

Generation Equality Forum: An Update

The final part of the Generation Equality Forum (GEF), billed as the centrepiece of the Beijing+25 review process, has now concluded in Paris. Initially scheduled to take place in 2020, the GEF marked almost two years of global discussions about how to commemorate, take stock as well as advance the gains made at the historic [Beijing Conference on Women](#) in 1995.

Critically, the GEF took place against the backdrop of a global pandemic which has further intensified gender inequalities and eroded women's rights – from an exponential rise in women's unpaid care responsibilities to a “shadow pandemic” of gender-based violence, alongside drastic reductions in the provision of basic public services and social protections as the pandemic ensues. Therefore, the GEF's ambitions and commitments are now even more urgent as the world continues to witness the rapid roll back of hard-won gains on gender equality and women's rights.

Following the conclusion of the GEF, this update will provide some background information about the process, what has been achieved and next steps.

1. What is the Generation Equality Forum?

The GEF is 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 (now 26 years), but to also chart a path forward.

Action Coalitions

The core part of the GEF is its ‘Action Coalitions’. These are partnerships across member states, civil society, international organisations, philanthropic organisations and the private sector that aim to accelerate action and make large-scale commitments, between 2020 – 2025, on specific thematic areas outlined within the [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#) (BDPfA). The intention is for these commitments to be realised by 2030 – in line with the conclusion of the Sustainable Development Goals. The six Action Coalitions are:

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

You can find the full list of Action Coalition co-leads [here](#). In addition to these six Action Coalitions, the GEF also includes a Compact for Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action. Although not a formal Action Coalition, it is intended to complement the existing six and further details about the Compact can be found [here](#). The UK government is a co-lead the Gender-Based Violence Action Coalition.

Generation Equality Forum: Mexico City

After a year-long delay caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the GEF commenced in Mexico City on 29 March 2021. The Forum in Mexico City saw the unveiling of the Action Coalitions' draft blueprints: [A Global Acceleration Plan for Gender Equality](#). The blueprint sets out how each Action Coalition will work to accelerate progress towards achieving gender equality.

2. Generation Equality Forum: Paris

The GEF in Paris was billed as the occasion for all stakeholders to make major commitments, following the announcement of the Action Coalitions' blueprints in Mexico City. The event kicked off on 30 June 2021 with a packed [programme](#) structured around seven key themes. While it was largely a virtual event, with over 40,000 virtual attendees registered, some sessions were conducted in-person. Below are some of the key developments from the GEF in Paris.

Political and funding commitments

Funding commitments

The GEF is projected to raise [US\\$40 billion of new investments](#) for advancing gender equality, including US\$17 billion in government commitments. This represents the largest ever collection of resources for addressing global gender inequality. The lack of resources is identified as one of the key impediments for realising the bold ambitions laid out in the BDPfA 26 years ago. Box 1 outlines some of the major funding announcements that were made at the opening of the GEF.

Box 1: International funding commitments made by governments, and foundations at the GEF

Canada	\$100 million over the next five years on global projects that address women's unequal care burdens, plus an additional nearly \$80 million in global funding for women and girls.
UK	£67.5 million for a seven year programme to prevent violence against women and girls – the successor of the 'What Works' programme.
Ford Foundation	\$420 million, over the next five years, to tackle threats to women's rights caused by Covid-19. This includes \$167 million in grants.
Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation	\$2.1 billion to advance women's leadership, reproductive health and economic empowerment.
Open Societies Foundation	\$100 over the next five years strengthening feminist-led movements and increasing women's leadership.

Political commitments

The opening ceremony of the GEF included a strong line-up of world leaders and decision-makers making their commitments to for the achievement of gender equality. They included President Emmanuel Macron of France, Mexico's President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, US Vice President Kamala Harris and former US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton. Notably absent was representation from the UK government which, historically, has prided itself in being a world leader on gender equality.

One of the landmark global initiatives to be launched at the GEF was the [Global Alliance for Care](#), led by the National Institute of Women in Mexico in conjunction with UN Women. It is a call to action for all stakeholders to work to alleviate the burden of care which is disproportionately borne by women.

There was also a big push for the ratification of [ILO Convention 190](#) on violence and harassment in the workplace, which came into force on 25 June 2021. It has so far been [ratified](#) by seven countries with others committing to initiate the necessary parliamentary procedures.

Challenges

All around the world, women's rights continue to be eroded, alongside the ever-growing rise of [anti-rights movements](#). From the curtailment of abortion rights in Poland to reports of forced sterilisation of Uyghur women in China. This sits alongside punitive anti-LGBTI legislation in countries like Uganda and Hungary. Further still, Turkey's withdrawal from the [Istanbul Convention](#) – at the same time that the GEF in Paris was convening – threatens to put millions of women and girls at increased risk of violence.

With an estimated US\$40 billion of new financial commitments, questions remain about how this money will be allocated and spent. During the closing ceremony of the GEF, UN Women's Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, announced that the money will be directed to grassroots organisations, member states as well as to UN Women and other UN agencies to scale up their gender equality programming. Concerns still remain about the transparency of this process and the extent to which funds will be allocated to private sector actors.

Commitment makers

At the end of the GEF, governments, CSOs, private sector actors, philanthropic organisations and other key stakeholders are being encouraged to make bold commitments about how *they* will work to advance gender equality across one or more of the six Action Coalitions themes. You can read more about the Commitment Maker process [here](#) and have your organisation develop and submit your own commitments.