

The Beijing+25 review process: An Update

As we kick-start 2020 and ramp up plans to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA), here is what you need to know about what is coming up. This update will cover the following:

1. A brief recap of what has happened so far as part of the Beijing+25 review process
2. The 64th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women and the Political Declaration
3. The UN Secretary-General's report
4. The Generation Equality Forum
5. The UN General Assembly

1. A brief recap of what has happened so far

National-level reviews

By October 2019, 161 UN member states had produced national-level reviews of their progress and challenges in the implementation of the BPfA – 25 years since its adoption. These findings will be used to produce synthesised regional-level reviews by each of the five United Nations (UN) Economic Commissionsⁱ. NGOs were also given space to provide a critical perspective on how their countries were implementing the BPfA. You can find those submissions [here](#), collated by NGO CSW.

Regional 25-year review processes

Between October 2019 and January 2020, each of the UN economic commissions also convened a Beijing+25 regional review meeting to enable their member states and, to a varying extent, civil society organisations to review progress and identify challenges in the implementation of the BPfA. Regional women's rights networks have raised concerns about the outcomes of these review meetings,¹ highlighting the shrinking space for civil society's engagement as well as the lack of political will in delivering the full ambitions of the BPfA.

2. The 64th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)

Since 1995, the CSW – the largest global policy-making forum on women's rights – has focused on monitoring the implementation of the commitments within the BPfA, with a full review of the Platform

ⁱ UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UNESCWA) and UN Economic Commission for Latin America (UNECLAC)

taking place every five years. This allows gains, gaps and challenges – as well as new and emerging issues – to be addressed. The CSW remains critically important to women’s movements as a mechanism for holding governments to account in the attainment of the BPfA and for setting forward-looking agendas. The proposed timetable, or [‘organization of work’](#), for the 64th session of the CSW includes dedicated space for member states to review and appraise the implementation of the BPfA.

However, this year, the CSW will operate in a slightly different way when it takes place in New York in March. Instead of ‘Agreed Conclusions’ at the end of 2 weeks’ worth of negotiations, member states will produce a Political Declaration. The Zero Draft can be found [here](#). The Political Declaration has the potential to do more than just reaffirm the commitments within the BPfA by the time it is adopted at the end of CSW. Currently, it lacks a political analysis about the continued global constraints for delivering women’s and girls’ rights. There is also potential for the language within it to be bolder, stronger and more robust.

At this stage, it is unclear what explicit role the Political Declaration will play as part of the remaining Beijing+25 review processes scheduled throughout 2020 – namely the Generation Equality Forum as well as the UN General Assembly (explained below), but there appears to be no expectation that the text of the BPfA will be reopened for deliberation. It would seem an omission though, if findings of the Beijing+25 review process did not influence concurrent global UN processes (including the Financing for Development Forum and the High-Level Political Forum) as well as the G7 which will be hosted by the US.

3. The UN Secretary-General’s report

As mandated by the Economic and Social Council in 2018, the UN Secretary-General has produced a [draft report](#) which serves as a review and appraisal of the implementation of the BPfA. The report examines some of the global challenges in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and proposes a way forward at this key juncture, on the 25th anniversary of the BPfA.

In contrast to the language in the draft Political Declaration that will be produced as part of CSW64, the UN Secretary-General’s report offers a frank assessment of the political contexts which have prevented the full attainment of the BPfA’s bold commitments. In addition to recognising the multiple structural barriers that have prevented women and girls from realising their human rights, it also identifies that *“[r]ising inequalities and economic exclusion are a symptom of development models in which gains are not shared equitably”*² whilst also highlighting that *“[c]urrent orthodox economic, especially neoliberal, policies are not generating the level and type of employment and livelihoods needed to make growth inclusive”*.³ Furthermore, the report is mindful of how the global climate crisis is being *“fuelled by the over-exploitation of natural resources”*⁴, thereby providing a more holistic understanding about the structural drivers preventing progress.

While the UN Secretary-General’s report is unlikely to gain the same level of attention as the CSW’s Political Declaration or the outcomes of the Generation Equality Forum, it provides a strong and much-needed political analysis from the world’s key multilateral institution.

4. Generation Equality Forum

The Generation Equality Forum has been billed as the centrepiece of the UN’s Beijing+25 review process. Convened by UN Women, and co-hosted by the governments of France and Mexico, it is

described by the organisers as a civil society-centred multi-stakeholder gathering to not only take stock of what has happened on women's rights and gender equality over the last 25 years, but to also chart a path forward. The Forum will kick-start in Mexico City, Mexico from 7-8 May where a blueprint will be developed on actions and accountability for the full implementation of the BPfA. It will then culminate in Paris, France from 7-10 July where the roadmap for delivering the BPfA will be launched. The Forum will be informed by the regional review meetings and the outcomes of the CSW64.

The governance structure of the Forum is supposed to include a diverse range of civil society organisations to support UN Women and the governments of Mexico and France deliver the aims of the Forum. You can find more information about the governance structure [here](#).

Action Coalitions

The central piece of the Generation Equality Forum is the establishment of a set of 'Action Coalitions'. These are partnerships across civil society, member states and the private sector that aim to accelerate action on specific thematic areas outlined within the BPfA. In January 2020, the following six Action Coalitions were announced:

1. **Gender-Based Violence**
2. **Economic justice and rights**
3. **Bodily autonomy and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR)**
4. **Feminist action for climate justice**
5. **Technology and innovation for gender equality**
6. **Feminist movements and leadership**

The six themes were selected in consultation with international feminist groups, grassroots activist organisations, governments and other stakeholders. The expectation is that each Action Coalition will be led by government representatives from selected countries, private sector actors and civil society representatives from networks/organisations who specialise on the specific thematic issue. The Action Coalition members will develop a set of concrete actions that they will take forward between 2020-2025 – beyond the formal Beijing+25 review process.

5. UN General Assembly

The Beijing+25 review process in 2020 will culminate in a high-level meeting at the UN General Assembly, scheduled to take place on 23 September. The theme is "Accelerating the realization of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls". It is expected that the high-level meeting will highlight achievements as well as challenges in the implementation of the BPfA and will provide an opportunity for governments to present their concrete plans for fulfilling their commitments to women and girls by 2030 – to align with the end of Agenda 2030.

Critically missing from this broad proposed agenda appears to be a dedicated discussion about the funding mechanisms for resourcing these bold ambitions. Without financial commitments, critics argue that the high-level meeting could be merely rhetoric and celebration and so fail to progress the BPfA.

¹ On regional meetings, see Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development. 2019. 'Press release: women and gender rights activists deeply disappointed with regional outcome on human rights', 19 November.

<https://apwld.org/press-release-women-and-gender-rights-activists-deeply-disappointed-with-regional-outcome-on-human-rights/>; African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET). 2019. 'Press release: Governments must deliver on the promises made to women in Beijing 25 years ago', 4 November. <https://femnet.org/2019/11/press-release-governments-must-deliver-on-the-promises-made-to-women-in-beijing-25-years-ago/> as well as FEMNET. 2020. 'Africa CSOs Positions Statement on the Beijing+25 review', 16 January. <https://femnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Africa-CSO-Position-Statement-on-Beijing25.pdf>

² UN Secretary-General. 2020. *Draft Report of the Secretary-General: Review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes on the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly*. New York, 3

³ UN Secretary-General 2020, 16

⁴ UN Secretary-General 2020, 3

The Gender and Development Network (GADN) brings together expert NGOs, consultants, academics and individuals committed to working on gender, development and women's rights issues. Our vision is of a world where social justice and gender equality prevail and where all women and girls are able to realise their rights free from discrimination. Our goal is to ensure that international development policy and practice promotes gender equality and women's and girls' rights.

Gender and Development Network

c/o ActionAid
33–39 Bowling Green Lane
London EC1R 0BJ

For more information

For more information about GADN,
please email the GADN Coordinator at
coordinator@gadnetwork.org

T: +44(0)20 3122 0609
E: info@gadnetwork.org
www.gadnetwork.org

Registered charity no. 1140272
