

# Resisting the rollback on women's and girls' rights

Considerations and entry points for action for the UK government

Advances in the rights of women and girls have always been met with resistance, but a new phase of 'rollback' is underway with more systematic and organised opposition creating a new wave of threats. It is therefore welcome that the UK government's new International Women and Girls Strategy recognises these escalating threats and has committed to act against them.

This briefing explores some of the ways in which attacks on women's and girls' rights are being experienced in areas such as women's economic justice, women's political and social empowerment and violence against women and girls – all priority areas within the government's Strategy.

It highlights recommendations for the UK government on how to meaningfully and impactfully address rollback across the areas of international action; research and evidence; internal systems; and supporting women's rights organisations and movements.

## 1. Introduction

Women's and girls' rights have been achieved largely thanks to the coordinated efforts and advocacy of feminist movements and women's rights organisations on an international scale. From sexual and reproductive health and rights to addressing violence against women and girls, women's economic justice and equal access to education, rights enshrined within and since the Beijing Declaration have led to important gains. Attacks on these rights are nothing new. However, there is a clear escalation of systematic attacks by well-funded, transnational, regressive actors, working together to turn back the clocks for women and girls. This current wave of rollback on rights means that hard-won freedoms are now in ever more serious jeopardy.<sup>1</sup>

The UK Government's International Women and Girls Strategy firmly recognises this rollback and its own position and ability to play a lead role in resisting it, committing to "step up, defend the gains and drive progress for women and girls".<sup>2</sup> Minister for Development Andrew Mitchell has declared that the new International Women and Girls strategy "stands as a rallying cry for women's freedom, empowerment and protection".<sup>3</sup>

---

The Gender and Development Network welcomes this commitment but calls for an urgent plan that moves beyond rallying cries to a comprehensive programme of tangible action. We propose that addressing the increasing rollback of rights is needed at many levels of engagement and entry points. Current efforts by the UK government protecting language on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) at the UN is a crucial component, but just one part of the broader overall picture.

We further argue that any action must consider and address the contexts of intersecting oppressions alongside the ongoing legacies of colonisation. As the feminist movement-building organisation JASS reminds us, “women and members of other marginalised groups and the many intersections in our movements, face the highest risks because they present the greatest challenges to the capitalist, patriarchal system we seek to replace”.<sup>4</sup> To make action on rollback meaningful, it is the voices of those most marginalised and at-risk who must inform it.

This paper is not intended as a comprehensive analysis of rollback, recognising the increasing evidence from activists and academics already in existence. Rather, it gives some illustrative examples and offers entry points for action for the UK government to consider in order to deliver the bold and welcome commitments in the International Women and Girls Strategy.

## 1.1 What is rollback and who is behind it?

There are several terms used to discuss the reversal or attempted reversal of women’s and girls’ rights. In its International Women and Girls Strategy, the UK government uses ‘rollback’, a term that typically refers to the resistance to and the undoing and dismantling of already established gains. ‘Pushback’ is also used, with a similar meaning. These phenomena are not new; the term ‘backlash’ was coined by Susan Faludi in 1991 and has a similar meaning but can also be used to describe the attacks faced by those who work to promote women’s and girls’ rights. Both backlash and rollback/pushback happen at all levels of societal structures, from interpersonal to international.

Whenever rights have been enacted, extended or upheld, there has been resistance from anti-rights actors who are working to undermine the universality of rights. In recent years, these attempts at rollback have professionalised and organised, and with significant funding and focus, have led to a new and acute problem for women, women’s rights activists, and progressive governments and actors around the world. As Phumi Mtetwa of JASS notes: “We’ve done amazing things to build. But then the Right, patriarchy, white supremacy and capitalism – all of those ills – are now reorganising themselves against all the gains that we’ve made”.<sup>5</sup>

The term ‘anti-gender movement’ describes a wide range of state and non-state actors who are actively seeking to erode the fundamental concept of universal rights. They are part of a broader range of actors undermining a wide range of rights, comprising individuals and institutions linked to religious fundamentalisms, nationalisms or ultra-nationalisms, white supremacy, ultra-conservatism, authoritarianism, right-wing populism and other oppressive ideologies and movements. The narrative of ‘gender ideology’ originated from the Vatican and

essentially depicts social justice and gender equality advocates as threatening the ‘natural order’ of society, claiming that oppressive gender roles are ‘common sense’.<sup>6</sup>

Anti-rights activists and organisations are operating at local, regional and global levels, mobilising opposition against equal rights for women and LGBTQI+ people. Whilst there is much current focus, and much pernicious backlash on SRHR (particularly against abortion rights and comprehensive sexuality education), rollback on rights cuts across the breadth of rights, and is felt in terms of its impacts on violence against women and girls, girls’ education, economic justice and women’s participation and leadership.<sup>7</sup>

Where anti-gender movements and anti-rights actors have been successful, they have achieved regressive policy change. Less visible is the effect they also have in weakening the enabling environment needed for a shift to more progressive policies, making change less likely in areas where progress has yet to be made. Together, these movements are effectively undermining democratic principles and contributing to the erosion of human rights institutions and norms.<sup>8</sup> Anti-state movements have also served to further neo-liberal economic policies that reduce public expenditure at the expense of those most marginalised. Neil Datta, Secretary of the European Parliamentary Forum for Sexual and Reproductive Rights, has described these trends as creating “an alternative political and social system” encompassing social, political and economic spheres.<sup>9</sup>

Anti-gender movements and anti-rights actors have been successful in rolling back rights on numerous fronts:<sup>10</sup>

- **Mobilising broad public support against legal and policy reforms on priorities for LGBTQI+ and gender equality** – for instance, campaigns against the Istanbul Convention<sup>11</sup> have seen success in Bulgaria, Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, and Turkey since 2018, with a focus by ultra-conservative and populist groups on the language and concept of gender.<sup>12</sup>
- **Setting political agendas at national levels** – for example in Turkey, homosexuality is not illegal, but the ruling party won the election on a conservative Islamist platform of ‘protecting family values’. Pride marches have been banned since 2015, and security forces ordered to suppress activity that supports the movement, leading to violent police suppression of LGBTQI+ activists.<sup>13</sup>
- **Forging space for anti-gender actors within multilateral and state institutions** – this includes ultra-conservative political and religious actors working together to espouse the notion of the ‘natural family’ and using it to undermine delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals.<sup>14</sup>
- **Translating anti-gender ideology into laws and public policy** – for instance between 2014 and 2022, lawmakers at the federal, state, and municipal levels in Brazil introduced over 200 legislative proposals to ban ‘gender ideology’ and ‘indoctrination’ of children with information related to gender and sexuality in Brazilian schools.<sup>15</sup>
- **Undermining women’s economic rights with austerity measures** – for example in Argentina, severe austerity policies, intensified under an IMF loan of US\$50 billion in 2018, leading to huge cuts in basic public services.<sup>16</sup> As part of the package, reforms to the pension system removed benefit entitlements for those who hadn’t met contribution requirements, disproportionately affecting women who, prior to the cuts, made up 75 per cent of beneficiaries of this scheme.<sup>17</sup> These austerity measures also directly impacted gender-specific spending, with the 2019 austerity budget showing a 19 per cent overall decrease in spending for gender-focused programmes.<sup>18</sup>

## 2. From global to local – rollback and its impacts

### 2.1 Attacks on rights in multilateral spaces

The United Nations has long been the site of attempted rollbacks on human rights. Regressive actors including ultra-conservative states and conservative religious actors, have come together in initiatives to delegitimise and undermine international human rights norms.<sup>19</sup> Anti-gender movements seek to create exemptions for states from human rights laws and norms with which they disagree, effectively reversing an international understanding of human rights as indivisible, interdependent, inalienable, and universal.<sup>20</sup> Consistently at sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), feminists report that anti-gender organising includes tactics that aim to dismantle human rights language, introduce discriminatory terms, and disrupt proceedings in an endeavour to weaken the rights of both women and trans people. As an example, during the 63rd session of CSW in 2019, Family Watch International organised an event with Qatar, The Gambia, and Pakistan titled ‘Social Protection: Enhancing Family Dynamics for Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment’. Despite the rights-oriented language in the event’s title, its primary focus was on the perceived link between ‘traditional families’ (defined narrowly as heterosexual and cisgender) and prosperous nations. During the event, it was asserted that families with two parents (a man and a woman, implicitly assuming cisgender identities) lead to the strength of children and the overall wealth of nations.<sup>21</sup>

Alongside efforts to weaken human rights provisions, feminists have also highlighted the prevalence of ‘discourse capture’ by regressive actors in international spaces. Discourse capture involves “the intentional resignification, shifting, mimicking, or twisting of existing concepts and terminologies, with the result that their dominant meaning and ideological underpinnings are altered, or replaced”.<sup>22</sup> Organisations motivated by ultra-conservative religious views have framed their anti-rights rhetoric in positive terms, positioning themselves as defenders of family values. By positioning the family, with heteronormative marriage at its core, as a universal basis of civilisation, they, in turn, argue it as the basis of sustainable development.<sup>23</sup>

Much time and energy are invested by feminist activists and civil society organisations who regularly collaborate with progressive governments and allies to counter attacks on rights in an attempt to prevent rollback. This is energy that could be spent advancing rights, rather than simply trying to stop their degradation.<sup>24</sup> The work involved is evidenced by a global umbrella organisation, the Association of Women’s Rights in Development (AWID), which has dedicated a Rights At Risk Resource Library to support feminists mobilising in this area.<sup>25</sup>

Also part of the problem is the lack of coherence among donors, where governments who appear committed to combat rollback on some aspects of women’s rights nonetheless support policy measures that will undermine rights in other areas. One particularly stark example is the continued support for IMF austerity measures and the reduction of public spending. The repercussions of such policies disproportionately affect women’s economic rights, disadvantaging them threefold: loss of access to public services and loss of decent work opportunities, given women are often employed in the public sector, as well as bearing the

brunt of the resulting rise of unpaid care work as households compensate for reduced public services – all amounting to a rollback of women’s economic rights.<sup>26</sup>

There are also cases where bilateral donors ostensibly opposed to rollback are nevertheless continuing to fund organisations responsible for anti-gender initiatives. For example, recent scrutiny of data provided to the International Aid Transparency Initiative has also raised alarming flags about UK Aid funding to groups in Uganda that purport to work addressing violence against women and girls but espouse dangerous anti-rights agendas.<sup>27</sup> More than GB£134,000 was provided between 2021 and 2022 by the Foreign Development and Commonwealth Office (FCDO) to the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda, which openly works to influence the Ugandan government with an anti-homosexuality agenda.<sup>28</sup>

## 2.2 Regressive action at national level

The trend of rollback on rights can be seen at national level across many countries in the Global North and Global South. In Poland, where ministers have opposed the Istanbul Convention, there has been a growing and targeted opposition to abortion rights, divorce, and comprehensive sexuality education.<sup>29</sup> Feminism and the LGBTQI+ movement, in Poland as elsewhere, are deemed to be in direct opposition to family values. In Brazil, gains for the LGBTQI+ community have included equal marriage (2013) and legal name and gender changes for trans people (2018). However, the shift to conservative politics and a growing backlash after 2017, saw the government remove all mention of gender identity from the national curriculum alongside pushback against any teaching of gender diversity and sexual orientation in schools.<sup>30</sup> In Afghanistan, the Taliban have imposed devastating restrictions on the rights of girls to access school, on women’s freedom of movement and right to work, and their right to peaceful assembly. In September 2021, the Taliban dismantled the Ministry for Women’s Affairs and transformed it into the Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, which enforces regulations on citizen conduct, including women’s clothing and freedom of movement. Shelters that previously supported women survivors of domestic abuse have closed and some women have been relocated to prisons.<sup>31</sup>

Increasing attacks on civil space more generally also impact the ability of feminist movements to organise and assemble, which are intrinsic to protecting against rollback. According to the Civicus Monitor Watchlist of February 2023, there are serious concerns about attacks on civic space in Cambodia, Iran, Sudan, Peru and Zimbabwe.<sup>32</sup> In January 2023 for instance, Zimbabwean authorities announced that they had revoked the registration of 291 nongovernmental and civil society organisations for “noncompliance with the provisions of Private Voluntary Organisation Act”, throwing into question the ability of civil society to participate in monitoring the 2023 electoral process.<sup>33</sup> It is important to note that the rollback of rights is not only associated with fragile or conflict-affected states, nor does it occur exclusively in the Global South. The United Kingdom, for example, has been downgraded by the Civicus Monitor Watchlist from ‘narrowed’ to ‘obstructed’, following the introduction of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act and the Public Order Bill, which give new powers to the police and Home Secretary. As well as regressive legislation, the report emphasises that climate and anti-racism protesters are targeted by police, with legal observers experiencing high levels of intimidation, harassment and aggression.<sup>34</sup>

## 2.3 Impacts on the lives of women and girls

Whilst rollback is conceptualised and pushed at international and national levels, it is *felt* very concretely by women and girls around the world.

SRHR advocates have been at the forefront of resisting rollback, defending the right to safe abortion and comprehensive sexuality education in the face of consistent and organised attacks that increase maternal morbidity and mortality, and directly deny women's bodily autonomy. This backlash has been felt acutely by young women and LGBTQI+ young people in particular who challenge gender norms or the status quo.<sup>35</sup>

Rollback on SRHR is comparatively well documented, and there is much to learn from feminists and activists who continue to act in resistance. This paper does not duplicate that work but instead examines how rollback is being experienced across a range of other women's and girls' rights. The existence of rollback is prevalent across the three other areas of focus in the UK government's International Women and Girls Strategy, namely **women's economic empowerment/justice**, **political and social empowerment** and **violence against women and girls**.

### Women's economic justice

The global rollback on women's and girls' rights extends to their economic rights. The deployment of austerity policies in particular has perpetuated and enabled a regressive environment of rollback. The UN High Commissioner on Human Rights published a report in 2013 on the impacts of austerity measures on human rights.<sup>36</sup> It found that: "the ability of individuals to exercise their human rights, and that of States to fulfil their obligations to protect those rights, has been diminished. This is particularly true for the most marginalised groups in society, including women, children, minorities, migrants and those living in extreme poverty, who suffer from decreasing access to work and social welfare programmes, and reduced affordability of food, housing, water, medical care and other basic necessities."<sup>37</sup>

The focus of current austerity packages tends to include social protection reforms, cuts in public sector jobs and pay, regressive consumer taxes, as well as privatising public assets and the increased use of Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs), all of which reduce the accessibility of critical public services that support the realisation of rights. Labour flexibilisation and liberalisation of trade and investment rules further reduce labour protection and workers' rights, particularly for women overrepresented in the informal sector. Due to existing discriminations within the global economy and their role as front-line responders, women's rights are particularly under threat from regressive economic policies.<sup>38</sup>

Oxfam conceptualises austerity as an instrument of gender-based economic violence, "with structural and systemic policy and political choices skewed in favour of the richest and most powerful people – usually men – resulting in direct harm to the vast majority of people around the world".<sup>39</sup> This leads to the inequalities and discrimination felt in women's daily lives, including the gender pay gap, the undervaluing of care work, insufficient investment in care infrastructure, the existence of the glass ceiling, women's time poverty, limited access to social services, and the prevalence of violence against women and girls.

In addition, according to research by the Fraser Institute on the Gender Disparity Index, 54 countries imposed greater restrictions on women's economic rights between 2016 and 2018. These included restrictions on the types of occupation women are permitted to undertake, restrictions on property ownership and inheritance, and on obtaining ID cards and passports, and in certain cases, restrictions on women's ability to open a bank account.<sup>40</sup>

Feminists are calling for the rejection of austerity policies across the world, advocating for the implementation of progressive taxation regimes, wealth taxes, sustainable debt solutions and reformation of global tax rules instead to generate much-needed fiscal space for the provision of gender-transformative public services countering the rollback of women's economic justice and rights.<sup>41</sup>

## Rollback of women's rights as workers: case study from Bangladesh<sup>42</sup>

Women's and workers' rights activists who campaign to protect and extend their rights regularly face backlash, intimidation, and state-sanctioned consequences.

The Bangladesh Garment Workers' Solidarity (BGWS) is a labour rights organisation that fights for the rights of workers in the Ready-Made Garment sector. Women make up the majority of garment workers, with 60.8% of all working women in Bangladesh being employed in the sector. The Ready-Made Garment sector is characterised by poor working conditions, low wages, irregular wage payment, extended working hours and lack of job security. High-profile tragedies, from the Saraka Garment fire incident in 1990 to Rana Plaza collapse in 2013, where over a thousand workers lost their lives, provide vivid examples of poor working conditions.

BGWS campaigns for improved livelihoods, safety of workers, a safe work environment, injury compensation, punishment of labour rights violators and trade union rights. The organisation's primary focus is to increase the minimum wage of Ready-Made Garment workers to an amount which will ensure better living standards. The current living wage is insufficient to maintain a basic standard of living and has not risen in the last 3 years.

Physical attack by the police during protest marches or sit-in protests is a common form of backlash faced by BGWS as well as other trade unions in Bangladesh. Although the Bangladesh Labour Act (amended 2013) promotes freedom of association, trade union registration remains highly politicised and BGWS has been denied registration multiple times. Moreover, the union leaders are under constant surveillance by the state and the market owners. Furthermore, due to the restrictive gender norms, women workers are not encouraged and even sometimes prohibited from joining trade unions by their families.

### Political and social empowerment

African feminists have identified that gains in political representation and democratisation are in reverse.<sup>43</sup> Advances in women's political participation, including through the use of quota systems and other affirmative action have been met with sustained undermining and backlash.<sup>44</sup> A survey of women parliamentarians in 39 countries by the Inter-Parliamentary

Union in 2016 revealed that 82 per cent reported experiencing psychological violence, 25 per cent had been subjected to physical violence and 20 per cent to sexual violence.<sup>45</sup> As of July 2023, women made up only 26.6 per cent of parliamentary seats worldwide.<sup>46</sup> Evidence suggests that deliberate rollback on women's political participation is a key factor in the slow progress and originates in women's own families and communities, the state and the rise of right-wing populist movements and parties.<sup>47</sup> As Mbalehle Matandela writes: "Women as decision-makers are often side-lined or not given substantive power in post-independence policy processes that affect gender roles and their livelihoods. Instead, patriarchy limits women to using their agency reactively in order to respond to policy development from the periphery".<sup>48</sup>

As well as formal political leadership, women's activism and civil society leadership are regularly met with hostility and violence. Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) across the world are targeted by extremists and experience threats, violence and murder, as a result of their work to defend and protect women's rights. Latin American feminists in particular have documented the way they face sustained backlash and threats, with one report in 2020 citing Latin America as the most dangerous region in the world to defend human rights.<sup>49</sup>

## Gender quotas and the rollback on women's political empowerment: a case study from Kenya<sup>50</sup>

In line with over 120 countries that have adopted gender quotas to promote women's political participation, Kenya's constitution of 2010 mandated that neither men nor women could hold more than two-thirds of positions in any elected or appointed body.<sup>51</sup>

Despite vigorous and sustained organising by women's movements and some initial gains in women's representation following the 2022 general elections, women make up only 21 per cent of Kenya's national parliament, still 12 per cent lower than the constitutionally mandated 33 per cent representation quota.<sup>52</sup>

As women have entered (or aspired to enter) traditionally male-dominated spaces in Kenya, there has been a renewed determination to limit women's space to operate and to reinforce the status quo. As Berry, Bouka and Kamuru's research reveals: "this 'renewed' attention suggests a reactivation of patriarchal efforts to police women's bodies and rights through whatever means possible, rather than simply a continuation of ongoing patterns of violence".<sup>53</sup> Backlash against women's political empowerment, and women's rights more broadly, has increased in Kenya in the face of efforts to advance these rights.

This backlash takes various forms, targeting women who seek political office or engage in official political spheres. It often involves verbal or physical violence, with the intention of excluding individual women from spaces that were historically dominated by men. Aspiring women politicians describe misogyny and violence as 'the cost of engagement', and women in Kenya face alarmingly high rates of violence when they run for office, as well as after they are elected.

Kenyan women in politics reported regularly being publicly accused of being 'loose women', 'prostitutes' and 'adulterers'. This abuse is often backed up by hostile media, who perpetuate and validate these assaults and the space offered by social media for



coordinated attacks. Media outlets have become notorious for publishing doctored photographs of women naked or with men they are rumoured to be having affairs with, which are then widely shared online. As described by Liz Njue, candidate for County Assembly: “We want women in politics, we want more women to get these political seats. But how are they going to get them if they are humiliated?”<sup>54</sup> Analysis of the framing of media coverage of women candidates and politicians in the run-up and following the 2017 election in Kenya showed that in two mainstream newspapers, 39 per cent of coverage was negative, compared to 47.4 per cent deemed as neutral, and just 13.6 per cent positive.<sup>55</sup>

Physical violence is commonplace when running for office and does not abate once elected. A woman Member of the County Assembly (MCA) from Kisumu recounted how she faced assault from a male colleague while advocating for office space and staff. A woman MCA with disabilities, elected to office in Kilifi, experienced a male colleague grabbing her by the neck and lifting her off the ground just outside the assembly hall. In a disturbing case from 2016, a male member of the Nairobi County Assembly violently slammed MCA Elizabeth Manyala's head into a wall when she refused to reallocate funding for his personal project. The severity of the attack resulted in her hospitalisation with extensive head and neck injuries.

These examples of violent backlash against women who seek public office have direct consequences on the numbers of women who will stand for election, and more widespread impacts beyond political circles, sending a devastating message to women across society who dare to use their voice, assert their rights, or make autonomous decisions.

## Ending violence against women and girls

Violence against women and girls (also termed by many as gender-based violence) is both a direct tool of rollback and a consequence of it. Accurate assessment of trends is hindered by the widespread underreporting of violence, especially in cases of domestic abuse. However, as well as the upward trajectory in incidents of violence against women politicians, attacks on women human rights defenders, feminist activists within civil society, and women employed within government bureaucracies are on the rise.<sup>56</sup> Recent findings from the real-time violence monitoring group, the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), reveal that instances of disproportionate force used by public authorities to quell 'demonstration events' primarily led by women, such as political protests, have exceeded those where such demonstrations were male-dominated.<sup>57</sup>

The implementation of laws to address violence against women and girls can be subject to intense rollback. In Europe, states have been slow to ratify the Istanbul Convention, and Turkey has even rescinded its ratification. Much of the resistance has been linked to a stated need to protect so-called 'family values', and contested meanings of the term gender.<sup>58</sup> In Bulgaria, in response to pressure from 'anti-gender' politicians, proposed amendments to domestic violence legislation were watered down to restrict provisions to 'relationships between men and women' and require that any relationship is 'lasting' and has been in existence for at least 60 days.<sup>59</sup>

Beyond the ratification, or not, of international conventions, national laws that prosecute, prevent and respond to violence against women and girls can remain little but paper instruments and spend years with no meaningful implementation, resulting in effective rollback. Firstly, those responsible for enforcing these laws often fail to follow required procedures, including handling women's reports of violence, providing necessary protective measures and enforcing court orders. Secondly, there are significant shortcomings in violence against women and girls-related infrastructure and services, such as shelters, counselling, legal aid and appropriate detention facilities for perpetrators. Thirdly, women seeking justice and support often encounter mistreatment, blame, disbelief, or discouragement when accessing services.<sup>60</sup>

Violence against women, particularly women leaders, activists, journalists and politicians is increasingly taking place in the online world, through social media targeting. Research by the Countering Backlash programme examined online violence against prominent women in Bangladesh over a five-month period in 2021.<sup>61</sup> It found sustained attacks online, including through tactics of name-calling, sexually explicit hate comments, rape threats, sexually fabricated photographs, religious and moral judgements, delegitimising and trivialising. Organisations, particularly feminist and women's rights organisations, face intense rollback and resistance when working on the prevention of violence against women and girls. UN Women has identified different types of resistance outlined below, ranging from passive to active and covert to overt.

Type of resistance <sup>62</sup>	Description
Omission	The exclusion of violence against women and girls and the experiences of women and girls, for example from laws and policies.
Denial	Denying that violence against women and girls is an issue.
Disavowal	Abdicating responsibility for taking action around violence against women and girls.
Inaction	Lack of action to tackle violence against women and girls.
Appeasement	Appeasing those working to dismantle violence against women and girls in order to limit their impact.
Appropriation	Overtly advocating against violence against women and girls but covertly attempting to undermine it.
Co-option	Using progressive feminist language to preserve the status quo.
Repression	Suppressing change initiatives to dismantle them.
Violence	Using violence to harass and subjugate groups at risk of violence against women and girls or working to end violence against women and girls.

## Pushback against women's rights organisations working to prevent violence against women and girls: a case from Pakistan<sup>63</sup>

Shirkat Gah began as a women's collective in 1975 and has become a leading national organisation for the advancement of women's rights in Pakistan. Funded by the UN Trust

Fund to End Violence Against Women and Girls, Shirkat Gah implemented a project between 2017 and 2020 in 40 rural communities to shift attitudes and prevent violence against women and girls. The project established 657 action groups, assisted 223 women to access the justice system and led to pledges from 3,157 households to be violence-free, reaching 11,450 women and girls. Throughout the project, Shirkat Gah experienced backlash, along a spectrum of passive and active and covert and overt methods. In response, the organisation had to adapt and find new ways to engage with power structures, community leaders and organisations.

Types of backlash included many of those identified by UN Women (see above):

**Omission** – many women faced a lack of documentation (for instance certificates, identity cards) required to access services for survivors of violence, and to pursue justice, placing them at significant disadvantage in pursuing their human rights.

**Denial** – particularly at community level, women’s ability to resist violence was hindered by deep-rooted patriarchal values that normalised violence. Violence against women and girls is often perceived as a private issue that falls beyond the realm of external intervention.

**Appeasement** – community and religious leaders, who appeared to be supportive of preventing violence against women and girls resisted certain aspects of the programmes and often couched their resistance in cultural terms.

**Appropriation** – the engagement of powerful community members had to be carefully managed to keep them on board and ensure they do not gatekeep or derail the progress of the project.

**Repression** – Shirkat Gah’s operations faced constant inquiry and surveillance from local government offices. Its project staff and office bearers were repeatedly called for inspection of their permissions, to check their paperwork and to ensure government offices remained in the loop.

As a result of the backlash against them, Shirkat Gah staff modified their activities and worked in less high-profile ways. For instance, they removed material publicising the organisation from communications and carried out its training and activities in lesser-known and less visible venues. They developed specific mitigation strategies to counter community resistance, including identifying and training male allies and finding new ways to engage collaboratively with local leaders. They included specific training for community mobilisers and field trainers on how to manage important members of a community during programme activities. Entry points to and framing of the issue of ending violence against women and girls were adapted from overtly focused on power and gender inequality, to more ‘acceptable’ issues of healthcare, education or economic empowerment, leading to a dialling down of visible feminist intent, although feminist commitment remained a key driver.

### 3. Suggestions for action by the UK government

The commitment in the International Women and Girls Strategy to countering rollback is a welcome recognition and intention to act against attacks on women’s and girls’ fundamental

rights and freedoms. For the UK's role to be meaningful and impactful, it will need to conceptualise rollback as including attacks on the whole range of rights; to incorporate rollback into the plans of the FCDO's diplomatic missions in Official Development Assistance (ODA) and non-ODA eligible countries and put in place an adaptable, funded programme of action. Given the context of decolonisation, this programme of action must deliberately and explicitly consider where the UK leveraging its international diplomatic power is both effective and legitimate – and where it is not – and work closely and accountably with other state and non-state actors on this agenda.

This section offers suggestions and areas for enquiry and development as the FCDO takes forward its important commitments to resisting rollback. Recognising the need for further consultation and joint action, they are presented as possible areas for exploration rather than a list of concrete recommendations. The following proposals for discussion are grouped into four main areas: international action; research and evidence; internal systems; and supporting women's rights organisations and movements. These areas are interdependent and interconnected, reflecting the holistic approach required to tackle rollback.

### 3.1 International action with progressive partners

Driving the conversation to uphold and advance women's rights globally is integral to the goals of the International Women and Girls Strategy. There is a key opportunity to work with progressive governments on a plan of action, with tangible outcomes and impacts, while considering where the UK leveraging its international diplomatic power is effective and legitimate given the context of decolonisation.

- Broaden the conceptualisation of rollback, building out from important work carried out to protect sexual and reproductive health and rights, to a more holistic understanding of the impacts of rollback on other key gender equality issues.
- Track, anticipate and counter attempts to rollback on human rights discourse and provision in multilateral spaces, including the United Nations bodies and processes, Group of Seven (G7) and Group of 20 (G20) processes, as well as within International Financial Institutions.
- Protect progressive consensus on human rights at multilateral levels. Convene allied governments and use diplomatic channels to reach out to middle-ground governments, emphasising UK commitment to protecting and advancing women's human rights.
- Ensure that international commitment to combat rollback on rights is reflected in domestic policy to ensure policy coherence, including addressing concerns on rollback of civil society space and rights to organise and protest in the UK.

### 3.2 Research, evidence and learning

The International Women and Girls Strategy has a wide-ranging commitment to research and evidence: Goal 3 commits the UK government to a new 'Expertise, Evidence and Research Offer'. There is an opportunity to include countering rollback as a vital element of this Goal.

- Build a global evidence base of what works in countering rollback (in all its forms), working specifically to document the strategies and experiences of women's rights and civil society organisations working at all levels, including across countries and regions of the Global South.

- Make funding available to feminist movements and women's rights organisations for the development and documenting of tools, strategies and lessons learned from their struggles against rollback.
- Base research on practice evidence, supporting collaborations between academics and practitioners to move beyond theory to an accessible and useable set of data, evidence and tools.
- Make research, evidence and tools to counter rollback accessible, in a wide variety of multi-media formats, and make them freely available to feminist activists.
- Convene and fund regional learning exchanges between civil society organisations working on women's and LGBTQI+ rights, to strengthen regional ties and promote learning and transnational analysis, action and activism.

### 3.3 Strengthen FCDO internal systems on gender equality and countering rollback

Understanding and analysis of rollback needs to be integral to the championing of women's and girls' rights within the department's response to the Integrated Review. To meaningfully address rollback, there needs to be a shift in systems and internal capacity, with leadership from senior levels.

- Mainstream work to combat rollback into the response to the Integrated Review as an integral part of the UK's role in addressing global challenges.
- Ensure that all Posts have an objective around the advancement of women's and girls' rights as part of their country business plan, and where possible link this to combatting rollback.
- Use the FCDO International Academy and other methods to increase understanding amongst FCDO officers and diplomats about rollback, how to spot it, how to challenge it and how to work creatively with civil society, feminist organisations and other interested parties to combat it.
- See combatting rollback and promoting and protecting women's rights as integral to the work of every FCDO officer and diplomat, using the collective resource of the FCDO's people and its convening power to ensure that the issue is regularly raised with relevant interlocutors.
- Take a more proactive approach to 'do no harm'. This should include robust due diligence processes and review of structures to ensure that current funding is not unintentionally going to organisations that support the rollback of gender equality and LGBTQI+ rights.

### 3.4 Supporting women's rights organisations and movements to counter rollback

Feminist movements and women's rights organisations have long been on the front lines of countering rollback, at high personal and organisational cost. Building on the UK's welcome support to women's rights organisations through the Equality Fund<sup>64</sup>, continued financial and political support to feminist activists is one of the most effective ways of countering rollback.

- Continue to provide and build financial and political support to women's rights organisations, engaging with feminist activists from global to local levels, and centring their priorities and demands in any international campaign and diplomacy.

- Ensure that funding for women’s rights organisations includes flexible, generous funding to counter rollback and support the safety, security and wellbeing of staff engaged in resisting backlash.
- Ensure representatives from a wide range of feminist civil society organisations can be heard in international fora and that their experience and lessons in countering backlash are meaningfully supported and learnt from.
- Where rollback on civic space is being encountered at national level, listen to the needs of feminists and women’s rights organisations and aim to broker a widening of space through diplomatic engagement.

---

<sup>1</sup> See for instance: McEwen, H. and L. Narayanaswamy. 2023. ‘The International Anti-Gender Movement Understanding the Rise of Anti-Gender Discourses in the Context of Development, Human Rights and Social Protection’, UNRISD. <https://www.unrisd.org/en/library/publications/the-international-anti-gender-movement-understanding-the-rise-of-anti-gender-discourses-in-the-conte>; Capraro, C., L. Webster and J. Woodroffe. 2017. ‘Standing with the Changemakers’. Womankind Worldwide. [https://www.womankind.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Womankind\\_Changemakers\\_FINALPDF.pdf](https://www.womankind.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Womankind_Changemakers_FINALPDF.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. 2023. ‘International Women and Girls Strategy 2023 – 2028’. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/international-women-and-girls-strategy-2023-to-2030>

<sup>3</sup> Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office 2023

<sup>4</sup> Just Associates. We Rise toolkit. <https://werise-toolkit.org/en/toolkit>

<sup>5</sup> Feminist Centre for Racial Justice. 2023. ‘Feminist popular education and Movement Building Schools with JASS’, FCRJ Podcast. <https://www.thefeministcentre.org/en/podcasts/episode-2/>

<sup>6</sup> For a more detailed overview of anti-rights movements and how they are organised and funded, please see The Observatory on the Universality of Human Rights, 2022. ‘Rights at Risk, A Primer’. [https://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/2022-01/rights\\_at\\_risk\\_primer\\_2021%20%281%29.pdf](https://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/2022-01/rights_at_risk_primer_2021%20%281%29.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> The Observatory on the Universality of Human Rights 2022

<sup>8</sup> Equal Rights Coalition. 2022. ‘Briefing note: Research on and Response to Contemporary Anti-Gender Movements’. <https://equalrightscalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Anti-Gender-Background-Paper-ERC-Conference-Material-EN.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Denkovski, D., N. Bernarding and K. Lunz. 2021. ‘Power Over Rights: Understanding and Countering the Anti-Gender Campaigns Volume I’, Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy. [https://centreforffp.net/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/PowerOverRights\\_Volume1\\_web.pdf](https://centreforffp.net/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/PowerOverRights_Volume1_web.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Equal Rights Coalition 2022

<sup>11</sup> “The Istanbul Convention is formally known as the ‘Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence’. It was adopted by the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers on 7 April 2011 and opened for signature on 11 May 2011 at a session in Istanbul.” See Coleman, C. 2022. ‘Istanbul Convention: Preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence’, House of Lords Library. <https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/istanbul-convention-preventing-and-combating-violence-against-women-and-domestic-violence/>

<sup>12</sup> Genç, K. 2021. ‘Turkey withdraws from treaty on violence against women’, The Lancet. 397(10283): 1433-1434. [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(21\)00837-0/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(21)00837-0/fulltext)

<sup>13</sup> Poyrazlar, E. 2023. ‘LGBTQ+ volleyball champion hits a nerve in Turkey’s culture war’, Politico, 5 September. <https://www.politico.eu/article/lgbtq-volleyball-karakurt-champion-backlash-turkey-erdogan-culture-war/>

- <sup>14</sup> McEwen and Narayanaswamy 2023
- <sup>15</sup> Cabrera, C. 2022. "I Became Scared, This Was Their Goal" Efforts to Ban Gender and Sexuality Education in Brazil', Human Rights Watch. [https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media\\_2022/05/brazil\\_lgbt0522\\_web.pdf](https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2022/05/brazil_lgbt0522_web.pdf)
- <sup>16</sup> Brunswijck, G. 2018. 'Argentina: more lending guarantees creeping austerity', Eurodad, 31 October. <https://www.eurodad.org/argentina-lending-guarantees>; Woodroffe, J. and P. Meeks. 2019. 'Push no one behind: How current economic policy exacerbates gender inequality', Gender and Development Network and FEMNET. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/536c4ee8e4b0b60bc6ca7c74/t/5d15f88d4edf8e0001281406/1561720979675/PNOB+briefing+FINAL+July+2019.pdf>
- <sup>17</sup> Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales. 2018. 'The state of economic, social and cultural rights in Argentina'. [https://www.cels.org.ar/web/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/reportsESCR.final\\_.pdf](https://www.cels.org.ar/web/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/reportsESCR.final_.pdf)
- <sup>18</sup> Centro de Economía Política Argentina. 2018. 'El impacto del ajuste en las mujeres: la dinámica del empleo y el Presupuesto 2019', 19 October. <https://centrocepa.com.ar/informes/110-el-impacto-del-ajuste-en-las-mujeres-la-dinamica-del-empleo-y-el-presupuesto-2019.html>
- <sup>19</sup> Shameem, N. 2021. 'Rights at Risk: Time for Action. Observatory on the Universality of Rights Trends Report 2021', AWID. <https://www.awid.org/ours-2021>
- <sup>20</sup> Equal Rights Coalition 2022
- <sup>21</sup> Shameem, N. 2021. 'Rights at Risk: Time for Action. Observatory on the Universality of Rights Trends Report 2021', AWID. <https://www.awid.org/ours-2021>
- <sup>22</sup> Lewin, T. 2021. 'Nothing is as it seems: discourse capture and backlash politics'. Gender and Development, 29.2-3, 253-268. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13552074.2021.1977047>
- <sup>23</sup> McEwen and Narayanaswamy 2023
- <sup>24</sup> See for instance: Soler, D.G., and N. Alabao. 2021. 'Challenging the Future: Co-inspiring Change. Attacks on democracy in Europe and Latin America. Feminist Voices', Mama Cash. <https://www.mamacash.org/en/challenging-the-future-co-inspiring-change-attacks-on-democracy-in-europe-and-latin-america-feminist-voices>
- <sup>25</sup> AWID. 'Rights at Risk Resource Library'. <https://www.awid.org/rights-risk-resource-library>
- <sup>26</sup> United Nations. 2013. 'Extreme poverty and human rights: Report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights'. <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N13/422/71/PDF/N1342271.pdf?OpenElement>; Woodroffe, J. 2020. 'Warning: May Contain Austerity – How the international response to Covid-19 threatens a return to austerity measures that undermine women's rights', Gender and Development Network and Brettonwoods Project. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/536c4ee8e4b0b60bc6ca7c74/t/5fdbacd3aed12262128fa41b/1608232178135/Warning%3A+May+Contain+Austerity.pdf>
- <sup>27</sup> Provost, C. 2023. 'Progressive Cash for the Anti-LGBTQI Backlash', The Institute for Journalism and Social Change. [https://centreforfeministforeignpolicy.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Progressive-cash-for-the-anti-LGBTQI-backlash\\_.pdf](https://centreforfeministforeignpolicy.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Progressive-cash-for-the-anti-LGBTQI-backlash_.pdf)
- <sup>28</sup> Davies, L. and S. Johnson. 2023. 'UK government funded anti-LGBTQ+ organisation in Uganda, says report', Guardian Development, 26 April. <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2023/apr/26/uk-government-funding-anti-lgbtq-organisation-in-uganda-says-report>
- <sup>29</sup> McEwen, H. 2020. 'Un/knowning and un/doing sexuality and gender diversity: The global anti-gender movement against SOGIE rights and academic freedom'. SAIH. <https://saih.no/assets/docs/RAPPORT-2020-Web-final-version-Orban-fixed.pdf>
- <sup>30</sup> McEwen 2020
- <sup>31</sup> Human Rights Watch. 2021. 'World Report 2022: Afghanistan chapter'. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/afghanistan#49dda6>
- <sup>32</sup> Civicus. 2023. 'Civicus Monitor Watchlist'. <https://monitor.civicus.org/watchlist/>

- <sup>33</sup> Human Rights Watch. 2023. 'Zimbabwe: A Move to Curb Freedom of Association as Election Nears', Human Rights Watch, 27 January. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/01/27/zimbabwe-move-curb-freedom-association-election-nears>
- <sup>34</sup> Bond. 2023. 'Influential global ranking of civic space downgrades UK to "obstructed"'. <https://www.bond.org.uk/news/2023/03/influential-global-ranking-of-civic-space-downgrades-uk-to-obstructed/>
- <sup>35</sup> Ricker, C. L., K. Matheson and B. Ashmore. 2020. 'Power To Decide: Accelerating adolescent girls' sexual and reproductive health and rights', Plan International UK. [https://plan-uk.org/file/power-to-decide-plan-international-uk-november-2020/download?token=5\\_MCfW0z](https://plan-uk.org/file/power-to-decide-plan-international-uk-november-2020/download?token=5_MCfW0z)
- <sup>36</sup> Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. 2013. 'Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on austerity measures and economic and social rights'. [https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Development/RightsCrisis/E-2013-82\\_en.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Development/RightsCrisis/E-2013-82_en.pdf)
- <sup>37</sup> Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights 2013
- <sup>38</sup> Woodroffe, J. 2020. 'Warning: May Contain Austerity – How the international response to Covid-19 threatens a return to austerity measures that undermine women's rights', Gender and Development Network and Brettonwoods Project. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/536c4ee8e4b0b60bc6ca7c74/t/5fdbacd3aed12262128fa41b/1608232178135/Warning%3A+May+Contain+Austerity.pdf>
- <sup>39</sup> Abed, D. and F. Kelleher. 2023. 'The Assault of Austerity: How prevailing economic policy choices are a form of gender-based violence'. Oxfam. <https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/assault-austerity>
- <sup>40</sup> Fraser Institute. 2020. 'Women's Economic Rights: What's changed and why does it matter?' <https://www.fraserinstitute.org/sites/default/files/women-progress-updated.pdf>
- <sup>41</sup> Nawi - Afrifem Macroeconomics Collective and The African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET). 2023. 'Weaving our Fabric – Framing an African Feminist Public Services Agenda'. <https://www.femnet.org/2023/03/weaving-our-fabric-framing-an-african-feminist-public-services-agenda/>; Asian People's Movement on Debt and Development (APMDD) and Tax & Fiscal Justice Asia. 2022. 'Statement: Asia Days of Action on Tax Justice 2022'. <https://globaltaxjustice.org/libraries/statement-asia-days-of-action-on-tax-justice-2022/>; International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC). 2023. 'IMF/World Bank spring meetings: Bold action for sustainable recovery needed'. <https://www.ituc-csi.org/imf-world-bank-spring-meetings-2023/>; Global Alliance for Tax Justice (GATJ). 2023. 'GDOA Tax Justice for Women's Rights 2023 – Concept note'. <https://globaltaxjustice.org/libraries/gdoa-tax-justice-for-womens-rights-2023-concept-note/>; The Future is Public. 2021. 'Future is Public: Global manifesto for public services'. <https://futureispublic.org/global-manifesto/manifesto-en/>
- <sup>42</sup> Solidarity Centre. 2017. 'Bangladesh: Escalation in Campaign to Silence Garment Workers'. <https://www.solidaritycenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Bangladesh-Escalation-in-campaign-to-silence-garment-workers-2017-01-14.pdf>; Sustaining Power: Women's Struggles against contemporary backlash in South Asia (SuPWR). n.d. 'Bangladesh Garment Workers' Solidarity'. <https://supwr.org/struggles/bangladesh-garment-workers-solidarity/>
- <sup>43</sup> Matandela, M. 2020. 'The Convergence of Patriarchy and Democratic Roll-back in the East and Horn of Africa'. <https://africanfeminism.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Challenging-Patriarchy.pdf>
- <sup>44</sup> Krook, M. and J. Restrepo Sanín. 2020. 'The Cost of Doing Politics? Analyzing Violence and Harassment against Female Politicians', Perspectives on Politics, 18.3, 740-755. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/perspectives-on-politics/article/cost-of-doing-politics-analyzing-violence-and-harassment-against-female-politicians/997569433135FA170B2789C88A48DD17>
- <sup>45</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union. 2016. 'Sexism, harassment and violence against women parliamentarians'. <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/issue-briefs/2016-10/sexism-harassment-and-violence-against-women-parliamentarians>
- <sup>46</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union. <https://www.ipu.org/impact/gender-equality>



- <sup>47</sup> See for instance: Institute of Development Studies seminar. 2021. 'Global perspectives on countering backlash against women in politics'. <https://www.ids.ac.uk/events/global-perspectives-on-countering-backlash-against-women-in-politics/>; Inter-Parliamentary Union. 2016. 'Sexism, harassment and violence against women parliamentarians'. <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/issue-briefs/2016-10/sexism-harassment-and-violence-against-women-parliamentarians>
- <sup>48</sup> Matandela 2020
- <sup>49</sup> Freedom House. 2022. 'Special Report: Defending Latin American Human Rights and Democracy Activists' <https://freedomhouse.org/report/special-report/2022/defending-latin-american-human-rights-and-democracy-activists>
- <sup>50</sup> Case study based on: Berry, M., Y. Bouka and M. M. Kamuru. 2020. 'Implementing Inclusion: Gender Quotas, Inequality, and Backlash in Kenya'. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/339725653\\_Implementing\\_Inclusion\\_Gender\\_Quotas\\_Inequality\\_and\\_Backlash\\_in\\_Kenya](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/339725653_Implementing_Inclusion_Gender_Quotas_Inequality_and_Backlash_in_Kenya)
- <sup>51</sup> Republic of Kenya. 'Constitution of Kenya, 2010'. <https://kdc.go.ke/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Constitution-of-Kenya-2010-min.pdf> as cited in Berry et al. 2020
- <sup>52</sup> Babkir, A. 2023. 'Kenya's Continual Failure to Meet their Two-Thirds Gender Quota'. <https://ohrh.law.ox.ac.uk/kenyas-continual-failure-to-meet-their-two-thirds-gender-quota/> as cited in Berry et al. 2020
- <sup>53</sup> Berry et al. 2020
- <sup>54</sup> Al Jazeera. 2022. News report: 'Ahead of Kenya elections, female politicians face abuse, attacks', Al Jazeera, 1 August. <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2022/8/1/women-candidates-in-kenyan-elections-endure-abuse-and-attacks> as cited in Berry et al. 2020
- <sup>55</sup> Mudavadi, K. 2022. 'Patriarchy and Print Media Coverage in Kenya: an analysis of newspaper framing of women politicians in pre-and-post 2017 general election'. <https://africanfeminism.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Challenging-Patriarchy.pdf> as cited in Berry et al. 2020
- <sup>56</sup> Goetz, A. M. 2019. 'The politics of preserving gender inequality: de-institutionalisation and re-privatisation', Oxford Development Studies, 48.1, 2-17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13600818.2019.1672144>
- <sup>57</sup> Kishi, R., M. Pavlik, and H. Matfess. 2019. "Terribly and Terrifyingly Normal": Political Violence Targeting Women'. <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/resource/terribly-and-terrifyingly-normal-political-violence-targeting-women/>
- <sup>58</sup> Al Jazeera. 2021. 'Anger, condemnation after Turkey exits treaty to protect women', Al Jazeera, 20 March. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/20/turkey-condemned-for-pulling-out-of-treaty-protecting-women>
- <sup>59</sup> Todorov, S. 2023. 'Amendments to Bulgarian Domestic Violence Law Pass after Heated Debate', BalkanInsight, 7 August. <https://balkaninsight.com/2023/08/07/amendments-to-bulgarian-domestic-violence-law-pass-after-heated-debate/>
- <sup>60</sup> Hughes, C. 2017. 'Legislative Wins, Broken Promises: Gaps in implementation of laws on violence against women and girls', Oxfam Canada. <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/legislative-wins-broken-promises-gaps-in-implementation-of-laws-on-violence-aga-620206/>
- <sup>61</sup> Antara, I. 2022. 'Online violence against women – a weapon used to silence and degrade', Institute of Development Studies, 9 March. <https://www.ids.ac.uk/opinions/online-violence-against-women-a-weapon-used-to-silence-and-degrade/>
- <sup>62</sup> Viswanathan, R. 2021. 'Learning from Practice: Resistance and Backlash to Preventing Violence against Women and Girls', United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women. <https://unf.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2021/12/resistance-and-backlash-to-preventing-violence-against-women-and-girls> Adapted from work by Michael Flood et al.
- <sup>63</sup> Case study adapted from information about Shirkat Gah's programme work in: Viswanathan 2021

---

<sup>64</sup> Alongside the International Women and Girls Strategy, the FCDO announced a partnership with the Equality Fund on 8 March 2023 that will deliver 33 million GBP to human rights and women's rights movements via the Equality Fund's grantmaking across the Global South. See: Equality Fund. 2023. 'First-of-its-kind partnership between the UK government and the Equality Fund delivers new resources – and momentum – to feminist movements'. <https://equalityfund.ca/news-releases/first-of-its-kind-partnership-between-the-uk-government-and-the-equality-fund-delivers-new-resources-and-momentum-to-feminist-movements/>

---

## Acknowledgements

This briefing was written by Lee Webster and Yamina Ouldali for the Gender and Development Network (GADN).

GADN is an influential network of UK-based NGOs and experts. Together, we promote gender equality and the rights of women and girls in all their diversity around the world. We collaborate with feminist organisations in the Global South, amplifying their analysis and priorities to global policymakers, and we hold the British government to account for its impact on the rights of women and girls internationally. In everything we do, we aspire to feminist, anti-racist and decolonial principles.

### Gender and Development Network

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

E: [comms@gadnetwork.org](mailto:comms@gadnetwork.org)  
[www.gadnetwork.org](http://www.gadnetwork.org)

Registered charity no. 1140272

### For more information

For more information about GADN, please email the GADN Coordinator at [coordinator@gadnetwork.org](mailto:coordinator@gadnetwork.org)

### Disclaimer

GADN produces a series of briefings for use by our members and others in consultation with our Advisory Group and relevant Working Groups. They do not necessarily represent the views of all our members.