

U.S. LEADERSHIP IN EMPOWERING WOMEN AND GIRLS AROUND THE WORLD

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Investments in women and girls are a force multiplier for diplomatic and development gains alike, from longer lasting peace deals to advancing economies to improving child nutrition, health, and school attendance.

While women make up roughly 50% of the world population, they experience adversity disproportionately across many issues, creating barriers to healthy and prosperous livelihoods and economies. America's commitment to empowering women and girls is part of its national security strategy; recognizing that there is a direct correlation between women's equality and the stability and the prosperity of societies.

The U.S. has a proud history of supporting women's empowerment initiatives that have led to sustainable change, overcoming barriers including in low- and middle-income economies that advances economic growth, sustainable development, healthy societies, and more peaceful communities in which women and girls can prosper.

CURRENT TRENDS AND BARRIERS

Barriers to gender equality including in low- and middle-income economies are complex and multifaceted, and can be rooted in cultural, social, economic, and political factors. Barriers include cultural norms and traditions, lack of access to education, economic disparities, legal and policy barriers, limited healthcare access, gender-based violence, lack of political representation, and bearing a disproportionate burden of unpaid care work. At the current rate of global progress, it will take [over 130 years to overcome the gender gap](#).

- **Economic Disparities.** Contributing to women's economic marginalization, [55% of the unbanked population worldwide is female](#) without access to credit, land, and resources, impacting women's ability to generate income and achieve financial independence.
- **Poverty.** At its current trajectory, more than [342.2 million women and girls will still live in extreme poverty by 2030](#).
- **Food Insecurity.** Of the over 300 million individuals who are severely hungry around the globe, [over 60% are women and girls](#). Women [in developing countries](#) account for roughly 43% of the agricultural labor force but do not have the same access to productive agricultural resources as men do and are paid almost 20% less than their male counterparts.

- **Education Gaps.** The [gender gap in schooling](#) is still prevalent in the developing world, with only 31% of girls enrolled in secondary school.
- **Digital Divide.** Though technology and the use of the internet has transformed economies and is shifting the future of work, there is still a [large digital divide](#) for women and girls in the developing world, where 90% of adolescent girls and young women aged 15-24 are offline.
- **Political Participation.** Women's [political participation](#) is connected to reduced likelihood of conflict and violence, yet the gender gap is still pronounced. Women only make up a quarter of parliamentarians around the world.
- **Health and Wellbeing.** Jeopardizing health, life expectancy, family nutrition and economic potential, globally 70% — roughly [1.2 billion — of girls and women globally suffer](#) from deficiencies of vitamins and other essential nutrients such as iron, zinc, folate and iodine, and woman dies every two minutes due to pregnancy or childbirth.
- **Conflict and Violence.** Conflict around the world can lead to increased gender-based violence, and it is estimated that 1 in 3 women have experienced gender-based violence in their lifetime.

OPPORTUNITIES IN CLOSING THE GAP

There are significant opportunities and benefits when the global gender inequality gap is closed.

These positive impacts affect women and girls directly but also economies and societies across the world:

- **Economic Growth.** Closing the gender gap in the global workforce could lead to a [\\$7 trillion growth](#) in global GDP, and if just 10% more adolescent girls attend school, a country's GDP increases by an average of 3%. Women's economic empowerment is key for growth both through the direct impact of the size of the labor force on output and through the impact on productivity, and [gender equality is associated with greater export diversification](#) in developing countries, reducing the risk of export concentration in few commodities.
- **Food Security and Agricultural Output.** If [women](#) were able to access the productive agricultural resources that men have, they could see yields on their farms increase by 20 to 30%, boosting agricultural output and reducing the global number of hungry people by roughly 12 to 17%.
- **Education and Wages.** Every additional year a girl completes in primary school will increase her [eventual wages by around 10 to 20%](#).
- **Health.** Healthier women and girls equal healthier societies: [for every \\$1 invested, ~\\$3 is projected in economic growth](#) since healthy women are better able to participate in the workforce, pursue education and training opportunities, and contribute to economic productivity and growth.
- **Peace and Stability.** When women are involved in [peace negotiations](#), the agreement is 35% more likely to last 15 years or longer.

AMERICAN LEADERSHIP AND INITIATIVES

The U.S. Congress, government agencies, and multisectoral partners are leading, designing, and implementing policies and initiatives to address the critical issues that women and girls face globally and to build lasting solutions to strengthen U.S. diplomacy and development efforts.

Republican and Democratic administrations have enacted significant reforms and initiatives to prioritize women's empowerment in U.S. foreign policy.

- The **Women, Peace, and Security Strategy and National Action Plan** is a [bipartisan effort](#) that was first established in 2011 to help hold perpetrators of gender-based violence accountable and public-private partnerships to expand on women's economic security.
- **The Biden Administration created the [White House's Gender Policy Council and the first-ever U.S. National Strategy on Gender Equity and Equality](#)**, which aims to elevate women's empowerment in U.S. foreign policy.
- **The Trump Administration established the [Women's Global Development and Prosperity \(W-GDP\) Initiative](#)**, the first whole of U.S. Government initiative designed to economically empower women. W-GDP reached twelve million women in the developing world in its first year through U.S. government activities, private-public partnerships, and a new, innovative W-GDP Fund.
- **The recently released [United States Strategy on Global Women's Economic Security](#)** addresses the challenges that make it difficult for women to be economically empowered and reaffirms the U.S. commitment promoting economic competitiveness through well-paying, quality jobs, advancing quality and sustainable care infrastructure, promoting women's entrepreneurship and financial and digital literacy and inclusion, and eliminating systemic barriers to help women achieve full and meaningful participation.

America's international affairs agencies are leading the charge to empower women and girls around the world.

Examples include:

- **The U.S. Department of State's [Office of Global Women's Issues](#)** is dedicated to empowering and promoting the rights of women and girls through U.S. foreign policy. The Office's focus areas are on women's economic security, women's role in peace and security, and preventing and responding to gender-based violence.
- **The U.S. Agency for International Development**, guided by its [Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Policy](#), is committed to driving partnerships and programming to advance gender equality and women's empowerment around the world including through initiatives such as [Generating Resilience and Opportunities for Women](#) to strengthen gender equality in agricultural and food work and closing the gender divide through [Women in the Digital Economy Initiative](#).
- The **U.S. International Development Finance Corporation** is committed to advancing women and girls in its work and in coordination with other U.S. government development tools. This includes DFC's [2X Women's](#)

[Initiative, launched by the Trump Administration](#) to incentivize and catalyze investments that are owned, led, produced or served by women and for women.

- **The Millenium Challenge Corporation (MCC)** has long [supported women empowerment worldwide](#), and in 2022 launched an [inclusion and gender strategy](#) to improve its analytical tools and program development, and to leverage public and private partnerships to generate inclusive economic growth. Every country's program must meet the requirements of MCC's gender policy, which was first adopted in 2006.
- **The U.S. Trade and Development Agency** has long prioritized the advancement of women and the removing of barriers through the creation of opportunities for small businesses and members of underserved communities with women-owned small businesses making up 24% of total procurement value for the agency.

Congress has passed critical bipartisan legislation to empower women and girls around the world.

- **Passed in 2003 with bipartisan support, [the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief \(PEPFAR\)](#)** has transformed the lives of women and girls around the world by providing support for HIV reduction where adolescent girls and young women are 14 times more likely to contract HIV than males. PEPFAR's flagship DREAMS public-private partnership has reduced the number of HIV infections in adolescent girls and young women by 25% in most regions it operates in.
- **In 2012, Congress first requested a multi-year strategy to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls** resulting in the first [U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence Globally](#). Additionally, through the passage of the [Women, Peace, and Security Act](#) of 2017, the United States became the first country in the world to have a comprehensive law on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS), codifying America's sustained commitment and ensuring that the United States promotes the meaningful participation of women in conflict prevention and post-conflict recovery efforts.
- **The bipartisan [Women's Entrepreneurship and Economic Empowerment \(WEEE\) Act](#)** was signed into law in 2019. The WEEE Act supports micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises, advocates for expanding property rights, and seeks to make improvements in the enabling environment for business and the free market in developing countries. The WEEE Act also requires USAID's plans and programs to identify and address gender gaps and socio-economic issues to improve the lives of women and girls.