisis and related disasters, the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic and the risk of other global pandemics, armed conflicts and humanitarian crises. Such crises impact women and girls unequally and exacerbate existing inequalities.

Digital developments and new technologies have a major impact on gender equality and the rights of women and girls. It offers opportunities, such as access to information, education and services, and opportunities to organize and speak out. At the same time, it also brings risks. For example, algorithms and artificial intelligence (AI) and the spread of mis- and disinformation reinforce existing gender bias, and these developments create new (expressive) forms of discrimination, exclusion and gender-based violence.

Globally, liberal democracies and international cooperation and treaties are under pressure from the normalization of conservative, far-right, nationalist and anti-gender movements that restrict the basic human rights and freedoms of women and girls. This is especially true for women and girls who are also excluded and disadvantaged on the basis of other characteristics, such as migrant women, black women, women with disabilities, lbtqi+ women. As a result, the agenda for women's rights and gender equality is increasingly under pressure, there is less space and funding for civil society organizations working towards this goal, and the safety of women human rights defenders (WHRDs) is at risk. **Accelerated implementation of the BPfA and subsequent agreed commitments is essential to prevent further deterioration and is crucial to achieving the SDGs by 2030.**

Dutch civil society therefore calls for a political outcome document for Beijing+30/CSW69 that not only reaffirms but further strengthens the commitments made by governments in Beijing in 1995 and since then at CSW and related processes. We call on the Netherlands and all other states and actors to take **direct transformative action and implementation** of the existing international commitments and treaties in the area of human rights and gender equality, including BPfA, CEDAW, UNSCR 1325, ICPD Platform for Action, ILO Conventions, the Istanbul Convention, COP, UN Convention on Disability, etc., whereby they should be **mutually reinforcing**.

The recommendations below are based on the recommendations of Dutch civil society for CSW65 to 68, Beijing+20 and Beijing+25, the most recent CEDAW and GREVIO shadow reports, the NGO Review Report Beijing+20 and recent consultations with a diverse group of organisations and individuals from Dutch civil society. We would like to emphasise that the previous recommendations from civil society remain as relevant, topical and urgent as ever.

### **General principle: leave no one behind**

Women and girls<sup>1</sup> are not a homogenous group. It is important that the outcome document recognises how gender norms, roles and stereotypes contribute to gender inequality. And that they have an additional, disproportionate impact on women, girls and gender non-conforming individuals when this intersects with other characteristics, positions or identities, such as having a disability, refugee or migrant status, indigenous origin, single motherhood, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, being a human rights activist or sex worker.

#### **To ensure that no one is left behind, we call on the Dutch government to:**

- Ensure that women, girls and gender non-conforming persons in all their diversity can participate and reach their full potential.
- Recognise women and girls in all their diversity, and implement this in policy. Including various forms of identities, households and families<sup>2</sup> and the associated differences in starting positions and needs, and ensure the protection of the rights of *all* individuals.

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<sup>1</sup> In this document, we refer to women, girls and gender non-conforming persons of all religions, ethnicities, classes, sexual orientations, gender characteristics, indigenous origins, employment status, HIV and health conditions, gender identities and expressions and with and without disabilities. Regardless of where they live and any other status that may affect how they live.

<sup>2</sup> Such as singles, single-parent families, composite families and same sex couples.

- Recognize the importance of language in the CSW process and in political processes in general. To address the root causes of gender inequality, 'gender' and 'gender equality', it is important to be explicitly named. Moreover, non-binary and inclusive language should be promoted.
- Ensure that the Beijing+30 and CSW process is accessible to the most diverse group of civil society (women's) organisations and youth, including in the preparation and during the negotiations, so that voices of the greatest possible diversity of women and girls are heard.
- Ensure sufficient funding for the full implementation of existing international human rights and gender equality commitments and treaties and to call on other member states to do so<sup>iv</sup>.

For reasons of clarity and continuity, we have chosen to maintain the titles of the BPfA Critical Areas as headers, even though the wording is often not entirely inclusive.

### **A. Women and poverty**

Worldwide, more women than men live in poverty<sup>v</sup>. The causes and consequences of poverty are often different for women and girls. They have fewer rights<sup>vi</sup> to access financial resources and assets, (quality) education, employment, good working conditions, a secure and living income, wealth, entrepreneurship, financial services and institutions, and affordable and accessible (public) services. As a result, they are more often dependent on a partner and face a higher risk of falling into poverty or becoming victims of sexual and gender-based violence. Moreover, women and girls are underrepresented in financial institutions and decision-making, despite being important change agents in preventing and combating poverty.

To realize the objectives under critical area A it is key to:

- protect and promote women's right to work, and ensure equal access to decent paid employment, entrepreneurship and innovation, by ensuring equal rights and implementation of legal protection<sup>vii</sup>, combating gender stereotypes, multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, exploitation and exclusion and gender segregation. And by promoting an equal division of care responsibilities through paid parental leave for all parents, adequate public, accessible and affordable childcare provision, and appropriate policies on flexible working hours<sup>viii</sup>.
- guarantee freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining and promote equal participation and leadership of women in trade unions.
- increase financial empowerment, independence, autonomy and inclusion of women and girls in all their diversity.
- combat the risks of, and counter poverty among the poorest, most marginalized, and stigmatized groups of women and girls, including migrant and refugee women and girls, women and girls in rural areas, the Global South, people with disabilities, and indigenous women and girls. Moreover, women who are getting older have a higher risk of living in poverty, especially lbtqi+ women, women with disabilities and women of color<sup>ix</sup>.

### **B. Education and Training of Women**

There has been significant progress in girls' and women's education worldwide in recent years. Since 2015, 50 million more girls are attending school. At the same time, there are wide regional disparities in access to education for women and girls. They are often unable to attend school due to gender

inequality and discrimination, including poverty, gender-based violence, and child marriage. Of the 84% of countries that legally protect the right to education, only 57% explicitly guarantee this without discrimination based on sex and/or gender<sup>x</sup>. Digital and technical education for girls and women is hampered by lack of physical accessibility, affordability, access to and acquisition of knowledge and skills, and social norms.

To realize the objectives under critical area B it is key to:

- guarantee financial, physical and safe access to (digital) quality education at all levels, which meets the specific needs of women and girls in all their diversity.
- invest in quality education for women and girls in all their diversity at all stages of life. Ensure inclusive, quality, relational and sexual education on sexuality, healthy and respectful relationships, consent, sexual pleasure, gender diversity, sexual and reproductive health and rights, HIV/AIDS and human rights for both boys and girls in all curricula, at all levels across the life course. To prevent sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), forced labor, financial dependency and poverty and to improve gender equality, health and self-determination.
- close the digital gender gap and facilitate and strengthen equal, free and fair access for women and girls in all their diversity to knowledge, resources, decent paid work, entrepreneurship, innovation, financing, institutions and (public and financial) services.
- ensure full, equal and meaningful participation of women and girls in all their diversity in STEM, ICT and R&D education, by countering gender stereotypes and social norms that underlie the (digital) gender gap and underrepresentation of women and girls in these sectors.

### **C. Women and health**

Life expectancy for both women and men has increased in recent decades. However, women spend a greater proportion of their lives in poor health. Medical research still takes little or no account of the impact of sex and gender<sup>xi</sup>. Women and girls have unequal access to health care, including sexual and reproductive health care, due to a lack of financial resources, limited mobility, restrictive laws and regulations, and stigma. In addition, poverty and education are linked to women's and girls' health. Also, SGBV increased during the COVID-19 pandemic and there is talk of a 'shadow pandemic'<sup>xii</sup>.

To realize the objectives under critical area C it is key to:

- guarantee universal access to preventive, curative, restorative and palliative health care for all women and girls. This must be of sufficient quality and effectiveness without financial barriers.
- realize sexual and reproductive health and rights, through the availability, accessibility, affordability, quality and financing of youth-friendly, gender-transformative sexual and reproductive health services and information. Including affordable and accessible contraception and safe and legal abortion for all.
- collect, analyze and report intersectional, gender-disaggregated health data for the development and use of health innovations, such as medicines and medical devices, as well as health programs and policies that promote gender equity.
- invest in women-focused research to address gaps in under-researched, often undiagnosed women's health complications and diseases and conditions that disproportionately affect women.

## D. Violence against women

Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) is one of the most widespread, persistent and devastating human rights violations, affecting women and girls in all their diversity. One in eight women and girls between the ages of 15-49 has experienced sexual or physical violence from an intimate partner in the past year; in some countries it is as high as one in three<sup>xiii</sup>. Economic violence, such as not being allowed to work or have access to a bank account and financial oppression are also forms of SGBV. Moreover, SGBV is linked to poverty, and the risk of SGBV and trafficking increases in (the aftermath of) conflicts, wars and climate disasters, such as displacement. When women and girls have access to the Internet, they are more likely to experience digital violence, such as sexual harassment, (physical) intimidation cyberstalking, sextortion, hate campaigns and misogyny. Moreover, online SGBV is related to SGBV in the offline world, and offline violence can be facilitated and amplified by technology. The risk of experiencing SGBV is higher for women and girls who experience intersectional forms of discrimination.

To realize the objectives under critical area D it is key to:

- prevent and end all forms of SGBV, including partner violence, non-partner sexual violence, rape (including within marriage), femicide, violence based on gender identity and/or expression, and technology-facilitated gender-based violence. This includes providing financial, legal and medical support, addressing harmful norms and practices, and ensuring the right to self-determination and bodily integrity for all women and girls.
- implement legally binding international conventions, including CEDAW, the Istanbul Convention and IAO Convention 190 and encourage other governments to ratify and implement these.
- ensure a coherent, integrated and gender transformative policy strategy to sustainably prevent and combat (online) SGBV and discrimination.
- develop policies and programs that address the risk factors and root causes of SGBV. These should explicitly address the role of men and boys in preventing SGBV, counter gender stereotypes and unequal power relations and promote positive social norms.
- guarantee access to gender sensitive, preventive health care services and safe access to shelters for people of all gender identities. Ensure that SGBV can be reported through safe, accessible, confidential and supportive (legal) services that meet the needs of victims. Increase the knowledge and awareness of SGBV among institutions, employers, aid and care agencies, police and judiciary.
- protect groups at additional risk of (online) SGBV and persecution, such as (female) activists, politicians, journalists, Women Human Right Defenders, defenders of indigenous groups' environments and of gender equality and LGBTQA+ rights, migrants and refugees, as well as sex workers and women and girls with disabilities.

## E. Women and armed conflict

In recent years, the number of (armed) conflicts has increased, as has the number of people in need of humanitarian aid. These growing humanitarian crises have greater impact on women and girls, including the risk of experiencing SGBV, exploitation, loss of resources and limited access to aid. By 2023, 612 million women and girls worldwide lived within 50 kilometres of one of 170 armed conflicts<sup>xiv</sup>. This is an increase of 41% since 2015. Moreover, women's participation in formal peace processes lags behind. By 2023, only 19% of delegates, signatories, observers and mediators in UN-led peace processes were women<sup>xv</sup>.

To realize the objectives under critical area D it is key to:

- implement the *Women, Peace and Security* (WPS) and the *Youth Peace and Security* (YPS) agenda. Reaffirm that maintaining international peace and security is a prerequisite for achieving BPFa and gender equality and work toward global disarmament and peace<sup>xvi</sup>.
- recognize the crucial role of women and girls in conflict prevention, peace negotiations and reconstruction and ensure meaningful participation of women in all their diversity in peace negotiations and reconstruction.
- strengthen universal access to gender transformative, affordable, accessible and quality sexual and reproductive health services and information for all women and girls and the most marginalized communities. By implementing the Minimum Initial Service Package (MISP) in humanitarian and other crises and conflicts<sup>xvii</sup>.

## **F. Women and the economy**

Women worldwide are still less likely to participate in the formal economy. One in ten women live in extreme poverty<sup>xviii</sup>. Moreover, women contribute disproportionately to unpaid care and domestic work: globally, women perform more than three-quarters of unpaid care and domestic work<sup>xix</sup>. This has major implications for their chances of gainful employment and entrepreneurship. When women do have paid work, they earn on average less than men for the same work. They are also overrepresented in low-paying, insecure and unsafe occupations<sup>xx</sup> and are less likely to have access to financial institutions or a bank account.

To realize the objectives under critical area F it is key to:

- ensure a globally just and sustainable economic and trading system, based on universal human rights and women's rights, including unpaid work and care as indicators of prosperity. Push for a binding UN human rights and business treaty to the of the UN Principles for Business and Human Rights, with explicit attention to the responsibility companies have for gender equality and women's rights<sup>xxi</sup>.
- end tax evasion and tax breaks to multinational corporations. Implement debt cancellation for countries in the Global South so countries can use these funds to fight poverty and invest in quality education, healthcare and achieving the SDGs.
- recognize and value the unique and essential contribution of women and girls in all their diversity to the prosperity and well-being of society. Focus on the proceeds of investing in gender equality for a more socially just society. Recognize women and girls in all their diversity as agents of change and value the knowledge of local communities and indigenous groups.
- protect and promote women's right to work, and ensure equal access to decent paid employment, entrepreneurship and innovation, by, inter alia, combating gender stereotypes, multiple and intersectional forms of discrimination, exploitation and exclusion, countering gender segregation, promoting equal sharing of care responsibilities through, paid parental leave for all parents, adequate public, accessible and affordable childcare provision, and adequate policies on flexible working hours<sup>xxii</sup>.
- ratify and implement the International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention 190, which requires member states to ensure accessible, safe, fair and effective procedures for violence and harassment in and around the workplace, including gender-based violence and harassment, and ILO Convention 189, for the protection of domestic workers, in addition to implementing the other ILO conventions.

## **G. Women in Power and Decision-making**

Despite the increase of women in parliaments, women remain significantly underrepresented at all political levels and in representative positions in public and private sectors. By 2024, 26.9% of parliamentarians were women, up from 11% in 1995<sup>xxiii</sup>. Women, girls and youth in all their diversity must be provided with tools and resources that enable their full, meaningful and effective participation in decision-making at all levels. This includes the full and meaningful participation of women in conflict prevention, peace negotiations and rebuilding societies. So they can shape a better future for all.

To realize the objectives under critical area G it is key to:

- ensure gender balance in decision-making and meaningful representation in all institutions and companies and at all levels (local, national and international), including in leadership positions. Break down legal, economic, social and cultural barriers to participation by countering gender stereotypes and social norms, discrimination and exclusion, ensuring a safe working environment, access to information, networks and funding, (re)recognizing, reducing, revaluing and redistributing unpaid work.
- implement effective measures to promote participation and representation (including monitoring, enforcement and sanctions for non-compliance), such as gender quotas and gender equality training, role modelling, mentoring and arrangements to reconcile work and care (including flexible working hours and workplaces, maternity, paternity and parental leave for all parents and accessible, affordable and quality childcare).
- respect and protect the right to freedom of expression, autonomy, privacy, security, participation in democracy, the right to association and demonstration. Including the protection of human rights of women and girls in all their diversity, both online and offline and without barriers and discrimination.
- ensure sustainable and predictable funding for human rights, gender equality, youth-led, and feminist organizations.

## **H. Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women**

Despite the existence of institutional mechanisms to promote gender equality, the lack of adequate funding, technical expertise and resources, and the lack of political will to prioritize gender mainstreaming in public policy remain crucial global challenges. The collection, analysis, reporting and application of representative, gender-disaggregated and intersectional data and statistics is essential for understanding the root causes of gender inequality and for designing and implementing effective and equitable policies and measures to prevent and counter inequality. Because there is still a lack of up-to-date, high-quality, comparable and disaggregated data at the individual level, much inequality remains hidden <sup>xxiv</sup>.

Key to realizing the objectives under critical area H:

- ensure that policies, programs and taxes at all levels (international, national and local) contribute to breaking down existing unjust power structures and exclusionary mechanisms. Gender equality and anti-discrimination should be made an integral policy goal, with associated targets and indicators at all stages of the policy cycle.

- ensure that (new) technologies and innovations are gender transformative and inclusive and counteract and prevent existing inequality and gender bias, including by mandating intersectional *Gender Impact Assessments* and *Gender Equality Plans* and co-creative methods as a condition of funding.
- collect, analyse and report high-qualitative representative, gender-disaggregated, disaggregated and intersectional data and statistics through internationally standardized methods – while ensuring privacy and human rights. This data should be publicly available for use by researchers, civil society organizations and the media. Through this data, understanding of the root causes and solutions to gender inequality in all 12 critical areas can be enhanced.

## **I. Human Rights of Women**

Worldwide, basic human rights and freedoms of women and girls are restricted by the normalization of conservative, far-right, nationalist and anti-gender and anti-rights movements. Even if member states have laws that guarantee equality and non-discrimination, there are major barriers to women and girls in all their diversity.

Key to realizing the objectives under critical area I:

- ratify and implement international human rights instruments, norms and standards for achieving gender equality<sup>3</sup>.
- pay special attention to realizing the human rights of people experiencing multiple, intersecting forms of discrimination, including (women) activists, defenders of gender equality and LGBTQ+ rights, and Women Human Rights Defenders.
- invest in women's rights, gender equality and feminist organizations and women's networks in local communities and recognize women and girls as changemakers in their communities
- implement a feminist foreign policy, involving women's rights organizations and other stakeholders in (international) trade negotiations.

## **J. Women and the Media**

Women worldwide are still underrepresented in the media and are often portrayed in a stereotypical manner. (Social) media play an important role in the portrayal and perception of women, raising awareness of gender inequality and in eliminating gender stereotypes. Gender inequality in the media arises both from underrepresentation of women in all their diversity and misrepresentation<sup>xxv</sup>, as a result, the female perspective and the proportion of stories that can be told by women is underexposed. Although an increasing number of women are studying journalism, they face barriers in terms of safety, support and career opportunities. In addition, attention should be paid to the role social media plays in gender (dis)equality: for example, women and girls disproportionately face online hate and harassment.

To realize the objectives under critical area J it is key to:

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<sup>3</sup>See page 2



- respect and protect the rights to freedom of expression, autonomy, privacy, security, participation in democracy, the right to association and demonstration, as well as the protection of human rights of women and girls in all their diversity, both online and offline and without barriers and discrimination.
- combat gender stereotypes in (social) media. Recognize and emphasize that gender stereotypes are socially and culturally constructed and rooted in historical and structural unequal power relations. Traditions, beliefs and social norms should not be an excuse for weakening international conventions and treaties.
- not censor online expression and content, including information on sexual reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and sexual well-being, and actively counter the spread of mis- and disinformation. By including international mechanisms for transparency and accountability of technology companies, digital platforms and media outlets.

## **K. Women and the environment**

Climate change, biodiversity loss and disasters caused by climate change disproportionately impact women and girls in all their diversity, with the most marginalized suffering the most severe consequences. The impact of climate and biodiversity crises and gender-blind policies exacerbate gender inequality<sup>xxvi</sup>. Globally, women and girls are at greater risk of hunger, disease, violence and death as a direct result of climate and biodiversity-related disasters. Women and girls often play important agenda-setting and mobilizing roles but are underrepresented in climate and environmental professions and in participatory processes, (political) decision-making and leadership positions in general). Moreover, women and girls lack and have less access to financial support and capital for climate adoption technologies, climate action programs and environmental protection and the energy transition.

To realize the objectives under critical area K it is key to:

- implement a gender transformative, inclusive and intersectional approach in international climate policy and fossil energy phase-out plans. Addressing climate change and the management and mitigation of (climate) crises and disasters must take into account their unequal impact on girls and women in all their diversity, including in terms of increased risk of SGBV, reduced access to education and essential health services, including sexual and reproductive health services.
- ensure climate finance to reduce gender inequality and make it accessible to local and women-led organizations, for example, through relaxed accreditation procedures and accountability mechanisms, lower starting amounts, and multi-year and flexibly deployable funding.
- ensure, promote and institutionalize full, equal and meaningful participation and representation in political and economic decision-making processes at all levels on climate and biodiversity issues, including the participation of local and indigenous communities and women's organizations in the Global South
- invest in female and (young) feminist leadership and role models in climate and biodiversity decision-making, and in male-dominated sectors, such as science, engineering, construction and mathematics.
- recognize the knowledge of local and indigenous communities and women in climate and biodiversity policy and protect their habitats.

## L. The Girl Child

Improving the well-being and empowerment of girls and young women requires an inclusive, gender transformative approach in legislation and policy in all areas, including sexual and reproductive health and rights, education, health care and the economy. Today, (young) girls are at risk of having fewer rights than their mother(s) and sometimes even their grandmother(s). An estimated 640 million women and girls are currently married as children. Moreover, the risk of child marriage increases during humanitarian crises, such as conflicts and climate-related disasters<sup>xxvii</sup>. Gender stereotypes and social norms about unpaid care duties cause girls, when they go to school, to struggle to divide their time between education and household chores. Girls and youth in all their diversity must have immediate access to tools and resources that enable their full, meaningful, and effective participation in decision-making at all levels so that they can contribute to shaping a better future for all.

To realize the objectives under critical area L it is key to:

- prevent harmful practices, including girl circumcision and intersex genital mutilation and child marriage through the adoption of health and welfare frameworks for young women and girls, implementation of gender transformative, adequate laws, policies and services and access to reliable information.
- invest in youth leadership and youth-led (feminist) organizations and recognize and facilitate youth as leaders and changemakers in their communities. They should have access to funding and grants by removing obstacles such as (gender) stereotypes and prejudices, language barriers, grant criteria, complicated procedures, costs, and compliance.
- Involve and empower young people, including girls and young women, in grant processes and decision-making so that money goes where it is most needed and makes the most impact. In particular, youth who benefit least from the existing patriarchal system, such as girls and young women in all their diversity, lhbtqi+ youth and youth with disabilities, rural, indigenous, and displaced, migrant or refugee status.
- guarantee and facilitate the full, meaningful and effective access, participation and inclusion of young people in international decision-making, conferences and congresses, including by removing barriers and providing financial support<sup>xxviii</sup> and supporting collective action by young people.

### Civil society participation

Finally, Dutch civil society is concerned about the shrinking space and (financial) support for civil society in the Netherlands and the (increasingly) limited access for CSOs in the CSW and other UN processes. We see the review year of 30 years of implementation of the Beijing agenda and the new commitment made at the Summit of the Future for a “revitalization of the CSW” as an opportunity for the Netherlands to revise the methods of work within the CSW and to ensure meaningful participation of civil society, including by encouraging NGO and youth representatives as part of every delegation and the possibility for CSO representatives who are not part of a delegation to be able to follow the negotiations (physically or online).

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