



CSW64 Advocacy Pack

Beijing+25 Review



SOROPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL

CSW64 Advocacy Pack: Beijing+25

About

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was globally agreed in 1995 and it is still considered to be the most progressive blueprint ever for advancing women's rights. As a defining framework for change, the Platform for Action made comprehensive commitments under 12 Critical Areas of Concern which envisioned a world where women and girls will live free from violence, able to access safe, high-quality education, experienced work-place equality, participated in decision making and experience their full range of human rights. The 12 Critical Areas of Concern listed below addressed all areas of women's and girls' lives; at home, in society, the economy, the environment, and during times of peace and conflict. Over the last 25 years since the agreement of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, governments, civil society and the public have translated the Platform for Action's promises into concrete changes in individual countries. However, no country has yet fully met the objectives of the Platform for Action, and in many cases progress has been extremely slow. By reviewing progress every five years, it is possible to hold governments to account and to provide guidance on best practice to realise the vision of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. These reviews take place during CSW.

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) happens every year in March in New York. Representatives from countries, UN entities, and thousands of NGOs meet to discuss some of the most significant challenges facing women and girls across the world. 2020 will be the 64th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW64), which will take place from 9-20 March 2020, as well as the 25th anniversary of the agreement of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. This means CSW64's main focus will be on the review of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The review will include an assessment of current challenges that affect the implementation of the Platform for Action and the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

SI UN Representatives are active in seven UN Centres, New York, Geneva, Vienna, Nairobi, Paris, Rome and Bangkok. SI has held consultative status with the UN since the 1950s and has maintained its General Consultative Status granted in 1984. An essential part of SI UN Representative's roles is to transfer the knowledge gained through SI projects to seek to guide international policy decisions, highlighting that all UN activities must mainstream gender. SI UN Representatives do this by participating in UN negotiations, providing input into different UN processes such as human rights instruments, and attending intergovernmental bodies like CSW. SI, as a member of the Women's Major Group, participates in the Major Groups and Other Stakeholders Coordination Mechanism, which facilitates civil society participation in deliberations on sustainable development issues.

The 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, agreed in 2015, is the first universally applicable development agenda; it is just as relevant to global north countries, as it is to middle income and global south countries. The aim of the 2030 Agenda is to achieve all the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030, ensuring that no one is left behind. These goals cover a range of issues from poverty, education and health, to justice, livable cities and the environment. Although drafted and agreed by UN member states, the process to develop the 2030 Agenda also had an unprecedented global consultative process that SI and its UN Representatives contributed to. Throughout that process SI joined the call for there to be a standalone goal on gender equality, and for that goal to be crosscutting for all other goals, understanding that no Sustainable Development Goal can be achieved without the inclusion of women and girls – their equal leadership, their equal participation and experiencing equal benefit from the results of development efforts. Achieving global consensus over SDG5 should continue to be celebrated, remembering it is critical in realising the entirety of the 2030 Agenda.

Importantly, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action is a foundational document of the 2030 Agenda; its aims and ambitions are considered to contribute to the achievement of the SDGs. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action is not replaced by the 2030 Agenda, the two agendas are complementary and mutually reinforcing.



This Advocacy Pack contains some resources you may find helpful, including an outline of SI's position on each of the 12 Critical Areas of Concern of the Beijing Platform for Action in the first section. The second section contains SI's recent statements submitted to the UN. Please do use your own knowledge of SI projects to highlight how these positions are based on SI best practice that can change the lives of women and girls and achieve the vision of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

Soroptimist International's Position Outlines on The Beijing Platform for Action's 12 Critical Areas of Concern

Women and Poverty

Women's experiences of poverty are often exacerbated by the everyday discrimination they face in other areas, including healthcare, education and employment. Women also are at greater risk of poverty due to resource distribution and lack of opportunities. This increased risk of poverty, in turn, puts women and girls at an increased risk of exploitation and violence. Therefore, Women and Poverty is a cross-sectional area of concern and directly relates to following critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action: the Education and Training of Women, Violence against Women, Women and the Economy, and Women and Health.

That women are often the primary care providers in families often reduces their ability to access resources and employment opportunities and can also affect their entitlement to social security measures such as pensions. One of the biggest barriers to equal access to resources and employment opportunities is gender stereotypes that prevent women from reaching their fullest potential. The current economic climate only furthers these disadvantages faced by women.

It is essential that actions are taken to:

- a) Ensure women have equal access to suitable work, are guaranteed equal pay for equal work, assets and employment opportunities;
- b) Involve women in the development and implementation of policies that are targeted towards their needs and wants;
- c) Provide women and girls with high-quality, safe, accessible and affordable education and vocational training that facilitates securing a stable livelihood; and to
- d) Guarantee payment, social security and social benefits for women who are at risk of poverty or, who work without such benefits.

It is noted that women who have suitable jobs acquire assets, invest their money in their families and contribute to the development of their communities. By empowering women and girls to identify the resources that enable them, they help perpetuate their own empowerment and the empowerment of other members of their families, communities and society.

This Critical Area of Concern connects with SDG1, 'End poverty in all its forms everywhere'. Its targets specifically seek to eradicate extreme poverty, half the number of women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions, and to implement national protection floors. Another key aspect of SDG1 is ensuring equal rights to economic resources – but SDG1 only refers to "access" to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, and microfinance. It is important the women have *equal* rights and access to these resources and legal protections.

The Education and Training of Women

This relates to one of Soroptimist International's Key Asks and/or Messages

Access to education for girls and women of all ages is a fundamental human right, and underpins their empowerment as individuals and as members of their communities. Education is also fundamentally connected to development, economic growth, and poverty reduction. Recognising the key role that

education plays towards achieving sustainable development lead to SDG4, ‘Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all’, in the 2030 Agenda.

Women and girls still face many barriers that prevent them from reaching their fullest potential – educational outcomes for women and girls are often unequal. Discrimination, gender stereotypes, economic and time poverty, and violence at schools, can all contribute to creating educational environments that negatively impact on women and girls. Reinforcing the Beijing Declaration, SDG4 supports the momentum for women of all ages and girls to access and complete education at all levels.

Key areas of concern to Soroptimists include (but are not limited too):

- a) Equal access to education: *Governments must fulfil existing obligations in international treaties and agreements relating to equal access to education. The sharing of good practice should be strongly encouraged. Girls and women often still face lower educational outcomes than their male counterparts, and this can be especially so in isolated communities. In these cases, solutions should be contextualised, culturally specific, and tailored to each community.*
- b) Educating to lead: *Educational programme outcomes are connected to the ethos of that programme. By ‘educating to lead’, participants’ empowerment will be promoted and encouraged. By encouraging this empowering approach to education, leadership skills and abilities will be promoted, and will in turn help to better the lives of women and girls. This bottom-up approach will contribute to increasing the participation of women and girls in decision making processes as leaders.*
- c) A Life-course Approach to Education and Training: *Many women lack the continuing education and training opportunities that they need to secure safe employment. It is important to recognise that access to education and training is a human right at all ages, and the women and girls have different learning needs at different times in their lives. Therefore, Soroptimist International would encourage governments to introduce policies that are outcome focused, and that are grounded in a human rights-based approach designed to empower women and girls. A life-course approach to education should be seen as a complementary measure to assist with economic development and poverty reduction.*
- d) Literacy for people of all ages: *Women and girls are still found to have lower rates of literacy, compared to their male counterparts. This is especially so for mature and older women. Actions need to be taken to ensure that access to basic literacy skills, and the empowerment that literacy provides women, is not only targeted at the younger generations but at all women and girls. Particular attention should be given to migrant and isolated communities, where access to educational opportunities may be lacking. It is not sufficient that SDG4 only requires “a substantial proportion of adults” to achieve literacy and numeracy. All adults should be literate, and this will require scaling-up efforts to reach adult and older women.*
- e) Health education (including sexual and reproductive health education): *Women and girls can only be empowered to make decisions about their bodies if they are educated about those choices. These choices directly affect the day-to-day lives of women. Without proper education women and girls are left vulnerable to exploitation and are more likely to suffer from poor health.*

Equal education and training opportunities for women and girls directly contributes to equitable employment and is key to improving the lives of women and girls. A life-course approach to education must remain as a prominent issue for all countries. Work with local partners to improve facilities so

that women and girls are afforded education that is accessible, acceptable, available, and of good quality should be strongly encouraged and supported.

Women and Health

This is a broad area of concern, and Soroptimist International engages in a number of subject areas relating to this issue. The over-arching concern is that many healthcare policies do not take into account gender-based experiences or perspectives. SI is also concerned that in many policies, the needs of women are discussed only in relation to their being mothers or caregivers. This is of course important, but the multifaceted roles and lives of women should be better represented and considered in policy development. Key areas of concern for Soroptimists are:

- a) Sexual and Reproductive Health: *The universal provisioning of “sexual and reproductive healthcare services, including for family planning, information and education, and the integration of reproductive health into national strategies and programmes” is essential for stable and sustainable development. Soroptimists support a human rights-based approach to sexual and reproductive health and recognise that universal access to sexual and reproductive healthcare reduces the vulnerability of women and facilitates their right to decide freely and responsibly on the number and spacing of their children. Striving to provide universal access to sexual and reproductive healthcare and education, addresses the rights of women and girls being made a reality and is a key aspect of empowerment. Implemented sexual and reproductive health programmes must be tailored to the needs of specific groups of women including homeless women, women in prisons, teenage mothers, women living with HIV/AIDS and others. Including language from the Beijing Declaration on sexual and reproductive health in SDG5 on gender equality demonstrates the continuing importance and relevance. The language quoted above should be the benchmark for service provision.*
- b) Maternal Health: *The provisioning of pre-natal and perinatal care is essential to delivering maternal health. Alongside physical healthcare provisioning, mothers and caregivers should be provided access to supportive social assistance and mental health care. Healthcare systems should be strengthened to be appropriate to changing societies, and should consult with women and caregivers to best provide for and respond to their needs. Maternity services should be free or heavily subsidised – no women should be unable to access appropriate maternal healthcare or trained medical personnel. Only when this is achieved can universal health coverage, included in SDG3, be realised.*
- c) Drugs and Health: *It is increasingly recognised that for cultural, social and historical reasons, women encounter and experience drugs and drug use in a way that is different from men (and children). This means an explicit mandate to engage with the specific needs of women as individuals is required.*
- d) Mental Health: *Mental health is an increasingly prominent issue, and must be included as an area of health care. Services need to respond and cater for the specific needs of women and should be interconnected with areas of physical healthcare, including maternal health. Dedicated resources should be provided to mental health services, including community-based services, which are frequently under-resourced and struggling to meet the needs of their patients and the demands for their services.*
- e) Older women’s health: *Although the Platform of Action states “Women’s right to the enjoyment of the highest standard of health must be secured throughout the whole life cycle in equality with men”, current discussions on and approaches to global women’s health mostly ignore*

women beyond reproductive age, particularly those who have suffered a life-time of discrimination. As women grow older, they also experience a range of health conditions linked to reproductive biology – from ageing with fistula, to cervical, ovarian and breast cancers, menopause, hormonal changes that contribute to an increased risk of cardiovascular disease and osteoporosis, stemming from declining ovarian function. They may have to undergo mastectomies, hysterectomies. A life-course approach to women's health is essential.

Many areas of health care provisioning and health rights exemplify social attitudes to women. It is important to recognise the legal, socio-economic and demographic factors that can render women more vulnerable to poor healthcare provisioning.

Violence against Women

This relates to one of Soroptimist International's Key Asks and/or Messages

The lack of progress in this area since the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action is unacceptable. Although changes to laws have been made, changes to society have not. The underlying factors that allow violence to happen in the first place unfortunately remain. Most approaches to reducing violence committed against women and girls have been top-down, not bottom-up. Soroptimists recognise the value and importance of the individual stories of affected women, including older women who suffer from violence, abuse and neglect. Their experiences are nuanced and multifaceted and the stories of women must be collected and taken into account when producing and implementing policies aimed to help them. Only then can solutions be contextualised, culturally specific, and tailored to each community. Some specific areas of violence committed against women and girls that concern Soroptimists are:

- a) Sexual Violence, such as rape and sexual assault;
- b) Trafficking;
- c) Domestic and Intimate Partner Violence;
- d) Female Genital Mutilation and its prevention;
- e) Femicide, including honour killings and;
- f) Sexual Harassment;
- g) Emotional, physical and financial abuse.

Progressive and safe indicators for measuring the elimination of violence against all women and girls must be developed, at national and regional levels. Soroptimist International supports the development and implementation of National Action Plans, and Regional Action Plans that;

- a) Prioritise and adequately resource policies, programmes, and interventions with education, empowerment, and enabling opportunities at their core, not just for victims/survivors or perpetrators, but for all;
- b) Strengthen legal frameworks and systems of justice to be responsive to the unique needs, experiences and perspectives of women and girls, and, where necessary, enact and enforce new laws to prevent, prosecute and punish all cases of violence committed against all women and girls;
- c) Ensure that violence committed against women and girls is not labelled "private", and therefore out of the reach of the state and/or community; and
- d) Ensures meaningful, respectful, and human rights-based approaches to eliminating violence against all women and girls.

These measures are essential to achieve this Critical Area of Concern of the Beijing Platform for Action, as well as SDG5 on gender equality which commits states to “eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation.” Violence committed against women and girls is primary barrier to achieving gender equality and is repeatedly reported to be an issue of most concern to Soroptimists across the ECE region.

Women in Armed Conflict

Soroptimist International is committed to working towards the achievement of sustainable peace and support the promotion of effective methods of conflict resolution and arms limitation. For peace efforts to be most effective, women must be an integral part to negotiations and actions taken to promote peace. Women must, therefore, be included in decision making processes concerning conflict resolution, peace mediation and negotiations, and preventative diplomacy. Whilst the SDGs call for more women to be included in decision making and for there to be peaceful societies, it does not explicitly address the needs of women in conflict. In this regard, the Beijing Declaration remains one of the strongest commitments States have made to addressing a range of dimensions of gender inequality during times of armed conflict.

Soroptimist International supports the full implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, and encourages all countries to develop and implement National and Regional Action Plans that increase the participation of women and incorporate gender perspectives into all peace and security efforts. Special measures must be taken to protect all women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse, in situations of armed conflict. International cooperation and support is needed to ensure that during times of conflict all people, including women and girls, have safe access to education, housing and healthcare during and in post-conflict situations. These essential human rights should not be suspended or considered as less important during times of conflict.

More women are joining the army as soldiers, and governments and armed forces must take proper steps to ensure that women who are soldiers are also protected from sexual violence and harassment. Soldiers who are women cannot only be thought of as soldiers – they also require access to gender-appropriate services and it is the duty of the state that employs them to provide those services.

Women and the Economy

Initiatives of governments, CSOs and NGOs to promote women’s participation in all economic and decision-making processes are necessary. For women to be equal participants in the economy they must have equal access to assets, employment, education, and leadership opportunities. Supporting this Critical Area of Concern, SDG8 on inclusive and sustainable economic growth and decent work for all, which calls for ‘equal pay for work of equal value’, to end forced labour and human trafficking, and to end child labour is critical. However, this SDG still focuses more on the broader economy and economic growth, rather than the realities of individuals or the role that women play. It is crucial to recognise that without achieving this Critical Area of Concern of Women and the Economy, SDG8 will not be realised.

Integrative policies must take into account women’s potential to contribute to macro and micro economic environments. Increasing the economic participation of women will contribute to increased GDP and other economic measures that demonstrate wealth, quality of life and development. Economic policies that aim to improve the participation of women must take into account women’s

priorities in their communities, especially in regard to the global economic crisis. Soroptimist International has continuously supported the following:

- a) Women's entrepreneurial capabilities should be better facilitated through practical measures like micro-financing and ensuring women's access to assets, property and appropriate social protection measures which provide support for women and their families;
- b) Women should be guaranteed equal work for equal pay;
- c) The creation of policies by national and international bodies that promote women's participation in all levels of economic decision-making;
- d) The development and implementation of family-friendly economic policies that recognise and encourage the sharing of caring responsibilities between women and men and family members. Equality in the informal sectors of the economy will affect equality in the formal sectors of the economy.

Women's equal involvement and participation in the economy, is an integral part of the Soroptimists 'Educate, Empower, Enable' model. Where possible, please try and relate all points back to this model. Economic participation helps empower and enable women, and the more they are empowered and enabled, the more they are able to economically participate.

Women in Power and Decision Making

This relates to one of Soroptimist International's Key Asks and/or Messages

Women are still underrepresented in positions of power and influence, at community, national and international levels. The participation of women and girls must be seen as a cross cutting issue – they need to be leaders in the workplace, political leaders and figureheads in their communities. The voices of women and girls must be a part of policy setting at every level on *all* issues, not just those labelled as 'women's issues'. Only then will the voices of women have the place that they deserve and need. This is recognised and supported by SDG5 on gender equality which urges States to take action to "ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life". By including women as leaders and decision makers, they will become equal participants and contributors to their communities and countries. A sustainably developed world must be just, equitable and inclusive; this is only possible if women are equally empowered as men in all areas of their lives.

The following actions should be encouraged in order for women to have increased roles in decision making processes and as leaders:

- a) Women and girls should be 'educated to lead';
- b) Governments should adopt, support and encourage equitable policies that increase the involvement of women in decision-making at all levels. These opportunities should be genuine, and not just a gesture to inclusion;
- c) Policies and practices that discriminate against women must be abolished. Women must have equal access to positions of power and influence at all levels of society;
- d) It must be recognised that education and the economic development of women and girls is an important aspect of leadership, and leadership skills and abilities should be introduced at an early stage, including in education, to best empower girls as well as women.

It must be emphasised that the inclusion of women's voices and a gendered perspective not only improves their status, but works to improve society as a whole.

Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women

This relates to one of Soroptimist International's Key Asks and/or Messages

This Critical Area of Concern relates to several key areas that are critical to the empowerment of women. Three of those key areas are:

- a) Organisational Practice
- b) Legislation and Legal Practice
- c) Data Collection and Analysis

Institutional mechanisms must be improved in order to close the gaps between ratification and implementation. International agreement cannot only be in words – it must be enacted. To do this proper monitoring and accountability mechanisms must be introduced, and all collected data must be disaggregated by sex. This would ensure that progress and current challenges in achieving gender equality can be properly exposed and better solutions can be provided. Adequate funding and financing has been consistently under provisioned, and previous accountability mechanisms have been weak.

Specifically, Soroptimist International and Soroptimists have consistently called for the following:

- a) For all practices and policies that are discriminatory against women and girls to be abolished. This should include (but is not limited to), employment practices, discriminatory legislation, education policies, practices that exclude women from positions of power and decision-making processes at all levels, healthcare provisioning, and social security measures. In some cases, women and girls are indirectly discriminated against by a policy or practice. These cases exemplify the importance of having a gendered perspective, as that will contribute to being able to avoid such policies and practices.
- b) For the full adoption, ratification and implementation of the UN Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, UN Security Council Resolution 1325, The Convention on the Rights of the Child and other pieces of legislation that directly improve the situation and status of women and girls. National and regional legislation is also welcomed and supported, for example the Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention (Convention on preventing and combatting violence against women and domestic violence).
- c) Data must be collected on all indicators, and that data must be disaggregated by sex, as well as income, age, race, ethnicity, migration status, disability and geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national context [para. 74(g) of 2030 Agenda]. Only by doing this can gender-sensitive approaches be properly integrated and can progress be properly monitored and assessed. This measure will also assist with ensuring that gender is seen as a truly cross-cutting issue.

The Human Rights of Women

It is true that Human Rights are Women's Rights. However, we must be mindful that due to multiple points of discrimination, the way that women and girls access and experience their human rights can be very different. The increased vulnerabilities of women and girls must also be taken into account. When implementing policies and practices designed and targeted to help women and girls access their human rights, it is vital to include a gender-sensitive perspective. Soroptimists support a human rights-based approach to all the Critical Areas of Concern of the Beijing Platform for Action, and this is exemplified through Soroptimist projects. Furthermore, Soroptimists repeatedly call for, and support,

legislation that strengthen the human rights of women and improves the ability of women and girls to access their rights. The Human Rights of Women is a cross-cutting theme, and so can be interlinked with other themes, especially those of Education and Training of Women, Violence Against Women, and Institutional Mechanism for the Advancement of Women. The human rights focus of SI advocacy has continued into advocacy efforts around the 2030 Agenda and SDGs where SI statements call upon governments to use human rights as both an outcome and a mechanism to achieve the 2030 Agenda. Although the 2030 Agenda refers to the role that human rights has to play in realising sustainable development, SDG5 does not refer to the full range of women's human rights or girls' rights. It only refers to "equal rights to economic resources" in SDG5. By not addressing the need to achieve women's human rights as strongly or explicitly as the Beijing Declaration, the 2030 Agenda could be considered a step backwards. With many women's human right defenders being targeted across the world, and the global political climate seeing push-back against women's rights, which also include civil, political and cultural rights, advocating for policy and legislative changes that will achieve women's and girls' rights is increasingly important.

Women and the Media

There is currently no agreed SI position on women and the media, although a Where We Stand Statement on Cyber Bullying is available on the Soroptimist International website. However, it is worth considering the positive and negative impacts that the media can have upon the empowerment of women.

- a) Positive: *The media is an invaluable tool that can be used to promote awareness of issues that face women. The successful campaigns on raising awareness about violence committed against women and girls, breast cancer, bullying, and other campaigns exemplify this. The media can also be used to promote women as leaders, and demonstrate their crucial involvement in public life. If portrayed constructively, the media is able to present women as equal participants and stimulate debate around issues that directly affect women and girls.*
- b) Negative: *The media can exacerbate the presence of gender stereotyping through its presentation of women. It is possible for the media to downplay the role of women as leaders, represent them unfairly and unequally to men, and objectify women and girls. It is also possible for the media to introduce ideals of "what a woman should be" that affects the views of young people. The responsibility that members of the media have in shaping social norms is often downplayed or ignored.*

Women and the Environment

Women and girls are disproportionately affected by climate change, particularly in poor and rural areas where services are harder to access and there may be a lack of funding. The increased vulnerabilities that women and girls face of violence, economic disenfranchisement, underrepresentation in decision making processes and other forms of discrimination are all exacerbated by climate change and in times of natural disaster. Climate change is a global issue, and countries must consider that while developing policies to combat environmental degradation and its effects on all people, especially women and girls.

The SDGs do address the environment and water, they do not address the specific roles that women can play in protecting the environment, nor the ways in which they are affected by climate change. These gender-specific realities were recently addressed by President Mariet Verhoef-Cohen's 2017-

19 Appeal, ‘Women Water and Leadership’, which as well as supporting the SDGs also contributes to the achievement of this Critical Area of Concern.

As well as forests, deserts, oceans and mountains, urban environments must also be considered as an environment. Urban development and change should be sustainable, and cater for the needs of inhabitants. Spaces must be made safe for women and girls, to help combat risks of violence. Sustainable urban design and development is able to break down social, economic and political barriers, which all disproportionately affect women.

In order for the gender-specific needs of women and girls to be best provided for, women should be included in all levels of decision-making.

The Girl Child

Whilst all children are vulnerable, girls experience heightened vulnerabilities due to deeply rooted gender inequalities and cultural beliefs which still often place girls in subordinated positions within the family, in communities and in society – they are not seen as a priority. The increased risks and vulnerabilities faced by girls need to be acknowledged in the development of policies designed to protect children, and facilitate their ability to access their rights.

Actions need to be taken to ensure that all people who work with girls are aware of and sensitive to their needs. Special awareness needs to be raised around harmful practices that contribute to the disempowerment of girls. Therefore, the following steps should be implemented to ensure the safety and equality of girls:

- a) Ensure that education for girls is accessible, safe, available, and of good quality, particularly for girls living in rural or remote areas. Teachers and school staff must be trained on the specific needs of girls, and how best to interact with them to aid learning outcomes;
- b) Raise awareness and eradicate harmful and criminal practices affecting girls, especially as those practices may occur across borders. Training should be given to those working with girls to make them aware of risks, and protective measures must be available to girls at risk;
- c) The Convention on the rights of the Child should be supported and implemented by governments to protect girls and promote their wellbeing.

The empowerment of girls directly relates to the empowerment of women in the future. The girl child is a cross-sector issue.

SI Statement Submitted to the UN for CSW64

Soroptimist International & Zonta International CSW64 Statement The Time is Now: Achieving the Beijing Platform for Action

*Soroptimist International and Zonta International present this statement on behalf of their members. These recommendations originate from the experiences of 75,000 Soroptimists active in 122 countries and 28,500 Zonta members active in 63 countries. Across the world, Soroptimist and Zonta members are united in achieving gender equality for all. Their grassroots projects address the discrimination and inequality experienced by women and girls, supporting the achievement of the Beijing Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda. Working in partnership with women, girls and their communities, members' projects **educate, empower and enable**, unlocking the potential of sustainable development and ensuring that no woman or girl is left behind.*

'No country has achieved gender equality'

Twenty-five years after agreeing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action – a revolutionary document providing a universal benchmark for women's rights and gender equality – no country has achieved equality for women and girls.

We should, however, celebrate achievements towards gender equality. More women and girls access education, awareness and action against gender-based violence is increasing, and we are closer to realising women's and girls' rights. Still, progress is fragile. Globally, changing political climates bring unacceptable pushback against women's and girls' rights. Such regression is detrimental to all, harming women and girls, preventing communities' sustainable development, and placing artificial limits on economies. Ultimately, a critical combination of a lack of political will, inaction and inadequate funding has caused uneven progress on the 12 Critical Areas of Concern.

Soroptimist International and Zonta International are advocating for the same things now as 25 years ago. It cannot take another 25 years to make the vision of the Beijing Platform for Action a reality.

Connecting the Beijing Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda

The 2030 Agenda saw global agreement that gender equality is both an outcome and means of encouraging sustainable development. The interconnected nature of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) means gender equality (SDG5) is fundamental to the achievement of all goals. Importantly, the 2030 Agenda and SDGs and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action are complementary. Efforts to achieve one supports progress on the other. Significantly, the language in SDG5 emphasises the importance of the 12 Critical Areas of Concern; the language contained within this commitment cannot be diluted.

Alongside efforts to inform the public about the Sustainable Development Goals and support the private sector and other stakeholders with implementation, equivalent efforts must be made with the Beijing Platform for Action, acknowledging their mutually reinforcing relationship. Young people are passionate about sustainable development and gender

equality, yet many remain unaware of the Beijing Platform for Action. All stakeholders have a role in addressing the 12 Critical Areas of Concern, however, effective action requires knowledge and government support. Merely paying lip service to the Beijing Platform for Action commitments has never been enough; now is the time for action not rhetoric.

Education

Despite significant progress on girls' and women's participation in quality education, education and training is difficult to access in many situations. Those living in poverty or with low incomes, migrants, and those in conflict situations or unsafe and rural areas all face disproportionate barriers to accessing lifelong, high-quality education. Education remains essential for gender equality and sustainable development. It contributes to the autonomy, self-sustainability, and economic and social empowerment of women and girls. It is a highly effective tool for alleviating poverty for individuals and communities. Yet too often women and girls do not equally benefit from education, preventing them from realising their potential. Furthermore, in places where women are on average *more qualified* than men, their educational achievements are not translated into equal paying, promotions or leadership positions in the workplace. Education should include gender awareness training to avoid perpetuating gender inequality.

These actions and strategies will support girls and women of all ages to have full and equal access to education:

- Education services should be extended to women and girls who are migrants, refugees, internally displaced persons or unaccompanied minors, including those in transit and in refugee camps. Sufficient funding must be allocated to these specialised services.
- Children not receiving appropriate, quality education must be identified and provided with alternative schooling so they can catch up with their peers and reintegrate into the education system.
- Policies promoting access to education should also promote lifelong access to vocational training and non-formal education to benefit girls and women of all ages.
- To promote women's equal access and participation in STEAM subjects, gender sensitive interventions should be used.
- All educational environments and associated facilities must be made safe for women and girls to enable full and equal participation.
- Safe, inclusive and accessible transportation must be made available to all those attending school.
- Provide girls and school staff with practical information, sanitary products and private and safe water, sanitation and hygiene facilities to decrease absenteeism and help girls manage menstruation in a healthy, safe and dignified manner.
- Gender awareness training must be included in all professional training, including for education professionals.
- Eliminate or reduce school fees and hidden costs of education, such as requirements to buy essential school resources or uniforms, that create barriers to entry.

Gender-based Violence

Gender-based violence remains one of the most significant barriers to achieving gender equality. This violence prevents women and girls from being equal participants in society at every level. Violence against women and girls is a fundamental human rights issue and a central sustainable development challenge. Intimate partner violence, child marriage, female genital mutilation, sexual violence, and other forms of gender-based violence are at epidemic proportions. With a third of all women having experienced physical or sexual violence, concerted action to combat gender-based violence is urgently needed; progress towards the Beijing Platform for Action commitments to reduce rates of gender-based violence has been unacceptably slow.

The following recommendations will support combatting gender-based violence:

- Take immediate action to make all forms of violence against women and girls illegal under criminal and human rights law. This includes legislating against female genital mutilation, domestic violence, rape, trafficking, psychological abuse and other acts that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm as defined in the Istanbul Convention.
- Develop, fund and implement national-level plans to end child marriage.
- Provide training and support to all those who interact with and assist victims of violence so they can better recognise, understand and respond to all forms of violence against women.
- Dedicate specific resources to essential services for women and their families escaping violent situations. Services requiring increased support include women's refuges, healthcare services, legal aid, social services, and education institutions.
- Include community leaders, and men and boys, in efforts to eradicate violence against women and girls.
- Recognise and support NGOs and civil society as key contributors to providing essential services to women and girls and as organisations that lead on approaches to eliminate gender-based violence.

Human Rights

With changing political climates, women's and girls' rights, and women human rights defenders are at risk. These rights are essential legal tools for achieving gender equality and the Beijing Platform for Action. Human rights processes facilitate accountability and address power imbalances. Women's human rights defenders play an essential role in realising the rights of women; it is vital that these women and their efforts are supported and protected, not attacked. The following recommendations support the realisation of women's rights as a critical dimension of gender equality:

- All states should ratify, remove all reservations, implement and participate in international human rights instruments, including CEDAW and its Optional Protocols and the Universal Periodic Review. Implementation must include transformation: incorporating international law into national legislation, policies and decision-making.
- Human rights-based approaches should be taken in all Beijing Platform for Action implementation efforts.

- Women and girls must be equipped with knowledge of their rights and the legal protections available to them.

Policy Administration for Gender Equality

Progress towards achieving gender equality as envisioned by the Beijing Platform for Action will continue to be slow without effective approaches to implementation. Guidelines on implementation methodologies and approaches that expedite the achievement of gender equality should be available to all stakeholders and included in National Action Plans. These guidelines should take into account the interconnectivity of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Sustainable Development Goals, and include:

- A requirement to include women at all levels of decision making and leadership.
- Advice on using gender mainstreaming across all policies and programmes.
- Guidance on using gender budgeting as a means to deploy resources more efficiently and effectively to achieve gender equality.
- A requirement to develop accountability mechanisms that ensure that those making decisions and implementing policies are answerable to women and girls who the policies endeavour to benefit.
- Guidelines on collecting qualitative and quantitative data, disaggregating data, and gender-sensitive monitoring and evaluation.

Conclusion

The world has changed rapidly since the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was agreed in 1995. However, this agenda remains powerfully relevant today, especially in the context of renewed action on achieving gender equality prompted by the 2030 Agenda. We must all adjust our efforts to achieve the 12 Critical Areas of Concern in light of the current international context. Climate change and natural disasters disproportionately affect women. Austerity measures adopted after the global financial crisis also have unique effects on girls, women and their families. Migration, especially due to conflict, political instability, economic strife, disasters and climate change, exacerbates existing vulnerabilities and puts women and girls at risk. The Beijing Platform for Action directly addresses these challenges through the Critical Areas of Concern “Women and the Environment” and “Women in Conflict”, among others. This agenda bolsters the Sustainable Development Goals and continues to provide a comprehensive road map for the achievement of gender equality.

The interconnectivity between the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals simultaneously offers challenges and benefits to the implementation of efforts to achieve gender equality and women’s empowerment. Challenges include assessing, planning, implementing and evaluating actions taken to realise gender equality. However, the advantage is that the best actions could have a dramatic impact, expediting the achievement of women’s empowerment and gender equality. Getting it right now means we should not have to wait another 25 years to achieve gender equality.

**Soroptimist International Statement Submitted to the UN for
The Commission for Social Development:
Supporting Homeless Women Commit to Action**

*Soroptimist International presents this statement on behalf of its 75,000 members active in 122 countries. Soroptimists work in partnership with women, girls and their communities to address gender discrimination, inequality and specific vulnerabilities. For nearly 100 years members' projects have addressed homelessness and its root causes, by supporting refugees and displaced persons, helping women and their families living in shelters, and providing training to women at risk of homelessness due to poverty. These projects use the Soroptimist approach of **educate, empower and enable**, supporting the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and the Copenhagen Declaration, unlocking the potential of sustainable development and ensuring that no woman or girl gets left behind.*

Homelessness is a universal challenge. Among the richest countries levels of homelessness are needlessly rising due to austerity measures which hit the most vulnerable hardest. Rising accommodation costs and family break-ups bring new challenges to single-income households, impacting women of all ages. Other countries shelter those who are displaced, migrating and homeless because of poverty, conflict, political turmoil, natural disasters, and climate change. Globally, many homeless people and temporary urban workers reside in temporary housing, be it shelters, in the homes of friends or family, hostels, or in shanty towns. Life-long income disparities and inequitable social security benefits mean that many older women face homelessness after the death of a partner when they experience a dramatic loss of income. Rural women, living far from available support, are often disproportionately impacted by discriminatory inheritance and land ownership laws, and loss of income. All these risks are created by structural inequalities and discrimination.

Homelessness takes many forms; it is caused by and creates multiple vulnerabilities that have specific and disproportionate impacts on women of all ages, girls and their families. One policy cannot address all of the realities faced by women and girls; comprehensive measures must be developed and enacted. It is possible to eradicate homelessness and provide specialised support to homeless women and their families through gender-sensitive policies and by properly resourcing policy implementation. Homelessness only persists in the forms and degree that it does because governments choose not to commit to act.

Homelessness and Violence Against Women

Domestic and intimate partner violence, sexual violence, abuse, and other forms of gender-based violence are significant causes of homelessness among women and girls as they leave harmful environments. Attempting to leave abusive situations and potentially facing homelessness is often when women are at greatest risk of violence. After leaving, women are placed at risk once again. Those who are street sleepers can face sexual violence, exploitation, and survival sex. Given the horrific prevalence of gender-based violence worldwide, state services already stretched to the limit and chronically underfunded NGO and civil society organisations are left to fill the gap. Too often shelters have to turn vulnerable women away because the demand for their support is so high.

The interconnected problems of gender-based violence and homelessness require integrated policies to support women and girls at a critical juncture. Soroptimist International recommends:

- Women's shelters must be fully funded, resourced and safe. Services should be provided without discrimination. Where NGO and civil society organisations provide services, including advocacy, legal support, accommodation and psycho-social support, in lieu of the government, the government should provide funding to ensure comprehensive service access.
- Resources must be earmarked for essential services to women and their families escaping violent situations regardless of whether they can provide an address. Women's shelters, healthcare providers, legal aid, social services, and education institutions all require increased support.
- Services for homeless women must provide specialised psycho-social support that help them re-establish a safe and stable living environment. This should include, but not be limited to, providing counselling for those who have experienced gender-based violence, income support, continued education and training, legal assistance, and childcare.

Safe Housing as a Woman's Human Right

Access to stable, safe, and quality housing is a critical determining factor in the realisation of core human rights, including rights to health, work, education, participating in the cultural life in the community and to vote. Those who are homeless, without a registered address, or stable accommodation, often cannot access basic services. That safe housing underpins access to a wide range of human rights is affirmed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN UDHR Article 25(1)). Eradicating homelessness is essential to the right to development (as shown by Article 8 in the UN Declaration on the Right to Development) and this right for rural women is further enforced through CEDAW (Article 12(h)). Additionally, specific protections are afforded to girls through the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 27(1)). The transformation of these international human rights obligations at the national level must recognise how different laws and policies can affect women's and girls' risks of homelessness. Laws that discriminate against women of all ages and girls on matters of inheritance, tenure and land rights, property ownership, employment opportunities, and access to social security benefits, among others, contribute to a legally created vulnerability that women and girls face.

Obligations to provide safe housing for women, girls and their families already exist, as shown through a network of human rights instruments. The burden now rests with states to implement their commitments. Failing to act is a breach of those human rights obligations, which structurally create and perpetuate the intersecting vulnerabilities that women face, meaning a government has failed to provide for the needs of their citizens.

Soroptimist International calls upon states to:

- Ratify CEDAW and its Optional Protocols, remove all reservations, and take immediate and effective action to ensure the realisation of gender equality and women's rights contained within CEDAW and its Optional Protocols. National legislation must be

reformed to ensure gender equality within the law, including, the equal right and ability to access to courts, own land, and legal identity documents without which homeless are deprived of social protection and justice.

- Include safe housing as a guaranteed social protection floor and take action to ensure all homeless women and girls have safe accommodation.
- Ensure homeless women and girls access essential services including education at all stages of life, healthcare, legal and banking services, and have the ability to vote.

The Copenhagen Declaration and the Sustainable Development Goals.

In 1995 the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development reaffirmed international consensus on the right to shelter, and viewed adequate housing as a dimension, and root cause, of poverty (Commitments 1f and 2b). In the 2030 Agenda, SDG11.1 commits states to “ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums” as part of making settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. That homelessness was not more explicitly included in the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals was a missed opportunity, and an omission member states must address. Still, the homelessness of women and girls has cross-cutting relevance to the SDGs. As long as there are homeless women and girls, SDG5 on gender equality, SDG1 on poverty, and SDG2 on food security will not be achieved. Therefore, homelessness must continue to be understood as a dimension of poverty and social development, as described by the Copenhagen Declaration.

To address homelessness as part of sustainable development, Soroptimist International recommends that:

- Member states develop an internationally agreed definition of homelessness that includes people living on the streets or open places, people living in temporary or crisis accommodation, those in insecure and inadequate accommodation, and those without access to affordable accommodation. This definition should be used when collecting data to formulate evidence driven policymaking.
- The prevalence of homelessness must be considered a development marker; steps must be taken to ensure there is good quality data on homelessness.
- The data on homelessness must include qualitative data on the experiences of homeless women and girls. Policies and service provision should respond to qualitative and quantitative data.
- The reliability and uniformity of data be addressed so that women are not undercounted in data collection. Alternative data collection methods to ‘by household’ must be found, as women are infrequently able to provide their own data as a household member, and homeless women are not in households.
- Housing protection and provision must be made a social protection floor. Poverty interventions should contain measures to reduce the risks of homelessness. Continued support, including housing and further education, should be provided to girls leaving the state care system to prevent them becoming homeless.
- States should commit to a minimum period of time during which shelter, support and mentoring will be provided to homeless women and their families. This minimum time should be guided by evidence-based research on best practice for breaking cycles of homelessness. This will prove more cost-effective in the long run and reduce the pressure on services.

Using Education to Prevent and Address Homelessness

High-quality, life-long education and training is a vital tool for addressing the root causes of homelessness and supports women and girls leaving situations of homelessness to re-establish safe and stable lives. Education helps women transform their lives, providing them with skills to have independent, economically stable, healthy lives and to share those benefits with their families. Specialised and targeted education and training programmes should be developed for homeless women and girls that address their specific needs and accentuated vulnerabilities. Soroptimist International recommends these programmes provide:

- Psycho-social care, including specialised counselling for gender-based violence, be available through education institutions.
- Safe education facilities and safe transport routes to those facilities.
- Education and support in managing personal finances should be made accessible to all women and girls.
- Access to education must be made available to all, regardless of housing status or the ability to provide a permanent address.

Conclusion

A home is the most basic human need without which human beings cannot fulfil their potential or exercise their rights. Homelessness can be eradicated by 2030 if all member states need to choose to act now by including it as a social protection floor. Effective actions to lift women and girls out of homelessness require a nuanced understanding of the root causes of homelessness, including gender-based violence, economic instability, conflict and climate change. Eradicating homelessness is the first step to eradication of poverty, an integral part of sustainable development and ensuring that no one is left behind.