



Beijing+30: From Words to Action

THE CRITICAL ROLE OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS FOR ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

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This publication is produced by the Ending Violence against Women Section, Policy Programme and Intergovernmental Division, UN Women, New York, in the framework of the “ACT to End Violence against Women” Programme, funded by the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of UN Women and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.

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ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

UN Women

New York, July 2025

INTRODUCTION

In 1995, 189 governments unanimously adopted the **Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action** (BPfA) as a groundbreaking and far-reaching framework for the achievement of gender equality and the realization of the human rights of women and girls. The commitments made in the Platform for Action were forward thinking for its time, and many of the critical areas of concern identified in the Platform for Action remain pertinent for responding to the complex challenges of today, particularly the commitment to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls.

At the 69th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW69), Member States reaffirmed their commitment to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action through the adoption by consensus of a powerful **Political Declaration**. This Beijing+30 series highlights key normative developments, best practice approaches and case studies of promising initiatives alongside key tools and resources to support implementation. It also highlights critical gaps, challenges and priority actions needed to accelerate efforts to eliminate VAWG.

It also complements and builds on the "**Beijing+30 Action Agenda**", particularly Action 3, For All Women and Girls: Zero Violence and offers evidence-based policy and programmatic solutions for member states who are invited to make concrete and transformative commitments to advance gender equality at the United Nations General Assembly High-Level Meeting on Beijing+30 in September 2025.

ACT to End Violence Against Women Programme

This paper was developed under the ACT to End Violence against Women and Girls programme funded by the EU. ACT is a new game-changing commitment between the European Commission and UN Women as co-leaders of the Action Coalition on Gender Based Violence (GBV), in collaboration with the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women. The **ACT shared advocacy agenda** is elevating the priorities and amplifying the voices of feminist women's rights movements and provides a collaborative framework focused on common priorities, strategies and actions.

To accelerate efforts in eliminating VAWG, ACT is calling for:

1. **Bold investments in prevention and responses to end violence against women and girls (VAWG);**
2. **Strengthened financing, protection and support to women's rights organizations;**
3. **Enhanced accountability, access to justice and the full and effective implementation of laws to prevent and respond to VAWG.**

These advocacy priorities reflect the core demands of the **Beijing+30 Action Agenda** and contribute to collective efforts toward the **High-level Meeting of the General Assembly in September 2025**, where Member States are called upon to make concrete and transformative commitments to advance gender equality.

INTERNATIONAL NORMS AND STANDARDS

International norms and standards highlight the importance of funding and strengthening women's rights movements to end violence against women and girls. In 1995, the **Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action** (BDPfA) recognised the crucial role of women's rights organisations in achieving gender equality, noting that the participation and contribution of all actors of civil society, particularly women's groups and networks and other non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations, with full respect for their autonomy, in cooperation with Governments, are important for the effective implementation of the Platform for Action. Specifically, in relation to ending violence against women and girls (VAWG), Governments were urged to support initiatives of women's organizations and non-governmental organizations all over the world to raise awareness on the issue of violence against women and to contribute to its elimination.

CSW57

Additionally, in 2013, the **Agreed Conclusions of the 57th Commission on the Status of Women** on the elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls recognized the important role of women's organizations, especially those working at the community level, and the need to support such organizations in their work, and ensure their meaningful participation and engagement in the design of policies and legislation, and to inform prevention and response interventions.

CEDAW General Recommendation No. 35

CEDAW General Recommendation No. 35 also recognises the social and political impact of women's organizations, and emphasises the need for legislation, policies and programmes to be developed and evaluated in consultation with women's organizations and feminist movements.

Realizing the vision of the Platform for Action to end violence against women and girls requires supporting and enabling women's rights organizations to play their pivotal role. A study of 70 countries across six continents and four decades found that the presence of a strong and autonomous feminist movement is the single most critical factor to drive policy change in ending violence against women.¹ Countries with the strongest feminist movements, are more likely to have more comprehensive policies on violence against women than those with

weaker or non-existent movements, underscoring the importance of investing in women's rights organizations to eliminate VAWG.² Similarly, research has shown that large-scale reductions in VAWG are possible through multi-sectoral coordinated actions of governments and civil society, and intensive advocacy efforts and media campaigns carried out by feminist organizations.³ A **UNDP-UN Women report on government responses to COVID-19** demonstrated the critical role that feminist mobilization played in driving government responses to VAWG during the pandemic -countries with strong feminist movements adopted on average three more measures addressing VAWG than those that do not.⁴

Yet despite this growing evidence of the critical role of feminist activism in ending violence against women, women's rights organizations and autonomous feminist movements are working in increasingly complex environments and remain severely underfunded with less than one per cent of Official Development Assistance reaching them according to OECD analysis.⁵



PROMISING PRACTICE APPROACHES

There has been growing focus on the role of women's rights organizations in ending VAWG, with evidence showing that large-scale reductions in VAWG are possible through multi-sectoral coordinated actions of governments and civil society, and intensive advocacy efforts and media campaigns carried out by feminist organizations.⁶ Women's rights organizations not only play a key role in advocacy

for policy and legislative change, but also carry deep expertise in the design and delivery of prevention interventions and support services across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, often with an intersectional approach.⁷ Yet in 2023, only 5% of ODA allocated to work on ending violence against women went to women's rights organizations.⁸

There are **five core elements** to creating an enabling environment for women's rights organizations to play their role in ending VAWG:



Investing in the capacity of women's rights organizations through
**QUALITY, CORE, FLEXIBLE,
AND SUSTAINABLE FINANCING**



Ensuring
MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION
of women's rights organizations in the design of policies, legislation,
services and prevention interventions



Strengthening
ACCOUNTABILITY OF GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS
and the private sector to women's rights organizations



Convening and establishing
**SPACES TO FACILITATE FEMINIST MOVEMENT
STRENGTHENING**



Strengthening
**MECHANISMS FOR PREVENTING AND RESPONDING
TO VIOLENCE, ATTACKS AND THREATS**
against feminist, women's rights activists and women human rights
defenders.

Sustainable financing

The **Generation Equality Action Coalition on Gender Based Violence** called for doubling international funding to women's rights organisations, activists and movements and women's funds by 2026. Further, the Action Coalition has also called for an increase in national funding to girl-led and women's rights organisations working to address GBV by \$500,000,000 USD by 2026.

Reaching these commitments requires new approaches to financing, as well as a political commitment to investing in women's rights organizations. Governments, multi-lateral donors and philanthropic donors should review and adjust funding modalities to reach women's rights and feminist organizations more directly. This involves reviewing eligibility criteria to establish a range of funding tranches to reach organizations of different sizes, allowing regranting, and intentionally prioritizing women's rights and feminist organizations from the global South.⁹ Similarly, long-term, core funding, rather than project funding, that organizations can use flexibly to respond to their contexts and take advantage of opportunities, enables women's rights organizations to drive impact. Pooling funding across donors can also minimize risks and create scale and impact in resources.¹⁰



UN WOMEN/MAGFUR RAHMAN SHANA

Promising practices

ACT TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN PROGRAMME

The Advocacy, Coalition Building, and Transformative Feminist Action (ACT) Programme, led by UN Women and the European Commission in collaboration with the UN Trust Fund aims to accelerate efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women through strengthened solidarity and partnerships with women's rights movements.

Building on the good practices of the Spotlight Initiative, the overall aim of ACT is to create an enabling environment for women's rights organizations and to support the leadership and resilience of women's rights movements, their advocacy and campaigning efforts to influence EVAW policy. ACT will achieve its results through direct investments in feminist women's rights organizations to strengthen institutional capacities, resilience, coalition building, networking, and leadership.

The ACT programme is funding more than **30 WROs/coalitions** across Africa and Latin America to strengthen their institutional and technical capacities, provide opportunities for feminist organizing and coalition building as well as strengthening their advocacy.

The ACT programme is also coordinating a shared advocacy agenda to elevate the priorities and amplify the voices of feminist women's rights movements from all

corners of the world, providing a collaborative framework focused on common priorities, strategies and actions.

SPOTLIGHT INITIATIVE, UN TRUST FUND TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND THE WOMEN'S PEACE AND HUMANITARIAN FUND

The Spotlight Initiative has prioritized supporting women's rights organizations and movements as a core strategy to end violence against women and girls. Supporting women's rights organizations is a central pillar of its theory of change. To ensure that a significant proportion of funding reaches grassroots communities, the UN Spotlight Initiative partnered with two global funds, the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women (UN Trust Fund) and the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF).

The UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women provides multi-year grants that prioritise funding to smaller and grassroots organisations to initiatives that address, reduce or eliminate violence against women and girls. The UN Trust Fund also prioritizes capacity strengthening. The Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund gives grants to support women and women's rights organisations that work on conflict and crises, support the prevention of sexual and gender- based violence and promote peace in their communities.

Meaningful engagement and participation

Ensuring that women's rights organizations, feminist movements and women-led CSOs play a meaningful role in all stages of the design, implementation and evaluation of legislation, policies, and services is critical to ensure that they are informed by the lived experiences of women and girls, and the specialist expertise of organizations working with victim-survivors. The engagement of women's rights organizations on National Action Plans on GBV prevention – including the design, development, implementation and evaluation – has been shown to increase the effectiveness and sustainability of NAPs.¹¹

Specific actions to ensure the meaningful engagement and participation of women's rights organizations include:

- Assembling steering, advisory, and technical committees made up of feminist and women's rights organizations representing diverse experiences and perspectives to inform policies, legislation, programmes and services
- Consulting with diverse women and their organisations to identify key stakeholders that should be involved in consultations
- Ensuring women and girls most marginalised by poverty, race, age, disability, sexual orientation, class, gender identity, and nationality are included, with specific trauma-informed processes and support for victim-survivors
- Providing support - both practical and financial - to enable participation, for example stipends and fees for participants, travel costs, and support for caring responsibilities.

Accountability of government institutions to women's rights organizations

Accountable institutions compel those in power to listen to and answer the claims of all rights holders, particularly those that have been historically marginalized. When they function effectively, accountable institutions enable women not only to see their claims and rights reflected in policy solutions, but also to monitor the performance of governments, offer feedback, and seek explanations or redress when necessary.

Specific actions to strengthen the accountability of governments include:

- Establishing formal channels for women's rights organizations to influence decision-making, including in parliaments and government
- Ensuring representation of women's rights organizations across all areas of decision-making
- Ensuring well-funded and robust national gender equality machineries and national human rights institutions with the appropriate authority to fulfil their role
- Report on the impact and results of government legislation, policies and programmes with transparency and provide opportunities for women's rights organizations to provide feedback and input

Promising practices

INVOLVEMENT OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS IN NATIONAL ACTION PLANS

In Fiji, the development of a NAP on the prevention of VAWG was co-led by the relevant government department and, Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, a WRO specialising in supporting victim-survivors, to ensure a trauma-informed, gender-sensitive and intersectional approach to large-scale prevention efforts. Collaboration between government and CSOs also builds willingness and acceptance of the plan, priming it for success and sustainability.¹²

In South Africa, a committee was established to lead the process of developing a national strategic plan. This group comprised CSOs, representatives from government departments and development partners. Researchers, academics, and international NGOs, and UN agencies including UN Women and UNICEF provided additional support.¹³

Promising Practices

SUPPORT FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS IN EL SALVADOR AND UGANDA TO HOLD INSTITUTIONS TO ACCOUNT

In 2022, the Spotlight Initiative supported the women's rights organisation El Instituto De Estudios de la Mujer in El Salvador to produce a shadow report on the El Salvadoran state's compliance with the recommendations issued by United Nations Treaty Bodies on VAWG. This involved establishing a consultative process to capture diverse perspectives from women and girls in multiple districts. See case study below.

In Uganda, the Spotlight Initiative worked with the National Association of Women's Organisations to advocate for the passage of a new ordinance on the prevention of gender-based violence. The Spotlight Initiative trained 75 women from a variety of women's movements on how to identify and influence duty bearers. Following these efforts, District Community Development Officers committed to prioritising groups of women with disabilities for government programmes.

Spaces to facilitate feminist movement strengthening

Feminist movement building is important for bringing together diverse women's rights organisations and allies to drive change at scale by identifying shared objectives, exchanging knowledge, building networks and sharing resources. There are several ways that governments and donors can strengthen feminist movements:¹⁴

- Creating spaces and supporting convenings, events and networking for knowledge exchange and coalition building, for example establishing a community of practice
- Hosting and facilitating meetings to bring women's rights organizations and decision-makers together
- Removing barriers for women's rights organizations by supporting the cost of participation for women's rights organizations, such as travel costs.

Promising practice

SUPPORT FOR THE PACIFIC FEMINIST COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

In 2021, Spotlight Initiative established the Pacific Feminist Community of Practice (PacFemCOP). This was moderated by DIVA for Equality in Fiji. It involved co-creation of a space and process between 20 civil society organizations and around 80 activists from across the region. Through PacFemCOP, activists were able to document feminist best practice from across the region, including topics such as feminist approaches to gender, ecological and climate justice; elimination of VAWG; how to mobilize, organize and action for change; feminist approaches to economic justice; LGBTIQ+ rights and inclusion; bodily autonomy and integrity; and sexual and reproductive health.

Mechanisms for preventing and responding to violence, attacks and threats against women's rights organizations and activists

Space for civic activism through which women and girls can hold their elected leaders to account has been shrinking rapidly, with restrictions on civic action and actors criminalized in some countries.¹⁵ Increased attacks on human rights defenders are a concern. Between May 2022 and April 2023, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) documented 140 incidents of reprisals and intimidation for cooperation with the United Nations, affecting at least 108 women and girls.¹⁶ Increasing online attacks targeting women human rights defenders, women's rights activists, and women engaged in public life serve to silence women's voices and undermine their participation in public discourse.¹⁷ Online threats, abuse and violence also leads to women's human rights defenders and feminist activists self-limiting or non-participation online, eroding democratic processes and further strengthening misogynistic norms.

Promising policy tools and mechanisms to protect women human rights defenders and their organizations include the adoption of early warning systems that identify risks and threats to their safety. Other strategies include targeted programmes that are developed, implemented and monitored by multi-sectoral mechanisms that guarantee

the prevention of threats and risks, the protection of women human rights defenders, and their access to justice and redress.

Promising practice

THE PASSAGE OF 'LA ESPERANZA PROTOCOL'

Under the Spotlight Initiative, UN Women in collaboration with the Centre for Justice and International Law, in partnership with women's rights organisations, civil society organisations and feminist organizations in Honduras to campaign for the passage of "La Esperanza Protocol". This protocol, adopted in 2021, is now recognised as the international standard for the investigation and response to threats and attacks against human rights defenders. The protocol includes a specific focus on the contribution of women human rights defenders to strengthening democracy and also recognises the unique risks of violence that women human rights defenders face, along with their security needs while carrying out this vital work.

KEY RESOURCES

- ACT programme to End Violence Against Women (programme brochure)
- UN Women and Generation Equality (n.d.). *Action Coalition on Gender Based Violence: Increasing Support to Women's Rights Movements* [PDF].
- Spotlight Initiative – compendium of good practices
- Spotlight Initiative – Women's Movements
- UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women:

Series on Movement Building

- The Equality Institute and UN Women (2023). *Together for Prevention: Handbook on Multisectoral National Action Plans to Prevent Violence against Women and Girls* [PDF].
- Mama Cash (2020). *Feminist activism works! A review of select literature on the impact of feminist activism in achieving women's rights* [PDF].

GAPS AND CHALLENGES

Women's rights organizations are facing an increasingly hostile environment due to growing pushback against women's rights, including well-funded anti-rights counter-movements, and the shrinking of civic space. States are increasingly employing misogyny and gender inequality as a governing strategy, promoting legal and policy reform with narrow definitions of traditional families, limiting the use of the concept of gender in policy documents, legislation and academic research; curtailing reproductive rights, the rights of sexual minorities, and legal protections against domestic violence.¹⁸ An emerging trend of concern in this regard has been observed in a few countries in which the space for women's rights organizations' participation in state-led consultations has been restricted while new spaces have opened for regressive actors that oppose women's human rights.¹⁹

A key challenge for women's rights organizations is the lack of sustainable funding. In 2022, only 5% of official development assistance on ending VAWG, on average, was allocated to civil society organizations.²⁰ Groups working on intersecting forms of marginalization

– such as LGBTIQ, indigenous, migrant and refugee women and young women are funded even less.

Only

7% of WROs



working in GBV prevention receive core funding and 84% of WROs receive only project-based funding according to one study.²¹

The lack of core funding threatens the continuity and sustainability of organizations. A further challenge for women's rights organizations is the lack of resources available for coalition building, sharing resources and networking resulting in fragmented movements and competition for resources.²²



PRIORITY ACTIONS

1

Increase quality, coordinated, flexible and sustainable financing for women's rights organizations including funding to grassroots communities on the frontlines of addressing violence against women and girls, including in conflict and crisis contexts.

2

Invest in strengthening institutional capacities and building resilience of local women's rights organizations in their diversity, to increase organizational sustainability and drive impactful change.

3

Ensure the meaningful participation of girl-led and women's rights organizations in decision making at all levels to ensure lived experience informs policies and legislation to enable women's rights organizations to play a leadership role in ending VAWG.

4

Invest in feminist movement strengthening, particularly by creating inclusive spaces for women's rights organizations to strategize, share knowledge and learn from each other.

5

Strengthen rapid response mechanisms to ensure the safety for women human rights defenders, including in the context of online violence.

END NOTES

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UN WOMEN EXISTS TO ADVANCE WOMEN'S RIGHTS, GENDER EQUALITY AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF ALL WOMEN AND GIRLS.

As the lead UN entity on gender equality and secretariat of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, we shift laws, institutions, social behaviors and services to close the gender gap and build an equal world for all women and girls.

Our partnerships with governments, women's movements and the private sector coupled with our coordination of the broader United Nations translate progress into lasting changes. We make strides forward for women and girls in four areas: leadership, economic empowerment, freedom from violence, and women, peace and security as well as humanitarian action.

UN Women keeps the rights of women and girls at the centre of global progress – always, everywhere. Because gender equality is not just what we do. It is who we are.



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