

Zero Discrimination Day  
1 March 2020

# ZERO DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS



**#ZERO DISCRIMINATION**  
**AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS**



## ABOUT ZERO DISCRIMINATION DAY

On Zero Discrimination Day, 1 March, we celebrate the right of everyone to live a full and productive life—and live it with dignity. Zero Discrimination Day highlights how people can become informed about and promote inclusion, compassion, peace and, above all, a movement for change. Zero Discrimination Day is helping to create a global movement of solidarity to end all forms of discrimination.

# ZERO DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

On Zero Discrimination Day this year, UNAIDS is challenging the discrimination faced by women and girls in all their diversity and raising awareness and mobilizing action to promote equality and empowerment for women and girls.

Although some countries have made laudable progress towards greater gender equality, discrimination against women and girls still exists everywhere. Intersecting with other forms of discrimination—based, for example, on income, race, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation or gender identity—these rights violations disproportionately harm women and girls. Ultimately, gender inequality affects everyone's health and well-being. In many countries, laws that discriminate against women and girls remain in force, while laws that uphold women's basic rights and protect them against harm and unequal treatment are far from the norm.

Across the world, many countries maintain legislation and coercive practices that contradict the basic tenets of human rights. Some of these laws limit women's sexual and reproductive health and rights. Others criminalize people for their gender identity or sexual orientation, for selling sexual services, for using drugs or for transmitting HIV. Removing discriminatory laws is a basic building block for an equitable society.

Discrimination against women and girls in education systems and labour markets creates economic and social insecurity, undermining their agency and well-being. Women are disproportionately represented in informal and unregulated sectors of the economy, where there are few if any legal protections. Compounding those inequalities are the burdens of unpaid care and domestic work, unequal property and inheritance rights, and limited financial autonomy, which shape the lives of women and girls around the world. During emergencies or climate-related disasters, women and girls face a higher risk of migration, exposure to sexual or gender-based violence and illness.

Gender inequality undermines the ability of women to decide how, when and with whom they have sex. It shapes the use of and access to health services by women. And it increases the risk of women experiencing gender-based violence and creates barriers to finding redress when their rights are violated. Ending violence against women and girls—one of the most widespread human rights violations in the world—must be a priority everywhere. Violence against women is deeply rooted in gender inequalities and is used to exert male control over women.

Numerous government commitments to end violence against women and girls have been made over the years, yet hundreds of millions of women and girls continue to be subjected to abuse and violence, at huge cost to themselves and to their families, communities, societies and economic development. Ensuring that women are participating equally in political life is both an end in itself to creating a more just society and a game-changer to addressing stigma and discrimination against women and girls in all parts of society.

# THE CHANGE WE WANT

## ENSURE EQUAL PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL LIFE

- The political leadership of women should be better recognized.
- Women should participate in political life as equals. Women play an essential role in political life. They are increasingly recognized for their leadership in health and in community and peace-building efforts.

## UPHOLD HUMAN RIGHTS AND LAWS THAT EMPOWER

- Laws that maintain or compound discrimination against women and girls must be abolished and human rights upheld.
- Child marriage, property laws and inheritance laws that continue to perpetuate discrimination against women and girls and treat them as second-class citizens must be changed.
- Criminalization of sex work exposes women to violence and prevents them from accessing the services they need.
- Laws criminalizing transgender people must be lifted. Transgender people are criminalized or prosecuted in 19 countries and face a huge risk of violence across the world.
- Laws criminalizing drug use need to be lifted. Women are disproportionately affected by the criminalization of drug use and are more likely to be incarcerated and/or to be asked for bribes, harassed and raped by law enforcement officers.

## GUARANTEE ECONOMIC JUSTICE

- Women need economic justice and their work merits a salary. Discrimination against women in the workplace must end and the gender pay gap needs to be addressed everywhere.
- Care work in the household is work just like any other and must be recognized. There is no reason why it should be carried out by women alone. Gender norms that perpetuate stereotypes where women carry out all the household chores for free and in addition to their other responsibilities must be changed in order to achieve a more just and equal society.

## END GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

- Gender-based violence must end and harmful gender norms and toxic masculinities should be addressed.



- The empowerment of women is an essential part of addressing gender-based violence. Women are at a greater risk of gender-based violence when they are disempowered for economic reasons, when they are not treated as equal citizens with equal rights in their country or when they are affected by other vulnerabilities, such as ill health or disability.
- Laws protecting women from violence should be in place and implemented everywhere. Policies must be put in place to provide supportive environments for survivors to be protected from perpetrators, including through training of uniformed personnel and the provision of safe houses and legal means of redress.

## PROVIDE HEALTH CARE WITHOUT STIGMA OR BARRIERS

- Women and girls need health care without stigma, discrimination or barriers.
- User fees must be removed. Women face too many financial barriers to protecting their health. Barriers to access to health care by women, such as the need for their spouse's consent, user fees at the clinic or countries not prioritizing women's health, must be ended.
- Care for women must be women-centred, respect their autonomy and place the power of making decisions in the hands of women. Sexual and reproductive health and rights for women and girls should be guaranteed. Health-care settings must not discriminate and should be welcoming to women and ensure that all women are treated with respect and dignity and have privacy.
- Age of consent laws for health services should be lifted. Every young woman or girl has the right to look after her own health without seeking permission from her parents or guardian. Married women should not need permission from their spouse.
- Adolescent health needs, sexuality education, the prevention and management of gender-based violence and the health rights and needs of key populations need to feature prominently in countries' universal health coverage plans and funding decisions.



**“NO WOMAN CAN CALL  
HERSELF FREE  
WHO DOES NOT CONTROL  
HER OWN BODY.”**

— Margaret Sanger

## ENSURE FREE PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION FOR ALL

- All women and girls should attend primary and secondary school for free. Large gender gaps exist in access, learning achievement and continuation in education in many settings, most often at the expense of girls. Despite progress, more girls than boys still remain out of school.
- Barriers to access to education by women and girls need to be lifted. Access to free primary and secondary education is a game-changer. When women go to school, everybody benefits. Poverty, geographical isolation, disability, early marriage and pregnancy, gender-based violence and traditional attitudes about the status and role of women are among the many obstacles that stand in the way of women and girls fully exercising their right to participate in, complete and benefit from education.
- Age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education should be made available to all.

## FIGHT FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE

- From rising sea levels to drops in farming yields and urban floods, the impacts of climate change are being acutely felt by women. Women make up a large percentage of poor communities worldwide that rely on natural resources for their livelihoods. Women and girls are particularly vulnerable to sexual and gender-based violence during climate-related emergencies.
- A people-centred approach to responding to climate change that fully takes into account the gender dimensions of climate change is needed.





**EQUAL**  
**PAY FOR EQUAL**  
**WORK**



# WHAT YOU CAN DO TO ADDRESS DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

## 1. RAISE AWARENESS

- Educate yourself about discrimination against women and girls—talk to women to understand their experiences of discrimination and examine your own beliefs and ideas.
- Highlight Zero Discrimination Day on your social media page today.
- Start a conversation about discrimination against women and girls in your workplace or with your friends and family.
- Highlight discriminatory laws so we can all advocate for change.
- Be an ally, call out discrimination when you see it and stand by women who speak up.

## 2. TAKE ACTION

- Give women a platform to speak.
- Start a petition to change discriminatory laws, policies or practices or join a peaceful protest or demonstration.
- Donate time, money or expertise to an organization that is working for women's rights and gender equality, or start one yourself.
- Demand change from your parliamentarian or from an ombudsperson or human rights organization.

## 3. HOLD LEADERS ACCOUNTABLE

- Governments must uphold their commitment to protect women's rights and to ending AIDS by 2030. United Nations Member States have made strong commitments to uphold, protect and fulfil the human rights of women and girls and to ending AIDS, including through:
  - The Sustainable Development Goals.
  - The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.
  - The International Conference on Population and Development.
  - The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.
  - The United Nations General Assembly 2016 Political Declaration on Ending AIDS.

# FACTS ABOUT DISCRIMINATION

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## Ensure equal participation in political life

- Only 24.3% of all national parliamentarians were women as of February 2019, a small increase from 11.3% in 1995.

## Uphold human rights and laws that empower

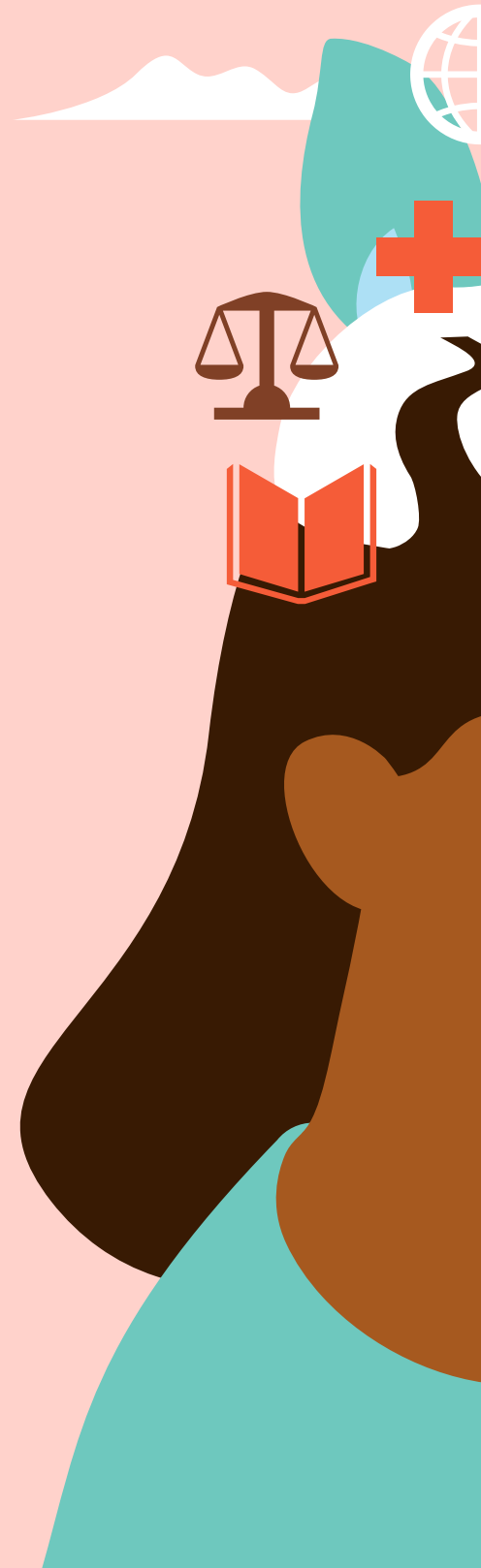
- At least 117 countries permitted girls to be legally married before the age of 18 years in 2015.
- Only 88 of 190 countries have laws mandating equal pay for work of equal value.
- Fifty of 190 reporting countries lack laws to address workplace sexual harassment.

## Guarantee economic justice

- Globally, women carry out three quarters of care work in the household.
- Thirty-six of 190 reporting countries lack laws to counter gender-based discrimination in employment.
- Fifty countries have no legislation addressing sexual harassment in the workplace.

## End gender-based violence

- At least one in three women and girls has experienced physical and/or sexual violence.



- More than 1 billion women lack legal protection against domestic violence.
- Young women are at a greater risk of intimate partner violence than adult women overall. One third of women aged 18–24 years report being sexually abused during childhood in Kenya (32%), Uganda (35%) and Eswatini (38%).

## Provide health care without stigma or barriers

- In low- and middle-income countries, nearly 230 million women and adolescent girls who want to be able to avoid pregnancy are not accessing modern methods of contraception.
- In sub-Saharan Africa, almost 50% of adult women have unmet needs for modern contraception, a gap that widens to 60% among adolescent girls (15–19 years).

## Give free primary and secondary education to all

- In 2018, an estimated 258 million children, adolescents and young people were not in school, representing one sixth of the global population of this age group.
- Nearly one in three adolescent girls (10–19 years) from the poorest households around the world has never been to school.

## Fight for climate justice

- Climate change has a disproportionate impact on women and children, who are up to 14 times more likely than men to die during a climate-related disaster.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2018/sdg-report-gender-equality-in-the-2030-agenda-for-sustainable-development-2018-en.pdf?la=en&vs=948>.





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