

# BEIJING+25

25 Years After the Global  
Platform for Action on  
Gender Equality

March 2020



**OUTRIGHT**  
INTERNATIONAL



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Outright International works together for better LGBTIQ lives. Outright is dedicated to working with partners around the globe to strengthen the capacity of the LGBTIQ human rights movement, document and amplify human rights violations against LGBTIQ people, and advocate for inclusion and equality. Founded in 1990, with staff in over a dozen countries, Outright works with the United Nations, regional human rights monitoring bodies, and civil society partners. Outright holds consultative status at the United Nations, where it serves as the secretariat of the UN LGBTI Core Group.

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**Cover photo:** UN Photo/Zheng Yan Hui. Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing Plenary, general view at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China. 5 September 1995.

**Right:** UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe. A view of the conference hall during the high-level side event on “Parliamentary Strategies for Tackling Violence against Women and Girls,” held on the sidelines of the 57th Session of CSW. 5 March 2013.



# What is Beijing+25?

## 2020 marks the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA) of 1995.

This extensive and historic document was drafted during the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China. This conference, historically marked as the venue at which Hilary Clinton famously announced to the crowd of delegates, “human rights are women’s rights and women’s rights are human rights, once and for all,” remains as one of the core moments of global gender equality initiatives.<sup>1</sup> Its original platform was and remains a public call to action on key elements in providing gender equality around the globe, in both public and private spheres.

This document aims to provide LGBTIQ and gender equality activists with an overview of the original Beijing Platform for Action, the processes taking place to mark its 25th anniversary, and how to engage with them inclusively.

## Key Elements

Originally drafted by UN Women during its Fourth World Conference, the final BPfA was signed by 189 member states. Within the official document lie twelve areas of focus by which global leaders may measure gender equality.

- i. Women and poverty
- ii. Education and training for women
- iii. Women and health
- iv. Violence against women
- v. Women and armed conflict
- vi. Women and the economy
- vii. Women in power and decision-making
- viii. Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women
- ix. Human rights of women
- x. Women and the media
- xi. Women and the environment
- xii. The girl-child

<sup>1</sup> <http://globaljusticecenter.net/blog/1149-beijing-25-push-back-against-the-pushback-on-women-s-rights>



# Why Is It Important?

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**The BPfA continues to serve a vital role in the push for gender equality. Beyond its groundbreaking impact on the international community at the time of its implementation, the BPfA remains the core platform by which gender equality may be quantified on an international scale.**

The United Nations (UN) continues to advocate that future global agendas must be both “universal” and “anchored” in human rights, including those related to gender equality, making the BPfA continuously relevant to future agendas.<sup>2</sup> Expanding upon this, the UN centers its promotion of the “realization of women’s and girls’ human rights” as essential to gaining not only universal human rights, but also establishing peace, security, and sustainable development.<sup>3</sup>

The review forums planned throughout 2020 act as important opportunities to maintain and reignite global focus on gender equality. Although not yet fully realized, these goals act as a standard by which intersectional feminists may quantify progress towards total equality. Past anniversarial reviews to the BPfA have provided meaningful expansion and refinement of its original objectives, as well as reimagined avenues towards realizing full international equality. This will result in various documented assessments serving as major tools in highlighting international commitments to gender equality and holding global actors accountable to their various commitments.<sup>4</sup>

A significant aspect of this declaration includes calls for state action, through financial, infrastructural, and overall organizational support. That being said, as is noted in the 20th anniversarial review of the BPfA, in comparative research it was found that in 70 countries for the past 40 years, autonomous, feminist organizations have accounted for “the most critical factor” in implementing gender equality policies.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the realization of these goals depends on the involvement of civil society actors to push further progress from member states. The review processes taking place in 2020 are important because they provide a platform for civil society to voice their concerns around the achievement of the BPfA.

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<sup>2</sup> A summary of the Report of the Secretary-General on the 20-year review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (E/CN.6/2015/3).

<sup>3</sup> CSW report titled “NGO Guidance for National Parallel Reports: Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995)” <https://www.ngocsw.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/NGO-Main-Guide-2019-Supplement-5.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> A summary of the Report of the Secretary-General on the 20-year review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (E/CN.6/2015/3).

<sup>5</sup> A summary of the Report of the Secretary-General on the 20-year review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (E/CN.6/2015/3).

## ACHIEVEMENTS

While the majority of commitments are yet to be met, several key achievements have been attained. Above all other objectives, UN Women cites major achievements in reference to life expectancy, fertility, enrollment in primary education, and income. Goals towards educational parity in particular stand as the most successful objective from the BPfA, with gender parity in both primary and secondary education overall achieved with some regional variations.<sup>6</sup> Although no LGBTIQ+ rights or objectives were ever explicitly mentioned in the BPfA, its creation opened dialogue regarding sexuality and sexual rights of women in the UN for the first time.<sup>7</sup> With its mere existence, the BPfA provides an avenue by which queer advocates may push for further expansion of intersectional gender equality discourse, including those of the LGBTIQ+ community.

## AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT

Since 1995, the ways by which rights for both women and girls are realized has changed significantly. Public discourse surrounding feminist advocacy continues to be a burgeoning topic on a global scale, in both public and private sectors.

While 189 governments signed the BPfA in 1995, not a single state may claim complete fulfillment of its enumerated objectives.<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, UN Women cites that gains in gender equality are experiencing heavy resistance and even reversals of gender equality agendas in some areas of concern, with those working towards human rights and gender equality being “imperiled.”<sup>9</sup> Although bringing about systemic change is often a slow and arduous process, people continue to face gender-based oppression on a day-to-day basis, and advocates are calling for a reversal on the attack against gender equality agendas.

### →] Access Point

Speak with your local governments regarding the development of the progression of the Beijing Declaration implementation and involvement in Beijing+25. Highlight potential expanded inclusion of LGBTIQ+ folk in discussions surrounding gender equality.



Right: UN Photo/Milton Grant. Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. 3 September 1995.

<sup>6</sup> A summary of the Report of the Secretary-General on the 20-year review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (E/CN.6/2015/3).

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.sxpolitics.org/frontlines/book/pdf/capitulo9\\_united\\_nations.pdf](http://www.sxpolitics.org/frontlines/book/pdf/capitulo9_united_nations.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> A summary of the Report of the Secretary-General on the 20-year review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform

<sup>9</sup> Background report on Civil Society Advisory Group to the Core Group, Terms of Reference (UN Women, 2019).

# LGBTIQ+ Inclusion

## **While the BPfA's language centers on women and girls and lacks explicit mention of LGBTIQ+, its overall objective is towards gender equality.**

At the root of all of the BPfA's objectives is the resistance to gender-based norms, restrictions, and overall violence. LGBTIQ+ people are disproportionately affected by gender inequality because of the deeply ingrained gender norms and perceptions which we do not fit into, and even challenge by our very existence. Because gender affects all people, not only cisgender or heterosexual women and girls, the conversations surrounding achieving gender equality should involve all society members, including those of the LGBTIQ+ community.

Therefore, it is the intent of Outright and other human rights groups, to underscore the importance of empowerment and equality for all people, for all genders. Lesbian activism and visibility in 1995 at the creation and adoption of the BPfA centered on ensuring inclusion within the document. This work was crucial and has, in many ways, paved our subsequent work in mainstreaming LGBTIQ+ inclusion through such processes. This year, in the review process, we wanted LGBTIQ+ visibility to be even stronger, not just on the part of activists, but also states. As this conversation and review continues across the globe, it is imperative that the voices of the global LGBTIQ+ community are not overlooked. An intersectional approach to gender equality should be consistently and strategically used so as to not leave behind the voices of LGBTIQ+ people.

The language used throughout the BPfA explicitly highlights the rights of women and girls and there has been some progress on explicit references to LGBTIQ+ people in reviews which have taken place since the adoption of the original platform.<sup>10</sup> Beyond this, the only other explicit note of LGBTIQ+ people appears in UN Women's 2015 report on the 20th Anniversary review in the final objective of violence against adolescents identifying as LGBTIQ+. Although this point is of concern for the LGBTIQ+ community, there needs to be an ongoing expansion of language to emphasize gender equality for those within the LGBTIQ+ community throughout all of the BPfA's objectives. It should be noted as well that this does not only refer to those who identify as women within the community, but all people who deviate from their prescribed gender identities and roles are devoid of substantial protections across the globe.

<sup>10</sup> A summary of the Report of the Secretary-General on the 20-year review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (E/CN.6/2015/3).

## →] Access Point

Identify and engage with allied civil society organizations who are on formal government delegations. Ask them for more information. Work with these actors on assessing dynamics (including language and climates) in these spaces and discussions.

## →] Access Point

Feed approved language from related proceedings to allied governments.

There has also been progress in states pushing for more inclusive language. Recent national reviews in preparation for Beijing+25 indicate that several member states, both in the Global North and South, have expanded their lenses of gender equality to include people from within the LGBTIQ+ community. Much of this inclusion indicates an improvement from past years' reviews. However, a large majority of member states involved in these reviews have abstained or merely ignored the involvement of LGBTIQ+ people in their discussions on gender equality. Despite the mixed progress towards this issue, it is paramount that civil society members continue to pressure their state representatives to revise and expand their understandings of gender equality to include all people.



**Above:** Brad Hamilton. Audience members from UN Event: *Gender Diversity Beyond Binaries*.



# 2020 Focus

**In 2015, during the Beijing+20 review, UN Women highlighted a condensed list of issues measuring women’s parliamentary positions, involvement in peace talks, wages, senior management roles, presence in media, maternal death rates, education parity, access to clean water, and overall literacy.<sup>11</sup>**

During this same time frame, in 2015 Partners for Change, a civil society coalition, cites “urgent action” requests on the following points:<sup>12</sup>

- Transforming discriminatory social norms and gender stereotypes
- Transforming the economy to achieve gender equality and sustainable development
- Ensuring full and equal participation of women in decision-making at all levels
- Significantly increasing investments in gender equality
- Strengthening accountability for gender equality and the realization of the human rights of women and girls

In review of this, certain questions, opportunities, and foci are anticipated for the Beijing+25 review. These review sessions assess core issues such as sexual and reproductive health, women, peace, security, sexual and gender-based violence and the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).<sup>13</sup>

Based on its Beijing+20 forum, Partners for Change cites that, beyond these general issues, the forums for Beijing+25 should provide key opportunities for the voices of participants such as those of “young feminist influencers, grassroots feminist mobilizers, LGBTIQ groups, people with disabilities, feminists from ageing groups, environmental and climate justice groups, minority groups including Roma women, migrant women, homeless women,” among others.

**Right:** Photo: Brad Hamilton Photography. LGBT Core Group at the UN: The Economic Cost of LGBT Exclusion. UNHQ, New York, 10 December 2015.

<sup>11</sup> <https://csopartnersforchange.org/news/2019/5/14/beijing25-and-unece-cso-regional-forum-28-october-2019>

<sup>12</sup> <https://csopartnersforchange.org/news/2019/5/14/beijing25-and-unece-cso-regional-forum-28-october-2019>

<sup>13</sup> A summary of the Report of the Secretary-General on the 20-year review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (E/CN.6/2015/3).



As previously mentioned, the framing of all of these issues may push an exclusive focus on women and girls; however, all of these issues affect members of the LGBTIQ+ population.

Tactful, intersectional approaches must be used when addressing these issues, which includes the involvement of the LGBTIQ+ population within the discussions. As LGBTIQ+ actors, this provides a significant opportunity to mainstream the expansion of gender equality beyond those of women and girls.

Finally, there is an ongoing gap in collected data not only of global LGBTIQ+ experiences, but gender issues in general.<sup>14</sup> While strategies will be reviewed and reformed during the Beijing+25 process, part of the call to action will be in data collection. Organizations such as Outright will continue to collect data in regards to gender equality, as significant gaps in research and policy making continue. However, as is stated in the 20th anniversary report of the BPfA, gaps in data are no excuse for inaction.<sup>15</sup>

Outright is engaging in the review process, through direct participation around the world, working with civil society partners to ensure LGBTIQ+ participation and inclusion in all of the forums. Additionally, Outright is supporting a group of 9 Beijing Fellows to specifically follow and engage in the Beijing+25 process.

## TIMELINE

Beijing+25, while standing as an anniversary celebration of this monumental document and global movement, will also bring about substantial review and highlight necessary room for improvement. UN Women and CEDAW have outlined a tiered system of review that is already underway. In order to make central voices heard, involvement must be pushed at all of these stages. All of these conferences stand as opportunities for interested and necessary parties to highlight further room for improvement of the global LGBTIQ+ rights agenda.

### Regional Meeting

As part of its 25th anniversary, UN Women and The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) facilitated national and regional forums, held across the globe in an effort to evaluate the overall implementation of the BPfA. These regional meetings were in anticipation of and preparation for various gender equality forums being held in 2020. There, NGOs prepared and delivered national reports, which then informed regional reports and declarations. Outright participated in each of these forums to ensure LGBTIQ+ voices were included.

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### →] Access Point

Actors are encouraged to pursue and advocate for opportunities to collect further disaggregated quantitative data pertaining specifically to various global LGBTQ+ information gaps.

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### →] Access Point

Regional Stakeholder forums are open to civil society members and registered NGOs. You can register for your respective regional forum by following the resource links included in this document.

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.choiceforyouth.org/news/blog/choice-at-the-csw/>

<sup>15</sup> A summary of the Report of the Secretary-General on the 20-year review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (E/CN.6/2015/3).

The meetings took place on the following dates:

- **Oct 27–Nov 1, 2019:** Africa regional consultation in Ethiopia
- **Oct 28–30, 2019:** European and Central Asia regional consultation in Geneva
- **Nov 24–29, 2019:** Asian regional consultation in Thailand
- **Nov 26–27, 2019:** MENA regional consultation in Jordan
- **Jan 27–31, 2020:** Latin American and Caribbean regional consultation in Chile

## UN Commission on the Status of Women

The sixty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) was scheduled to originally take place from March 9–20, 2020. At this session, the Commission and other session actors were slated to analyze the BPfA's implementation and produce an enumerated list of challenges affecting overall full enactment of the 2030 SDGs. During the ten-day CSW sessions, there would normally have been "formal" and "informal" meetings open to UN member states, civil society actors, and gender experts at UN headquarters. The session builds itself upon three annual themes: a priority theme, a review theme, and an emerging issues theme, all of which are based on the 12 central points introduced in the BPfA. Unlike prior years, the sixty-fourth CSW session outcome document did not follow the traditional form of Agreed Conclusions but rather a Political Declaration.

Non-state actors looking to participate in these discussions are normally able to access the formal meetings and various side-events throughout the session (the informal meetings are open-floor discussions accessible to only member states). Side-events include panels, presentations, exhibits, film screenings, and expert discussions centered on the themes of the overall session, and provide excellent opportunities for governments and civil society actors to interact with one another in open dialogues surrounding global gender equality.<sup>16</sup>

On March 2, 2020, due to the WHO issuing a level four alert related to the spread of COVID-19, CSW was postponed to an indefinite future date. On March 9th Member States held a procedural meeting to adopt the Political Declaration.

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### →] Access Point

CSW and UN Women have created "NGO Guidance for National Parallel Reports" as a helpful tool to be utilized through the ongoing review processes leading up to Beijing+25. NGOs and civil society members are encouraged to use this as a resource in creating their own independent BPfA progress reports.

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### →] Access Point

Find out if your government is holding any civil society briefings on the negotiations during Beijing+25. Ask if you may be included or, if not, provided notes following these meetings.

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### →] Access Point

Follow up with your government representatives throughout and after these review forums. Ask for government officials to provide report-backs following these meetings.

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<sup>16</sup> <https://www.choiceforyouth.org/news/blog/choice-at-the-csw/>

## Generation Equality Forum

Following the aforementioned preparatory review sessions, UN Women is hoping to host The Generation Equality Forum in both Mexico City and Paris in 2020. Both events are open to the public with an emphasis on multilateralism, including actors ranging from civil society to trade unions, to media, encouraging dialogue on global integrated partnerships. The kick-off forum in Mexico City is currently scheduled to

be held May 7–8, 2020 and the culminating forum in Paris to be held in July 7–10, 2020.<sup>17</sup> However, due to the ongoing concerns around COVID-19 the future of the forums is unclear. They will most likely be rescheduled to be held in the last quarter of 2020.

## Governance Structure for the Generation Equality Forums

To ensure robust civil society participation in the creation and roll out of the Generation Equality Forums and the various Beijing+25 entry points the following bodies have been created:

- 1. Core Group:** this decision making body consists of 4 members including 1 representative for UN Women, France, Mexico & Civil Society. The Civil Society representation is shared between 2 members of the Civil Society Advisory Group Shannon Kowalski and Mabel Bianco.
- 2. Civil Society Advisory Group:** this body consists of 21 diverse representatives of civil society and works together to discuss issues which are brought to different bodies including the Core Group.<sup>18</sup>
- 3. Multi-Stakeholder Steering Group:** this body includes 25 members chosen by the Core Group consisting of civil society, Member States, private sector and influencers.
- 4. Strategic Planning & Leadership Group:** this body consists of over 50 civil society leaders selected by UN Women to help advise UN Women on Beijing+25.
- 5. Beijing+25 Youth Task Force:** this body consists of 30 members selected by UN Women which advises UN Women on youth involvement in Beijing+25.

These various bodies regularly meet to ensure civil society voices are heard throughout the various entry points and discussions taking place regarding the Beijing+25 process. Outright is currently a member of both the Civil Society Advisory Group and the Strategic Planning & Leadership Group.

### →] Access Point

The official website for all information on the generation equality forums can be found here: <https://forum.generationequality.org>.

The information on this page can be used to put together advocacy initiatives for both forums as well as the action coalitions.

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<sup>17</sup> <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2019/7/announcer-generation-equality-forum>

<sup>18</sup> [https://apngocsw.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Advisory\\_Group\\_Photos\\_Bios\\_1\\_-1.pdf](https://apngocsw.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Advisory_Group_Photos_Bios_1_-1.pdf)



## Action Coalitions

As a result of these conferences, “Action Coalitions” are then launched as a way to address the most pressing large-scale gender equality issues. The current themes of the Action Coalitions are as follows:

- Gender-based violence
- Economic justice and rights
- Bodily autonomy and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR)
- Feminist action for climate justice
- Technology and innovation for gender equality
- Feminist movements and leadership

Due to the delay in the forums, the Action Coalitions will now move forward outside of the conference process. In January 2020 UN Women announced the eligibility criteria for the leadership positions of the Action Coalitions and collected a great amount of interest from both Member States and civil society. Currently, members of the various Governance Structure bodies, including Outright, are reviewing applications to ensure robust cross-regional and intersectional representation.

## UN General Assembly

Together, these events provide opportunities for various actors of the UN, Member States, and civil society to underscore their own experiences of the BPfa over the past 25 years. The findings from all these various forums and discussions will then be presented at the High-Level Meeting of the UN General Assembly in September 2020. During this time, there will be, at a minimum, a High-Level Panel acknowledging the Beijing+25 anniversary and Global Forum.



# Concluding Remarks

**In order to ensure LGBTIQ+ inclusion within the Beijing+25 process it is vitally important that civil society continues to follow the various elements of the process closely and engage thoroughly.**

Participation by a diverse range of civil society will help firmly situate LGBTIQ+ issues within the broader gender equality agenda. With the disruption in the process by the developments around COVID-19, Outright and civil society partners will work to hold governments accountable for holding these forums in a meaningful way at a future date and will continue to provide updated information as it is provided.



**Right:** Photo: UN Photo/Milton Grant Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing. Women attending the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China, discuss issues during the informals. 13 September 1995.

# Additional Readings

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**Report of the Secretary-General: Review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly**

<https://undocs.org/E/CN.6/2020/3>

**UN Women's outline on "The Beijing 12 Critical Areas of Concern"**

<https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/csw59/feature-stories>

**"Submitted NGO National Parallel Reports"**

<https://ngocsw.org/beijing25/submitted-national-parallel-reports/>

**United Nations press release titled "As Result of Beijing Conference, World Has Recognized Critical Importance of Gender Equality to Peace, Development, Secretary-General Tells Observance"**

<https://www.un.org/press/en/2005/wom1498.doc.htm>

**UN Women's information page on the Generation Equality Forums**

<https://www.unwomen.org/en/get-involved/beijing-plus-25/generation-equality-forum>

**UN Women's information page on the Action Coalitions**

<https://www.unwomen.org/en/get-involved/beijing-plus-25/generation-equality-forum/action-coalitions>



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