

# WE DESERVE BETTER

## Unlocking the Power of Social Protection for Women and Girls







# Acknowledgments

This document was prepared by Lauren Whitehead and Clara Ceravolo (UNICEF Social Policy and Social Protection). Many thanks also to the Glowing Embers Network in Sierra Leone, Glorious United for Rural Development (GURD) in Rwanda, Mobile Creches in India, Nepal Institute for Social and Environmental Research (NISER) in Nepal, Children's Rights Innovation Fund (CRIF) in Barbados, and Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement in Sri Lanka. Special thanks to the UNICEF Sierra Leone, Rwanda, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Eastern Caribbean Area country offices for the support with the We Deserve Better consultations, the Social Protection Technical Assistance, Advice, and Resource Facility (STAAR), Amel Hashim Salim (University of Buffalo), and Rouge Communications.

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# Executive Summary

UNICEF conducted a series of consultations with feminist, women-, and girl-led organizations to explore their experiences and participation in designing and implementing social protection systems. This report presents the outcomes and recommendations from these consultations on enhancing the gender-responsiveness of social protection systems and participatory approaches for women and girls. Building on these recommendations through the We Deserve Better initiative, UNICEF urges the development of co-designed gender-responsive and transformative social protection with women and girls, addressing short, medium, and long-term pathways to achieve transformative gender equality outcomes. This requires coordinated collaboration among governments, development partners, and civil society to ensure effective implementation and impact.









# 1

## What is the issue?

The landscape of social exclusion exhibits a pronounced gender bias, with girls, adolescent girls, and women facing heightened vulnerabilities. Statistics reveal a 25% greater likelihood of poverty among females compared to males, a figure that climbs to 50% in female-headed households.<sup>1</sup> Globally, 333 million children live in extreme poverty.<sup>2</sup> Poverty, however, extends beyond monetary constraints, encompassing a deprivation of fundamental resources.<sup>3</sup>

Girls, particularly those living in poverty, encounter elevated risks such as child marriage and early pregnancy, with an estimated 640 million women having been married in childhood.<sup>4</sup> Access to education and vocational training remains inadequate for women and girls with almost twice as many adolescent girls not in education, employment, or training compared to boys.<sup>5</sup> Access to gender-based violence (GBV) prevention mechanisms and survivors' support remains inadequate for women and girls despite one in three women globally having experienced intimate partner violence in their lifetime.<sup>6</sup> Access to sexual and reproductive health remains inadequate for women and girls, despite 218 million women in developing countries who want to avoid pregnancy not having access to safe and effective family planning methods.<sup>7</sup>

The responsibility of unpaid care, support, and domestic work is disproportionately shouldered by women and girls globally, with girls aged 5-14 dedicating 160 million more hours daily to domestic chores compared to boys.<sup>8</sup> In climate-affected regions, these disparities are exacerbated as girls often undertake perilous journeys for necessities like water and wood, increasing their vulnerability to violence and impeding educational opportunities.

**333**  
million

Children live  
in extreme  
poverty

### Women and girls

**640**  
million

Married in  
childhood

**218**  
million

lack access to  
safe and effective  
family planning  
methods

**The perpetuation of these gender  
disparities is a policy choice.  
Women and girls deserve better.**

<sup>1</sup> UN Women Gender Snapshot. 2023.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Global Coalition to end Child Poverty

<sup>4</sup> UNICEF. Is an end Child Marriage within Reach? 2023.

<sup>5</sup> UNICEF. Five Game-Changing Priorities. 2023.

<sup>6</sup> UN Women. Explore the Facts: Violence Against Women. 2021.

<sup>7</sup> National Institute of Health (NIH). Unmet Family Planning Need Globally: A Clarion Call for Sharpening Current Research FrameWorks. 2023.

<sup>8</sup> UNICEF. Harnessing the Power of Data for Girls. 2016.

# 2

## What is the role of social protection?

Social protection is a universal human right. It is a set of systems, policies, and programs aimed at protecting individuals against the hardship of poverty, preventing deprivation during life course periods of vulnerability; promoting economic opportunities and human capital development; and transforming the power imbalances in society that create and sustain poverty and vulnerability.<sup>9</sup>



**Cash assistance and access to social services can reduce poverty and help households shift negative coping mechanisms that harm women and girls most.** When designed well, they can provide economic security for girls and their families, increase her school enrollment, reduce her unpaid care labor, and mitigate the risk of domestic violence, transactional sex, and child marriage.<sup>10</sup> This includes linking girls to critical services and resources like health insurance, menstrual hygiene, and sexual and reproductive health. Free of these risks and with access to these services, girls are empowered to make positive choices in their lives.



**Access to social services such as care and support, and access to economic opportunities such as skills and jobs are impactful linkages that social protection programs can make for women and girls.** Family-friendly policies such as child benefits, childcare services, and paid parental leave can increase women's labor force participation and girls' school attendance by shifting domestic labor. Linkages to skills, vocational training, and financial services can increase women and girls' short and long-term economic prospects.



**Linking cash transfers with early warning systems, providing support for livelihood diversification,** training on green skills and climate information, can support girls' adaptation to climate shocks, their climate-resilience, and reduce households' gender-discriminatory coping mechanisms to the financial hardships brought by climate change. Investments that improve access to social protection and decrease poverty can **considerably reduce overall climate risk for 310 million children,** especially girls who are more vulnerable to its impacts.<sup>11</sup>

Despite these potential benefits for women and girls, **out of the 3099 social protection and labor market measures included globally in response to COVID-19, only 19.6% took gender into account.**<sup>12</sup> At a time when social protection measures saw the greatest global uptick and women and girls demonstrated the highest need, still their needs were overlooked.



"Systems are broken. We try to incorporate women and girls into these broken systems, but we need to convert them into systems that actually work for everyone. That is how we bring about change."

– **Mallika Dutt**, Program Director,  
Gender Equity and Governance, William and Flora Hewlett  
Foundation at the 68<sup>th</sup> Commission on the Status of Women

©UNICEF, 2024. "We Deserve Better: Unlocking the Power of Social Protection for Women and Girls" high-level event at the 68<sup>th</sup> Commission on the Status of Women.

<sup>9</sup> UNICEF. Global Social Protection Programme Framework. 2019.

<sup>10</sup> UNICEF. A synthesis of what we know works to prevent and respond to child marriage: Evidence Paper for UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage, Phase III (2024-2030). 2024.

<sup>11</sup> UNICEF. The Climate Crisis is a Child Rights Crisis. 2021.

<sup>12</sup> Gavrilovic, M. et al. Gender-responsive social protection post-COVID-19. 2022.





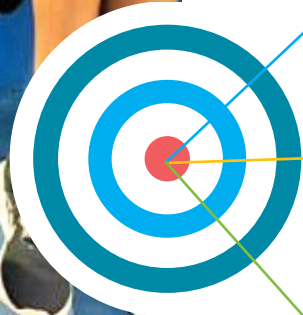
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# 3

## What is the We Deserve Better initiative?

Under the We Deserve Better initiative, UNICEF and partners conducted a series of consultations and a global survey with feminist, women and girl-led organizations aimed at exploring the lived experiences of women and girls with the design and implementation of social protection to inform policymaking. The consultations investigated the challenges that women and girls are facing in different contexts to benefit from and influence social protection systems towards enhanced inclusivity and gender-responsiveness.

### Objectives of the We Deserve Better initiative



Explore perceived **benefits and limitations of social protection** for gender equality, particularly for marginalized and disadvantaged gender groups.



**Outline strategies** by which implementers and policymakers can improve policies and programs to address gender equality objectives.



Expose ways women and youth, particularly girls, have been engaged in the **design and implementation** of social protection systems to improve their engagement ahead.

**UNICEF works in 151 countries on strengthening social protection systems to ensure that all children have access to social protection.** A critical part of this is ensuring social protection programs and systems are more inclusive, responsive to the needs of women, girls, and accountable. In 2023, UNICEF worked in 129 countries that reported integrating gender-specific objectives into national and sub-national social protection systems, a more than fourfold growth from 29 countries in 2019. UNICEF also witnessed a 15% increase in countries achieving gender-responsive or transformative status by adopting gender considerations into the design and delivery of social protection policies and programs.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> UNICEF. Global Annual Results Report. 2023.



©UNICEF, 2023. We Deserve Better Consultation at Women Deliver in Kigali, Rwanda.

Under the We Deserve Better initiative, **UNICEF trained and supported women’s and girls’ rights organizations in different countries to conduct a total of seven local consultations.** The participating organizations include Glowing Embers Network in Sierra Leone, Glorious United for Rural Development (GURD) in Rwanda, Mobile Creches in India, Nepal Institute for Social and Environmental Research (NISER) in Nepal, Children’s Rights Innovation Fund (CRIF) in Barbados, and Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement in Sri Lanka.

In addition, **UNICEF conducted five We Deserve Better consultations** on the sidelines of major global events in 2023: namely, the Transfer Project in Kenya, Women Deliver in Rwanda, African Youth SDG Summit in Zambia, Asian Development Bank Social Protection Week in the Philippines, and COP28 in the United Arab Emirates. Partners such as the World Bank, UN Women, Asian Development Bank, and the COP28 International Youth Climate Delegates, among others, participated in these consultations.

The **We Deserve Better consultations comprise the first phase of this initiative.** This phase culminated in a high-level event at the 68th Commission on the Status of Women (CSW68) in March 2024, premiering the We Deserve Better [Mini Documentary](#) as an advocacy tool for policymakers and practitioners, and convening champion governments and partners for gender-responsive social protection.



**Almost 300 girls and women aged between 18 and 60 from over 30 different countries were consulted.**

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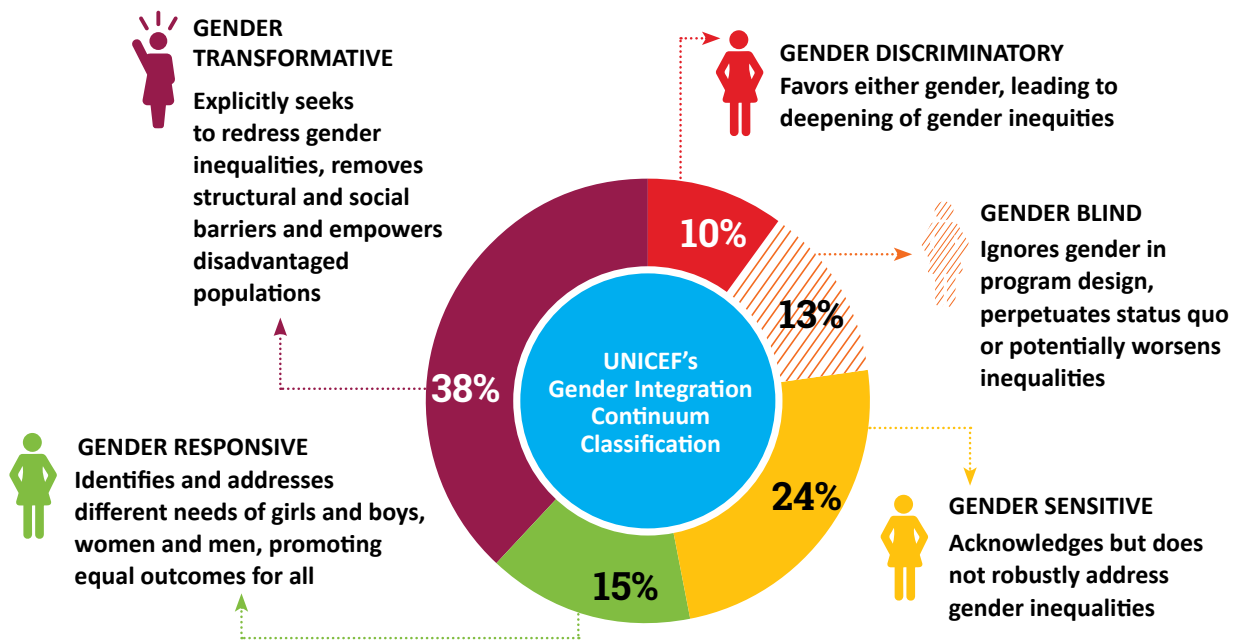


# 4

## What did we learn from the consultations?

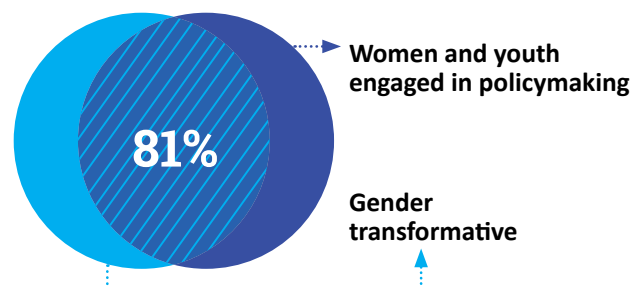
More than 85% of the consultees had been engaged, to different extents, with local and national level organizations in their country.<sup>14</sup> These organizations do not all necessarily focus on social protection, although they all work towards gender equality more broadly. Despite this, most women and girls consulted were familiar with social protection programs and policies in their country and how they impacted their lives. Levels of familiarity varied across consultees and depended on the effectiveness of national communication strategies as well as the availability of social protection for women and girls.

Based on UNICEF’s Gender Integration Continuum classification (see below),<sup>15</sup> 10% of the consultees deemed their national social protection system, program, or policies to be gender-discriminatory, 13% gender-blind, 24% gender-sensitive, 15% gender-responsive, and 38% gender-transformative.<sup>16</sup>



More than half of the consultees reported to have been engaged, to different degrees, in policymaking processes for social protection in their countries. However, 58% of women and girls also expressed the need for more participatory policymaking. This data begins to indicate that engagement in policymaking, if not meaningful and intentional, is not satisfactory and conducive to participatory policymaking.

Notably, **81% of the consultees who deemed their national social protection system to be gender-transformative reported to have been engaged in the policymaking process.** This shows a correlation between participatory policymaking and the transformative nature of social protection systems.



<sup>14</sup> Please note that this percentage reflects only the respondents of the We Deserve Better Survey.

<sup>15</sup> UNICEF. Gender-Responsive Age-Sensitive Social Protection. 2020.

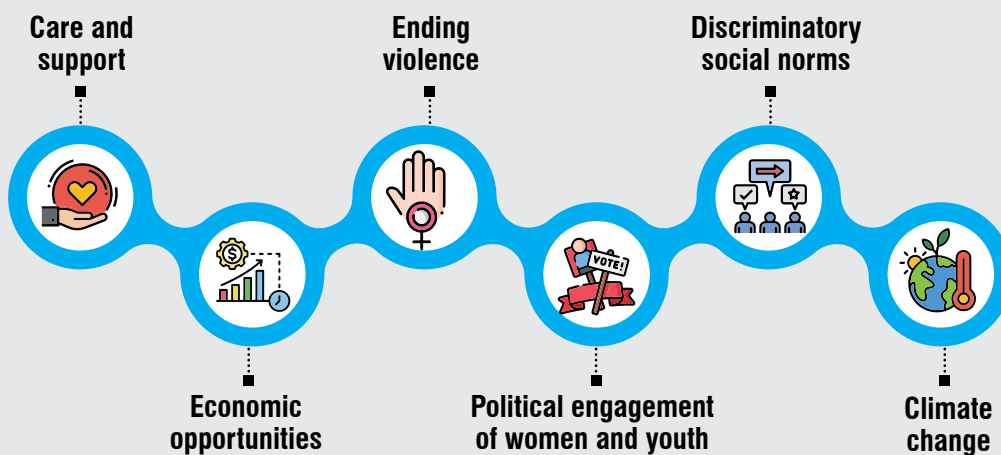
<sup>16</sup> It should be noted that the application of the classifications may not always be straightforward for entire systems as to specific system components such as a specific policy or programme. A social protection system can have some gender-sensitive components and some gender-responsive components, for example.

# 5

## What are the key trends?

Under the We Deserve Better initiative, women and girls discussed the role that social protection can play towards gender equality outcomes and the need for meaningful participatory approaches to systems' design and implementation.

They explored the potential benefits and challenges in leveraging social protection systems, programs, and policies in addressing gender issues related to:



### Care and support

#### Key takeaways

1. Unpaid care and domestic work is disproportionately shouldered by women and girls.
2. Care and domestic work stand as a barrier for women and girls to pursue education and paid work opportunities.
3. The lack of social and monetary recognition for care work causes economic vulnerability and social marginalization.

Effective care and support systems play a pivotal role in shaping societal well-being, particularly in fostering human development, ensuring equal participation in socio-economic activities, and mitigating systemic gender inequalities. However, there are gross imbalances in the gender distribution of unpaid care work. These disparities are grounded in gender norms that deem domestic responsibilities as women's and girls' work.<sup>17</sup>

**In the consultations, women and girls reported bearing the primary responsibility for childcare and household work (typically unpaid), which stand as a barrier for them to perform other activities (e.g., education, paid work, etc).** This limits their future prospects and further entrenches restrictive gender norms on expectations of their roles. The lack of social recognition and monetary compensation for care, support, and household work was additionally identified as a cause of economic vulnerability and social marginalization for caregivers – disproportionately women and girls – in all consultations.

**Social protection can provide access to subsidized childcare services, paid maternity and paternity leave, child benefits, community sensitization and social behavioral change around domestic work in the household.** This can increase women's labor force participation and girls' school attendance.

<sup>17</sup> UNICEF Data. Gender Norms and Unpaid Work. 2023.



In our communities, it's mainly the women who take care of household chores, look after the old members in the family, attend to the sick and also children. That's why a lot of awareness and practical solutions are needed. For example, more work opportunities for women so women will also have power over decisions in the family.

– *We Deserve Better Consultation in Sri Lanka*



## Economic opportunities

### Key takeaways

1. Women and girls face economic challenges due to limited access to education, skills building, and employment.
2. Women and girls have limited access to credit and financial services, collateral security, and capital for investments.
3. Women and girls often experience limited access to collateral security and capital for investments.

According to a 2024 UNICEF U-Report on adolescent girls, a higher percentage of younger adolescent girls aged 14 or younger voted that receiving money for their families is a priority (27%), compared to older adolescent girls (17%), who identified earning money as their top priority and concern for the future (27.5%).<sup>18</sup> Younger girls were more likely to prioritize cash transfer and social protection programs for their families and caregivers, while older girls were more likely to prioritize support to increase their own ability to earn money, for example through skills building and employment support programs.<sup>19</sup> These findings highlight the undeniable reality that economic and income security are top priorities for girls.

**In the We Deserve Better consultations, women and girls reported facing economic barriers due to limited access to education, skills training, and employment including both formal and informal employment.** 80% of the consultations highlighted that the economic opportunities matching the education qualifications and skills of women and girls are severely limited. Women and girls highlighted the fact that their learned **skills often do not match market demand** leading to high concentration in lower skilled and traditionally gendered domains deemed more 'appropriate' for women and girls. For instance, women and girls expressed **limited access to building digital and financial skills** which are more readily available to men and boys.

Serving millions of households globally, **social protection acts as an economic lifeline for families, especially vulnerable households, and offers a door to social services that might otherwise be out of reach for women and girls.** Economically empowering girls through social protection can directly contribute to reducing some of the gravest risks they face that propel them into dangerous coping mechanisms such as school dropout, risky and transactional sex, and more due to poverty, exclusion, lack of opportunity, and lack of access to the resources and services necessary to thrive.

Women and girls deserve to live in a world where they have the same economic opportunities. We must challenge the systems and attitudes that perpetuate discrimination, and work towards a future where every woman and girl has a fair chance.

– *We Deserve Better Consultation in Rwanda*

<sup>18</sup> UNICEF. Delivering with and for adolescent girls: five game changing priorities. 2024.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.



## Ending violence

### Key takeaways

1. Women and girls are more exposed to all forms of violence, including mobility restrictions by a partner.
2. Women and girls often struggle to leave abusive relationships due to a lack of economic independence and social stigma.
3. Girls are disproportionately exposed to child marriage due to social norms and financial constraints to their families.

In all of the consultations, women and girls reported being more exposed to all forms of violence, including sexual and intimate partner violence, economic violence,<sup>20</sup> domestic violence, child marriage, and mobility restrictions by a partner.<sup>21</sup> 40% of the consultations reflected that women often struggle to leave abusive relationships due to a lack of economic independence and fear of the social stigma against single women, especially single or adolescent mothers. The consultations also emphasized that girls are disproportionately vulnerable to child marriage due to gender discriminatory social norms and financial constraints to their families leading to negative coping mechanism to their expense.

A review of 21 studies on the impact of **cash transfers on child marriage found these programs can alleviate several of the economic and social drivers of child marriage** through distinctive pathways, such as improved household economic security and increased access to education.<sup>22</sup> There is a corresponding, strong body of evidence that cash transfers can also decrease violence against women and girls; delay adolescent girls' sexual debut; and delay adolescent pregnancy.<sup>23</sup>

At night they come drunk and we are angry. We think we will leave them. But in the morning, men are sober, they go about their work and we have a change of heart and continue with our work of taking care of them! It is too challenging to leave him, life will be too difficult without him.

– *We Deserve Better Consultation in Nepal*



## Political engagement of women and youth

### Key takeaways

1. Women and girls are often not consulted and engaged in policymaking, and often do not hold leadership positions in decision-making bodies.
2. There is a lack of engagement of community-level and grassroots organizations in policymaking for social protection, especially youth-led organizations.
3. There is a lack of effective and accessible communications and advocacy efforts around policymaking.

<sup>20</sup> Economic violence can include maintaining total control over financial resources, withholding access to money, and/or forbidding attendance at school or employment, among others (UN Women).

<sup>21</sup> Mobility restriction encompasses any measure or policy that limits or impedes the movement of individuals or groups of people. This can include physical barriers such as checkpoints, roadblocks, or fences, as well as legal restrictions such as curfews or travel bans. Mobility restrictions can have significant impacts on people's access to essential services, livelihoods, education, and healthcare, particularly in humanitarian crises or conflict situations (UNICEF).

<sup>22</sup> UNICEF. A synthesis of what we know works to prevent and respond to child marriage: Evidence Paper for UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage, Phase III (2024-2030). 2024.

<sup>23</sup> Kerr-Wilson, A., et al. (2022: ii, iii). A rigorous global evidence review of interventions to prevent violence against women and girls. What works to prevent violence against women and girls Global Programme.



**In 60% of the consultations, women and girls reported having limited opportunities to hold leadership positions, including in national and sub-national governments.** They are often not consulted and engaged in policy design, implementation, or monitoring of gender-related and social policies. They found a general lack of community-level and grassroots opportunities and youth-targeted communications, identifying this as a barrier to meaningful youth engagement in the building and strengthening of social protection systems, programs, and policies.

Social protection programs play a vital role in enhancing the political engagement of women and youth by addressing their socio-economic vulnerabilities. Studies show that when **women and youth have access to social protection, they are more likely to engage in civic activities and exercise their political rights, leading to greater representation and inclusion in decision-making processes.**<sup>24</sup> Social protection can foster economic empowerment among women and youth, reducing their dependency on traditional power structures and enabling them to advocate for their interests in the political arena.<sup>25</sup>

We need to start with our local populations, working with different groups and listening. We also need to listen differently to different people [given] the way in which older women, young women, or women living with disabilities experience poverty differently.

**– Ambassador Copus Campbell, Gender Equality, Government of Australia**



## Discriminatory social norms

### Key takeaways

1. Women and girls are deemed as weak members of society with no entitlement to acquiring assets and economic resources.
2. Women and girls are faced with social stigma and backlash if they challenge discriminatory social norms.
3. Men and boys play a critical role in shifting discriminatory social norms.

**In all the consultations, women and girls reported often being deemed weak members of society who are not entitled to acquire assets or seek economic and educational opportunities, according to patriarchal societies and discriminatory social norms.** They reflected on being faced with social discrimination and stigma if such norms are challenged, serving as a deterrent for other women and girls to do so. 60% of the consultations highlighted the role of men and boys in shifting gender-discriminatory social norms as instrumental. We are learning more about inclusive design and implementation in social protection that brings about more transformative change around social norms.

Access to social protection can disrupt traditional gender roles and empower women to challenge discriminatory practices, such as unequal division of household labor and limited access to education and employment opportunities.<sup>26</sup> While each generation has historically tended to share broadly the same politics and general ideology, there seems to be a “yawning chasm” growing between 18-30 year old men and women with women being 30% more liberal than their conservative male peers.<sup>27</sup> Social protection programs can contribute to

<sup>24</sup> ILO. Gender Equality and Inclusion for a Just Transition in Climate Action. 2024.

<sup>25</sup> UNDP. Executive Board of the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Office for Project Services. 2022.

<sup>26</sup> ICRW. Gender Equity and Male Engagement: It Only Works when Everyone Plays. 2018.

<sup>27</sup> Financial Times. A new global gender divide is emerging. 2024.

changing societal attitudes towards gender equality by promoting women’s economic autonomy and participation in the formal labor market.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, investing in inclusive social protection systems is crucial for dismantling entrenched gender norms and advancing towards more equitable and inclusive societies.

My father is not permitting me to continue my education after class 10. He fears that I will run away with a boy. I want to just study but my father is not trusting me.

– *We Deserve Better Consultation in Nepal*



## Climate change

### Key takeaways

1. Women and girls experience heightened impacts of climate change due to pre-existing deprivations which are exacerbated.
2. Girls are more vulnerable to child marriage in climate-affected contexts.
3. Gender-responsive policies for disaster risk prevention are necessary for women and girls.

**In all the consultations, women and girls reported experiencing heightened impacts of climate change, including loss of livelihoods and educational opportunities, and increased domestic, care, and support responsibilities.** 60% of the consultations highlighted the link between climate change and heightened vulnerability to various sexual and reproductive health challenges (e.g., lack of access to menstrual health, safe abortions, and premature labor).

Women and girls reflected on their increased vulnerability and risk of violence during climate-induced or forced migration and temporary shelter situations, as well the increased risk of child marriage for girls due to climate-driven poverty. They highlighted the importance of gender-responsive policies for disaster risk prevention supporting initiatives that address the specific vulnerabilities of communities, particularly women, such as access to social services in times of crisis.

It has been demonstrated that investments that improve access to social protection and decrease poverty can considerably reduce overall climate risk for 310 million children, especially girls who are more vulnerable to its impacts.<sup>29</sup>



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<sup>28</sup> World Bank. The World Bank in Gender. 2024.

<sup>29</sup> UNICEF. The Climate Crisis is a Child Rights Crisis. 2021.



A blend of long-term investments in building social protection systems and short-term adjustments in response to crises can help

(1) tackle women's poverty via social assistance;

(2) enhance women's resilience and their capacity to manage shocks, including through social insurance and livelihood diversification;

3) offer sustainable routes out of poverty for women by better integrating social protection, public services, and labor market initiatives;

(4) address the fundamental causes of poverty, inequality, and marginalization, such as gender-based violence, women's limited control over economic resources, and their disproportionate burden of unpaid care and domestic work.<sup>30</sup>

**In the consultations, women and girls shared reflections cutting across the themes:**



Targeting and **including men and boys** at community level in the conversation is necessary, specifically to shift discriminatory social norms.



The **engagement of women, girls, and youth, in all their diversity**, in policymaking processes is often not meaningful. It is too often superficial or tokenistic.



The transformative value of social protection is its focus on **gender-specific needs**, especially for those living in rural areas and with lower levels of education and economic opportunities for upward mobility.

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<sup>30</sup> Socialprotection.org. Addressing the Specific and Heightened Risks Faced by Women and Girls in Crisis. 2024.

# 6

## Recommendations

Under the We Deserve Better initiative, women and girls from over 30 countries provided a **set of recommendations**<sup>31</sup> for government, development partners, and civil society advocates to make social protection policymaking more participatory and social protection systems ultimately more gender-responsive, and even transformative. These recommendations expand on the African feminist priorities for extending coverage and adequacy of social protection systems explored by UNICEF in 2022.<sup>32</sup>

The We Deserve Better recommendations are not meant to be prescriptive and take into consideration the diverse contexts of the participants. They represent the voices of women and girls, and should be understood as a set of potential next steps that can be taken to progressively strengthen the gender-responsiveness of – and their participation in – social protection systems.

Women and girls stressed that social protection systems should be made more gender-responsive and participatory by:



### A. Engaging men and boys

#### Goal

The goal is to create an inclusive environment that fosters collaboration and exchanges to strengthen inclusive social protection systems that benefit all genders.

#### How

This goal can be achieved by (1) targeting men and boys with public awareness campaigns around harmful gender norms, (2) providing them with sensitization training and programs, and (3) including them in community-level consultations with women, girls, and policymakers to enable social accountability mechanisms.

Everybody plays a necessary role in eliminating gender inequalities.  
*– Tuyishime Fidele, Founder and Executive Director of GURD-Rwanda, Rwanda*

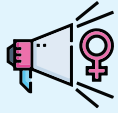


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<sup>31</sup> The We Deserve Better recommendations are not meant to be prescriptive and take into consideration the diverse contexts of the participants.

<sup>32</sup> UNICEF. Feminist Priorities for Extending and Adapting Social Protection in Africa 2022. 2022





## B. Providing effective awareness campaigns and communications

### Goal

The goal is to provide women, girls, and youth, especially those living in underserved contexts, with the instruments to meaningfully engage with policymakers.

### How

This goal can be achieved by

- (1) targeting women and youth, in all their diversity, with communications campaigns on social protection,
- (2) ensuring accessibility of communications, and
- (3) designing awareness campaigns in participatory ways alongside women and youth.



## C. Recognizing care and support work through social protection

### Goal

The goal is to ensure that care, support, and domestic work are recognized, remunerated, re-balanced within the family unit, and covered by social protection.

### How

This goal can be achieved by

- (1) providing financial remuneration to caregivers;
- (2) providing family friendly policies such as paid parental leave, child benefits, and childcare subsidies to families in an effort to re-balance the share of care and domestic work within the family unit;
- (3) extending social protection to care workers in the formal and informal economy; and
- (4) revising local work hour policies to accommodate pregnant women and nursing mothers.



## D. Providing income for families and links to jobs, skills, and training

### Goal

The goal is to address the economic barriers that women and girls face, through social protection measures.

### How

This goal can be achieved by

- (1) leveraging social protection to provide support for livelihoods including training in financial and digital literacy for both women and adolescent girls, skill development and matching to jobs;
- (2) increasing access to credit, savings, seed funds, equipment, and entrepreneurship support for women;
- (3) advocating for the protection of women's land and property rights, particularly in rural areas;
- (4) advocating for equal wage policies, regulations against gender discrimination in employment, and promotion of entrepreneurship among women;
- (5) providing workspaces with childcare and breastfeeding facilities to enable women with mobility constraints to participate in the workforce.



## E. Providing social protection to prevent and respond to violence

### Goal

The goal is to leverage social protection towards prevention and protection of girls and women from all forms of violence.

### How

This goal can be achieved by

- (1) advocating for social protection measures supporting survivors of violence,
- (2) designing social assistance to minimize the risk of GBV, and
- (3) collaborating with NGOs and community leaders to sensitize and raise awareness on GBV.



## F. Strengthening social protection for youth

### Goal

The goal is to strengthen the age-sensitiveness and gender-responsiveness of social protection programs towards economic security and opportunity for youth.

### How

This goal can be achieved by

- (1) integrating youth perspectives into policy planning and implementation, promoting youth-led initiatives and advocacy efforts,
- (2) providing support for employment, skills development, and apprenticeship programs tailored for youth, including for the future of jobs, and
- (3) ensuring policies are in place to support teen mothers and adolescent girls in returning to school.



## G. Building resilience to climate change through social protection

### Goal

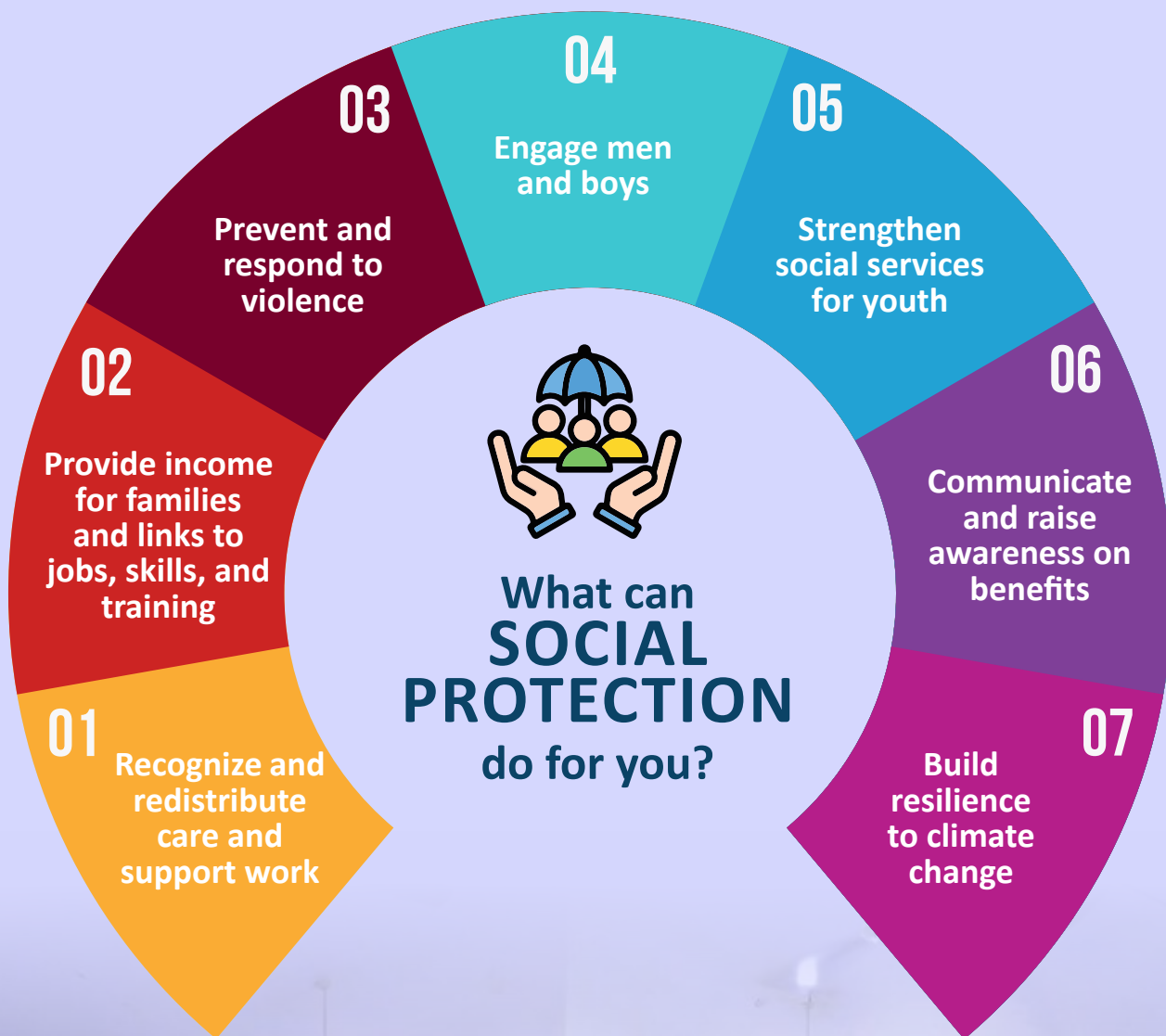
The goal is to strengthen both the adaptability and gender-responsiveness of social protection programs to address the gendered impacts of climate change.

### How

This goal can be achieved by

- (1) embedding an analysis of climate risks and their gendered impacts in social protection policies and programmes, and including social protection as a policy and programme measure in climate change policies to achieve climate change mitigation, adaptation and L&D goals in countries,
- (2) designing and implementing climate risk informed social protection measures to mitigate the impacts of climate change, especially on women and children including through social assistance, insurance mechanisms, and skills training for women to leverage opportunities for green jobs where they exist,
- (3) providing support for local women-led organizations and enterprises working on empowering women addressing climate change, and
- (4) increasing active participation of women and girls in climate actions and decision-making processes in countries.





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# 7

## Where do we go next?

**Policymakers should take action and prioritize participatory policymaking that meaningfully engages communities, with an emphasis on women and girls. They should uplift marginalized voices.**

The active involvement of girl-led, women's rights, and youth-led organizations, including the engagement of men and boys, can create more impactful, gender-responsive, and age-sensitive social protection interventions that leave no one behind.

With the We Deserve Better initiative, UNICEF urges policymakers to conduct community-based vulnerability and needs assessments to identify and reach vulnerable women and girls, ensuring that interventions are developed in participatory manners and tailored to address their specific needs. **These policies must be informed by the realities and experiences of those they aim to serve in meaningful and non-tokenistic ways.** This includes reaching to the furthest mile of grassroots organizations and covering directly with policymakers at national level and practitioners at local implementation level.

**UNICEF urges the development of co-designed gender-responsive and transformative social protection with women and girls, addressing short, medium, and long-term pathways to achieve transformative gender equality outcomes.** These must be practical and feasible at the outset as well as aspirational and boundary-shifting for the longer-term with concrete and actionable steps to implement. This requires coordinated and close collaboration among government, development partners, and civil society alike to achieve and execute with fidelity and impact. Implementation further requires adaptive grievance response mechanisms, feedback, and engagement processes for continuous evolution of approaches that harness the inputs of women and girls in their local communities. In this way, we can ensure social accountability of all actors engaged including governments, international organizations, civil society, community leaders as well as men and boys and women and girls themselves.



Now is the time to act with urgency and commitment to building a more equitable and inclusive society. By prioritizing empowering participatory modes of engagement, conducting informed needs assessments, and developing gender-responsive policies with concrete roadmaps for measurable action, policymakers can make meaningful strides towards achieving social protection that truly leaves no one behind. Let us work together to create a future where all individuals, regardless of gender, age, or background, have the support they need to not only survive, but to thrive.

“ If it was hard for you, be committed to making it better for the next woman because that’s the only way ten generations from now there would be no need for conversations on [...] social protection for women and girls. If we do the right thing now for them, they will do better for the girls after them, and the girls after them will do best. ”

– **Aminata Conteh, Founder of Glowing Embers Network, Sierra Leone**

## THIS IS JUST THE START. WHERE DO WE GO NEXT?

### PHASE II: IMPLEMENTATION

Building on Phase I, the We Deserve Better initiative aims to provide **technical assistance and policy advising** to support policymakers in implementing the recommendations through concrete and co-designed gender-responsive social protection roadmaps for policy and program reforms designed with women and girls. To do this we will:

#### STEP 1

Convene **broader consultations** with women and girls, and **train more feminist organizations** in countries ripe for enhancing social protection systems

#### STEP 2

Host strategic dialogues with policymakers, men and boys, and community leaders to **co-design country action plans** with women and girls

#### STEP 3

Provide **technical assistance and policy advising** to governments to implement recommendations and strengthen social accountability to women and girls

## Together let’s build inclusive social protection systems that leave no one behind.

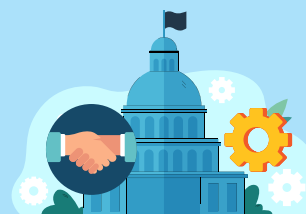
### THE WE DESERVE BETTER JOURNEY

**LISTEN.** Explore the lived experiences and recommendations of women and girls through global and local consultations



**LEARN.** Connect women and girls with social protection policymakers to elevate their voices and drive tangible change to policies and programs

**LEAD.** Strengthen the gender-responsiveness of social protection systems through sustainable participatory policymaking approaches and tailored technical support to government and partners



### HOW CAN YOU SUPPORT?

UNICEF is looking to collaborate with a wide range of partners, including business, philanthropy, government and other development actors to leverage resources and influence to improve the lives of women and girls through Phase II of the We Deserve Better initiative.



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**Year of publication: 2024**

