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UNICEF Gender Equality Action Plan, 2026–2029*Summary*

The UNICEF Gender Equality Action Plan, 2026–2029 provides the road map for the organization's key commitments to advancing gender equality and the empowerment of all girls and women, anchored in the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2026–2029. Building on UNICEF comparative advantages, lessons learned from prior gender action plans, as well as evidence of proven strategies to effect change at scale in the lives of girls and women, the Gender Equality Action Plan sets targets to enhance access by girls and women to quality services across all five Impact Results of the Strategic Plan. A special emphasis is placed on boosting investments to advance the well-being, leadership and agency of adolescent girls, recognizing that investments in this age cohort yield multiple dividends for children, families and societies. The role of UNICEF in convening partners and influencing budgets, policies and systems is underscored, both for greater national ownership and long-term impact. UNICEF will lead by example, adhering to financial expenditure benchmarks for gender equality, implementing robust measures for monitoring and reporting on progress to achieve programmatic targets, and nurturing safe, equitable and empowered workplaces. For when girls and women rise, the world rises with them.

* E/ICEF/2025/27.

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



I. Overview and context

1. Gender equality and the empowerment of all girls and women is central to the mandate of UNICEF to uphold the rights of every child. Guided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and other key international human rights treaties, UNICEF works to protect and advance the rights of every child and woman so that they have the resources, support and opportunities they need to achieve their full potential.

2. Despite the proven benefits of gender equality and the empowerment of girls and women for individuals, families and societies, nearly every country is failing to meet the gender equality-related commitments in the Sustainable Development Goals. Progress is hindered by shrinking official development assistance, a shifting multilateral landscape, a lack of data and increasing pushback on the rights of girls, women and children. The consequences are profound, with adolescent girls particularly vulnerable as their rights continue to be neglected. In this challenging environment, UNICEF remains steadfast in its commitment to advance gender equality and the empowerment of all girls and women, as articulated in this Gender Equality Action Plan. The approach is guided by three priority themes to drive lasting change.

Priority theme 1: Achieving positive change *for* adolescent girls, *with* adolescent girls

3. Adolescence¹ is a critical stage of childhood, during which risks and opportunities for girls intensify. Over 122 million girls remain out of school and nearly 40 per cent of adolescent girls do not complete upper secondary education. The digital gender gap – inequality between girls and boys in access to and use of digital technologies – is particularly wide in low-income countries. Globally, adolescent girls are almost twice as likely as boys to not be in education, employment or training, limiting their future opportunities. Millions of adolescent girls continue to face violence, abuse and harmful practices, including female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriage.²

4. Despite these challenges, there is hope. Since 2000, girls' primary school enrolment has improved, child marriage rates have declined from one in four to one in five girls marrying before 18 years of age, and adolescent birth rates have halved. Maternal mortality and FGM rates have also dropped, though progress is slow. Success is driven by strong government leadership, targeted investments in evidence-backed programmes and community action, including partnerships with organizations championing the rights of girls and women. Girl-led and girl-focused organizations are promoting more equitable policies for all girls and are at the heart of change. Girls are powerful leaders and effective advocates for the most marginalized and excluded girls, such as girls with disabilities, girls living in rural areas, girls on the move, married girls, indigenous girls and adolescent mothers, to access quality services and connections. They must be adequately resourced and supported.³

¹ Adolescence is defined by the United Nations as ages 10 to 19 years.

² United Nations Children's Fund, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and Plan International, *Girl Goals: What has changed for girls? Adolescent girls' rights over 30 years*, UNICEF, New York, 2025.

³ All data in this paragraph are taken from UNICEF, UN-Women and Plan International, *Girl Goals: What has changed for adolescent girls? Adolescent girls' rights over 30 years*.

5. The evidence is clear: investing in adolescent girls has transformative effects. Empowered girls lead to smarter, more resilient and more prosperous societies. Expanding girls' secondary education boosts their lifetime earnings and countries' gross domestic product, while preventing harmful practices generates budget savings for Governments. Mental health and psychosocial interventions in schools and communities, especially in humanitarian settings, save lives and money. Multifaceted interventions, such as programmes that combine cash transfers and parenting efforts, are particularly impactful, with returns of up to four times the original investment.⁴

6. Building on this evidence and momentum towards positive change, UNICEF has made investing in adolescent girls an accelerator across the targets in its Strategic Plan, 2026–2029. The programming priorities of the Gender Equality Action Plan elaborate on this accelerator, outlining a series of time-bound actions to improve adolescent girls' health and nutrition, access to education, learning, livelihood and economic opportunities, and protection from violence, harmful practices and poverty. Especially in humanitarian contexts, UNICEF is committed to ensuring that adolescent girls can access services and participate in decision-making on matters that affects them. In all contexts, UNICEF will listen to girls, amplify their voices and empower them with the skills and support services they need to shape their futures. Recognizing that lasting change requires supportive environments, UNICEF will also emphasize support to families, parents and caregivers to ensure that every adolescent girl has a foundation to thrive.

Priority theme 2: Integrating priorities for gender equality and the empowerment of all girls and women in policies, budgets, systems and at-scale programmes

7. Gender inequality affects all children, hindering their rights and well-being throughout their lives. It is thus imperative to promote gender equality and empower girls and women as intrinsic to children's rights across all levels of society, fostering communities and environments that promote equitable outcomes as children grow. With its mandate to protect and promote the rights of children and adolescents during the time of life when roles, attitudes and behaviours are learned, UNICEF has a special responsibility to centre gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in its work across the life cycle.

8. Children's rights and women's rights are deeply interconnected. Ensuring women's access to quality social services improves their well-being and provides their children with opportunities for a healthy start. Increasing women's access to resources and decision-making processes for climate and disaster preparedness and recovery can reduce disruptions to girls' education, rates of child marriage and exposure to gender-based violence. Ending violence against women can disrupt intergenerational patterns of violence. Well-designed social protection systems that focus on low-income women and support women's agency improve families' access to services, including education, health and nutrition support. Similarly, equipping women front-line workers with skills and protections helps to enhance children's nutrition and health. Across programmatic areas, UNICEF will continue to contribute to empowering all women, lifting and keeping them and their children out of poverty and enabling their livelihoods through improved social protection and care systems that can reduce labour force gaps and galvanize economies.

⁴ University of Cape Town, University of Oxford, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, and United Nations Children's Fund, *Right on the Money: Making the case for rights-based investments in adolescent girls*, London, 2024.

9. Recognizing the substantial results achieved for women and girls of all ages reported in prior UNICEF gender action plans, this Plan is deliberately selective. Based on a rigorous analysis of critical concerns for girls and women, countries will prioritize action to achieve targeted results, drawing from evidence-based models where UNICEF has a strong track record and aligned to the Strategic Plan. At a time of economic strain, cost-effective, proven solutions are more critical than ever. Moving away from fragmented and project-based approaches, UNICEF will take deliberate action to leverage and influence budgets, policies and systems, and thus embed proven solutions within national, regional and global frameworks for maximum impact and long-term gain.

Priority theme 3: Cementing organizational gains and accelerating progress for gender equality and the empowerment of all girls and women

10. An independent evaluation of its gender equality frameworks found that UNICEF has made significant progress since 2018 in advancing gender equality and the empowerment of girls and women within its programmes and workplaces.⁵ The evaluation also identified areas for improvement in processes and policies to maximize efficiency and impact. In response, UNICEF has committed to stronger, more accountable leadership across country programmes, sectors and regions; to establish a core cadre of technical gender equality expertise to guide programmes; more routine analyses to inform priorities; and to make sector-led investments in gender equality outcomes – all underpinned by robust monitoring and evaluation systems.⁶ Meaningful partnerships with national Governments and civil society organizations, especially girl- and women-led organizations and networks, remain vital. These actions align with the United Nations System-Wide Gender Equality Acceleration Plan, with UNICEF reporting annual progress through the updated System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women.

UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2026–2029 and UNICEF Gender Equality Action Plan, 2026–2029

11. UNICEF articulates its commitment to gender equality and the empowerment of all girls and women in the Strategic Plan, 2026–2029 in three ways. First, gender equality is described as a core principle to achieve child rights. Second, noting the multiplier effects of at-scale investments, support for all adolescent girls is identified as a crucial accelerator for achieving broader targets. Third, support for all girls and women is embedded within all five high-level Impact Results, with dedicated results for achieving measurable change for adolescent girls.

12. The Gender Equality Action Plan elaborates these Strategic Plan commitments and includes a clear theory of change (see figure II) and indicator matrix. As the Plan is implemented, supplementary guidance for specific programming and operational aspects will be elaborated.

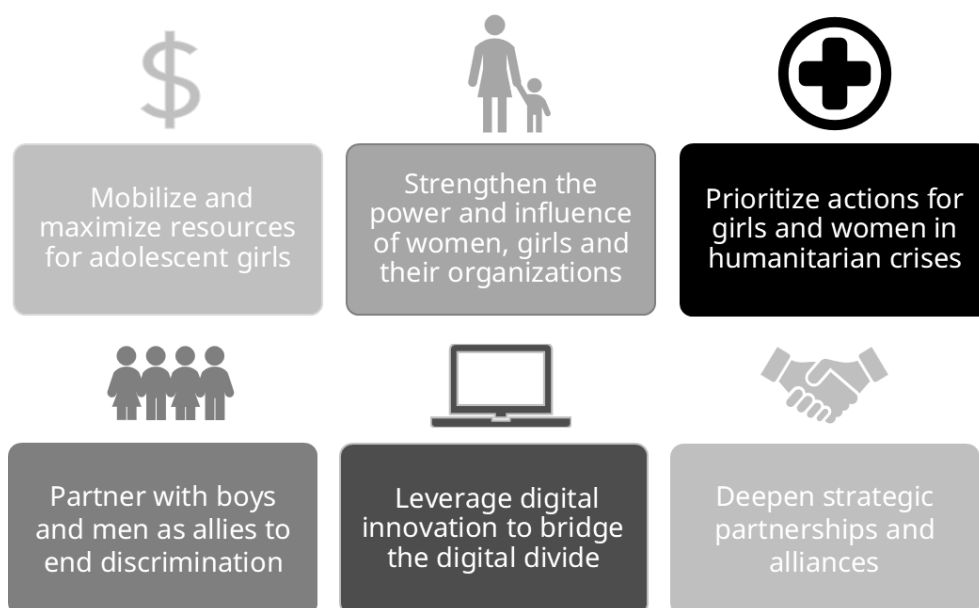
⁵ UNICEF, Transforming programming: Evaluation of the implementation of the UNICEF Gender Policy and Gender Action Plans (GAP 2 and GAP 3), UNICEF Evaluation Office, New York, 2024.

⁶ UNICEF, Management response to the evaluation report: Evaluation of the UNICEF Gender Policy and Gender Action Plans, E/ICEF/2025/6, New York, 3 January 2025.

II. Pathways to accelerate the achievement of gender equality

Figure I

Six pathways for action underpinning programmatic priorities



13. Since the release of its first Gender Policy in 2010, UNICEF has become increasingly ambitious in its efforts to improve the lives of girls and women. At the heart of these ambitions is the delivery of high-quality, at-scale programmes that shift outcomes and contribute to long-term, transformative results. Underpinning this imperative are six pathways for action, as shown in figure I above:

(a) **Mobilize and maximize resources for adolescent girls:** UNICEF champions the rights, leadership and well-being of adolescent girls, who hold tremendous potential to make the world a more equitable place. Harnessing global momentum, UNICEF will work with partners to influence domestic and international funding, catalyse innovative financing streams and advocate for the implementation of global and regional commitments to support adolescent girls.

(b) **Strengthen the power and influence of girls and their organizations:** Girls must be at the centre of decision-making in matters that affect their lives. UNICEF will expand inclusive processes that amplify their voices and priorities, such as through the Global Girl Leaders Advisory Group and other mechanisms for girls' leadership and will significantly increase funding for organizations led by and focused on girls and women.

(c) **Prioritize gender equality and the empowerment of girls and women in humanitarian crises:** Crises disproportionately affect girls and women. UNICEF will increasingly identify and address the needs of girls and women in humanitarian contexts with a special emphasis on programming for adolescent girls. UNICEF will deliver on its Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action – from education and protection against violence to economic resilience. Targeted efforts will be made to reach and support adolescent girls. Girls and women will be empowered to be leaders and active participants in enhancing the resilience of their communities and better protecting them from disasters and climate and environmental risks.

(d) **Partner with boys and men to end discrimination:** Empowering girls and women requires tackling the root causes of gender inequality, including the systems, norms and power imbalances that perpetuate gender discrimination. UNICEF will design, implement and support forward-looking and context-appropriate programmes that address these challenges, engaging boys and men as allies and agents of change. This will include parenting initiatives, violence prevention efforts and youth-led campaigns, among others, which tackle harmful norms, promote equal rights for all children and foster positive gender roles and relationships.

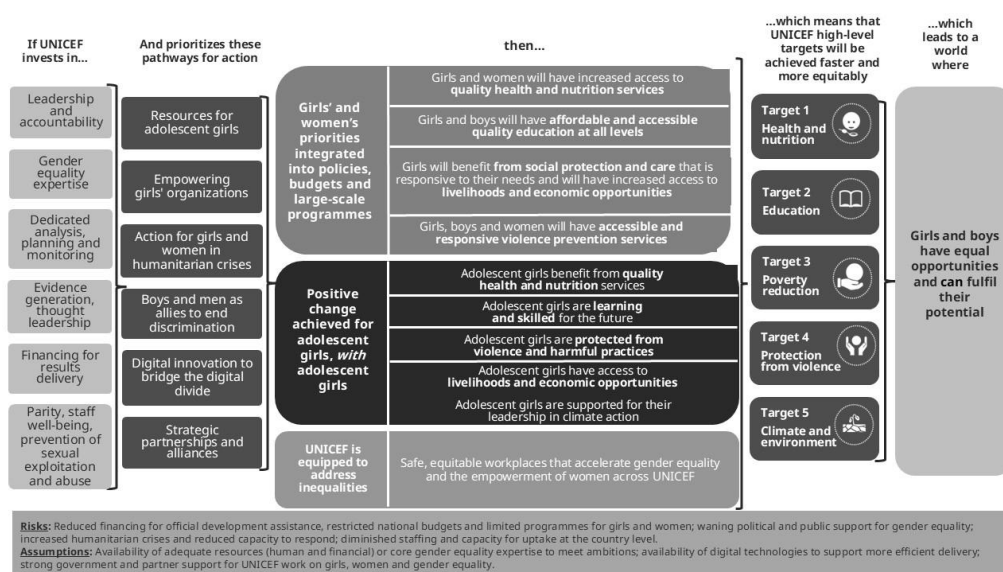
(e) **Leverage digital innovation to bridge the gender divide:** Despite the expansion of digital technologies, girls and women remain disproportionately excluded. To tackle the digital gender divide and reap the benefits for girls, UNICEF will work with girls and other partners to connect girls and women to digital opportunities and skills. UNICEF will also continue its work with partners in the public and private sectors to reduce online violence and abuse. This will include promoting virtual safe spaces for girls to gain access to information about reporting online violence and seeking support, raising awareness of online dangers among parents and caregivers, understanding the differential impacts of social media and online interactions on girls and boys, engaging both adolescent girls and boys in designing digital interventions and tackling the gaps in legislative and policy frameworks.

(f) **Deepen strategic partnerships and alliances for at-scale impact:** In a challenging funding and political landscape, partnerships are more critical than ever. To maximize impact, UNICEF will strengthen partnerships with Governments guiding national programmes and budgets, and increase collaboration with international financial institutions, civil society, the private sector and other key stakeholders.

14. Guided by these pathways, UNICEF will accelerate progress towards a more just and equal world – one in which every girl has the power, opportunities and support she needs to thrive.

III. Theory of change

Figure II
UNICEF Gender Equality Action Plan 2026–2029 Theory of change



IV. Programmatic priorities

15. The programmatic priorities outlined in this Gender Equality Action Plan are grounded in data and evidence, aligned to the priorities of UNICEF and built on its comparative advantages, including its capacity to deliver across sectors and contexts. Over the next four years, UNICEF and partners will aim to achieve large-scale impacts for girls and women in the following areas, leveraging proven solutions through domestic and other resourcing while investing in innovations for change. Explicit targets for and with adolescent girls are included. Success will depend on effective integration into UNICEF country programmes of cooperation, consistent accountability by all UNICEF leaders, government ownership and thoughtful, context-sensitive scale-up with consistent investments by diverse partners.

A. Impact Result 1: 10 million child lives saved and at least 500 million children healthy, well-nourished and developmentally on-track

16. Adolescent girls are often excluded from health planning and funding, especially in humanitarian settings. Each year, 23 million adolescent girls become pregnant, yet few of them have access to specialized maternal services. Maternal conditions remain a leading cause of death for girls aged 15–19 years, and adolescent girls account for 70 per cent of new HIV infections in their age group. Globally, only one in eight girls is protected from cervical cancer through human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination.

17. Mental health is another critical challenge. Approximately 77 million adolescent girls live with mental disorders, with depression the leading cause of disability among adolescent girls ages 15–19 years. Stressors – such as household and care responsibilities, social expectations, child marriage, exposure to violence and online harassment – contribute to distress and self-harm – the latter now among the leading causes of death for older adolescent girls. Caregivers, many of whom also experience mental health conditions, often lack the resources to provide support.

18. Malnutrition continues to affect over one billion adolescent girls and women, with one third of them anaemic – three times the rate of their male peers. Anaemia impairs cognitive development and learning outcomes, and increases risks during pregnancy, including maternal death and low birthweight babies, perpetuating poor health across generations. Limited decision-making power within households further undermines the health and nutrition of girls and women.

Advancing health and nutrition systems and services for adolescent girls

19. UNICEF will support national Governments in delivering accessible, empowering and well-resourced maternal services for girls. Investments will focus on expanding HIV and related programmes designed with and for adolescent girls, including pregnant and parenting girls. Life skills, puberty and age- and developmentally appropriate information for adolescent girls and boys will help to address their heightened risk of adolescent pregnancy and HIV infection, while also contributing to building self-confidence and a positive body image.

20. UNICEF will work to integrate mental healthcare into primary healthcare services and expand access to early intervention programmes, particularly for vulnerable groups such as pregnant and post-partum adolescents and young parents, as well as girls living with HIV or in humanitarian settings. UNICEF will take targeted actions to reduce self-harm by identifying key drivers in different contexts, raising awareness among parents and caregivers, and expanding services for adolescent girls who are self-harming or at risk of self-harm, including in schools and on digital

platforms. Private sector partners will be engaged to challenge harmful stereotypes in the media and advertising that negatively affect the mental health of adolescent girls and boys. Crucially, adolescent girls will be empowered as change-makers to advocate for and contribute to mental health solutions. The development of new sex-disaggregated data-collection methods to better understand the determinants of adolescent mental health in low- and middle-income countries will continue to be a priority.

21. UNICEF will also strengthen partnerships to improve adolescent girls' access to cervical cancer screening, prevention and treatment, and ensure these services are reflected in national budgets and workplans. Key to success will be strengthening healthcare infrastructure, including training and empowering front-line workers, for efficient delivery. Additionally, in support of national priorities, UNICEF will work closely with parents, caregivers and communities to address vaccine hesitancy and social stigma, and to promote understanding of the benefits of HPV vaccination for both girls and boys. UNICEF will further contribute to research, evidence generation and thought leadership on HPV vaccine effectiveness and impact.

22. Together with Governments and partnerships such as the Child Nutrition Fund, UNICEF will scale up efforts to prevent anaemia and malnutrition among adolescent girls, including pregnant and parenting adolescent girls, using proven school- and community-based approaches. This will include partnerships with health and education facilities to distribute iron folate and micronutrient supplements for anaemia prevention and nutritional support; raising awareness among parents and caregivers about quality nutrition; implementing targeted social protection programmes to increase dietary diversity and healthcare; and advocating for policy reforms that address the root causes of malnutrition among girls, such as poverty.

23. Poor access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services, including dignified menstrual health and hygiene facilities in schools, healthcare facilities, homes and public places, exposes girls and women to risks of violence, harassment and exploitation. Adolescent girls are also often responsible for fetching water for their households and frequently travel long distances, which can jeopardize their safety and preclude them from attending school or engaging in income-generating activities. Climate and environmental factors are increasingly disrupting WASH services and compounding these challenges. Aligned with the third phase of the Accelerating Sanitation and Water for All programme, UNICEF will work with partners to support girls' access to safe, equitable and climate-resilient WASH services and dignified menstrual health and hygiene in all settings. This includes increased access to menstrual hygiene supplies, dignity kits during emergencies and girl-friendly facilities during displacement, crisis or conflict. Scaling up promising initiatives requires strengthening the enabling environment through support for national WASH-related policies, budgets and systems to advance gender equality and the empowerment of girls and women. UNICEF will embrace market-driven strategies that include girl-led innovations and embrace partnerships with girls' networks.

Protecting maternal health and nutrition, supporting positive parenting and empowering women as front-line workers

24. UNICEF will improve maternal health and nutrition services, especially during crises, enabling women to benefit from increased access to healthy diets and services and practices to prevent anaemia, poor nutrition and poor health. UNICEF will support countries in making maternal, newborn and child health services climate resilient. UNICEF will also scale up parenting and caregiving support strategies, including through social and behaviour change programming, for more equal

opportunities to services within households and communities. This will result in improved health and nutrition for women and children, as well as promote positive social norms and behaviours among girls, boys and their communities. To strengthen the integration of gender equality and the empowerment of all girls and women within country nutrition portfolios, UNICEF will pursue continued investment in advancing integrated service delivery covering violence prevention, mitigation and response, as well as nutrition, particularly in humanitarian settings. Interventions to prevent stunting and poor development, early detection and treatment of child wasting, and access to nutritious diets will also be scaled up. The health challenges of overnutrition and obesity specific to girls and women will be tackled by expanding knowledge management, advocacy and policy-related efforts.

25. Further, UNICEF will champion the professionalization of front-line health and nutrition workers, of whom 70 per cent globally are women. This means ensuring they are sufficiently reflected in national systems, receive adequate training, remuneration, supervision, protections and supplies to deliver high quality care, and are offered career development opportunities. Efforts to train and empower young women as front-line health and nutrition workers will include outreach in communities, targeted mentoring and internships, and opportunities to build digital skills, among others.

B. Impact Result 2: 350 million more children and young people learning and skilled

26. Despite progress in education access and enrolment, many adolescent girls – particularly those in low-income, conflict-affected, rural and indigenous communities – remain at a disadvantage. The impacts of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, ongoing humanitarian crises and climate change have further disrupted learning. In sub-Saharan Africa, girls are more likely than boys to be out of school at primary and secondary levels. Globally, adolescent girls and young women aged 15–24 years make up 56 per cent of illiterate youth – a figure that has not improved in a decade. Adolescent girls are also twice as likely as boys to not be in education, employment or training. Girls with disabilities or living in rural areas face the highest risk of being left behind. Just 10 per cent of girls aged 15–24 years in low-income countries use the Internet, compared with 22 per cent of boys, limiting their access to science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education and future job opportunities.⁷

Promoting comprehensive skills programmes for adolescent girls

27. UNICEF aims to accelerate action to remove the barriers that hinder adolescent girls and young women from accessing and completing quality education, learning and skills training. This requires tackling the global learning crisis, including by expanding skills acquisition, digital education and alternative learning pathways, as well as ensuring safer and more supportive school environments to better reach the most marginalized and underserved adolescent girls. UNICEF programming will embrace these focus areas, particularly for girls who are out of school, displaced, living in humanitarian contexts, living with disabilities, pregnant or parenting.

28. In collaboration with its partners, UNICEF will reimagine learning and skills-building for adolescent girls by expanding access to digital learning and connectivity and ensuring online safety, specifically protection from online sexual harassment and discrimination. Efforts will focus on closing the digital divide by addressing social barriers, increasing access to affordable devices and Internet services, and promoting

⁷ All data in this paragraph are taken from UNICEF, UN-Women and Plan International, Girl Goals: What has changed for adolescent girls? Adolescent girls' rights over 30 years.

girls' participation in comprehensive skills development, particularly in STEM fields, for positive learning outcomes and future employment opportunities.

29. Through the education sector, UNICEF will continue to promote girls' leadership, voice and agency as catalysts for their inclusion, participation and leadership across all sectors and contexts. This will include innovative and safe platforms and spaces, both offline and online, to build their skills and capacities to voice their opinions, influence change and lead. It will also promote accountability among adult stakeholders and institutions for developing and ensuring opportunities for girls' systematic inclusion and participation in designing, advocating for, owning and implementing solutions to the issues affecting them and their communities.

Empowering teachers, parents and communities to foster enabling learning environments

30. To improve equity in access and learning, UNICEF will address the structural barriers that disproportionately affect marginalized and underserved girls and boys, including those with disabilities. Investments will be made in education sector planning and monitoring that help to advance changes in outcomes for adolescent girls; strengthen national capacities in data, delivery and accountability for results; and improve linkages with social protection systems to reach those most vulnerable to school dropout, including boys and girls from the poorest households.

31. Schools and education systems can be key platforms for advancing gender equality and child rights, including through curricula and pedagogy that support both girls and boys to thrive on an equal footing. UNICEF will strengthen education systems by building the capacity of teachers and education staff, the majority of whom are women,⁸ and provide safe and dignified working environments to deliver equitable learning for all.

C. Impact Result 3: 100 million fewer children in multidimensional poverty

32. Girls and women are disproportionately affected by poverty, both monetary and multidimensional. Global poverty reduction efforts often overlook or inadequately address gender-specific risks, needs and opportunities. Social policies fail to recognize the socioeconomic value of care work, which is still largely viewed as the responsibility of women and girls. As a result, girls are two to three times more likely than boys to bear the burden of unpaid household and care work, which limits their development, education and future earning potential. This unpaid work also forces women out of the paid workforce, hindering progress towards economic empowerment. For poor women and girls, especially those in female-headed households, vulnerabilities are magnified.

33. Social protection systems are essential, cost-effective tools for alleviating poverty and improving health, education and social inclusion. They help families to cope with socioeconomic and environmental shocks as well as during periods of intensified care work, such as family illnesses. However, affordable, quality childcare is inaccessible for most households and social protection programmes still fall short in providing girls and women with the support they need. For example, mothers who are illiterate or have limited access to the Internet, or those whose mobility is restricted, may not be able to access information about available support services.

⁸ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Global Education Monitoring Report: Gender report – Women lead for learning, Paris, 2025.

Strengthening and expanding social protection and care systems to address the needs of adolescent girls and women

34. Recognizing the critical role of gender equality and the empowerment of all girls and women as drivers of sustainable poverty reduction and economic growth, UNICEF has increasingly expanded support for social protection – including in fragile and humanitarian contexts – that enhances outcomes for girls and women. UNICEF will strengthen and expand coverage of national social protection programmes to deliver greater results, including reducing child marriage and expanding girls’ access to education, meaningful employment and economic security. UNICEF will work with other United Nations agencies, Governments and private sector partners to generate public financing to support adolescent girls, gender equality and the empowerment of all girls and women.

35. UNICEF will seek to further strengthen social protection systems, care systems and family-friendly policies to achieve a more manageable and equitable division of care work within families. This will include policies to advance economic security, maternity grants, parental leave and flexible workplace policies. UNICEF will expand advocacy for universal access to affordable, quality childcare from birth, including publicly supported care, statutory childcare and improving the qualifications of caregivers and child-to-staff ratios in schools. UNICEF will continue to provide support to establish and expand national cash transfer programmes that provide child benefits, promote girls’ completion of schooling, and protect girls and women from violence in humanitarian settings.

Expanding economic empowerment programmes for adolescent girls

36. Too many girls face systemic barriers that hinder their ability to secure stable employment and a fair income in adulthood. By tackling the barriers facing adolescent girls as they transition to the labour market, more girls will be equipped, as they enter adulthood to obtain decent work and ascend to leadership roles. UNICEF will support girls with access to training and professional networks, quality mentoring, career counselling, apprenticeships, internships and the opportunities needed to enter the labour market on an equal footing with their male peers. This is key to enhancing girls’ economic security and empowerment. UNICEF programmes will also provide cash transfers and direct livelihood grants, as well as financial inclusion strategies. These include financial literacy training, access to mobile money or banking platforms or both, community savings associations, seed funding for entrepreneurial activities, and vocational skills development to enable older adolescent girls to accumulate savings to support their transition to different types of employment tailored to their circumstances, age and relevant markets.

D. Impact Result 4: 350 million children protected from violence

37. Fifty million girls alive today have experienced sexual violence, while nearly one in three have been victims of emotional, physical or sexual violence committed by an intimate partner. Progress made in recent decades, notably in declining rates of child marriage and FGM, is insufficient to meet the Sustainable Development Goals related to child protection. Tens of millions of adolescent girls continue to face a high risk of child marriage, sexual violence and adolescent pregnancy. The practice of FGM, which can lead to serious health complications, including mental health problems, prolonged bleeding, infection, infertility or even death, remains prevalent in many communities. Girls and women who have undergone FGM are at heightened risk of experiencing complications during childbirth. One third of all adolescents aged 15–19 years continue to believe that intimate partner violence is acceptable,

underscoring the need to engage with both adolescent girls and boys to change attitudes and behaviours.

Protecting and caring for adolescent girls at risk of or experiencing harmful practices

38. UNICEF will continue to work to prevent violence against adolescent girls in homes, schools and communities, and will accelerate strategies to end child marriage and FGM. It will build on the successes and lessons learned from working in partnership with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) on the Global Programme to End Child Marriage and the Joint Programme on the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation. UNICEF will prioritize partnering with and empowering girl-led and girl-focused organizations to advocate for ending these violations of the rights of girls. Cross-sectoral, context-specific and complementary strategies that work from the level of the girl and her family on through community and systems levels, will be scaled up. This includes interventions in support of national programmes that support at-risk adolescent girls' sexual and reproductive health and rights, including HIV prevention, social protection against poverty, keeping girls in school or supporting their return to school to delay pregnancy and marriage, and legal and policy reform efforts, such as strengthening and enforcing laws that establish 18 years as the minimum age for marriage. UNICEF will also support the needs of married girls, including by addressing violence within child marriage, and the additional vulnerability of adolescent girls with disabilities who are forced into child marriage.

Preventing and responding to gender-based violence

39. UNICEF broader protection work will focus on tackling the gender-based dimensions of violence against girls, boys and women. Beginning with the caregivers of children in their early years, UNICEF will scale up evidence-based parent and caregiver support interventions that promote nurturing care, prevent violence and advance gender equality in the family. For adolescent girls and boys, UNICEF will implement social and behavioural change interventions that promote healthy, non-violent and gender equitable relationships. Such interventions will be built into safe and enabling school environments. In cases where women and children are experiencing violence in the family, UNICEF will support coordinated responses of domestic violence and child protection social service workers. UNICEF will also expand its role in the field of gender-based violence in emergencies and conflicts and will continue to provide inter-agency leadership in this area within the Inter-Agency Standing Committee. To advance this work, technology-based interventions will be tested and used when appropriate.

E. Impact Result 5: 500 million children better protected from disasters, climate and environmental risks

40. Climate change, environmental hazards and disasters disproportionately affect girls and women, deepening gender inequalities. These disruptions reduce access by women and girls to essential services, decision-making spaces and life-saving resources. Girls and women are also affected differently than boys and men, for example through higher rates of child marriage and increased risk of violence, reduced educational attainment, and increased domestic responsibilities, particularly in response to disasters. Targeted protections are needed to shield girls from harmful pollutants, including toxic metals, chemicals, hazardous waste and air pollution.

41. Adolescent girls must be meaningfully involved in climate and environmental decision-making, especially around local and nature-based solutions. UNICEF will

support adolescent girls to understand, participate in, lead and benefit from climate action. This includes climate-related policies, budgets, systems and at-scale programmes to advance gender equality and the empowerment of girls and women, focusing on nationally determined contributions, climate-resilient social services and disaster risk reduction. Young women and adolescent girls, including those who are out of school, will be supported to gain access to environmental education and training to build climate resilience and context-specific green skills, enabling them to help to address environmental challenges in their communities.

42. UNICEF will support the development of gender-equitable climate and environment-related strategies and action plans that integrate specific targets and results for girls and women based on gender equality analyses. UNICEF will focus on closing the knowledge gaps regarding how climate and environmental changes affect girls and women, identifying existing risks and emerging threats, vulnerabilities and opportunities that increase their preparedness for climate, environmental and disaster hazards, and improve access to sustainable energy sources. The organization will continue to collect, analyse and disseminate disaggregated data through the Children's Climate Risk Index. Raising awareness of these issues will support ongoing advocacy for evidence-based policy changes and the increased financing needed to tackle them. By leveraging climate financing mechanisms, such as the Green Climate Fund and the Adaptation Fund, and directing funds to girl- and women-led organizations in the aftermath of climate-related shocks, UNICEF can better deliver for gender equality and the empowerment of all girls and women.

V. Strategies for programmatic results on gender equality

43. The success of UNICEF in achieving meaningful gender equality outcomes depends on the strategies it implements to ensure a consistent focus on gender equality and the empowerment of all girls and women across the organization. The key strategies UNICEF will prioritize under the Gender Equality Action Plan, 2026–2029 follow.

A. Leadership and accountability

44. All UNICEF staff are accountable for advancing gender equality and the empowerment of all girls and women, but the organization's leadership has the primary accountability for promoting and ensuring effective institutional strategies are in place. Senior leaders will ensure that gender equality analyses inform country and regional priorities, that targeted programmes for adolescent girls are actioned, and that partnerships with Governments and other partners amplify these priorities. The global Gender Equality Steering Committee provides guidance and has ultimate accountability for the implementation of UNICEF gender equality frameworks. The Committee will meet at least annually to review corporate progress on the implementation of the Gender Equality Action Plan. Sector leads will be responsible for resource mobilization and technical leadership to advance results for girls and women, supporting the at-scale results outlined in the Strategic Plan and the Gender Equality Action Plan.

45. UNICEF country offices are central to the success of the Gender Equality Action Plan and will lead strategies that prioritize the needs of girls and women in their local contexts. In partnership with Governments, country office leadership will secure resources, staffing and expertise to support these priorities, following staffing guidance outlined in the Gender Equality Action Plan. Aligned with the United Nations System-Wide Gender Equality Acceleration Plan, UNICEF country office leadership will continue to coordinate with resident coordinators' offices and United Nations country teams to drive action, including through contextual gender analyses

focused on adolescent girls. Regional leadership and accountability mechanisms will reinforce country-level progress, including robust country strategies for gender equality and the empowerment of girls and women. UNICEF leadership at all levels will continue to champion gender equality and the empowerment of all girls and women, especially adolescent girls, aiming to ensure that their needs and priorities remain central among partners and the public.

46. UNICEF will strengthen explicit accountabilities among senior managers to ensure gender equality goals are achieved, both programmatically and within workplace policies and practices. Leadership accountabilities under the Gender Equality Action Plan will be reflected in individual performance evaluations and reviewed regularly at global and regional senior management meetings. Sector leaders will ensure alignment between the Strategic Plan, the Gender Equality Action Plan priorities and respective sectoral strategies. Progress and compliance will be monitored through digital dashboards at the global, regional and country levels, and formally reported to the UNICEF Executive Board through an annual report on the implementation of the Gender Equality Action Plan.

B. Gender equality analysis, planning and monitoring

47. Gender equality analysis is the cornerstone for identifying and addressing the differing needs of girls, boys, women and men within UNICEF programmes. UNICEF will continue to ensure that such analyses inform programme planning, particularly within country programme documents and midterm reviews of country programmes, and will improve gender equality analyses in humanitarian preparedness and action. The systematic collection and analysis of sex-disaggregated data as part of programme monitoring allows for greater understanding of gender disparities and needs emerging during programme implementation. These analyses and sex-disaggregated data will be incorporated into organizational reporting and used to advocate internally and externally for more targeted support and funding to adolescent girls and women, where evidence indicates these are most needed. Where possible, these efforts will be undertaken jointly with United Nations country teams for maximum efficiency and cost savings, as called for in the United Nations System-Wide Gender Equality Acceleration Plan.

C. Evidence generation and thought leadership

48. Evidence-based policy solutions and programming are the backbone of the UNICEF strategy for impactful interventions for adolescent girls and women. Collaborating with academia, including young researchers, and other civil society partners, UNICEF will continue to leverage its data, research, knowledge management and evaluation functions to advance the evidence base on what works to promote gender equality and the empowerment of all girls and women. Primary, secondary and evaluation data relating to the lives of adolescent girls and women will be used to develop knowledge products that support advocacy, address evidence gaps and improve policy and programming. Up to two impact evaluations will be planned during the Gender Equality Action Plan period, with at least one focusing on adolescent girl programming, while taking into account the fact that significant data gaps persist for girls and women, and national capacity and resources for surveys and studies are limited. UNICEF is committed to, where feasible, supporting Governments and other partners to address these data gaps and enable more systematic tracking of outcome-level changes, within and across countries.

D. Financing for gender equality results delivery

49. Despite global consensus that gender equality and the empowerment of all girls and women are essential to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and all 17 Sustainable Development Goals, funding for gender equality programming remains inadequate. UNICEF is committed to reversing this trend by increasing financing for adolescent girls and gender equality over the next four years. This is not only a moral imperative but is also essential for delivering on the Strategic Plan's Impact Results.

50. UNICEF will hold itself accountable by meeting and exceeding the new UN-SWAP 3.0 [United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women] minimum benchmarks for gender equality financing. This includes maintaining the 15 per cent target for gender equality marker 3 results – programmes that explicitly aim to address gender inequalities, remove structural barriers and empower disadvantaged populations – with a focus on increased investments in the health and education sectors. UNICEF will also set a target of 20 per cent for gender equality marker 2 expenditures to ensure that programmes meet the distinct needs of girls, boys, women and men to achieve equal outcomes. UNICEF will also track and report on financing for adolescent girls' programming and funding for organizations led by girls and women, ensuring greater transparency and measurement of impact.

51. UNICEF will leverage additional financing for adolescent girls and gender equality through diverse partnerships and innovative funding mechanisms. This includes strategically accessing relevant windows within large-scale funds in the humanitarian sector and systematically ensuring girls are visible in the UNICEF Humanitarian Action for Children appeals. Additionally, funding mechanisms such as the POWER4Girls initiative will be prioritized to channel funding directly to girl change-makers and women- and girl-led organizations, alongside at-scale solutions and a robust learning agenda. UNICEF will also make greater efforts to influence climate and other funding envelopes (such as the Green Climate Fund) for more girl-focused investments. Existing funding mechanisms, such as the Child Nutrition Fund, will be more deliberately targeted to prioritize the needs of girls and women, while new partnerships with private and philanthropic actors will further expand resources. A key focus will be strengthening collaboration with international financial institutions to drive greater impact at scale.

E. Vibrant and diverse partnerships

52. UNICEF is redoubling efforts to engage a diverse range of traditional and new partners to advance gender equality and the empowerment of all girls and women, including through UNICEF-led multi-stakeholder platforms such as Generation Unlimited, as well as across the United Nations, such as through the Gender Equality Acceleration Plan advisory mechanisms. Increasing partnerships with girls' and women's rights organizations will be promoted within existing relationships with other United Nations partners such as the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UNFPA. New and more straightforward partnership models and robust consultation mechanisms will facilitate more direct and meaningful collaborations with girl- and women-led organizations, particularly those at the community or grass-roots level.

53. Member States, civil society, Governments, development organizations, international and regional financial institutions, private sector actors and United Nations system entities remain important partners in this collective work. UNICEF

will work with government partners through support for sector expenditure reviews, costing exercises and fiscal analyses, and by co-developing strategies to increase or reallocate finances to support gender equality and the empowerment of all girls and women. UNICEF will work with international financial institutions, climate funds and country thematic funds to increase the funding available for girls and women to address pressing needs, such as climate risk-financing solutions. UNICEF will deepen partnerships with other United Nations organizations through joint programmes and initiatives, while strengthening technical cooperation with other development partners.

VI. Equitable, safe and empowered workplaces

54. The commitment made by UNICEF to advance gender equality and the empowerment of all girls and women globally mirrors its dedication to ensuring that all personnel benefit from an equitable, safe and empowering workplace. This is enshrined by organization-wide policies, including on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse; the prohibition of discrimination, harassment, sexual harassment and abuse of authority; and personnel procedures related to flexible working arrangements, family and parental leave and breastfeeding. Expanded efforts include better alignment with the UNICEF Disability Inclusion Policy and Strategy, 2022–2030 and, building on internal evidence regarding the power of allyship and actively intervening to stop harmful behaviours, the introduction of comprehensive interventions to address harmful workplace norms, including bias, discrimination and microaggressions.

A. Maintain gender parity globally and address parity gaps where they persist

55. In keeping with the Secretary-General's commitment to gender parity in staffing, UNICEF has achieved parity at all senior levels. While maintaining global gender parity, UNICEF will focus on addressing persistent imbalances between women and men internally and foster equitable career paths across the organization. Priority areas include:

- (a) National staff roles in country offices with significant gender disparities;
- (b) Emergency duty stations;
- (c) Sectors and teams where imbalances remain, such as WASH.

56. To advance these goals, UNICEF will implement targeted strategies, including proactive talent outreach, development of talent rosters and building a pipeline of young women professionals through paid internships and placements of United Nations Volunteers.

B. Make UNICEF a more equitable workplace

57. Drawing on staff surveys, including the Pulse Check survey on workplace culture, UNICEF will update its workplace policies, strategies and training to better reflect the needs and priorities of all personnel, with a focus on supporting women and ensuring safe and dignified working environments, including in humanitarian contexts. Core training on gender equality and the empowerment of all girls and women will be updated and made available to all staff. Senior leaders will receive leadership training to fulfil their expanded responsibilities in advancing gender equality and the empowerment of girls and women in both programmes and workplaces. Leadership will also promote greater awareness and use of existing workplace policies that support gender equality, including family-friendly measures

that support work-life balance. UNICEF maintains a zero-tolerance policy for sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment, and will implement a globally applied, victim-centred action plan on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse and sexual harassment.

C. Leverage recruitment and performance management systems for change

58. Clearer reference to gender equality and the empowerment of all girls and women will be included in the UNICEF Competency Framework, including for incoming staff at senior levels. This will be reinforced through vacancy announcements and questions in interview guides and assessments. UNICEF will continue to incorporate use of the ClearCheck screening database in onboarding processes to ensure that candidates have no prior history of sexual exploitation, abuse or harassment. Performance management systems will encourage and support staff to build their competencies on gender equality and anti-discrimination at all levels. Existing personnel are accountable for building their gender equality competencies, delivering on gender equality results and contributing to an equitable, safe and empowered workplace for all. Senior leaders will reflect gender equality commitments in their compacts with the Executive Office of the Secretary-General; these compacts are designed as tools to ensure performance and accountability.

VII. Conclusion

59. UNICEF is fully committed to advancing gender equality and the empowerment of all girls and women, addressing the deep-rooted challenges and barriers that prevent them from reaching their full potential. This Plan serves as both an accountability framework and a programmatic guide, ensuring that the interconnected goals of child rights and the rights of girls and women remain at the heart of the UNICEF mission to achieve meaningful, lasting outcomes for children and women worldwide. UNICEF will closely monitor and respond to global shifts and emerging risks, adapting its strategies to ensure continued progress. To drive continued learning and improvement, the implementation of this Gender Equality Action Plan will be reviewed annually, with a comprehensive final evaluation in 2029. UNICEF will leave no stone unturned in its determination to protect the next generation of children from the harmful effects of gender inequality. Embracing a girl's full potential is to unlock a future for all to thrive.
