



Gender Equality Topic Overview

Women and girls represent half of the world's population, and therefore, half of its potential. But today, women across the world continue to experience gender inequalities and the effects that come from them. This includes child- and forced marriage, gender-based violence, sexist laws and policies, as well as barriers to participation in education and employment. Achieving gender equality globally is crucial in reducing human suffering and solving our biggest environmental problems.

No country has achieved full gender equality, and women worldwide continue to endure discrimination and unequal rights and opportunities. The situation is worse in countries where harmful patriarchal traditions like child marriage remain the norm. Globally, [129 million](#) girls do not attend school, and [one in five girls](#) is married before she turns 18. These women, who are often in less developed countries, rarely have the freedom to determine the number and spacing of their children, leading to an increased risk of complications or even death from pregnancy and childbirth.

Even in many developed countries, women often get paid less than men for the same jobs, face gender-based discrimination and violence, and suffer from sexist attitudes and policies that restrict their autonomy over their own bodies.

Possible Gender Equality Subtopics

Gender equality is a broad topic. Rather than taking on the entire topic, consider focusing on just one part of it (a subtopic). We've put together a list of subtopic angles you could take, and linked to a variety of credible sources, below. But remember, there are many other gender equality subtopics, and tons of other sources, so no need to limit yourself to what's included here!

Click on the colored tiles to navigate to resources about each subtopic.



Girls' Education

Despite respectable strides over the past 20 years, girls are still far less likely to attend school than boys. But investing in girls' education transforms communities. Girls who receive an education are less likely to marry young and more likely to earn a higher income, participate in the decisions that most affect them, and build better futures for themselves and their families.

- There is a direct link between illiteracy and women's security. (Source: [United Nations Chronicle](#))

- Around 61 million school-aged girls are not in school, and girls are four times more likely to be out of school than boys from the same background. (Source: [Theirworld](#))
- By not educating girls, countries lose trillions of dollars in potential productivity and earnings. (Source: [World Bank](#))
- Women make up only 28% of the workforce in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). (Source: [American Association of University Women](#))
- Equal access to education is an important step in fighting climate change. (Source: [The Brookings Institution](#))

Sanitation

When safe drinking water is not available on household premises, the burden of water collection and treatment falls largely on the shoulders of women and girls. The lack of safe sanitation and hygiene facilities at home and in their communities may expose them to illness, harassment and violence, thus hampering their ability to learn, earn an income, and move around freely.

- It has been shown that access to clean water and sanitation will empower women individually, as well as help women overcome poverty and empower their children, families, and communities. (Source: [United Nations Human Rights](#))
- 500 million people around the world struggle to access menstrual products or safe, private, hygienic spaces in which to use them. (Source: [The World Bank](#))
- When schools have access to safe water, toilets and soap, children have a better environment to study, learn, and meet their potential. (Source: [UNICEF](#))
- When clean drinking water is not readily accessible, the responsibility of gathering it often falls onto the women in the community. (Source: [Water.org](#))
- Safe water access, sanitation, and hygiene are the most basic building blocks for empowering women everywhere. (Source: [Lifewater](#))

Access to Healthcare & Family Planning

Lack of access to essential health services has long-term implications for the health and well-being of women and their children. Gender disparities in health begin in

the womb and carry through a person's life, from maternal and child nutrition to access to reproductive and maternal healthcare.

- Unintended pregnancy is linked to higher maternal death rates, lower socioeconomic development, increased exposure to violence, and lower levels of education and employment for women. (Source: [United Nations Population Fund](#))
- In low- and middle-income countries, approximately 218 million women of reproductive age lack modern contraception. (Source: [Guttmacher Institute](#))
- During the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, key health interventions for women, children, and adolescents dropped by 25%. (Source: [World Bank Blog](#))
- The burden of emotional pain and disorders like depression fall disproportionately on women. (Source: [Hologic](#))

Economic Opportunities

Economic empowerment is central to realizing women's rights and gender equality. Things that would fall under economic empowerment include women's ability to participate equally in existing markets, access to decent work, and increased voice, agency, and meaningful participation in economic decision-making at all levels, from the household to international institutions.

- Around the world, finding a job is much tougher for women, and a disproportionate number of women work in low-quality jobs in vulnerable conditions. (Source: [International Labour Organization](#))
- 2.4 billion women of working age do not have equal economic opportunities to men, and many countries still maintain legal barriers that prevent women from fully participating in the economy. (Source: [World Bank Blog](#))
- In 19 countries, married women are required to obey their husbands and/or get their permission before seeking employment. (Source: [Fraser Institute](#))
- Women experience economic violence, which limits their ability to be self-sufficient and often threatens their ability to leave harmful or dangerous situations. (Source: [World Bank Blog](#))
- Closing the gender gap in the workforce would improve the world's economy and add an estimated \$28 trillion to the global GDP. (Source: [Council on Foreign Relations](#))
- Women's economic empowerment makes economies more diverse, boosts productivity, and lessens income inequality. (Source: [King's College London](#))

Women in Government

Women's equal political participation and leadership are essential to achieving gender equality on a larger scale. However, the latest data shows that women continue to be underrepresented at all levels of decision-making worldwide.

- Often, sexism and existing biases from the media open women politicians up to scrutiny and coverage that their male counterparts don't face. (Source: [The Wilson Center](#))
- Women in positions of authority tend to resolve national crises without resorting to violence, advocate for social issues that benefit all, and allocate greater portions of their budgets to health and education. (Source: [Women Deliver](#))
- It has been shown that women's leadership promotes bipartisanship, equality, and stability. (Source: [Council on Foreign Relations](#))
- Having more women in political positions leads to decreased maternal mortality, most likely due to the fact that women policymakers are more effective at allocating time and resources toward women's health. (Source: [The Brookings Institution](#))
- Women are more likely than men to work part-time or have temporary contracts, which leads to fewer chances for career development, lower rates of pay, and fewer management opportunities. (Source: [Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development](#))

Paid & Unpaid Labor

Women are responsible for the vast majority of domestic "unpaid labor." This includes things like cooking and cleaning, child-rearing, caring for older relatives, and fetching firewood. This unpaid labor is rarely formally acknowledged, and often holds women back in the paid workforce when they are expected to take on even more work. In the paid workforce, women do not earn as much as men with equal qualifications.

- Because women carry out more than double the household labor than men, they often fall behind in their paid jobs or are forced to work longer hours. (Source: [UN Women](#))
- Worldwide, women only make \$0.77 for every dollar earned by men. (Source: [Global Citizen](#))
- Around the world, finding a job is much tougher for women, and a disproportionate number of women work in low-quality jobs in vulnerable conditions. (Source: [International Labour Organization](#))

- Women in low- and middle-income countries devote more time to unpaid work than women in high-income countries. (Source: [British Medical Journal](#))
- Tens of millions of women have left the workforce since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, many permanently. (Source: [Harvard Business Review](#))