

The Fourth World Conference on Women: 25 Years On

In 1995, 20 years before the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was created, the Fourth World Conference on Women took place in Beijing, aiming to achieve greater equality and opportunity for women.

The Fourth World Conference on Women followed three initial world conferences in [1975](#), [1980](#) and [1985](#). Each conference set out areas where progress towards women's equality was to be prioritised. Across the three conferences, these included, for example, education, employment opportunities, adequate health services and women's participation in all areas of human activity, including political participation and decision making. By the Fourth World Conference, it was acknowledged that most of the goals set out at the Third World Conference in the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women had [not been achieved](#), and a Platform for Action with [twelve areas of concern](#) was established. This included some areas that had already been prioritised in the initial three conferences and provided further areas of concern, such as women and armed conflict, violence against women, women and media and the girl child. This year, on its 25th anniversary, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action is still considered one of the most progressive blueprints for advancing women's rights.

Reviewing Progress Towards Gender Equality

In March this year, representatives of Member States, UN entities and NGOs gathered along with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) for the Commission on the Status of Women's sixty-fourth annual session to review progress towards gender equality and women's empowerment. In this session, attendees looked at current challenges that could affect the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and stated an intention to "[contribute towards](#) the full realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development through a gender perspective". This intention highlights the importance of understanding each of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through a gender perspective and not only focusing on SDG 5, gender equality, as *the* SDG that concerns women. This point is critical for achieving the goal of women's participation in all areas of human activity.

In preparation for the sixty-fourth annual session, each state was asked to undertake a comprehensive [national-level review](#) that looked at the priorities, achievements, challenges and setbacks in progress towards gender equality and the empowerment of women over the past 5 years. In the [report from Germany](#), ongoing challenges, such as women's equal participation in leadership positions and decision making, were highlighted. Acts such as the Act on Equal Participation of Women and Men in Leadership Positions in the Private and Public Sectors, which came into force in 2015, were put forward as evidence of how Germany is addressing issues of gender inequality. According to the report, women missing from leadership positions and decision-making roles, as well as being an issue in and of itself, leads to other issues of gender inequality, such as the gender pay gap. In order to address these issues, the Act has "prescribed a mandatory gender quota of 30 percent for supervisory boards of German companies which are publicly listed and fully codetermined". In 2018, this quota was increased to 50%. Other challenges, such as combating violence against women and girls were included in the report, where it was stated that the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence

(Istanbul Convention) entered into force in Germany on the 1st February 2018. Provisions in the Convention were transposed into national law through, for example, the introduction of a “Violence against Women” [helpline](#) that is open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year and is available free of charge in 18 languages. On top of this, the “no means no” rule has been implemented, meaning that “a sexual act is a criminal offence if it takes place against the discernible will of the victim”.

Generation Equality: The Declaration Put into Practice

Although the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action is a landmark text, it is, of course, the ongoing work of putting this declaration into practice that eventually contributes to advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women. Acknowledging women who have participated in and continue to participate in this advancement is a vital part of achieving this goal. To mark the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, UN Women set up a [Generation Equality campaign](#), which included a “25 Women” series produced by the UN Women Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia. In this series, 25 women who have campaigned to advance gender equality and the empowerment of women share their stories.

- For example, in an effort to tackle violence against women, [Jonada Shukarasi](#), a 16-year-old Albanian teen, along with Arla Hoxha and Dea Rrozhani, has developed an app called GjejZâ (Find your Voice) that aims to tackle domestic violence across Albania by providing comprehensive information to women suffering from abusive behaviour. The app provides support, such as breathing exercises, emergency hotlines, empowerment programmes and information on local jobs and workshops that can help women become more financially independent.
- [Anastasiia Yeva Domani](#), a 40-year-old Ukrainian trans activist, is tackling violence against trans women (and all trans people) by advocating the decategorisation of transgenderism as a medical disorder in Ukraine. She has also helped compile a database of trans-friendly doctors and teaches medical workers how to treat patients in an ethical and tolerant way.
- [Bahar Toksoy Guidetti](#), a former professional Turkish volleyball player, shares her story on empowering girls through sport. She states that women are underrepresented in sports leadership, which is why she has created a summer academy for girls where they can learn different sports and other subjects, such as art, science, business and nature, in order to allow them access to a further well-rounded education where their needs are nurtured and prioritised. Creating safe spaces for girls and women and spaces where they can learn and develop in varying directions is an important step towards achieving gender equality. It also empowers girls and women as individuals in their own right to find their space in the world.

With the UN’s 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development now in its 5th year, in order to continue towards the aim of gender equality and to further empower women and girls, it is necessary to follow the lead of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and to spend the next decade prioritising each SDG with a gender perspective. Alongside this, stories of the work women and girls do that contributes towards putting the declarations and resolutions set out by the UN into practice must continue to be shared to show their participation in all areas of human activity.

Teri Shardlow