Gender equality goals at risk as global leaders fail to stop rollback on women's rights



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The urgent need to dismantle barriers to gender equality must be the focus as global leaders gather for the 69th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW69).

The global rollback on women's rights highlights the urgent need for action, as modern slavery and gender inequality remain deeply connected.

Governments and UN agencies must respond decisively to address these urgent issues.

Global leaders must act now to remove barriers to gender equality

The 69th session of CSW is taking place in New York from 10-21 March 2025.

Government officials, accredited civil society organisations, and UN agencies will meet to address the persistent roadblocks preventing progress on the Beijing+5 commitments to gender equality, development, and peace.

Beijing+5 was signed in 2000 as a Political Declaration and outcome document that aimed to create a platform for action.

However, in the 25 years since its adoption, there has been a concerning global rollback on women's rights, emphasising the need for renewed urgency and accountability.The UN has recognised gender equality as an 'accelerator' essential for achieving all Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This includes SDG Target 8.7, which calls for immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking, and eliminate the worst forms of child labour, including child soldier recruitment.

All SDGs have a 2030 deadline, but targets related to children are set to be achieved this year.

Without urgent action, these goals will stay out of reach and worsen existing inequalities and vulnerabilities.

Women and girls remain disproportionately affected by modern slavery

Modern slavery cannot be addressed in isolation from gender inequality.

Women and girls continue to be disproportionately affected by forced labour, human trafficking, and child marriage. Poverty, education, and access to healthcare continue to increase their vulnerabilities.

At the current rate of progress, it will take 134 years to achieve full gender parity, according to the World Economic Forum.

This is a timeline that goes 4 generations beyond the 2030 SDG deadline.

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Women are participating in the 19th Krakow Manifa at the Main Square in Krakow, Poland, on March 9, 2024. Photo Credit: NurPhoto / Contributor via Getty Images.

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Gender equality is key to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals

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Global examples of recent setbacks to women's rights and gender equality

Several countries have made alarming changes to laws and policies that restrict the rights and freedoms of women and girls.

Iraq, Somalia, and Bangladesh have lowered the legal age for marriage, allowing girls under 18 to marry. Iraq and Somalia made this change in 2024, while Bangladesh implemented it in 2017.

LENS ASIA

Afghanistan

The Taliban has severely limited the participation of women and teenage girls in public life.

This includes barring them from attending secondary schools and universities, working in many sectors, and even restricting their freedom of movement outside the home.

China

The Chinese Government has intensified social control by silencing feminist voices.

It has imposed strict censorship measures, including banning terms and content related to feminism, which they deem as harmful speech or potentially inciting gender-based conflict.

Poland

Poland has seen its government target women's rights activists and organisations, actively campaigning against them and imposing laws that block efforts to address gender-based violence.

The government has used its Constitutional Tribunal to undermine reproductive rights for women and girls.

United States

Ongoing legislative changes have significantly reduced access to sexual and reproductive healthcare in the US.

Following recent Supreme Court decisions, several states have moved to ban or heavily restrict access to legal abortions, placing women's health and rights at greater risk.We're calling on global leaders to take immediate action to address the concerning rollback on women's rights.

Despite decades of work by countless advocates, we are witnessing setbacks that undermine the progress made in gender equality.

Governments, international organisations, and civil society must collaborate to ensure that the commitments to gender equality are achieved.

Coordinated and decisive action is needed to reverse this trend and secure a more just and inclusive future for women and girls worldwide.