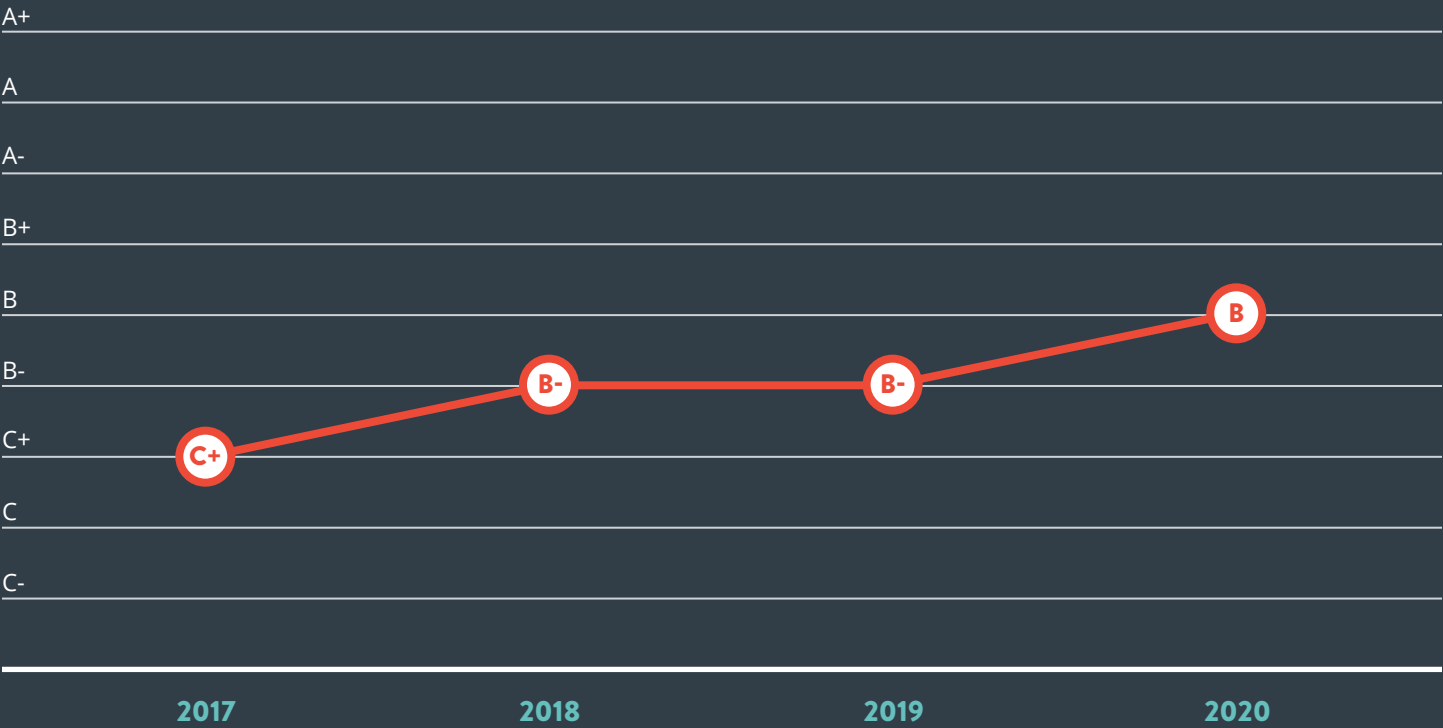




PROGRESS IN A PANDEMIC: **TOWARD FEMINIST LEADERSHIP IN A TIME OF CRISIS**

A Report Card on the Secretary-General's
Fourth Year from the Feminist U.N. Campaign

OVERALL REPORT CARD GRADES FROM 2017-2020



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INTRODUCTION

For gender equality and for the United Nations, 2020 was supposed to be a year of celebration and reflection. The United Nations would celebrate its 75th year. UN Women would commemorate its 10th year. Women’s rights activists would mark the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. U.N. Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security would look back on 20 years. And with 10 more years to realize the ambitions of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 2020 presented an opportunity to call for increased action and more urgent implementation where progress was lagging.

But 2020 took us by surprise. The onset of a global pandemic exacerbated inequality, shattering any sense of normalcy and placing life’s most ordinary pleasures out of reach. The world in 2020 was flipped upside-down, nearly unrecognizable—and the effects on women and girls were particularly harmful.

As UN Women reports, “The impacts of crises are never gender neutral, and COVID-19 is no exception. While men reportedly have a higher fatality rate, women and girls are especially hurt by the resulting economic and social fallout. Impacts on women and girls have worsened across the board.”¹ The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated violence against women; a loss of earnings, livelihoods and educational opportunity; the burdens of unpaid care and domestic work; and lack of access to sexual and reproductive health services.²

As the crisis unfolded and lockdowns

began as the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) was set to convene, it became clear: for the United Nations and its leadership, 2020 was hardly the year for global celebrations of progress and commitments to increased ambition. The milestones we had looked forward to were delayed, canceled or considerably scaled down.

This involved a resetting of expectations for gender equality advocates who had campaigned with increasing fervor over recent years and had aligned around the key moments and anniversaries of 2020 with tremendous anticipation, and with a long list of demands of the Secretary-General himself and the U.N. system, writ large.

Four years ago, as the United Nations prepared to pick a new leader, member states and women’s rights advocates alike were clamoring for female and feminist leadership at the United Nations. It was in this context that the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) convened a group of feminist thinkers,



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advocates and U.N. experts to imagine a transformative and progressive agenda for women's human rights and gender equality in the U.N. system, anticipating it might have its first female Secretary-General (SG).

The General Assembly ultimately appointed António Guterres, who, while not a woman, proclaimed himself “a proud feminist.” This and other statements by the SG indicated that he had potential to be a champion for feminist reforms throughout the system, and so the Feminist U.N. Campaign was born.

In 2016, the Campaign released its flagship report, *Toward a More Feminist United Nations*, delineating an agenda for then incoming Secretary-General Guterres.³ The Campaign adapted these recommendations into an initial 100-day framework, as well as actions the Secretary-General could implement over the course of his five-year term. These include six key points: (1) articulate and implement a feminist leadership agenda, (2) ensure feminist implementation and accountability for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), (3) finance for gender equality, (4) utilize feminist leadership through parity and rights protections, (5) enable a feminist transformation for the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) and UN Women, and (6) promote the freedom of information in the U.N. system.⁴ Each year following, the Campaign has issued a report card grading the Secretary-General's progress against this agenda.

Following a strong rhetorical performance in his first 100 days,⁵ the SG has struggled to secure the kind of transformation imagined in the 2016 agenda. Following Guterres's first year in office, he scored highly in his efforts to achieve gender parity and respond to violence and sex-

based harassment in the U.N. system. But he lagged behind in fostering greater freedom of information, ensuring feminist implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and transforming key gender equality institutions and convenings—like UN Women and the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)—into stronger, more inclusive bodies and resources within the wider U.N. system.⁶

Following his second year, in 2018, Guterres again scored highly in promoting gender parity and prioritizing the elimination of violence, discrimination and abuse in the U.N. system, particularly in the wake of the #MeToo and #AidToo movements. The Campaign noted improvements in the Secretary-General's efforts to advance feminist implementation of the SDGs and promote greater freedom of information. However, progress still lagged. Most notably, gender equality initiatives and actors remained vastly underfunded.⁷

In 2019, the Campaign noted “a year of incremental progress” with “no measurable increase or decrease” compared to the previous year. While his public messaging on gender equality substantially increased in frequency, the Secretary-General turned much of his attention to internal processes and outcomes. Those included continued focus on gender parity, the High-Level Task Force on Financing for Gender Equality and preparations for 2020 as a key anniversary year for both the U.N. system and women's rights globally. However, as we reported in 2019, “the choice to focus on internal processes to ‘get our own house in order’ resulted in an understandable perception by observers inside and outside of the U.N. of decreased momentum on the overall agenda, particularly in the context of

severe funding shortfalls and backlash on initial efforts.”⁸

And what of 2020? How to assess progress in a most extraordinary year? Is it fair to evaluate against the same criteria when, for instance, one of our scored criteria is strong leadership at the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), which was largely suspended?⁹

In truth, we considered punting to 2021 and electing not to publish the annual scorecard. But, ultimately, we decided that in a year that threatens to reverse decades of progress on gender equality, this is no time to let leaders off the hook on these issues. Rather, we must press our case ever more urgently.

So we shall.

For 2020, the Feminist U.N. Campaign once again measures to what extent the Secretary-General advanced progress on our proposals for a more gender-equitable world and U.N. system, even and especially in the midst of a most turbulent year. We revisit our six priority recommendations, assessing progress and setbacks in each area.

Overall, we find that Secretary-General Guterres responded to the exigence at hand, both recognizing and prioritizing the gendered effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

He regularly cautioned against increased levels of violence against women—calling for peace worldwide and “at home”—incorporated a gendered analysis in his policy recommendations to member states and issued a standalone policy



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brief on gender, the first in a series of thematic briefs on the crisis. Perhaps most importantly, he also integrated a gender marker in the U.N.'s COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund, making program funding in its second call for proposals contingent upon support for gender equality and women's empowerment.

Indeed, despite a year in which progress could have easily stalled or been reversed, Guterres's scores actually increased overall and in three of the six areas on our agenda, resulting in a B overall—his highest grade in the past four years, although still offering room for improvement.

Specifically: the SG's scores increased over last year in the areas of **feminist leadership and agenda-setting**, reflecting his leadership for gender equality in both diplomatic and funding responses to the pandemic; **feminist implementation for the SDGs**, where he did a better job of clearly linking the SDGs to the women's human rights agenda and called out Goal 5 and targets such as sexual and reproductive health and rights in the of the Decade of Action; and **freedom of**

information, again due to increased transparency around the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund and increasing telecast and virtual meetings in the wake of the pandemic.

Scores remained the same in one area, on **parity and rights protections**, where he is ahead of schedule, and went down in two: **financing for gender equality** and **enabling a feminist transformation for CSW and UN Women**. Two important notes here: On financing, the SG's strong leadership on the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund would have taken his score up rather than down had the Campaign not uncovered, in the course of this year's research, a Concept Note outlining a significantly increased level of ambition and transparency that was initially planned for one of his signature efforts in this area, the High-Level Task Force on Financing for Gender Equality (HLTF). This document revealed that, at least initially, the SG's plans for the Task Force included a number of Campaign asks: increased resourcing for gender equality, civil society input and public dissemination of report findings and recommendations. However, interviews

with U.N. officials and comments from his Executive Office continue to insist that this is an internal-facing Task Force with no mandate to increase financing for gender equality, and no clear plans to disseminate any information with regard to the Task Force—from membership to recommendations—to the public, an unfortunate development and one that has undermined pandemic-related progress where financing is concerned. Finally, on the CSW, we elected not to score the SG this year given that the CSW was largely canceled, scheduled as it was to convene in March, just as global lockdowns were beginning.

Zooming out a bit from the Secretary-General himself to consider overall trendlines in the larger system, there is one important lesson from 2020 that merits deeper examination, not only by the SG and his leadership team, but also by the various agencies, officials and member states operating throughout the system: as the pandemic necessitated a move to virtual modalities for a number of U.N. meetings, events and processes—a move that is likely to endure to some degree even after the pandemic chapter

has at last come to a close—we found, across the board, missed opportunities to enable greater civil society access and foster greater transparency, two critical components of our Feminist U.N. agenda. **As lobbies closed so too did valuable opportunities for information exchange and influencing on the margins of negotiations and debates, with no digital mechanism designed to accommodate this.** For every event or forum we tracked, advocates and academics alike expressed frustration that meetings were still scheduled in Eastern Standard Time, designed to accommodate New York participation, even though participants no longer were physically required in New York. In a year that could have transformed colonial and Western-centric approaches underpinning U.N. processes and events, civic space seemed more constricted than ever. Particularly following the global protests that erupted against racism and white supremacy, the U.N. as an institution and the SG as its leader must confront these intersecting issues head-on.

Looking ahead to 2021, which marks the fifth and final year of Secretary-General

Guterres's first term and the rescheduled celebration of the Generation Equality Forum,¹⁰ all eyes are on the Secretary-General to make this the banner year for gender equality and women's rights—as well as intersecting human rights issues that came to the fore in 2020, like racism—that 2020 was supposed to be.

We urge Secretary-General Guterres to make his commitment to gender equality a centerpiece of his campaign for reelection, using his fifth year in office to cement progress to date, embrace outstanding areas of our agenda and set a strong expectation either for himself or for his successors to achieve or exceed.

In his first year in office, Guterres proclaimed, “Do not let us in the UN off the hook.”¹¹ The Feminist U.N. Campaign took that request to heart. While we commend the Secretary-General's efforts, we recognize that a feminist U.N. system is still far from reality. As such, we repeat the Secretary-General's words back to him: “Keep pushing. Keep inspiring. Keep making a difference.”¹²

The fight is far from over.

It is important to note that this assessment evaluates the Secretary-General's progress against the Campaign's recommended agenda, not his own. The goal and intention of this effort is to seed ideas for the SG's action that would lead to necessary transformation within the U.N. system, giving credit where he has taken up civil society's ideas and calling attention where he has not. As we saw in those first, historic days, this is a Secretary-General who

is listening to civil society's calls for feminist leadership and is willing to take good ideas on board. We insist that our six action areas are equally worthy of his attention and will continue to push for their consideration and uptake. For even if Secretary-General Guterres does not act on all of our recommendations, some future Secretary-General might, and in the spirit of forward momentum and future progress we will continue to present them. We also recognize that

the Secretary-General is not solely responsible for effecting the recommended changes, and there are a number of factors beyond his control—not the least of which are political undercurrents surrounding this era of decreasing resource flows, intensifying ethno-nationalist and misogynist sentiments undergirding the rise of authoritarian governments, and ongoing reforms that reflect and manifest these trends. Our order is, therefore, an admittedly tall one. Nonetheless,

as an institution born out of international crisis, in direct response to authoritarianism, and chartered specifically “to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small,” we believe the United Nations is up to the task and hence present our progress assessment as an appropriate and essential call to action to realize these founding ideals.

HOW TO BUILD A MORE FEMINIST UNITED NATIONS

The election of a new Secretary-General of the United Nations in 2016 provided an important opportunity to ensure that the United Nations implements an agenda that puts gender equality and women's and girls' rights at the heart of everything it does.

The Feminist U.N. Campaign created its initial report card in early 2017, in response to Secretary-General Guterres declaring himself a "feminist" as he took the helm at the United Nations. Since then, it has measured the extent to which the Secretary-General advanced progress toward a more gender-equitable world and U.N. system across six recommendations:



ONE ARTICULATE AND IMPLEMENT A FEMINIST LEADERSHIP AGENDA

Secretary-General Guterres should set out and implement a full-fledged women's rights agenda for the duration of his term, including a commitment to report on progress and work with feminist civil society to hone and implement it.



TWO ENSURE FEMINIST IMPLEMENTATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY FOR THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGs)

The SDGs represent the single best opportunity to achieve gender equality and include a focus on gender and advance women's rights across the U.N.'s efforts. Ensure the goals have a strong accountability framework and continue to focus on gender including and beyond Goal 5, and align with other commitments such as the Beijing Platform for Action and have a clear mandate for oversight at the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW).

THREE FINANCE FOR GENDER EQUALITY

Ensure there are sufficient funds committed to gender equality across the U.N., including full funding for UN Women as well as for gender integration throughout the U.N. system. Convene an annual High-Level Panel on Financing Gender Equality to analyze and present the state of financing for women's rights and gender equality within the U.N. system. Publish funding sources to enhance transparency across all agencies.



FOUR UTILIZE FEMINIST LEADERSHIP

Increase the numbers of women and feminists in U.N. leadership, and protect women's rights across the system. Secretary-General Guterres should achieve gender parity in his appointments, call for nominations for strong female candidates to head critical agencies and establish and implement feminist policies across the system, including whistle-blower policies and a zero-tolerance policy for all forms of gender-based violence.



FIVE ENABLE A FEMINIST TRANSFORMATION FOR CSW AND U.N. WOMEN

Commit to ensure that the CSW and U.N. Women live up to their potential by serving as inclusive platforms for civil society participation, with a specific focus on the inclusion of southern, feminist voices.



SIX PROMOTE THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION IN THE U.N. SYSTEM

Announce system-wide reforms to increase transparency within the U.N. and to build public trust in the U.N. system. Institute universal System-Wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (SWAPs) for all U.N. agencies and bodies, including the fifth committee, and make that data publicly available on a central platform.



REPORT CARD

2020 GRADE: A-
2019: B+
2018: B+
2017: B

ONE ARTICULATE AND IMPLEMENT A FEMINIST LEADERSHIP AGENDA

Our Ask: The Feminist U.N. Campaign defines a feminist leadership agenda as: i) a full-fledged women's rights *agenda* based on U.N. policies of human rights, equality, fairness and nondiscrimination, which ii) outlines which members of the Secretary-General's administration are *responsible for implementing* its key provisions, and iii) reports progress to the public on an annual basis *with consultation* from feminist civil society and U.N. staff to hone and implement.

Progress to date:

The Agenda
Our 2019 analysis found that, for those both inside and outside of the U.N. system, there was a sense of lost momentum as the Secretary-General turned inward from his proactive agenda to focus on other matters, such as funding shortfalls and corresponding budget cuts. "Progress stalled," the title of our report, was a prevailing theme. If there was some upside, there was a sense that 2020 would be different, marking a major push on gender equality initiatives, implementation and awareness-raising, particularly with the 10th anniversary of UN Women, the 20th anniversary of UNSCR 1325 and the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and associated Generation Equality Forum events.

But 2020 shattered expectations. A global pandemic ground progress to a halt, canceled events and rendered anniversaries moot, not to mention the havoc it wreaked on the global populace, most especially women and girls.

As we assess the Secretary-General's leadership in this unprecedented and unpredicted context, we find the pandemic featured heavily in shaping his agenda—and that ultimately, his focus on gender equality remained or perhaps even increased in light of the pandemic.

Each year, we examine the Secretary-General's messaging around gender equality and various related issues through a coding and analysis of his public speeches. In the time period analyzed for this report (December 15, 2019 to December 11, 2020), Secretary-General Guterres delivered a total of 169 public speeches. Of this number, 14 were entirely on gender issues (equal to last year)—mainly delivered at commemorative events or occasions and key women's rights meetings or conferences. The number of speeches on other topics that nonetheless included a focus on gender grew, however (93 as compared to 85 last year). A large number of these were pandemic-related as the SG consistently focused on the gendered impacts of COVID-19 (an emphasis on violence against women, which he termed "the shadow pandemic," was particularly prominent). 61 speeches did not reference gender at all. We commend the Secretary-

General for maintaining a rhetorical focus on gender equality with speeches devoted entirely to the issue, and for increasing references to gender in other remarks—an uptake of the Feminist U.N. Campaign's recommendations.

In addition to the laudable increase in the number of speeches connecting gender equality to other topics and outside of gender-related events or anniversaries, the content of the SG's speeches with regard to gender equality also improved, becoming more substantive and containing more systemic and power-based analyses of structural constraints to equality.

This was most notable in the Secretary-General's speech on "Women and Power" delivered at The New School, a university in New York City, in February. This high-visibility speech set a strong tone and clear priority for the year's focus on gender. In his remarks, Guterres proclaimed: **"Gender equality is a question of power; power that has been jealously guarded by men for millennia."** For a global public and political leader, blatant language about power and patriarchy is uncommon. We commend the Secretary-General's efforts to raise awareness around the roots of gender inequality, as indeed power was mentioned not just in this speech, but in several remarks delivered throughout the year. In the same "Women and Power" speech, Guterres identified five key areas relevant to gender equality: conflict and violence, the climate crisis, inclusive economies, the digital divide and political representation. He challenged accepted ways of thinking around gender equality issues; for instance, when referencing the trillions of dollars poured into peace and security, he asked, "Whose peace? Whose security?" and questioned the inequality that is foundational to structures and institutions. Guterres also

called out "default man" thinking, which accepts men's circumstances, preferences and lifestyles as standard and normal—compared to women as the exception. In the same speech, Guterres asserted that sexual and reproductive rights are "under threat from different sides"—responding to our Campaign's recommendation to more frequently and publicly address gender issues deemed "controversial." He also spoke about the role of gender stereotypes in promoting risky behaviors among men and boys—driving the point that gender inequality is to the detriment of all, and not just women.¹³

In the 14 speeches focused entirely on gender issues, Guterres frequently spoke about women's leadership, gender parity, violence against women, and conflict, peace and security—issues he has focused on in previous years as well. While the SG frequently mentioned the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Generation Equality Forum in this set of 14 speeches, there were very few references to this commemoration in his 93 other speeches. Speeches focused entirely on gender are delivered to an audience rather familiar with gender equality issues and events; therefore, we encourage the Secretary-General to raise awareness about the Beijing Declaration anniversary and Generation Equality Forum in his other engagements. In the same set of speeches, Guterres made sure to point out the pernicious impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on women. While he often highlighted increasing levels of gender-based violence during the pandemic, he also referenced women's leadership during crisis, invisible and unpaid care work, and women frontline and essential workers.

Guterres improved in integrating gender into non-gender speeches and settings, a key recommendation from



NEARLY 15%
of tweets from the
SG this year were
about issues related
to gender.

This is a
4% INCREASE
from last year.

ABOUT 22%
of the gender-related
tweets from the SG
focus on violence.

last year. **He also became much more conversant in feminist analysis, recognizing power at the root of gender inequality issues.** In the 93 speeches not explicitly about gender issues, there were 143 non-substantive references to gender or gender-related topics, and 38 substantive references.¹⁴ Last year’s 85 speeches not explicitly about gender issues included 51 substantive references and 81 non-substantive references. The Secretary-General frequently pointed out the gendered effects of COVID-19 in exacerbating inequalities. He often spoke about women’s leadership, violence against women and conflict, peace and security. However, much of his language on gender issues reaffirmed gender as binary. For example, in his speech at the New School—otherwise perceived as a rather progressive speech—Guterres referred to men as “half the population,” which was critiqued for excluding other genders. Similarly, at the opening of the General Assembly, he referenced women as “half of humanity,” and his references to LGBTIQ+ individuals are exceedingly rare.¹⁵ We urge the Secretary-General to use more gender-inclusive language, and to expand his definition of gender parity and equality—both within the U.N. system and worldwide.

Key informants pointed out that Guterres often falls short of recognizing the intersections of gender, race and other identities. **His references to race and racism were often separate from his references to gender—and he had very few references to race at all.** One strong example is his Nelson Mandela lecture on inequality and a new social contract, delivered in July. In his remarks, he commented that “multiple inequalities intersect and reinforce each other across the generations” and that colonialism and patriarchy are “two of the historic sources of inequality in our world.”¹⁶ The

Secretary-General should increase and elaborate on such references. **Patriarchy and colonialism are deeply related; their influence permeates not just global inequalities and international relations, but also the organization and success of the U.N. system itself.** In his remarks about racism in the workplace, delivered in November, Guterres lacked any substantive references to women and gender.¹⁷ It is important that he recognize, and act upon, the biases, barriers and discrimination facing women of color in the workplace and worldwide.

Taken particularly in the context of the police killing of George Floyd last year, which prompted mass protests for racial justice, both in the U.S. and worldwide, the SG’s leadership in recognizing the intersecting issues of racism and gender equality is all the more pressing, noticeable and overdue. Initially, the U.N. discouraged its staff from participating in protests and breaking curfew. The U.N. ethics board issued a circular that stated, “Participation in public demonstrations in the current circumstances may not be consistent with the independence and impartiality required of us as international civil servants.” According to an article in *Foreign Policy*, Guterres had initially endorsed this circular; however, his office disputes this coverage, claiming he did not. The ethics board instructions prompted significant pushback from U.N. staff and advocates, who argued that their guidance defied rights to free speech and peaceful assembly. Guterres eventually reversed this position, citing the U.N.’s record of challenging racism and discrimination, and urging staff to contact U.N. leadership if they face racial profiling themselves.¹⁸ If Guterres had in fact endorsed the circular, this situation raises questions about the centrality of race and racism to the U.N.’s mandate—particularly its alleged commitment to human rights.

While the Secretary-General rightfully responded to staff concerns, he and the entire U.N. system must be more proactive in standing up against racism. Racism is a rights issue, and a feminist issue; in the face of blatant rights violations, the U.N.’s actions must match its rhetoric.

The Secretary-General also made minimal references to adolescent girls. In few instances, he mentioned girls’ education, child marriage, pregnancy and young women’s participation in leadership and decision-making. However, he often spoke about youth as a bloc—instead of recognizing the intersections of age with other identities. Guterres articulated many barriers facing adolescent girls in his speech on “A Call to Action for the Education of Adolescent Girls,” delivered in February, but could better integrate such references in other speeches.¹⁹

A common trend emerging from the Secretary-General’s speeches was his pivot to speaking about gender parity when discussing how the U.N. exemplifies its commitment to gender equality. For example, in his speech to the 33rd African Union Summit, Guterres identified gender equality as one key to poverty eradication, proclaiming: “At the bottom line this is a question of power. We live in a male-dominated world. That is why I have made gender parity a centerpiece of U.N. reform and gender equality and the advancement of women a top priority in all the U.N. does.”²⁰ **While the Secretary-General’s efforts to advance gender parity are important and overdue, parity does not shift power if underlying ideologies remain unchanged and continue to reinforce the binary construction of gender.** It is equally important to ensure that all people in leadership roles embrace feminist values and pledge to challenge the patriarchal, colonialist culture pervading the U.N. system.

This year, we again analyzed the Secretary-General’s social media engagement through his posts on Twitter. Of his 902 tweets in the period of analysis, 133 tweets were gender-related—nearly 15 percent. This reflects a significant increase from last year, when he tweeted about gender only 56 times out of 540 tweets (nearly 11 percent). A large portion of these gender-related tweets (34 percent) focused on COVID-19, mentioning disproportionate effects on women (e.g. increased domestic violence, job loss, pushback on women’s rights). Guterres frequently tweeted about gender-based violence (about 22 percent of his gender-related tweets), both in the context of COVID-19 and regarding sexual and physical violence in war. 18 of the Secretary-General’s gender-related tweets focused on achieving parity, particularly through an increase in women’s leadership and participation. Three of these tweets discussed parity in U.N. peacekeeping forces. Additionally, 14 of his gender-related tweets mentioned power differentials between men and women.

Like his speeches, Guterres’s tweets still reaffirm gender as binary. Only two tweets

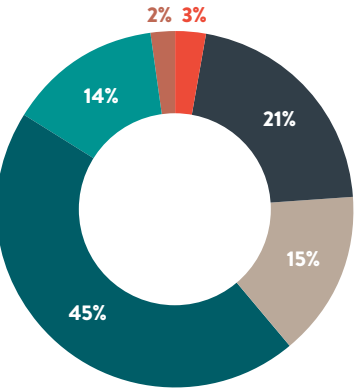


FIGURE 1
Survey respondents’ satisfaction
with the SG’s leadership and
response to the COVID-19
pandemic in regards to gender
and women’s rights issues (n=66).

Very dissatisfied Dissatisfied Neutral
Satisfied Very satisfied Don’t know

mention LBGTIQ+ individuals. Given the potential for social media to reach broad audiences, we suggest he adopt more gender-inclusive language in his online engagement as well. Despite sexual harassment being a major issue in the U.N. system itself and globally, Guterres only mentions harassment in one tweet—in the context of harassment against women leaders. Guterres tweeted about the “#GlobalGoals” (SDGs) 33 times, but mentioned women in just four. He only tweeted about the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action once (in March), posting: “25 years after the Beijing women’s conference, violence against women & girls is still not only common, but accepted as a fact of life. This must change. Achieving gender equality is the key to securing our future,” linking to a press release about a UNICEF, Plan International and UN Women report on girls’ education.²¹ Likewise, he tweeted about joining the #GenerationEquality movement just once—a missed opportunity to raise awareness about an important commemoration, particularly when the Generation Equality Forum is upcoming.

Assessing the Secretary-General’s commitment to a feminist leadership agenda this year necessarily warrants examination of his response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Secretary-General’s office released a series of policy briefs on the impacts of COVID-19 on both thematic areas and regional issues.²² **The first thematic policy brief, released in April, focuses entirely on women—a clear indication that gender equality ranks highly on the Secretary-General’s agenda, and in his efforts to influence member state policymaking around COVID-19.** It highlights adverse effects on economic well-being, unpaid care work, health—including access to sexual and reproductive health services—and

gender-based violence, and exacerbated conditions in conflict, fragility and emergency contexts. The policy brief makes three main recommendations: to ensure women’s equal representation in all COVID-19 decision-making and response planning; to address the paid and unpaid care economy; and to target women and girls in all socioeconomic responses to COVID-19.²³ According to comments shared by the EOSG, this policy brief informed the General Assembly’s Third Committee²⁴ resolutions on the advancement of women and girls within the COVID-19 pandemic,²⁵ as well as the General Assembly Omnibus Resolution on COVID-19 Response.²⁶ Following significant civil society advocacy, the Omnibus Resolution also incorporates a reference to the SG’s call for a global ceasefire and “peace at home and in homes around the world.” The Omnibus Resolution recognizes the pandemic’s detrimental toll on women in several references, including:

“Deeply concerned that the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the social and economic situation of women and girls and their access to education and essential health services, the increased demand for paid and unpaid care work and the reported surge of sexual and gender-based violence, including domestic violence and violence in digital contexts, during confinement, are deepening already existing inequalities and risk reversing the progress in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls made in recent decades.”

Importantly, in addition to a strong brief on COVID-19 and gender, almost all other COVID-19 policy briefs and documents incorporate a gender perspective (except the one focused on debt). For example, the policy brief on impacts of COVID-19

on children highlights the damaging, differential effects of the pandemic on girls—particularly girls’ education. It points out that girls’ limited access to digital technology affects their opportunities for online learning, and warns of a rise in teenage pregnancies as girls drop out of school.²⁷ Similarly, the policy brief on impacts of COVID-19 on older persons brings attention to older women, who are often more vulnerable to violence, abuse and neglect.²⁸ The gendered effects of the COVID-19 pandemic were incorporated in 18 other policy briefs and documents, including those focused on regional conditions, food security and nutrition, disability inclusion, migration and refugees, mental health and economic recovery.²⁹ Additionally, the Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19, released by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), also integrates several references to the detrimental impact of COVID-19 on women and girls, specifically referencing GBV and access to sexual and reproductive health services. In its gendered analysis, it also mentions that “Greater harm can also be expected for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) people who typically face prejudice, discrimination and barriers to care, due to their sex, sexual orientation, and/or gender identity.”³⁰ This demonstrates effort and intention by the Secretary-General’s office to prioritize gender in post-COVID-19 response and recovery, and to insist that member states follow suit. Going into 2021, the Secretary-General must continue to reiterate these messages and policy recommendations—in public speeches, documents and any bilateral and multilateral meetings with global leaders and Heads of State.

In April, Deputy Secretary-General (DSG) Amina Mohammed launched “Women Rise for All,” an advocacy initiative urging

support for the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund (which is further addressed in Section 3) and the U.N.’s framework for immediate socio-economic recovery.^{31,32} Women Rise for All brings together women leaders across sectors to encourage greater action to “save lives and protect livelihoods” and to insist that governments “address the human crisis of the pandemic.”³³ This includes women advocates, philanthropists, Heads of State and heads of U.N. agencies. This initiative links COVID-19 recovery to the Decade of Action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (further addressed in Section 2), and centralizes women’s frontline leadership on the global stage. Together with the Secretary-General’s other actions, initiatives and messaging, these efforts reflect a commitment by the U.N. system to both integrate gender in COVID-19 response and recovery and amplify women’s leadership in times of crisis.

The Team Responsible

Like previous years, much of the Secretary-General’s core team remains the same—including several women in leadership positions. This includes Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed leading work on SDGs; Under-Secretary-General (USG) and Senior Policy Advisor Ana Maria Menéndez serving as a focal point for civil society, co-chairing the High-Level Task Force on Financing for Gender Equality and leading on accountability and implementation of the SG’s Gender Parity Strategy; and Senior Gender Advisor Nahla Valji providing substantive gender expertise on the Secretary-General’s overall agenda. Assistant-Secretary-General (ASG) for Strategic Coordination Volker Turk, appointed last year, works closely with senior leadership in the Chief Executives Board (CEB) and liaises with civil society leaders.

Key informant interviews with U.N. staff revealed that the Executive Office of the Secretary-General (EOSG) has prioritized greater learning, discussion and collaboration on gender equality with senior leadership.

An example cited was that the Executive Committee (EC) held a discussion on obstacles and opportunities for women's political participation with a key focus on violence. As a result of this discussion, the Executive Committee developed guidance for U.N. Country Teams on how the U.N. can systematically support women candidates and women's meaningful engagement in politics. According to the EOSG, this guidance is soon to be shared with Resident Coordinators. Also per comments from the EOSG, the EC hosted discussions on femicide, civic space and women's civil society and other gender-specific issues. Their comments indicated that gender was mainstreamed into a range of thematic and country-specific discussions among the EC. We urge the EC to continue such discussions, and bring attention to often-overlooked, yet pressing topics; for instance, civil society insists that U.N. leadership bring greater attention to the systematic killing and repression of women human rights defenders worldwide. Key informants revealed that the EC also held, for the first time, a discussion on sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI). They discussed support for and barriers facing LBGTIQ+ staff and communities worldwide, examining how the U.N. can advocate for LBGTIQ+ rights and inclusion. It is unclear whether any outcomes came from this unprecedented and overdue discussion. While this is certainly progress, key informants from civil society pointed out that the U.N. continues to lag behind in supporting LBGTIQ+ communities worldwide. As such, additional and more

in-depth initiatives and discussions with LBGTIQ+ communities, including staff, are necessary and welcome.

Through key informant interviews and comments shared by the EOSG, we also learned that the Deputies' Committee (comprised of Assistant-Secretary-Generals, or ASGs) held a day-long retreat specifically on gender equality, during which they discussed the women, peace and security agenda; the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action; global trends around gender and the future of work; and gender biases in data and analysis. This greater attention to gender equality at this level of system leadership is progress, albeit overdue; in the words of one key informant, gender equality has become "part of the DNA" of senior leadership, with "not tokenism or ticking the box, but a genuine, deep discussion." Per comments from the EOSG, the retreat culminated in senior officials making personal and institutional commitments to shifting the needle on "default male" thinking and ensuring that decisions are based on gender data and analysis. The EOSG has followed-up by initiating an in-depth analysis of EC decisions since 2017 which a key informant says resulted in an increase in the number of gender references in EC decisions, particularly throughout 2020. Some of these decisions ensured that gender data was considered as part of the implementation of broader decisions, while others actively engaged with women as agents of change. These developments are best seen as part of the Secretary General's stated commitment (as expressed in the New School speech) to confront "default male" thinking within the organization and to explore ways to leverage the influence of the United Nations to ensure women's representation in political and peace processes.

Public Reporting and Opportunities for Feminist Critique and Civil Society Input

On the matter of annual progress reporting, limited information continues to be available to the broader public, with the notable exception of the gender parity dashboard, which is quite comprehensive, and, as of this year, regular public reporting on COVID-19 response efforts. As in previous years, we only learned of many of the SG's efforts through our interviews with U.N. officials close to the Secretary-General. **We continue to recommend that the EOSG develop a mechanism to make these efforts visible and accessible to the broader public, and recommend annual, public progress reporting as both a matter of transparency and an opportunity to leverage more broadly those resources that are developed as part of his ongoing efforts.**

With regard to opportunities for feminist critique and civil society input, the COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically changed the landscape for participation in any and all U.N. convenings, simultaneously creating unprecedented barriers and opportunities thereto. The 64th session of CSW—scheduled for March, as in all years—was largely suspended. The Commission proceeded only with an opening session and adoption of a draft Political Declaration. Any interactive sessions and side events were canceled. **Since his first year in office, Secretary-General Guterres has hosted an annual town hall with women's civil society organizations during CSW.** This year, instead of canceling the town hall entirely, he hosted it virtually some months later, in August. This reflects a continued commitment to hear from women civil society leaders year after year, and opened opportunities for participation

that were not limited to those who could afford to travel to New York—or, as has increasingly been an issue in recent years, who could obtain visas to enter the United States.

While the town hall is the SG's primary opportunity to hear from feminist civil society, it only takes place once a year. Key informants expressed a desire for more continued, regular engagement with the Secretary-General—instead of a single event in which they may or may not be granted the opportunity to speak. Indeed, the move to virtual consultation in 2020 would seem to facilitate more regular exchange, if waiting for feminists from around the world to travel to New York is no longer a prerequisite. To encourage broader participation, virtual town halls can be held more frequently and to accommodate multiple time zones.

Comments from the EOSG provided additional information about the scope of civil society engagement with the Secretary-General's team. In lieu of her regular country travels, DSG Amina Mohammed conducted a two-day virtual visit to Colombia. She met with young women peacebuilders, women human rights defenders and women leaders on the implementation of Colombia's 2016 peace agreement, as well as new challenges arising within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.³⁴ Furthermore, according to comments from the EOSG, ASG Volker Turk hosts regular consultations with civil society on a range of issues, and approximately 30 percent of these meetings are with gender and women's rights organizations.

Like every year, opportunities for civil society participation in major convenings, like CSW and the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), and everyday U.N. affairs are

severely restricted. Such participation became even more complicated as meetings moved online; while online convenings can reach a broader audience, **they do not necessarily encourage meaningful participation unless organized to do so.** Furthermore, timings did little to anticipate or accommodate global engagement; from HLPF to UNGA, the timings of various virtual events were still scheduled in EST, and held over long hours that resulted in participants in the Eastern hemisphere in particular staying up until two and three o'clock in the morning in order to stay engaged.

This also raises questions of how the U.N. would integrate the voices and needs of those women and girls without internet access. As one key informant pointed out, “How many grassroots organizations holding the gender equality agenda can afford to be on video and deliberate with decision-makers?”

Promoting and protecting civic space—which refers to opportunities for citizens and civil society organizations to freely assemble and express their views—has also been on the U.N.’s agenda.³⁵ In line with the SG’s Call to Action for Human Rights, the U.N. issued a Guidance Note on Protection and Promotion of Civic Space in September. This Guidance Note, directed to U.N. staff and leadership, recognizes civic space as essential to COVID-19 response and recovery, and urges U.N. leadership to understand “attempts at limiting participation and silencing those who speak” as “early warning signs” of restrictive action. The Guidance Note recognizes women advocates, LGBTI

persons, environmental defenders, children, young people and members of ethnic and religious minorities and indigenous groups among targeted civil society actors.³⁶

Shortly after his speech at the New School, the Secretary-General launched a Call to Action for Human Rights at the opening of the Human Rights Council where he identified gender equality as a priority. In a follow-up to this Call, per comments submitted by the EOSG, the EOSG and the Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) have been working closely to transform these priorities into concrete actions and transform his commitments in the speech into improved realities on the ground. According to the EOSG, work has begun on leveraging the U.N. to repeal gender discriminatory laws and use the human rights tools available under the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), such as the use of Temporary Special Measures (TSMs) and quotas, for more catalytic progress on SDG 5 and ensuring women’s participation across all spheres of society. The Call to Action for Human Rights—released to commemorate the U.N.’s 75th year—also pledges to “launch a dialogue on more systematic participation of civil society in United Nations bodies and agencies, with special attention to women’s rights organizations and young people” and to “design a system-wide strategy on civic space and adequate guidance to U.N. leaders in the field,” among other commitments.³⁷

WHAT’S LEFT TO BE DONE:

These are three areas in which we evaluate progress in this section: the articulation and implementation of a “feminist agenda” per our definition above; the delineation of a team responsible for seeing it through; and the transparency, accessibility and permeability of that process to civil society stakeholders. Our 2020 analysis finds that progress is needed in the following areas:

In the context of COVID-19, the Secretary-General seems to have sharpened the feminist lens through which he views the world, increasing the scope of his gender analysis and its connection to other issues. He has been a key global spokesperson bringing needed attention to the pandemic’s detrimental effects on women’s rights and gender equality through his speeches, social media engagement and various official policy briefs and documents. This is critical progress at a challenging time. He must continue to raise awareness about the Beijing Declaration and upcoming Generation Equality Forum, particularly to audiences who may be less familiar with this commemoration.

Moving forward, we urge the Secretary-General to continue using his leadership platform to ensure that U.N. agencies and programs, as well as member states, prioritize women and girls in their COVID-19 response and recovery teams and plans. In moments of crisis, gender is often forgotten, robbed of human and financial resources that are redirected to other urgent crises. We commend Secretary-General Guterres for recognizing

early on that gender is foundational to the COVID-19 pandemic, and moving forward, he must maintain momentum and urgency. Furthermore, we urge the Secretary-General to more frequently and substantively recognize multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination—even within the U.N. system. He must speak more regularly and in more depth about the effects of racism, LBGTIQ+ rights, adolescent girls, disability and the intersections of multiple identities—and ensure that these serve as the foundation of future policies, programming and leadership decisions.

According to information provided by the EOSG, the EOSG and OHCHR are working to advance implementation of the SG’s Call to Action for Human Rights in two areas: amending discriminatory laws and increasing the use of TSMs. We urge the Secretary-General to see through all remaining Call to Action commitments, and ensure more meaningful inclusion of civil society throughout the U.N. system. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the world’s power differentials and challenged its institutions. The U.N. must use this opportunity to reexamine its own establishment, and defy the remnants of colonialism and hegemony within its own ranks. As virtual meetings and conferences continue into 2021—and perhaps longer—the U.N. must ensure broad reach and accessibility. It must accommodate multiple time zones, set up mechanisms for more meaningful participation and determine effective strategies to engage women and communities without digital access.

2020 GRADE: B-
2019: C
2018: C
2017: D+

TWO
ENSURE FEMINIST
IMPLEMENTATION AND
ACCOUNTABILITY FOR THE
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
GOALS (SDGs)

Progress to date:

We only have ten more years to realize the ambitions of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development— and COVID-19 has only set a world that was already behind further off-track. In such a context, it is essential that Secretary-General Guterres advance public communication, implementation and member state assistance to achieve the SDGs, and in particular, to champion Goal 5 on gender equality, which has suffered acute setbacks across targets in the wake of the pandemic.

This urgency is clearly not lost on the SG. In January, the Secretary-General launched the Decade of Action to deliver the SDGs. This was a direct response to the 2019 Political Declaration of the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF)— wherein member states called upon the SG to mobilize actors in “generating solutions and accelerating action” on SDG implementation, and to “organize an annual moment to highlight inspiring action on the Goals.”³⁸ The Decade of Action calls for global, local and “people” action to advance sustainable development. In his speech at the New School on “Women and Power,” Guterres announced, “The Decade of Action is aimed at transforming institutions and structures, broadening inclusion and driving sustainability. Repealing laws that discriminate against women and girls; increasing protection against violence; closing the gap in girls’ education and digital technology; guaranteeing full

access to sexual and reproductive health services and rights; and ending the gender pay gap are just some of the areas we are targeting.” We ask the Secretary-General and the Deputy Secretary-General to ensure that the Decade of Action is not just about awareness-raising, but also implementation and long-term sustainability.

Despite the urgency of instituting a Decade of Action, we find less frequent references to the SDGs and their relation to gender equality in the Secretary-General’s speeches. These were, understandably, largely overtaken by references to COVID-19 and its detrimental impact on women. There are a few powerful examples, however. In his address marking the 64th session of CSW, Guterres claimed: “We all understand the imperative of achieving Sustainable Development Goal 5 on gender equality. This is, quite simply, a question of justice.” He also noted that achieving the SDGs is integral to “accelerate the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.” We commend and encourage the SG for this language, as linking SDG implementation with human rights and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was one of the Feminist U.N. Campaign’s initial recommendations.

As in years past, a majority of global civil society representatives who responded to our survey³⁹ either agree or strongly agree that the Secretary-General has expressed support for full implementation of SDG 5 on gender equality (83 percent), as well as gender mainstreaming across all SDGs (75 percent) (n=87). Indeed, actions speak louder than words, **and in 2020 the SG explicitly linked the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund to SDG implementation**, and to Goal 5 in particular, in its Terms of Reference (to be further addressed in Section 3).

Similarly, one key informant pointed out that it seems the SG is “hitting the right notes” in many of his words and speeches. Guterres must continue highlighting the connections between the 2030 Agenda and other key anniversaries and turning points, like the COVID-19 pandemic and economic recovery, the anniversaries of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and other human rights instruments and occasions. He should also take actions where he is able to institutionalize those connections—as he has in the case of the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund.

Each year, the HLPF is cited as an area of weakness in the Secretary-General’s agenda. While the HLPF is largely a member state-driven process, as is SDG implementation, the Secretary-General and the Deputy Secretary-General can play a key role in raising global attention to the forum and its purpose—but they continually fall short of responding to civil society concerns. Each year, civil society organizations cite restrictions on their time and participation in HLPF, as well as intimidation from member states. Civil society organizations possess important insights on local development processes, implementation and impacts on local communities. Limiting their participation in HLPF thereby prevents accurate reporting on SDG progress. In an era of shrinking civil society space, the Feminist U.N. Campaign asks the Secretary-General to use his leadership platform to request greater accommodation, respect and equity for civil society participants. It is also important to make connections between the HLPF and other U.N. mechanisms on human rights, as the HLPF remains a largely voluntary convening.

This year’s HLPF encountered new—yet avoidable—challenges as the format moved entirely online. One key informant described the negotiation of the Ministerial

Declaration as “problematic.” This civil society representative pointed out that it was “harder to call for accountability” and that the format was “tricky and opaque.” In addition to the Ministerial Declaration, on which member states never reached an agreement, key informants noted that the resolution on ECOSOC reform “went into hiding” with no mechanism for civil society input. Another key informant pointed out that meeting times were mostly amenable to those in the Global North, and that few translations were available.

While online convenings have the potential to reach more people, their design can either restrict or expand meaningful participation. In the case of HLPF, key informants indicated that potential for expansion fell victim to exclusion: as one survey respondent pointed out, “Due to the nature of it having to be virtual, there was limited ability to have discussions on the margins or to meet with member states to give better language, red lines or input to the negotiations in general.”

Our survey showed mixed results on civil society’s level of satisfaction with HLPF, likely demonstrating the varied effects of the shift to online convenings: virtual events can enhance accessibility for some respondents, while restricting it for others. Survey results, as demonstrated in this section’s figures show that 41 percent of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with consultation between governments and civil society on SDG implementation in the 2020 HLPF, 35 percent were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied, and 21 percent were neutral. On satisfaction with opportunities for civil society to input into the Ministerial Declaration, 47 percent felt satisfied or very satisfied, while 35 percent felt dissatisfied or very dissatisfied, and 18 percent were neutral. On satisfaction with the SG’s efforts to increase opportunities for civil society participation in this HLPF, 47 percent



were satisfied or very satisfied, 24 percent were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied, and 29 percent were neutral. Among the 34 respondents to this question, the results convey a diversity of sentiments towards the 2020 HLPF and its modalities for participation, which, entering 2021 can be further expanded and improved.

A virtual format could and should have done more to include new voices who have not traditionally been involved in HLPF, but this year's forum **lacked strategic planning** about how to increase accessibility—such as by hosting meetings at times more friendly to those outside of New York or conducting outreach to broader constituencies who typically cannot travel to the forum.

A lack of in-person meetings means a loss of interaction in the lobbies and corridors surrounding these meetings, where civil society representatives would literally “lobby” their member state representatives in between discussions and in advance of votes or revisions of text. The loss of access to these physical spaces for lobbying and interaction could have been anticipated

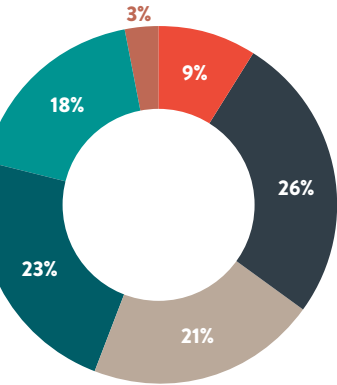


FIGURE 2
Survey respondents' satisfaction with consultation between governments and civil society on SDG implementation and reporting at 2020 HLPF (n=34).

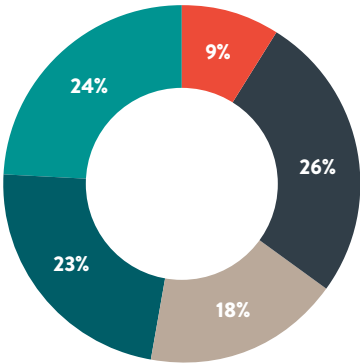


FIGURE 3
Survey respondents' satisfaction with opportunities for civil society to offer input into the HLPF outcome document, the Ministerial Declaration (n=34).

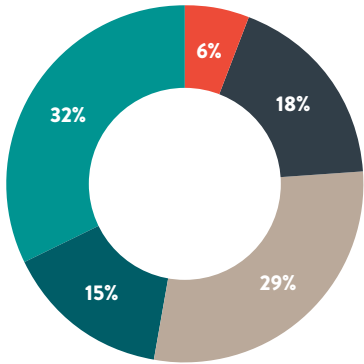


FIGURE 4
Survey respondents' satisfaction with the SG's efforts to increase opportunities for civil society participation in the 2020 HLPF (n=34).

Very dissatisfied Dissatisfied Neutral Satisfied Very satisfied Don't know

and addressed. For instance, the Executive Office of the Secretary-General can publish guidance urging member states to conduct digital town hall briefings to civil society stakeholders or hold virtual “office hours” to hear from constituents throughout the negotiating process, thereby ensuring that civil society’s opportunities to input are not contingent upon in-person gatherings. Indeed, such an approach could have expanded the representation of oft-marginalized voices and constituencies in the negotiating process, even beyond “normal” years, when those voices had to have physical access to influencing opportunities in New York. Rather, it became an opportunity for member states who are suspicious of or outright hostile to civil society engagement to literally hide behind the virtual walls occasioned by the pandemic. As some manner of virtual engagement in such forums is likely here to stay, even beyond the pandemic, U.N. leaders and member states must think urgently and intentionally about how to use such platforms to expand, rather than restrict, civic space.

WHAT’S LEFT TO BE DONE:

While SDG implementation is primarily a process driven by member states, it is important that the SG use every element of his leadership platform to push for gender mainstreaming throughout the SDGs; for the full implementation of Goal 5, including its more controversial components, such as sexual and reproductive health and rights; and for full civil society participation, particularly for feminist, girl-led and women’s rights organizations.

Throughout his term, Secretary-General Guterres has spoken frequently about the importance of the 2030 Agenda and its connection to gender equality. This year, he did a better job of clearly linking the SDGs to the women’s human rights agenda, an appropriate and recommended rhetorical shift in this anniversary year of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. He improved in specifically focusing on the importance of achieving Goal 5 and how the pandemic threatens to reverse progress made there and on other SDGs; and in sounding the call on more “controversial” areas of Goal 5, such as sexual and reproductive health and rights. This is an important, noticeable and laudable shift.

The Secretary-General should continue to link the 2030 Agenda to member states’ COVID-19 response and recovery plans, ensuring the SDGs remain a global priority. He should keep calling for action on the gendered aspects of the pandemic—from unpaid care to gender-based violence—as well as women’s leadership and decision-making in all response and recovery plans.

The Decade of Action is an important and necessary messaging campaign marking the urgently closing window for

progress to achieve the Global Goals. The SG’s clear focus on Goal 5—including the more historically controversial areas—in his speeches is laudable and a welcome embrace of our recommendations. Moving forward, the SG should align calls for the Decade of Action with priority actions developed in the Generation Equality Forum Action Coalitions, several of which map well with the SDG targets. He can and should send a system-wide directive asking entities to participate in and make transformative commitments at the GEF, addressing the structural drivers of gender inequality and ensuring accountability for commitments made for a 5-year time horizon across all six themes.

In the final year of his first term, the Secretary-General and his delegates must call for HLPF to be transformed into a more open, inclusive process. If the forum is again virtual, it must accommodate participants worldwide, as opposed to this year’s HLPF, in which timings largely favored those situated in Eastern Standard Time zones.

In previous years, Voluntary National Review (VNR) labs were lauded as effective, encouraging member states to more productively address their SDG implementation, gender mainstreaming progress and engagement with civil society. The Secretary-General and Deputy Secretary-General can further encourage member states to participate in such platforms, particularly in making their VNR reporting process more collaborative—and as a result, more accurate in revealing both progress and shortfalls. Like CSW, HLPF can include a Town Hall-style forum where civil society and grassroots organizations are provided the opportunity to ask any questions and voice concerns directly to U.N. leadership.

2020 GRADE: C2019: C+⁴⁰

2018: C+

2017: C

**THREE
FINANCING FOR
GENDER EQUALITY*****Progress to date:***

Our report card evaluates the Secretary-General's progress in this area against four criteria: collection and publication of the System-wide Action Plan (SWAP) on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women; convening a High-Level Task Force on Financing for Gender Equality; advocating for full funding (\$1 billion) for UN Women, and committing to a pathway for full financial transparency in the U.N. **Our 2020 analysis reveals that the SG responded to the COVID-19 crisis by redoubling efforts to finance this agenda through new tools deployed for U.N. recovery and response efforts,** which have tremendous potential in terms of scale of impact should the desired amount of funding (\$2 billion) be leveraged and have been deployed with a high degree of transparency and reporting. However, he encountered real setbacks with regard to the Task Force and financial transparency associated with that body, and made no progress with regard to funding for UN Women.

**Financing for Gender Equality
in U.N. COVID-19 Response
and Recovery Efforts**

In the past few years, the U.N. has been facing a bleak funding landscape, with member states often falling short on their financial commitments. In April, the Secretary-General wrote to member states revealing that the U.N. "ended 2019 with arrears of \$711 million, the highest level for a decade and a 34 percent increase compared to 2018."⁴¹ He asked managers to temporarily halt hiring and reduce non-post expenses,⁴² as COVID-19 further

introduced new challenges for the already cash-strapped U.N.⁴³

Catherine Pollard, USG for management, wrote that, "Although the immediate impact of the move to alternate working conditions in response to the COVID-19 outbreak will lead to reductions in travel, contractual services, and general operating expenses across all budgets, we also anticipate new demands upon our operations and services as we respond to the global health crisis."

Right she was.

And so, in response to this unprecedented exigence, in April the Secretary-General launched the U.N. COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund, an interagency mechanism "to help support low- and middle- income program countries to respond to the pandemic and its impacts, including an unprecedented socio-economic shock."⁴⁴ As of the start of 2021, the fund has collected about \$67 million, or roughly 30 percent of its projected financial requirements of \$2 billion. The fund operates under the oversight of the Designate of the Secretary-General for the COVID-19 Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF), Jens Wandel of Denmark, and spans a period of two years.⁴⁵

In moments of crisis, gender is often deprioritized, as it could well have been in the priorities and approach for the fund. As the SG pointed out in remarks to the Security Council, "Yet another risk for the long term is the shifting of resources away from gender equality initiatives, education and other economic sectors."⁴⁶

Not so: The SG has designed the fund to anticipate and address this risk as a condition for project funding, explicitly stating in the Terms of Reference (TOR) a mandate for gender analysis and an

inclusive and rights-based approach as conditions for funding:

"All U.N. COVID-19 MPTF funded initiatives—including through fiscal and monetary stimulus packages—will promote an inclusive and human rights-based approach to the provision of services and livelihood support, ensuring that COVID-19 responses fully incorporate human rights considerations. The funded initiatives need to address gender implications of COVID-19 and design tailored action to avoid gender-based discrimination."⁴⁷

According to a Guidance Note developed by UN Women for the fund, the "COVID-19 MPTF works to make sure its entire portfolio is gender mainstreamed." To do so, it applies a four-point gender marker, introduced in April 2020 and adapted from the UNCT's own. This considers to what extent gender is integrated in programs' "situation analysis, theory of change, target population description, definition of implementing partners, risk analysis, results framework, selected SDG focus, and proposed budget."⁴⁸ The Guidance Note includes minimum criteria, advice and good examples of gender mainstreaming. Proposals coded with Gender Equality Marker (GEM) 0 (with no gender focus) do not receive funding, and proposals coded with GEM 1 (with limited gender focus) are discouraged.

In its second, interim Call for Proposals,

the MPTF is reserving 30 percent of all funds (estimated \$6 million) for GEM 3 projects, in which gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls is a principal objective.⁴⁹ To raise awareness about the gender marker and this Call for Proposals, members of the UN Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality hosted two "gender-responsive programming webinars," which attracted 400 participants from UNCTs and Resident Coordinator Offices (RCOs). At the Recover Better Together Action Forum in June, which brought together U.N. stakeholders to discuss the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 and strategies for recovery, UN Women also launched the COVID-19 Gender Monitor, a dashboard that compiles indicators, such as COVID-19 confirmed cases and deaths (by sex and age) and several SDG indicators (including those for Goal 5), to advise on gender-responsive policy formation.⁵⁰

This is a significant step forward for the SG's leadership in financing for gender equality, as well as in other relevant areas of Campaign concern. As discussed in Section 2, the Fund is designed to reinforce SDG implementation, specifying Goal 5 among those most directly addressed. UN Women also sits on the Advisory Committee for the fund, along with WHO, OCHA, the MPTF Office and the UN Development Coordination Office (DCO). Funding status, government contributions, delivery status and contact information are regularly updated on the MPTF website, promoting greater transparency and public accessibility.⁵¹ The UN Women Guidance Note points to the Secretary-General's High-Level Task Force on Financing for Gender Equality as inspiration: its recommendations called for gender integration across the formation, lifespan and monitoring of pooled funds, which the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund seeks to emulate. Should



the SG be successful in securing the full amount of envisioned funding—\$2 billion—this would represent significant potential to ensure global response and recovery efforts advance gender equality at scale.

Demonstrating a ripple effect of the SG's leadership on financing for gender equality in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic across the system, **the Central Emergency Response Fund, established in 2005 by the U.N. General Assembly, also designated \$65 million to prevent and respond to rising rates of gender-based violence around the world.**⁵²

Further demonstrating improvement in this area, the results of our global civil society survey show improvement in respondents' level of satisfaction with the SG's efforts to promote greater transparency and momentum around financing for gender equality between 2019 and 2020 across all dimensions of our analysis. **For example, respondents' level of satisfaction (satisfied and very satisfied) on the SG's efforts to improve financing for gender equality in U.N. programs and initiatives increased from 26 percent in 2019 (n=76) to 55 percent in 2020 (n=73).**

Another relevant 2020 effort by the Secretary-General that merits mention in this area is his Women Economist Roundtable series. In May, the governments of Canada and Jamaica convened a High-Level Event on Financing for Development in the COVID-19 Era and Beyond, a key outcome of which was a three-part discussion series on "Rebirthing the Global Economy to Deliver Sustainable Development." The first roundtable discussion brought together renowned women economists to discuss debt, external finance and trade. The second discussion in this series convened young women economists to discuss jobs and climate action.⁵³ A summary of these events states

that, "Across both Roundtables, participants called for putting women and climate justice front and center in our economic models and shifting the economic paradigm to become more forward-looking by adopting a preventative and intergenerational approach."⁵⁴

The final roundtable, which was gender-balanced, reflected on the first two discussions and offered recommendations for a pathway forward. It focused on immediate actions, eradicating systemic inequalities and the role of the multilateral system.⁵⁵ This is significant and unprecedented in the course of U.N. history. The true test, of course, will be its impact, and the extent to which the recommendations surfaced in the course of these discussions are taken up.

Existing Structures: The High-Level Task Force on Financing for Gender Equality and Spotlight Initiative

High-Level Task Force on Financing for Gender Equality

Announced in 2017 and convened in 2018, the High-Level Task Force on Financing for Gender Equality (HLTF) has been a core focus of the Feminist U.N. Campaign's recommendations for the SG's leadership on financing for gender equality from its inception, though information about the Task Force continues to be difficult to obtain from the EOSG. While the establishment of such a body was a key recommendation of the Campaign and was lauded in our earlier reports, previous years' attempts to obtain any information about the Task Force from relevant officials—from its participants to its recommendations—have been continually frustrated.

Year over year, our key questions included: who sat on the Task Force, both within the U.N. and among external experts? What findings and recommendations did it issue?

To what extent have they been enacted? Did it identify any challenges to address, or promising practices that could be replicated? And what is the path forward?

A brief history on this: Our 2016 white paper encouraged the SG to convene such a body, to consult with and engage civil society experts, and to publish its findings and recommendations to push for increased investment in gender equality in the U.N. and around the world. We initially learned of plans to inaugurate such a task force in 2017. Our 2018 report card revealed that the Task Force had been convened, and that an Advisory Group of external experts had also been appointed to advise the inward-facing Task Force on the basis of their expertise and best practices. However, the composition of both bodies was never released by the U.N. Our 2019 report card published an account of the Task Force given to us by U.N. officials: that in December 2019, the Task Force had submitted an assessment and recommendations to the Executive Committee for consideration, which included a mapping of the U.N.'s gender architecture, as well as a review of budgeting systems. The Executive Committee endorsed the recommendations and asked the Task Force to continue working into 2020, focusing more specifically on an implementation plan.

One key point that we included in our 2019 findings, based on interviews with UN officials, was that the Task Force report was never supposed to be publicly released, nor was the Task Force mandate ever to push for increasing allocations for gender equality. This was a disappointment to us, but, particularly in the context of unprecedented funding shortfalls in the U.N. and with no information to the contrary, we published this account as fact, once again calling for more action and transparency in 2020.

Once again, in the course of conducting interviews for the 2020 report card, key informants within the U.N. repeated these statements. However, ICRW obtained a copy of the official Concept Note (see Annex: Concept Note),⁵⁶ which is not dated but appears to have been issued in 2018 based on quoted documents and stated timelines for HLTF work, which it indicates is to conclude by December of that year. The stated objectives and process outlined in the Concept Note directly contradict the account we published from 2019 interviews, as well as interviews conducted with U.N. officials during our 2020 research process and subsequent requests for comments by officials in the EOSG and UN Women:

THE CONCEPT NOTE READS:

"The objective of the High-Level Task Force is to galvanize action across the system for increased and targeted investments for gender equality and women's empowerment and accurate tracking of resources in this area. The Task Force will set a strategic vision and mobilize the UN-system to increase financing for gender equality by:

- Ensuring the UN system is a model for aligning financing with gender equality commitments.
- Providing the best evidence on gender equality financing gaps.
- Applying standardized methodologies for tracking gender equality allocations.
- Integrating gender equality into current expenditure reporting systems.
- Incentivizing increased investment in programmatic and non-programmatic activities across the UN system to advance gender equality."

The Concept Note explicitly states that the objective of the Task Force is to “mobilize the UN-system to increase financing for gender equality.” To meet this objective, it will focus on “incentivizing increased investment in programmatic and non-programmatic activities across the U.N. system to advance gender equality.” This indicates that the original formulation of the Task Force aimed to increase investment in gender equality both across the U.N. system and among member states, per our Campaign’s recommendation.

Further, the Concept Note outlines a governance structure that includes a Task Force comprised of principals from the Secretariat and a number of key entities, as well as an Advisory Group of external experts that “should not exceed 6 members and will meet with the Task Force and at least once with each Working

Group.” The Concept Note establishes two working groups, one to focus on structural and operational changes needed—including resource reallocation—while the other focuses on the scope of investment required to strengthen the U.N.’s gender architecture system-wide and raising resources among member-states, as well as “the establishment of a universal minimum financial target of funding allocated to gender equality and women’s empowerment work.” Finally, the Concept Note indicates that the outcome of the HLTF will be a “report to the Secretary-General with a set of actionable recommendations. The report will be shared broadly in a public event.”

This information directly contradicts findings from key informant interviews with U.N. officials over at least the last two years, as well as subsequent comments by officials from the EOSG and UN Women—both verbally, during a meeting about the 2020 report findings, and in writing, in response to a request for comment about the discrepancy of their stated account and that of the Concept Note. “The S-G was clear from the start of the HLTF that this is not about seeking additional funding on gender to the UN System,” replied the EOSG. “The language on incentivizing Member States relates to the role of the UN in linking externally to encourage donors to spend more on gender (Goal 5) generally themselves through earmarking and targets—not that it was an advocacy for increasing funding on gender to the UN. It is possible that the Task Force indirectly results in increased financing but this is not a direct goal.” On public dissemination of the report, there does seem to be some movement by the EOSG, whose response indicates that “Eventually, COVID-19 put the public event on hold. Whether there will be a public event for this will be revisited.” **If such an event is hosted, it will be important to**

ensure the report is indeed released publicly as the Concept Note indicates.

The exact timing and rationale for the shift in U.N. messaging about the goals and scope of the Task Force, and that of its corresponding, expert Advisory Group is unclear. However, given that requests for comment from the EOSG as early as 2019 resulted in the same response—that the Task Force report was never intended to push for increased financing for gender equality, nor was it ever intended to be released publicly—the Concept Note clearly refutes that claim and, had we had access to it in the previous year, these responses would have lowered his score in this section, and potentially in the entire report card.

Further, key informant interviews revealed that the Task Force’s Advisory Group never met with Task Force principals or its two co-chairs

(USG Ana Maria Menéndez and Executive Director of UN Women, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka). This Advisory Group was only formed in late December 2018—despite the fact that the Executive Committee decided in 2017 to form a Task Force. In such convenings, an Advisory Group is critically important, as its members can provide additional perspectives, point to best practices outside the system, and provide substantive, comprehensive guidance on system-wide reform that may be difficult for internal participants to embrace. Members of the Advisory Group made a considerable investment of time reviewing report drafts, making recommendations and pushing for the Task Force to seek detailed budgeting and SWAP information from all of the U.N.’s entities. They received limited information in response and zero opportunity for direct engagement with Task Force principals—as envisaged in the Concept Note—before the final HLTF report was submitted.

Research also indicates that they have not been approached to review the implementation plan. When asked about this, the EOSG explained that the promised Advisory Group meetings with the Task Force principals were not held due to COVID-19 delays and “out of respect for the Advisory Group,” as principals continually delegated representation when meetings were scheduled. With regard to the implementation plan, “The work on the implementation plan is still ongoing between the co-chairs, and therefore, the implementation plan has not yet been shared within the system⁵⁷—it will go to the Executive Committee next week with plans to share with all HLTF members and the advisory group for comment.” If the goal of such information-sharing is to obtain input before review or decision by the EC, this sequencing seems to be at cross-purposes.

The Secretary-General’s messaging on financing for gender equality has also seemingly changed. In his 2018 gender mainstreaming report to ECOSOC (E/2018/53), the Secretary-General noted that “an additional \$20 million would be required system-wide to meet the targets of the System-Wide Action Plan (UN-SWAP)” and that “the largest share of resources was required for gender architecture and parity.”⁵⁸ However, his 2019 gender mainstreaming report (E/2019/54) stated that the Task Force would “establish baselines and assess how resources may be meaningfully increased without leveraging additional external resources”—reflecting a significant shift.⁵⁹ While the 2020 report (E/2020/50) does include a breakdown of 2019 SWAP data by entity,⁶⁰ it indicates that Task Force recommendations “provide practical ways to address current gaps and strengthen the resource base for gender equality, including through the implementation of an automated Gender Equality Marker



system at the entity and country team level. All efforts will be made to accelerate implementation by all entities in 2020.”⁶¹

Alas, although more than two years have passed since the establishment of the Task Force, the deliberations and recommendations of the High-Level Task Force on Financing for Gender Equality remain largely opaque. The recommendations, implementation plan, and any associated progress, strengths or shortfalls are unknown to those outside of the U.N.—and likely limited among those within the system as well. **The annexed Concept Note reveals an initially strong level of ambition and potential for a Task Force that has, for whatever reasons, been beset by delays from the envisioned timeline and suffered from a decrease in ambition.** The Concept Note clearly indicates that, at least initially, the Task Force was meant to undertake research and analysis—and to publish its findings and recommendations—in consultation with civil society experts and with the goal of using its findings and recommendations to increase financing for gender equality, very much in line with Campaign recommendations. Should the work of the HLTF evolve as envisioned in the Concept Note—in a transparent manner, in consultation with civil society experts and in a manner that resulted in increased resourcing for gender equality (all of which is outlined in the Concept Note) the SG’s scores on this section of the report card would have likely been much higher the past two years running.

Spotlight Initiative to Eliminate Violence Against Women and Girls
The other existing mechanism in which the SG has exercised leadership on matters of financing for gender equality, the European Union (EU)-funded Spotlight Initiative to Eliminate Violence Against Women and Girls, has also seen a number

of developments in 2020, largely in the area of civil society engagement—an area of past critique. The Initiative—considered an “SDG model fund” but analyzed in this section due to its committed funds to gender equality—has broadened its reach, expanding its regional presence in 2020 and funding programs in the Caribbean, Central Asia, the Pacific and other regions.

Also in 2020, the Initiative launched a civil society page on its website, providing information for Civil Society Reference Groups (which are convened at national, regional and global levels) and additional tools and resources.⁶² At the global level, the Civil Society Reference Group was chosen by a civil society selection committee in April 2020, and is composed of 20 representatives involved in Spotlight’s governance and decision-making. The members of this group are profiled on the webpage, and according to the EOSG, DSG Amina Mohammed meets with them regularly. Additional tools and resources include guidance on supporting and protecting women human rights defenders in their engagement with the Spotlight Initiative, released in November 2020, and a Grassroots Action Plan, released in April 2020.⁶³

The Grassroots Action Plan fulfills one of Spotlight’s commitments announced in 2019 and responds to concerns that funds are not reaching grassroots, feminist actors.⁶⁴ The Plan’s objective is to “guide Spotlight Country Teams on how to fully utilize the existing U.N. policies and procedures to better reach and engage local and grassroots organizations in the Spotlight Initiative as recipients of funding (implementing partners, grantees and vendors).” It is described as a “living document” that will be updated as Spotlight Country Teams and Agency Focal Points discover best practices.⁶⁵ The Spotlight Secretariat, composed of



twelve staff members, also hosted a series of learning sessions in November— all of which can be accessed online.⁶⁶ The topics of these learning sessions were determined by a needs assessment conducted in September 2020 and include: sharing best practices around local communications strategies, interagency coordination, innovative access to essential services, social norms and behavior change, and supporting women’s rights movements to achieve a “feminist funding ecosystem.”

Another indicator of progress is the increasing amount of funding flowing to civil society and women’s rights organizations. According to a summary of Spotlight’s 2019 Global Annual Report (the 2020 report has not yet been released), the Initiative dedicated 50 percent of 2019 programmatic funds to civil society. **82 percent of these funds supported grassroots organizations.** Of that 82 percent, 88 percent of funds were committed to “women-led or women’s rights/feminist organizations.”⁶⁷ The Spotlight Initiative is also making progress with regard to transparency, making available a full list of its civil society partners, as well as an analysis of approved program budgets; the breakdown for 2020 will be posted in

early 2021.⁶⁸ Responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Spotlight Initiative has also disseminated key messages on violence against women in this context, and urged country teams to “engage national and civil society partners to identify, map and mitigate COVID-19 risks, and leverage opportunities including asset and resource allocations to continue critical service delivery.”⁶⁹

Full Funding for UN Women and a Pathway to Financial Transparency
The final two areas of the report card’s evaluation, on the SG’s efforts to secure full funding for U.N. Women and a pathway to financial transparency, had mixed results in 2020. While UN Women achieved the internal benchmark of funding of \$500 million this year (civil society campaigned for \$1 billion), the SG has continued to resist calls to support more funding for the agency. And while the steps taken to document funding parameters and allocations in the MPTF for COVID-19 Response and Recovery and Spotlight Initiative are laudable and increased scoring over previous years, this progress was undermined by his office’s continued lack of transparency around the High-Level Task Force, as discussed above.

WHAT'S LEFT TO BE **DONE:**

In 2019, we wrote that the SG's progress on this agenda was at risk of stalling out, and cited a fraught funding context as a primary threat. The U.N. faced extreme funding shortfalls and budget cuts impacted staffing, fanning flames of internal opposition to associated efforts, like the SG's focus on gender parity. In this context, it would stand to reason that the onset of a global pandemic and associated economic shocks, combined with the strain associated with increased funding needed to address it, could well have sealed this fate entirely.

Our review finds the opposite: **that the SG has used the crisis and its gendered toll to step up his efforts in this area, not only rhetorically emphasizing the importance of a gender lens to response and recovery efforts, by mandating such an approach for projects in his new COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund, which has the potential to direct significant resources to advance gender equality.** With the U.N.'s funding crisis expected to persist in coming years, the Secretary-General's leadership to both maximize existing resources, and mobilize new funds, is ever more pressing.

The Secretary-General should continue to both talk the talk and walk the walk on financing for gender equality—in U.N. initiatives, country action plans and also for UN Women as the lead gender equality-focused agency. The Secretary-General should also adhere to this messaging in his bilateral meetings with Heads of State and Ministers, as well as in his deliberations with International Financial Institutions (IFIs). His Women Economist Roundtable series set a positive precedent for imagining an inclusive economy in COVID-19 recovery, and such efforts must be continued and amplified in 2021.

Such progress has not been observed in the SG's efforts with regard to the High-Level Task Force on Financing for Gender Equality, which continues to lag, or in his support for full funding for UN Women, two critical areas of focus for the Campaign. We regret that the level of ambition for the HLTF seems to have so precipitously decreased, and that its findings and recommendations continue to be cloaked in secrecy despite keen interest and original intent to publicly disseminate them for transparency, impact and learning. We urge the Secretary-General to reembrace the original, stated scope and ambition of the Task Force. At a minimum, Guterres should direct the HLTF to meet with its Advisory Group, as well as representatives from the U.N.'s entities, to discuss the recommendations and implementation plan, and subsequently host the originally-conceived, public event disclosing the Task Force's findings, recommendations and the implementation plan.

But a minimum is not what will be required in 2021, his final year of his first term, a year still marked by crisis and a campaign year as he seeks a second term. This is a time for bold leadership; the SG should make financing for a gender-equitable recovery a cornerstone commitment of his campaign. Doubtless he would find donors eager to partner with him, and recommendations from his own Task Force able to facilitate the path forward. As we requested last year, Guterres should use the findings and recommendations of the Task Force to issue calls to new donors, particularly those with progressive governments and hold up his own efforts via the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund as a model to encourage similar efforts to mandate a focus on gender.

FOUR UTILIZE FEMINIST LEADERSHIP: PARITY + RIGHTS PROTECTIONS

SECTION 4A: Parity

Progress to date:

Since taking office, achieving gender parity has been one of the Secretary-General's primary areas of focus. Guterres launched the System-wide Strategy on Gender Parity in 2017, aiming to achieve gender parity across the U.N. system by 2028. In 2019, the U.N. attained gender parity in its Senior Management Group and among its Resident Coordinators, who are designated by the Secretary-General to lead U.N. Country Teams. And on January 1, 2020, it reached gender parity among all ASGs and USGs, not including specialized agencies.⁷⁰ In his remarks to the Group of Friends on Gender Parity, Guterres pointed out that the U.N. has achieved full gender parity where "leaders are either appointed by me or elected by the General Assembly under my recommendation."⁷¹ However, positions elected by member states, thereby outside the SG's purview, are still largely held by men.

Another area that lags behind is field appointments. Field missions are expected to undergo downsizing over the next few months and years, making this particularly important. Guterres has attempted to make inroads in this demographic, including by issuing a Global Call for nominations in 2017 and 2019 that sought a diverse pool of candidates for leadership positions as Special Representatives of the Secretary-General (SRSGs) and Deputy Special Representatives of the Secretary-General (DSRGs).⁷² Guterres called upon the Group of Friends to increase their nominations, explaining, "Our greatest

challenge in reaching parity is in our field missions, where the challenges to gender parity are the most pervasive and the rate of change the slowest. Having women at the helm can undoubtedly help."⁷³

Key informant interviews further revealed the Secretary-General's commitment to gender parity. One key informant pointed out that Guterres often pushes back on recruitment of men, asking, "why couldn't you choose a woman?" In 2019, the SG issued a memo reinstating a staff administrative instruction from 1999 (ST/AI/1999/9) that was not adequately implemented.⁷⁴ As a result, all departments lacking gender parity would have to submit to the EOSG an explanation for their decision to hire a man. According to comments shared by the EOSG, in 2020, this was updated and brought in line with current staff selection procedures. The EOSG considers this one of the most important advancements in this area, as it aligns with CEDAW's call for the use of Temporary Special Measures to achieve women's equal representation (also a priority area for the SG's Call to Action for Human Rights). The EOSG reports that this guidance is now being implemented consistently across the board.

In 2019, Guterres also introduced the Enabling Environment Guidelines for the U.N. system (EEGs), which provide guidance on workplace flexibility, family-friendly policies and standards of conduct—aiming to transform the U.N.'s organizational culture into one that is more gender-equitable.⁷⁵ To commemorate the first anniversary of the EEGs, the Vienna-based Organizations' Gender Focal Points convened an Enabling Environment Week. They hosted virtual dialogues on the key themes of the EEGs, as well as concerns and barriers facing field and LBGTIQ+ staff.⁷⁶ Key informants also revealed that the Secretary-

**2020 OVERALL
GRADE: B+**
2019: B+
2018: A-
2017: B+

**SECTION 4A
2020 GRADE: A**
2019: A
2018: A
2017: A-



General asks his leadership team for gender parity updates every month. He frequently references gender parity and women’s leadership in his speeches—demonstrating continued pride and interest in this area.

To address gender parity in peace operations, Guterres established a Working Group on Emergency Measures. This group focuses on “rosters, downsizing, recruitment, retirement, talent management, retention and mission conditions.” While this Working Group seeks to enhance parity under the U.N.’s current policies, Guterres is also seeking to improve the system’s regulatory frameworks. In his remarks to the Group of Friends on Gender Parity, Guterres pushed for amendments to the Staff Regulations and Rules that would encourage greater gender parity (but which are subject to member state approval and therefore not within his immediate power).

The picture that emerges in 2020 is another year of continued focus on this area for the SG, who is on-track or ahead of schedule in achieving parity in all domains in which he has authority, and clearly thinking creatively about how to enable and advance parity in domains where he does not.

According to comments shared by the EOSG, the SG also requested in December that every U.N. entity (not just the Secretariat) share updates in January 2021 on implementation progress of the Gender Parity Strategy—ensuring some level of follow-up and accountability.

However, despite this progress, key informants highlighted several concerns. First is the perception that only areas under the Secretary-General’s direct purview have achieved gender parity, and that the wider system lacks accountability. Guterres is clearly aware of this, based on his commentary at the Group of Friends meeting and efforts to make resources and pressure available to encourage parity in areas outside his control. While parity has been achieved among senior management, Guterres pointed out that a gender gap persists between P3 to D1 levels. He noted that “we are making concerted efforts across all entities to address the imbalance,” including working with gender focal points and asking member states to approve of gender as a criteria in recruitment and retention.⁷⁷ According to comments from the EOSG, the U.N. system is on track to achieving gender parity at headquarters by the target year of 2028, but there remains significant discrepancy globally. The Secretary-General’s outlined efforts—the Global Call, the Working Group on Emergency Measures, Enabling Environment Guidelines and Temporary Special Measures—all seek to amend this gap, and bring the system closer to coherence and overall parity.

Like previous years, key informants also expressed concern that the Secretary-General risks conflating gender parity with gender equality. One U.N. staff member pointed out that Guterres’s initial push on gender parity took away from the gender equality agenda as it “struggled to get people to understand that gender equality is beyond just having women.” As discussed, the Secretary-General often pivots to speaking about his achievements in gender parity when promoting gender equality. While the U.N. has undoubtedly progressed in this area, Guterres must take care not to conflate

women’s leadership and inclusion with advancements in gender equality more broadly. Another key critique offered by a key informant was that Guterres’s definition of gender parity does not seem to include genders beyond men and women—to the exclusion of people of other genders, and LGBTIQ+ populations worldwide.

SECTION 4B: Rights Protections

Progress to date:

The Feminist U.N. Campaign has been analyzing the Secretary-General’s efforts to promote and protect women’s rights both inside and outside of the U.N. system for four years running. These include system-wide responses to sexual harassment, abuse and exploitation, as well as more gender-equitable staff and human resource policies.

Progress in this area in 2020 included the SG’s launch of a Call to Action for Human Rights to support global human rights policies and implementation. The Guiding Principles of the Call to Action state that “realizing gender equality underpins every element” of its mandate. In its standalone section on gender equality, it asserts that “Globally, we are witnessing a pushback against the realization of human rights of women, alarming levels of femicide, attacks on women human rights defenders, as well as laws and policies that discriminate.” In response, it commits the U.N. to six key actions: (1) engaging with member states to support gender-equitable laws and policies, (2) ensuring adequate protection for women, (3) incorporating a “gender lens” in all U.N. engagement and decision-making, (4) integrating gender analysis in all conflict prevention and resolution efforts, (5) improving risk analysis and early warning methodology to recognize violence against women, and (6) regularly consulting with women’s

human rights organizations.⁷⁸ This is a promising development that links gender equality with the human rights framework, a key Campaign concern, and would do much to advance gender mainstreaming throughout the system. Widespread promotion and implementation of the Call to Action, and public progress reporting thereof, will be a valuable accountability tool to advance and cement progress moving forward.

Since the SG’s launch of the Call to Action on Human Rights, the EOSG and OHCHR

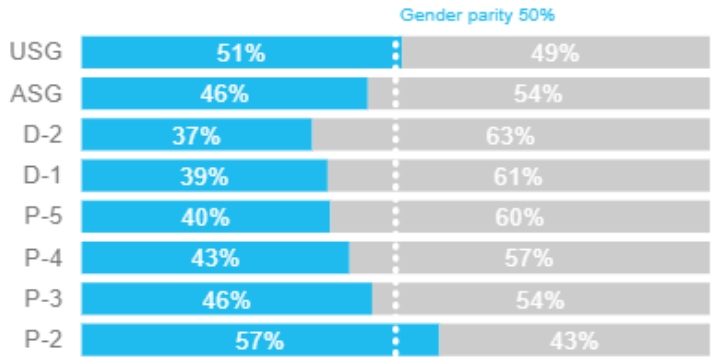
UN SECRETARIAT GENDER PARITY DASHBOARD

International staff, overall balance:

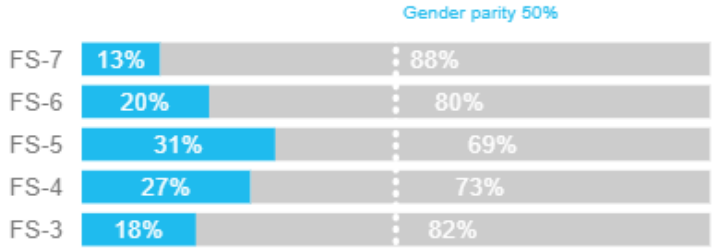
GENDER BREAKDOWN

● Women ● Men

PROFESSIONAL AND HIGHER, BY LEVEL



FIELD SERVICE STAFF, BY LEVEL



This image is from the [U.N. Secretariat Gender Parity Dashboard](#). It shows progress on gender parity in international staff positions, by level, as of December 2020.

SECTION 4B

2020 GRADE: C+

2019: C+

2018: B

2017: B

have begun formulating concrete actions and interventions in two areas: amending discriminatory laws and increasing the use of Temporary Special Measures (TSMs) to advance women's participation across society. According to information provided by the EOSG, key actions include developing system-wide guidance and strategies on both eliminating discriminatory laws and promoting TSMs, developing key messages around both themes to encourage advocacy, designing a dashboard on good practices to track progress and engaging with U.N. human rights mechanisms to advance global attention. This intervention seeks to advance the U.N.'s engagement with civil society, women's rights organizations, parliaments and national authorities. According to the EOSG, these processes have begun moving forward and work plans are in place for the coming months.

As discussed in Section 1, the Secretary-

General was particularly vocal about the harmful effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on exacerbating violence against women. This year, he issued a call for a global ceasefire—asking all parties to halt conflict so that the world could focus on defeating COVID-19. A week later, he also called for “peace at home,” urging governments to “make the prevention and redress of violence against women a key part of their national response plans for COVID-19.”⁷⁹ This call for peace in the home, supported by 146 member states and observers, draws upon previous themes of the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence—an international, civil society-led campaign linking human rights and violence against women.⁸⁰ A total of 180 countries endorsed Guterres's global ceasefire call, as well as civil society organizations, global citizens and regional organizations.⁸¹ When briefing the U.N. Security Council in October, furthermore, Guterres took on board a strong

rhetorical frame from the global women's movement problematizing levels of military expenditure, which “saw its largest annual increase in a decade” in 2019, as compared to investments in violence prevention, human rights and peace. Having the world's top diplomat assert that “weapons do not make us safer”⁸² is a strong reinforcement of an advocacy message the global women's and peace movements have been asserting for decades.

In previous years, the Secretary-General's response to issues of sexual harassment, abuse and exploitation emerged as a major focus of his leadership agenda in this area of our report card. Strikingly, this year, that focus had all but disappeared: there was stalled progress in issuing major initiatives and carrying out implementation, and he made fewer references to it in public speeches, unless contextualized around conflict, peace and security. The Secretary-General barely spoke about sexual harassment and bullying within the U.N. system, which continues to be a major concern for staff and advocates.

In 2017, the Chief Executives Board (CEB) established the Task Force on Sexual Harassment. This resulted in the Model Policy on Sexual Harassment, encouraging agencies to develop their own policies. The U.N. also formed a team of all-women investigators in the Office of Internal Oversight Services. A “Clear Check” system, established in 2018, prevents any staff member with a history of sexual harassment, abuse and exploitation from being re-hired. In 2019, Guterres issued a bulletin (ST/SGB/2019/8) on discrimination, harassment and abuse of authority—granting the Model Policy increased visibility.⁸³ The Task Force also developed a set of 14 criteria advising the U.N. system on how to respond to allegations of misconduct, support reporters and address concerns. This culminated in the drafting

of the Model Code of Conduct, aiming to prevent harassment and assault in U.N. events.⁸⁴

The Secretary-General outlined a system-wide strategy to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) (A/71/818) in 2017, most recently reviewed in February 2020 (A/74/705). A U.N.-issued fact sheet (last updated December 18, 2020) tracks system-wide initiatives undertaken in support of this strategy over the past several years. Among these initiatives, in 2020, OHCHR led preparations for a U.N. policy on a “human rights-based approach” to SEA and the Victims' Rights Advocate (appointed in 2017) continued drafting a statement and complementary guidelines for U.N. personnel on centralizing victims' rights in all U.N. prevention and response efforts. The Victims' Rights Advocate also completed a mapping of existing victims' rights approaches/services across the U.N. system, identifying key gaps and challenges. The fact sheet outlines U.N. entities' efforts to streamline accountability systems and promote greater transparency and accessibility around prevention and reporting efforts. In 2020, various U.N. entities continued communications campaigns around SEA and led individual and inter-agency agency efforts and consultations on the issue, particularly in the context of COVID-19.⁸⁵

Key informant interviews, as well as our analysis of speeches, nonetheless point to slowed progress in responding to sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse in 2020. Key informants pointed out the SG's continued support for this issue in meetings of the Chief Executive Board, but the momentum we reported on in our previous report cards around rooting out misconduct, particularly in the wake of the #MeToo and #AidToo movements, has stalled.



Photo credit: Kyle Glenn/Unsplash

Key informant interviews pointed out that, despite these efforts over the past few years, sexual harassment remains a key issue. The culture of power and privilege pervades the U.N. system, requiring a major cultural shift. In an article in Devex, former UNAIDS employees Claudia Ahumada and Malayah Harper reiterated a perennial critique of the Feminist U.N. Campaign: meaningful progress and accountability for crimes is unlikely when “the U.N. investigates and reports to itself. By being both party and judge of the proceedings, establishing both the rules and their application, and failing to have the expertise to support survivors throughout the process, the internal U.N. justice system can hardly be called justice at all.”⁸⁶ They point out that the U.N. is not required to release the findings of any investigations, and that the system is “designed to let these cases die a slow and silent death.” One key informant also pointed out that the U.N.’s contractual mechanisms have significant disparity. Having people in constant fear of losing their jobs effectively prevents reporting.

Indeed, according to a Guardian article dated December 22, 2020, Purna Sen, the UN Women official tasked with this portfolio, stepped down in protest, fearing the effort had lost priority. “I have grave concerns about the direction of travel that was so clear in previous years. There was a big drive to tackle sexual harassment in 2017-2018, but these issues appear to have been put on the back burner,” she said.⁸⁷

Particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important to point out that virtual work and working from home does not necessarily mean that workplace harassment has disappeared.

Harassers may continue to make inappropriate comments and demands online, exploit women’s personal information or exclude them from key meetings and discussions.⁸⁸ With less oversight and accountability, abusers can escape or more easily excuse retaliation. The SG should incorporate a focus on these issues in system-wide efforts to address SEA and harassment in the U.N.’s digital workplace moving forward.

The issue of sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse continues to permeate the U.N.’s peacekeeping operations. In January, Skye Wheeler of Human Rights Watch pressed that “it’s crucial that the U.N., the media and civil society groups continue to exert pressure on countries that contribute peacekeepers to respond to abuse allegations more seriously and more transparently.”⁸⁹ With known cases of abuse in Haiti, Somalia, Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of Congo—among others—the Secretary-General must make the most of his leadership platform to seek reform and accountability in this area.⁹⁰

2020 marked the 20th anniversary of U.N. Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS). As such, 2020 was expected to be a banner year for progress on the WPS agenda. But key informants argue that progress continues to lag, and that the Secretary-General has, through his mandated reports to the Security Council, demonstrated only “selective” implementation of this agenda, falling short of the full implementation that was called for.

In UNSCR 2493 (2019), the Security Council “requests the Secretary-General to ensure the full implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda,” and asks the leaders of all U.N. entities to “lend

all support to the Secretary-General in this matter.”⁹¹ However, key informants argue that the SG’s 2020 report to the Security Council (S/2020/946) falls short of meeting the UNSCR 2493 request for “full implementation” of the WPS agenda. In this report, the Secretary-General reiterates a series of directives and recommendations, and instructs that these will be tracked annually by the Executive Committee. However, these are only tied to six priority areas and ten priority actions elucidated in his 2019 report (S/2019/800), as well as seventeen additional recommendations, rather than the full universe of 196 technical recommendations outlined as implementation gaps in the 2015 Global Study on the Implementation of UNSCR 1325, widely considered to be the most comprehensive picture of implementation gaps for the WPS Agenda.⁹² Additionally, the 2020 report does not delineate progress or shortfalls in meeting these actions and recommendations specifically, nor does it outline progress under each of the six key areas identified in the SG’s 2019 report.

Albeit “selective,” there is a good deal of progress outlined in the SG’s 2020 report that merits mention:

- The Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) started organizing high-level strategy meetings on inclusive peace processes—the first of which was held in April and focused on Yemen. DPPA also adopted a revised gender marker system to integrate WPS into its “extrabudgetary project formulation and planning.”
- A group of U.N. entities completed a review of the U.N.’s peacebuilding architecture, which found that “many national and local actors, in particular women, were still not always engaged



U.S. Mission Photo by Eric Bridiers



Teresa Casale/ICRW

in a meaningful way and in the development and advancement of national peacebuilding priorities.”

- As part of the Call to Action for Human Rights, the Secretary-General urged member states to institute quotas and TSMs to enhance women’s roles in decision-making.
- The Women and Peace and Security Focal Points Network hosted a special session in May 2020 on accelerating WPS in the COVID-19 era.
- The Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund launched a “rapid response window on the participation of women in peace processes and the implementation of peace agreements.” In 2019, the SG had asked member states to support this Fund’s goal of reaching \$40 million by the end of 2020. This year’s report indicates that “the target has not only been surpassed, but thanks to the increased support, the Fund has been able to quadruple the number of grass-roots civil society organizations reached by funding.”
- The Peacebuilding Fund’s Gender and Youth Promotion Initiative added two WPS priorities: women’s participation and leadership, and protecting women peacebuilders and human rights

defenders.

- The Emergency Relief Coordinator, the U.N.'s senior-most position on humanitarian issues, recognized gender-based violence among four strategic funding priorities. However, the Secretary-General's report points out that "less than 10 percent of the funding called for in order to respond to gender-based violence as part of the global humanitarian response plan for COVID-19 has been received."
- In response to the SG's call for increased engagement with civil society and local communities, a U.N. civil society working group developed "system-wide community engagement guidelines to support country-specific and local-level community engagement strategies on building and sustaining peace."⁹³

To the point of tracking implementation, key informants also point out that the U.N.'s indicators on WPS are a decade old, and have yet to be updated. The SG acknowledges this in his 2020 report to the U.N. Security Council, stating that the current monitoring and accountability framework, outlined in 2010 (S/2010/498) and based on UNSCR 1325, "must be updated."⁹⁴ As he explains, the past ten years witnessed "relevance of issues such as the climate crisis, pandemics, misogynist extremism, the growing power of private corporations and the role of new technologies," as well as several new U.N. agendas and frameworks.

While the Secretary-General recognizes that the existing monitoring and accountability framework is outdated, key informants argue that his 2020 report to the Security Council does not propose any new or updated mechanisms to track more comprehensive implementation. It merely indicates that a "dedicated task force" has been set up under the

Standing Committee on Women and Peace and Security to "promote alignment and strengthen the existing monitoring framework"—but falls short of providing additional details on timeline, strategy and reporting.

It is also important to point out that the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, with its resulting suspension of meetings and shift to online convenings, further restricted civil society access to Security Council deliberations. The SG's 2020 report acknowledges this shortfall, stating:

"There was also a record number of briefers from civil society in 2019, but the number plummeted in the first half of 2020 after the COVID-19 pandemic forced the Council to suspend regular meetings. The advice of those briefers, while often welcomed and praised, was rarely followed by robust action."

Civil society organizations have called upon the Security Council to reverse this "pattern of exclusion" and "live up to its own promises" of championing the essential role of civil society in all conflict prevention, peace and humanitarian processes. The NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security argues that the Security Council's lack of action in prioritizing civil society engagement in the COVID-19 era demonstrates "not merely technical challenges but a lack of political will."⁹⁵

In sum, the SG's reports outline some progress but fall short of the level of ambition key informants expected for

the hallmark, 20th anniversary year of UNSCR 1325. These critiques are that, (1) the SG has narrowed the scope of the WPS agenda to a set of key actions and recommendations without adequate justification for why they were prioritized over the remaining elements, (2) the Executive Committee is supposed to track implementation of these actions and recommendations, but the SG's 2020 report fails to provide updates thereof, (3) ten years on, the SG acknowledges that

the WPS monitoring and accountability framework is outdated, but without directing the system to make the required updates, thereby misses an opportunity to deliver on the "full implementation" with which the Security Council tasked him, and (4) the SG recognizes the decline in civil society participation in Security Council convenings, but must exert greater leadership to increase and guarantee their involvement.



Ilyass Seddoug/Unsplash



Jason Leung/Unsplash



Glenn Carstens Peters/Unplash

WHAT'S LEFT TO BE DONE:

SECTION 4A: Parity

By all accounts, year after year the SG continues to score well in this area, and has achieved the goals he set for himself ahead of schedule. While barriers continue to exist, most of these are beyond his direct control and he is clearly creatively imagining ways to chip away at them.

His final year is an opportunity to go even further. 2021 offers a chance to exhibit the same level of leadership on behalf of other demographic areas that could benefit from a similar level of ambition: elevating leaders and promoting pathways to attract, retain and advance people from a diversity of backgrounds with regard to race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender identity, among others. The leadership exhibited by the Vienna-based institutions including a focus on barriers for LGBTIQ+ staff in their Enabling Environment Week is an example of a promising practice that merits replication throughout the system and in the SG's own efforts in 2021.

Additionally, the U.N. must continue to advance cultural sensitivity around gender parity and gender equality issues. As one key informant pointed out, some U.N. staff still perceive gender parity as a threat to men's career prospects—instead of a right to a more inclusive workplace. In his rhetoric and action, the Secretary-General must also be careful not to conflate advancements in gender parity with achievements in gender equality more broadly. While advancing women's representation in the U.N. is important and overdue, parity does not necessarily signify ideological and structural change. Furthermore, as we called for last year, the Secretary-General must also engage with staff unions and their representatives to increase women's

participation and build support for gender equality.

SECTION 4B: Rights Protections

In 2020, the Secretary-General brought significant focus to the issue of violence against women in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, and has prioritized gender issues in his Call to Action for Human Rights—supporting gender-equitable laws and policies, gender analysis and consultation with women's human rights groups, the full implementation of which would represent transformative progress in the U.N. system.

However, the lack of rhetorical and policy attention to rooting out sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse in 2020—which had been a central focus for the SG in previous years of our review—is noticeable. Looking ahead to 2021, we call on the Secretary-General to revisit and redouble these efforts, including expanding them to address the digital workplace that will continue to be part of our lived reality for 2021 and likely beyond.

In his fifth year, the Secretary-General should double down on vocal and direct actions to support meaningful accountability and survivor-centered approaches to end all forms of gender-based violence, including and beyond harassment, ensuring that efforts:

- Consult survivors in any systematic way or include survivor consultation in a systematic and meaningful way;
- Require appropriate standards of proof;
- Include minimum protections from retaliation;

- Implement standard disciplinary measures;
- Utilize common definitions and coordination across various offices, agencies and entities, such as ethics offices, the ombudsman, human resources departments, etc.

The Model Policy on Sexual Harassment should be reviewed and evaluated regularly, with consistent data collection taking place to measure effectiveness, including in the virtual workplace. All agencies across the system should adopt the policy and fully institutionalize it. System-wide efforts should also be made to bring greater awareness and adherence to the Code of Conduct on U.N. Events, along with 100 percent system-wide participation in the Clear Check program. The U.N. must adapt its sexual harassment response to meet this new virtual working format, ensuring online safety, protection and accountability. It can also apply its Code of Conduct to virtual events and convenings to guarantee that all participants are aware of the U.N.'s zero tolerance policies.

Also, it is essential to note that the issues of harassment “internal” to the United Nations and abuse and exploitation “external” to the U.N. being treated as parallel and distinct is a false binary. These issues reflect a continuum of violence, with the common denominator being U.N. perpetrators against individuals both inside and outside of the system. This is one of the most important reasons it is critical that the patriarchal and hierarchical culture of the U.N. be acknowledged and impunity addressed.

On WPS issues, the Secretary-General's 2020 report to the Security Council insists: “More than ever before we must build

on the incremental progress made in the women and peace and security agenda, move beyond incremental to wholesale implementation, and make an all-out effort to address the remaining challenges with vigour and steadfast commitment.”⁹⁶ We urge Secretary-General Guterres to do exactly this, accelerating full implementation of the WPS agenda—and taking into consideration all Security Council requests and U.N. review processes undertaken since the issuing of UNSCR 1325. His 2021 report to the Council should mandate a time-bound implementation plan that addresses all 196 recommendations for which action is still needed from the 2015 Global Study, as well as any other developments that merit note since its publication.

Furthermore, Secretary-General Guterres should ensure that, as virtual meetings continue into 2021, women civil society representatives and human rights defenders are given adequate time and opportunity to speak in Security Council deliberations. Secretary-General Guterres must reverse the trend of a declining number of civil society briefers to the Security Council, ensuring that civil society representatives are invited to all thematic open debates, country-specific meetings, informal briefings and side events—including those hosted via virtual teleconferencing. As the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security recommends, the Security Council must direct that these briefers are “selected and supported by civil society organizations, and not only hand-picked by Security Council members,” and that their recommendations are “acted upon in all outcome documents and statements” and adequately tracked.⁹⁷

2020 GRADE: C

2019: C+

2018: C

2017: C

FIVE ENABLE A FEMINIST TRANSFORMATION FOR CSW AND UN WOMEN

Progress to date:

This area was one in which the SG's score went down in 2020, largely due to stalled support for UN Women and shortfalls in promoting greater engagement with women's civil society—due in no small part to the coincidence of the onset of the global pandemic and lockdowns affecting travel and in-person consultations. For this report card, we decided not to grade the SG on the extent to which he “increased amount and scope of civil society participation at CSW” since the event was largely suspended. In previous years, this was included among our scoring criteria for Section 5, but we determined that the circumstances of CSW in 2020 would prevent an adequate assessment of this area. Therefore, we graded the SG on the remaining two criteria for this Section: encouraging a focus on women's rights and gender equality in outcome documents and proceedings, and supporting a more transparent and plural advisory council for UN Women. The grades from these subcomponents were averaged, and the CSW criterion was left negligible.

Due to public health concerns around the COVID-19 pandemic, the 64th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) proceeded only with opening statements and adoption of the draft Political Declaration. The general debate, including the interactive session, and all side events were canceled, severely constraining two of the main avenues for civil society participation in the forum. The Secretary-General's town hall with women's civil society representatives,

which he has held at every CSW since 2017, was held nonetheless, although it was postponed to August. While some feminists commended the Secretary-General for committing to the town hall despite CSW's cancellation, others pointed out that “there wasn't much dialogue” between civil society representations and the SG, different platforms for web access “didn't allow equal access for everyone,” and the event felt “a bit pre-cooked,” as though it was decided beforehand which representatives would get the opportunity to speak.

Some civil society representatives felt that the Political Declaration failed to address key issues, like the rights and inclusion of adolescent girls, and expressed frustration that the cancellation of CSW was not rectified. For example, Plan International released a statement that the “2020 political declaration reflects the unwillingness of Member States to fully embrace gender equality as a human rights issue.”⁹⁸ The Women's Rights Caucus, a global coalition of more than 200 organizations that lobbies the CSW, issued its own Feminist Declaration “recognizing that several member states lack political courage or will to commit to an ambitious political declaration 25 years after the Fourth World Conference on Women.”⁹⁹ While the Political Declaration is a product of member state deliberations, the Secretary-General can endorse key issues raised by civil society, express support for progressive governments and call for greater collaboration with civil society, feminist and grassroots groups.

This year, 45 percent of survey participants reported feeling dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the Secretary-General's efforts to engage with and respond to concerns of civil society about CSW (n=40)—compared to about 36 percent last year (n=45). Key informants lamented that

modalities for civil society participation in CSW have remained the same over the years, and that space is still limited despite an opportunity to design it differently in light of the pandemic. Like previous years, they pointed out the need for large-scale reform, especially as the forum is “so NY-focused” that it overshadows global participation and engagement. While, unlike HLPF, the timing of the CSW would not have allowed a redesign via a virtual platform for broader, global civil society engagement as the pandemic was unfolding just as CSW was supposed to convene, activists' calls for a delayed CSW or convening on the margins of HLPF or another forum could have been accommodated. Barring this, the virtual modalities for CSW in 2021 have been determined months in advance, and offer an opportunity to plan well in advance a virtual platform that can expand—rather than restrict—civil society engagement.

With regard to UN Women, the other subject of the Campaign's focus in this area, once again no major progress was noted in 2020. While Secretary-General Guterres has elevated UN Women's role in senior leadership, creating space on the Executive Committee and drawing upon technical expertise, there were few new developments in 2020, with the exception of including UN Women in the Advisory Committee to the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund, the attributes of which have been explored in the financing section.

However, the agency itself remains underfunded—and the Secretary-General continued in 2020, as in all previous years, not to publicly advocate for the level of member state budgetary support to UN Women that it has been long-promised. As one key informant put it, “It's deceptive for the system to see UN Women as a watchdog for gender

equality. It's problematic to look at it this way when they don't have the capacity, resourcing and staffing.” While applauding the Secretary-General's elevation of UN Women in this and past years, there was little progress in 2020 in working to increase the agency's capacity so that it is, in the words of the U.N., “fit for purpose.”

A major focus of the agency in 2020—and due to the pandemic, now also continuing into 2021—is hosting the Generation Equality Forum (GEF), a one-year delayed 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. According to a key informant interview, the Secretary-General has asked UN Women to brief the Executive Committee, the Deputies' Committee and the Senior Management team on more than one occasion about GEF and the Beijing anniversary to encourage interagency interest, and desires to take part in commemorations and intergenerational leadership.

However, his direct engagement with the GEF proceedings has been limited. Guterres can use his leadership platform to make up for a continued lack of interagency interest, and prompt greater momentum around GEF and the outcomes of its Action Coalitions—both among U.N. agencies and member states. One key informant pointed out that the October 1, 2020 Heads of State meeting convened on the Beijing Declaration anniversary felt rather “lackluster,” wherein very few member states made significant new commitments, and many spoke about achievements instead of candidly highlighting areas that can be improved.



WHAT'S LEFT TO BE DONE:

This area of our agenda held the least progress in 2020, directly impacted by the pandemic and, perhaps, falling down on the priorities list in a year like no other. It is therefore incumbent on the SG to focus with great urgency and intention here in his final year, which will coincide with the now-delayed Generation Equality Forum, a major platform for his leadership on this agenda and partnership with UN Women:

Events like the Town Hall must be held consistently throughout each year, and must accommodate global participation. Virtual events can be held frequently, and at timings more accommodating to broader engagement; the SG must not miss this opportunity in 2021. While the Secretary-General made several references to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in his speeches, he made few direct references to the GEF, which would benefit from his platform in raising awareness among U.N. agencies and member states. The Secretary-General should continue participating in high-level events amplifying the GEF, like September's UN Women-led event on gender-based violence, during which the Gender-Based Violence Action Coalition issued a call to action urging all actors to respond to the multiple forms of GBV exacerbated in the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, he must, finally and frequently, reiterate the need for financial support for UN Women—one of our Campaign's founding and unmet recommendations. As UN Women's Executive Director completes her term in 2021, we also call upon the SG to support an inclusive, transparent selection process with adequate civil society input. This process should result in the selection of a strong leader of the agency who can partner

with the SG in strengthening financing and architecture to support women's human rights and gender equality.

As virtual convenings are expected to continue into 2021, we urge Guterres and U.N. leadership to take up the "Open Call for Strong and Inclusive Civil Society Engagement at U.N. Virtual Meetings," initiated by the Women's Major Group and endorsed by members of the Major Groups and Other Stakeholders.¹⁰¹ The Open Call asks U.N. agencies and member states to consult civil society before finalizing engagement mechanisms, to provide financial and technological assistance to groups less likely to have digital access and to prevent intimidation of human rights defenders—among other recommendations.

In the lead up to the 65th session of the CSW, 66 civil society organizations have reiterated a similar call, which has been organized by the Women's Rights Caucus. They ask for a task force comprised of regionally diverse feminist organizations who can select speakers for all CSW panels and negotiations, reasonable accommodations for all participants and mechanisms to enable early dialogue around the Agreed Conclusions.¹⁰² This, in combination with the recommendations articulated in previous sections with regard to how to increase global civil society participation and access to virtual forums like the HLPF, would go a long way toward improving the SG's score in this area, as would his full and unfettered support for full funding for UN Women and feminist civil society organizations, perhaps as his own commitment to the Feminist Movements and Leadership Action Coalition at the upcoming Generation Equality Forum.

SIX PROMOTE THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION IN THE U.N. SYSTEM

Progress to date:

The Feminist U.N. Campaign considers freedom of information to be a feminist issue, especially when much of the information we seek to document on the status and advancement of women's rights and gender equality in the U.N. system and the world more broadly is difficult to come by. The U.N. itself has long been criticized for its archaic and bureaucratic structures; its complexity and decentralization have prevented system-wide monitoring, coherence, data collection and accountability.

One of the few tools for collection, analysis and public reporting of gender equality efforts, the System-Wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (SWAP), remains largely underutilized despite its ambitions to mainstream gender across the U.N. system. However, in 2020 it was incorporated in the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund and represents a real step forward for the collection and publication of gender data, as outlined in Section 3.

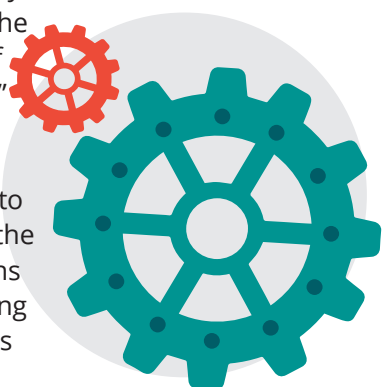
Another indication of progress in this area in 2020 was the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund, which is setting an example for greater transparency in funding initiatives. Established in April, the Fund has already published an interim report, and is legally obligated to issue an annual report on May 31, 2021. As pointed out, the fund publishes all "commitments, deposits and allocations in real-time" on the MPTF Office website, and all U.N. agencies involved in program implementation must issue detailed reports on "how they have spent

the money and what programme results were achieved."¹⁰³ UN Women's COVID-19 and gender monitor dashboard detailing gender equality indicators is also a step forward in this area for the year 2020, as is UNDP's Global Gender Response Tracker which tracks government policies to address the impacts of COVID-19 on women, namely "women's economic and social security, including unpaid care work, the labour market and violence against women."¹⁰⁴

Data on gender equality and related issues is often difficult to obtain, and such information can inform inclusive policy development.¹⁰⁵

Our civil society survey shows mixed, albeit positive, views on the availability of information on the U.N.'s activities online. Of 69 respondents, 61 percent agree or strongly agree with the statement "I know how to find information about the U.N.'s activities in my country," while 20 percent disagree or strongly disagree and 17 percent are neutral. Likewise, 68 percent agree or strongly agree with the statement "Sufficient information about the U.N.'s activities is available online," while 13 percent disagree or strongly disagree and 15 percent are neutral. Of 70 respondents, 61 percent agree or strongly agree with the statement "I know how to find information about the U.N.'s activities at its headquarters (New York and Geneva)," while 19 percent disagree or strongly disagree and 16 percent are neutral. Lastly, 43 percent agree or strongly agree with the statement "I am able to contact U.N. staff in my country if I seek more information," while 20 percent disagree or strongly disagree and 33 percent are neutral. It is important to point out that respondents to our civil society survey mostly engage in the U.N. in some capacity, so such perceptions of the U.N. system may be different among those organizations and grassroots actors that are more distantly situated, albeit

2020 GRADE: B-
2019: C-
2018: C-
2017: D+



important actors in human rights and sustainable development processes.

On the other hand, as pointed out in Section 3, the findings of the High-Level Task Force on Financing for Gender Equality still have yet to be released, one year later. Despite a few examples of comparatively transparent, regularly-updated systems—such as the U.N. Gender Parity Dashboard and the Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF) Office website—detailed information about the U.N.'s funding and programming for gender equality is often difficult to find. Furthermore, meetings among senior leadership, such as the Executive Committee, where major decisions are made around gender equality issues are still conducted behind closed doors. The Feminist U.N. Campaign is only able to obtain such information through key informant

interviews; otherwise, they are closed to public comment and perception.

And finally, the pandemic-imposed shift to online meetings did not necessarily make information or political processes more accessible. Despite the potential the move to virtual meetings holds for increased civil society access and input, some reported being unable to determine when key deliberations are taking place, or meeting documentation not always readily available online. The loss of access to physical spaces for lobbying also decreased information flow and influencing opportunities. This is a missed opportunity; as online meetings and conferences continue into 2021, the U.N. must ensure greater openness, adaptability and accessibility, employing all the tools in the digital toolbox to make it so.

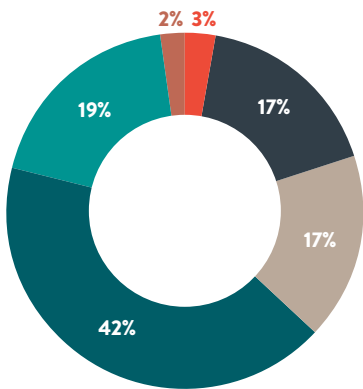


FIGURE 5
Survey respondents' agreement with the statement: "I know how to find information about the U.N.'s activities in my country (n=69)."

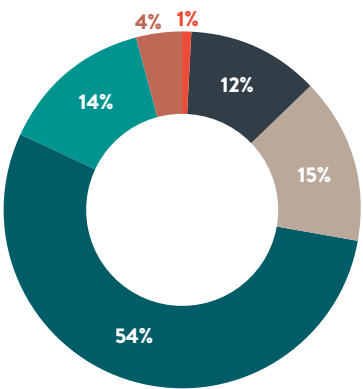


FIGURE 6
Survey respondents' agreement with the statement: "Sufficient information about the U.N.'s activities is available online (n=69)."

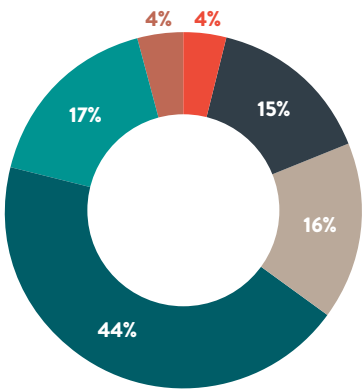


FIGURE 7
Survey respondents' agreement with the statement: "I know how to find information about the U.N.'s activities at its headquarters (New York and Geneva) (n=70)."

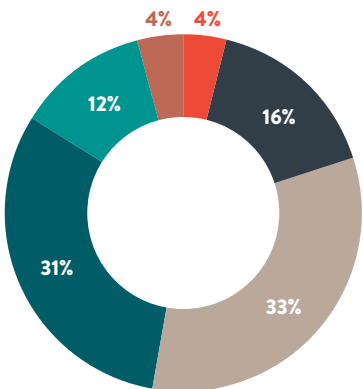


FIGURE 8
Survey respondents' agreement with the statement: "I am able to contact U.N. staff in my country if I seek more information (n=70)."

Strongly disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree Don't know

WHAT'S LEFT TO BE DONE:

The SG made progress in this area in 2020, most notably in the advancements in information and access associated with his COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund. These are important steps forward that should be continued in 2021, and will increase accountability for gender equality if fully utilized.

As the last year of the SG's first term, 2021 marks the final year for the Secretary-General to push for internal processes, reports and data to be more publicly

accessible—including Executive Committee discussions and outcomes from the High-Level Task Force on Financing for Gender Equality. And as meetings continue to take place online, the Secretary-General should push for greater accommodations for global civil society participation and input. The U.N. must satisfy global engagement by making all meetings, recordings, translations, documentation and lobbying opportunities available to the public—and adhering to the recommendations outlined in Section 5.



CONCLUSION

Four years down, one to go in the Secretary-General's first term.

We now have enough data to observe trend lines, and even in this most extraordinary year—a year of pandemic, protest, recession, Brexit, conflict and climate crisis—those lines indicate overall progress.

Over the past four years, the Secretary-General has made continued strides in setting and hewing to a women's rights and gender equality agenda, with increasing attention to it in his speeches, commitments and actions. **In 2020, Secretary-General Guterres earned a 'B' overall—his highest score to date, mostly owing to his leadership on gender in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, where he matched powerful words with strong actions—including funding—to ensure gender is at the heart of the U.N.'s response and recovery efforts.** This is what feminist leadership looks like in a time of crisis.

From the very first weeks of 2020, the SG set a strong standard for the year with a powerful speech on gender equality and women's human rights, one that interrogated the power dynamics underpinning inequality, discrimination and violence, borrowing language from feminist movements and paying homage to women's human rights standards.

A past critique of his language was that he played it "safe" when speaking about gender, avoiding more "controversial" areas like sexual and reproductive health and rights. Not so in 2020. The SG's language grew more radical, examining and critiquing

structural and systemic barriers to equality and embracing sexual and reproductive health and rights. As a global pandemic unfolded, that emphasis remained in both speeches and policy recommendations, urging attention to gender in U.N. and global COVID-19 response and recovery efforts and mandating it in the new COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund.

In a year in which Black Lives Matter became a global rallying cry, we find that his rhetoric and action on race and intersectionality could have been stronger, and the U.N. missed an opportunity to expand civil society engagement and diversify stakeholder access in a virtual world, but overall the SG maintained or increased his focus in this area at a time when that energy could have been easily diverted. He also made a strong push on the SDGs, consistently pointing to urgent progress needed on Goal 5 in the remaining Decade of Action, and linking more to the women's human rights framework than in previous years.

Unquestionably the SG's strongest year rhetorically speaking—but what of his actions? **Four years in, and ahead of a prospective second term, words must be matched with action, and actions with results.**

Here, too, there was much progress to recount: The SG's integration of the gender marker system into the minimum criteria of the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund has the potential to leverage millions of dollars for gender equality if the funding goal of \$2 billion is met, and sets a strong precedent for streamlining gender equality priorities into international development,

funding and crisis response for the U.N. and other multilateral and bilateral donors. The Secretary-General continues to be ahead of schedule on his gender parity objectives—at least those within his control—and his Call to Action for Human Rights placed gender at the center and resulted in 143 nations rising to the Call.

However, there remained little—and perhaps lost—momentum on rooting out the system's own issues with sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse, a top priority from previous years. Particularly with 2020's shift to online work, this is an area that merited attention and incorporation into the SG's efforts.

The SG also seemed to suffer from a deference or lack of leadership in a few areas where it was needed: his High-Level Task Force on Financing for Gender Equality never convened with its civil society Advisory Group—a process that has been beset by delays and cloaked in secrecy, despite clear initial intent to make a public, leadership push for increased financing for gender equality in the U.N. system and beyond. Particularly given his progress incorporating gender in his COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund in 2020, this decreased ambition on financing overall is perplexing. And, in line with the last few years, the Secretary-General still fails to advocate for full funding for U.N. Women—although it did achieve an internal benchmark of \$500 million this year—and has largely deferred to the agency with regard to the Generation Equality Forum process, for which his visible leadership would be most useful to spur system-wide action.

With the recent announcement that Secretary-General Guterres intends to run for a second term, 2021 is an opportunity for him to cement the last four years of progress and make a final push on those areas where it has been out of reach. This

is the year to double down on his efforts to mainstream gender in global pandemic recovery and response—his hallmark achievement in 2020—pick back up work to root out—and hold accountable—sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse, drive forward implementation on the Call to Action for Human Rights and the 2030 Agenda, and send a clear signal to his High-Level Task Force on Financing for Gender Equality that they must complete their work, including meaningful engagement of the civil society experts who have contributed to it, at last releasing publicly their findings, recommendations and implementation plan with a clear focus on increasing funding for gender equality. He should send a directive to all entities that they must participate in the Generation Equality Forum, and make transformative commitments as part of this process. This is the last year to demonstrate his clear commitment to strengthening the U.N.'s gender equality architecture, from UN Women, to gender advisors to the Commission on the Status of Women—and to civil society's meaningful engagement in its efforts. As virtual events continue into 2021, the Secretary-General must promote as much expansive and inclusive participation of civil society as possible—ensuring their voices are amplified and secure throughout U.N. deliberations, events and convenings.

In many ways, 2021 can be the banner year for women's rights we hoped it would be: the Generation Equality Forum has been delayed to March and June of this year, and, having been largely canceled in 2020, the Commission on the Status of Women will convene to do much of the business that was lost last year.

The stage is set for the Secretary-General to make a final, strong stand on gender equality—and to see through the implementation of the commitments that will make it a reality.

ANNEX

METHODOLOGY

The scoring reflected in this report card draws on qualitative and quantitative data collected and curated through a variety of different sources and methods. All research procedures were approved by the ICRW Institutional Review Board to ensure full compliance with the Human Research Protection Program.

We sought to be rigorous and generate as representative input as possible. We have also aimed for this endeavor to be replicable, so that similar data can be collected throughout the duration of the Secretary-General's term and thereafter, providing ongoing opportunities for learning and reflection. The intent is to capture whether gender can be effectively mainstreamed across the U.N. system and whether sufficient resources are being dedicated to gender mainstreaming and gender equality and to the more transparent and accountable engagement of civil society in U.N. processes and fora.

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

We conducted key informant interviews (KIs) with 19 individuals. These informants came from within the U.N. system (10) and global civil society (9), each possessing considerable U.N. expertise. Where possible we interviewed the same individuals we had spoken to last year in the same agencies or organizations. Key informants were identified through a number of civil society and U.N. networks, including: Women's Major Group, Women's Rights Caucus, U.N. Feminist Network, multiple U.N. agencies, and feminist organizations directly engaged

in the Feminist U.N. Campaign. Each interview took about an hour.

Key informants were asked questions about the different domains of the report card, including the Secretary-General's support for feminist leadership within the United Nations, the gender parity agenda in staffing and recruitment, financing for gender equality, financing and support for UN Women, engagement with the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), and the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), as well as gender mainstreaming throughout the SDGs and full implementation of Goal 5. They were also asked about freedom of information, sexual harassment and the pursuit of greater accountability for sexual abuse cases by peacekeepers. This year, we also added questions on the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Generation Equality Forum (GEF), as well as the Secretary-General's leadership and response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Key informants' responses were anonymized, and individuals are only identified by their organization type and broad geographic location.

ONLINE SURVEY

We used the same networks and affiliations to enable us to field an online survey about the key domains and levels of civil society engagement and civil society's perceptions of U.N. transparency, accountability and support for gender equality under the leadership of this Secretary-General. The survey was sent out through these networks to individuals in different non-governmental

organizations (NGOs), INGOs, unions and academic institutions, which snowballed, as individuals forwarded it to other similar organizations. Again, all information was anonymized and respondents were coded by their type of organization and geographic location. This was the first year we administered the survey in three languages: English, French and Spanish. In total, we reached 136 respondents that work across the regions and various sub-regions of Africa, the Americas, Asia, Europe and Oceania and across 54 countries (n=96). We reached 103 respondents in English, 19 in French and 14 in Spanish.¹⁰⁶ The chart on the following page represents the operating regions of these civil society organizations, which are not limited to areas where they have formal registration but reflects where their work is conducted and their mission is advanced. The results of the survey capture the perceptions of civil society respondents about the Secretary-General's progress in advancing gender equality to date. They are used to augment and substantiate our analysis and are not representative of the views of global civil society.

SPEECHES

Text of the SG's speeches was pulled from the U.N. Secretary-General's website, covering the time period following the end of last year's data collection period (December 15, 2019) to the end of this year's data collection period (December 11, 2020). In that time, the SG made a total of 169 speeches. Of these, 14 were focused entirely on gender and women's rights issues, and 93 made references to gender but were focused on other topics. These 107 speeches were downloaded into NVivo and all were coded thematically. The 93 speeches focused on issues other than gender were also coded based on whether their references to gender were substantive or non-substantive. The 61 speeches that made no reference to gender were excluded

from the analysis.

Non-substantive references included quick references to women or gender as an aside on another topic, or as part of a grouping. For instance, when listing the challenges facing the world, "racism, poverty, xenophobia, violent misogyny, homophobia" would be an important but non-substantive reference. General statements, such as "we must make gender equality a priority" were also non-substantive, if they did not elaborate on why gender equality should be a priority or how to achieve it. It is important to note that non-substantive statements are not necessarily unimportant. They were often used to highlight that women and gender equality were relevant to the conversation in instances where that may not have been evident. This was especially the case when used in combination with substantive references, to highlight the relevance of gender to certain issues.

Key Terms:

Woman/women, girl, female, gender, sex/u al, mother, wife, daughter, sister, feminist/ism, harassment, #Metoo, #Aidtoo, SDG 5, Sustainable Development Goal 5, women's economic empowerment, Generation Equality, Beijing

Thematic Areas:

adolescent girls; agriculture; Beijing/Generation Equality Forum; child marriage; climate change; conflict, peace and security; COVID-19; disabilities; economic empowerment; education; empowerment; funding; hate speech; humanitarian assistance; LGBTIQ+; migration and refugees; nutrition; other important; power; sexual exploitation and abuse; sexual harassment; SRHR; technology; terrorism and extremism; violence against women; women's leadership

TWITTER ANALYSIS

We also pulled the Secretary-General's tweets (@antonioguterres), covering the same data collection period (December 14, 2019-December 20, 2020). In that time, the Secretary-General tweeted a total of 902 times. 133 tweets, nearly 15 percent, focused on gender or women's rights issues. We analyzed how often the Secretary-General called himself a "proud feminist" (5 tweets), mentioned gender-based violence (29 tweets), women and the

#GlobalGoals together (4 tweets), the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1 tweet), #MeToo or #AidToo (0 tweets), COVID-19 and gender together (45 tweets), parity and women's leadership (18 tweets), the Spotlight Initiative (0 tweets), power imbalances between men and women (14 tweets), LGBTQ+ people (2 tweets), sexual violence from U.N. personnel (2 tweets), harassment against women (1 tweet) and engaging men and boys in overcoming gender inequality (4 tweets).

FIGURE 9
Survey respondents' region(s) in which their civil society organization operates.



SCORING

The overall weighted average score was informed by scores on each of six dimensions and the subcomponents that we tracked under each:

ONE. ARTICULATE AND BEGIN TO IMPLEMENT A FEMINIST LEADERSHIP AGENDA FOR THE UNITED NATIONS

(30 percent)

- A. Give speeches that make substantive reference to gender in U.N. processes and commitments (percent of speeches)
- B. Seek parity in high level appointments (percent of new appointments)
- C. Actively engage with civil society in U.N. fora and through town hall meetings (# meetings with civil society)

TWO. ENSURE FEMINIST IMPLEMENTATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY FOR THE SDGs

(14 percent)

- A. Make efforts to link the SDGs and their targets to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action
- B. Make efforts to ensure that CSW has a clear mandate to oversee gender mainstreaming in the SDGs
- C. Link SDG implementation to accountability mechanisms
- D. Emphasize gender equality and human rights in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the HLPF

THREE. FINANCE FOR GENDER EQUALITY

(14 percent)

- A. Track and publish what is spent on gender equality throughout the system and support the U.N.-SWAP
- B. Convene an annual high-level panel on financing for gender equality within the U.N. system
- C. Advocate for increased funding for UN Women to US\$1 billion
- D. Commit to a pathway to full financial transparency in the United Nations

FOUR. UTILIZE FEMINIST LEADERSHIP AS A DEFINING MODEL OF THE NEW ADMINISTRATION AND THROUGHOUT THE SYSTEM

(14 percent)

- A. Support parity among ASGs and USGs
- B. Establish gender parity in the Cabinet
- C. Call for nominations for feminist female candidates in WHO, UNFPA and U.N. Treaty Bodies
- D. Support gender equitable employment practices (respect for care work, flexible working hours, paid family leave, zero tolerance for sexual harassment)
- E. Institute a global commission of inquiry for victims of sexual exploitation and abuse

FIVE. ENABLE A FEMINIST TRANSFORMATION FOR CSW AND UN WOMEN

(14 percent)

- A. Increase amount and scope of civil society participation at CSW¹⁰⁷
- B. Encourage focus on women’s rights and gender equality in outcome documents and proceedings
- C. Support more transparent and plural advisory council for UN Women

SIX. PROMOTE THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION IN THE U.N. SYSTEM

(14 percent)

- A. Institute a system-wide freedom of information policy
- B. Publish contributions by member states and staff quotas publicly
- C. Televisе major U.N. meetings and make them available to civil society via internet platforms

Each of these dimensions was scored based on the data from the KIIs, the online survey, coded speeches and analysis of reports and outcome documents. The grading scale is shown here:

A+	97%+
A	93-96%
A-	90-92%
B+	87-89%
B	83-86%
B-	80-82%
C+	77-79%
C	73-76%
C-	70-72%
D+	67-69%
D	63-66%
D-	60-62%
F	0-59%

The scores were reviewed by a technical advisory group comprised of members of the Feminist U.N. Campaign and are reported for each of the six components. The sub-component analysis is included in the full report. The first component of the six components was weighted at 30 percent of the overall score in order to reflect that it encompasses the other components by framing an overarching commitment to gender equality within the U.N. system and is an action that is fully within the power of the Secretary-General to undertake alone (i.e., does not require action by member states or bodies beyond his individual control).

ANNEX: CONCEPT NOTE

Establishment of a High-Level Task Force on Financing for Gender Equality

Objective:

At its meeting discussing the Gender Architecture in June 2017, the Executive Committee of the Secretary-General decided that the UN should “consider establishing a light and time-bound Task Force on Financing for Gender Equality to review UN budgets/expenditures across the system and make recommendations on how to increase financing for gender equality, including by:

- a. identifying structural and operational changes required to enable budget tracking;
- b. establishing a baseline as an important first step to reallocation of resources;
- c. defining the scope of the investment required to strengthen the gender architecture system-wide;
- d. proposing innovative recommendations for Member States to incentivize increased spending on gender equality and women’s empowerment.”

Context:

- Across the UN Development System, investment in gender equality and the empowerment of women is low. The 2017 SG Report *Repositioning the United Nations development system to deliver on the 2030 Agenda: ensuring a better future for all*,¹ found that only 2.03% of the UN Development System expenditure is allocated to gender equality and women’s empowerment (SDG 5) while only 2.6% of personnel work on this important issue. Despite these low figures, 30 entities, out of 32 in the report, identify gender equality and women’s empowerment as a primary or secondary priority in their strategic documents.
- The Report states the financing needs for the implementation of SDGs call for a comprehensive overhaul in the United Nations system’s approach to financing. In this context, the United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks should “be repositioned and strengthened as the single most important United Nations planning tool in all countries” to serve as a system-wide response to national priorities and underpinned by a clear budgetary framework. It is critical to ensure scaled up resources for gender equality through common budgetary frameworks, joint funding mechanisms and joint mobilization efforts.
- Several UN entities have adopted “gender markers” to track the proportion of funds devoted to advance gender equality. These tools have drawn on the experience of the OECD-DAC Gender Equality Policy Marker. Intergovernmental bodies have called on the UN system on multiple occasions to track gender-related resource allocation and expenditure. Two performance indicators of the UN System-wide Action Plan (UN-SWAP) on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women focus on resource tracking and allocation. UN Women provides support and guidance for the implementation of gender markers.
- Although the proportion has more than doubled since 2012, only 54 percent of UN entities currently meet UN-SWAP requirements on gender markers. In particular, it is essential for the UN Secretariat to put in place gender markers as its Departments and Offices make up over half of UN entities. The

¹ A/72/124–E/2018/3

UN Secretariat faces special circumstances as it is mostly funded from assessed contributions and uses Umoja as Enterprise Resource Planning system.

Challenges:

- The 2016 SG Report *Mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system*,² noted that **33% of entities reporting on the UN-SWAP identified lack of sufficient resources for gender equality as one greatest impediments to progress**. It went further to note that without intensified efforts and investments, the system’s progress towards implementation of the System-wide Action Plan will stagnate or decline.
- The 2017 edition of the same report³ indicates that **adequate resourcing to effectively carry out gender equality work remains a concern**, with only 25% of entities (16 entities) reported having a fully resourced gender unit or equivalent. This represents a decline of 8 percentage points since 2016, suggesting significant reduction in funding availability at the entity-level for gender equality work.
- In 2017, **54% of UN-SWAP reporting entities “met” or “exceeded” requirements for the resource tracking indicator**, indicating that they use financial resources tracking systems. A total of 7 entities reported working towards adoption of gender equality markers. **Non-development entities within the UN system consistently express difficulties in adopting resource tracking mechanisms and need targeted technical support.**
- Resource tracking and resource allocation continue to be among the areas where UN-SWAP performance is weakest. Encouragingly, compliance with UN-SWAP requirements for resource tracking has increased by 32 percentage points between 2012 and 2017, indicating need for harmonized work on financial resources for gender equality by the UN system. Resource tracking constitutes one of the areas most widely targeted by entities for enhancing performance.

Objectives

The objective of the High-Level Task Force is to galvanize action across the system for increased and targeted investments for gender equality and women’s empowerment and accurate tracking of resources in this area. The Task Force will set a strategic vision and mobilize the UN-system to increase financing for gender equality by:

- Ensuring the UN system is a model for aligning financing with gender equality commitments.
- Providing the best evidence on gender equality financing gaps.
- Applying standardized methodologies for tracking gender equality allocations.
- Integrating gender equality into current expenditure reporting systems.
- Incentivizing increased investment in programmatic and non-programmatic activities across the UN system to advance gender equality.

² E/2016/57

³ E/2017/57

Composition, Roles and Responsibilities and working arrangements:

The **High-Level Task Force** will include Principals of all relevant UN entities and departments. It will be co-chaired by the **Chef de Cabinet** and the **Executive Director of UN-Women**.

While it will be open to all entities of the UN system, the following officials will constitute the minimum core group for the task force:

UN Secretariat

- Senior Adviser on Policy, EOSG
- Under-Secretary-General for Management
- Assistant Secretary-General, Controller
- Assistant Secretary-General, Peacebuilding Support
- Executive Secretary, UN ESCWA (on behalf of the Regional Commissions)
- High Commissioner for Human Rights

Funds and Programmes

- Executive Director, United Nations Children Fund
- Administrator, United Nations Development Programme
- Executive Director, United Nations Population Fund
- Executive Director, World Food Programme

Specialized Agencies

- Director-General, International Organization for Migration
- Director-General, World Meteorological Organization
- Director-General, World Health Organization

The Task Force will meet at Principals’ level and submit a set of recommendations to the Secretary-General and the Executive Committee.

Working Groups

Two Working Groups will be established to support the work of the Task Force. Working Groups will be comprised of UN staff from Task Force entities with proven expertise in the areas of focus of the Task Force. Each Working Group will be chaired or co-chaired by one of the members.

The Chairs or co-Chairs will support the organization of the Working Groups and report back to the Task Force on its outcomes. The Chairs will endeavor to generate commitment in support of the Task Force efforts and recommendations.

The **First Working Group** will focus on identifying structural and operational changes required to enable budget and expense tracking; and on establishing a baseline as an important first step to reallocation of resources. This may include the following:

- Assessment of technical capacities and infrastructure needed to achieve full adoption for resource tracking mechanisms across the UN system;
- Developing recommendations for the systemwide application of gender markers by all entities to ensure comparable data and increase transparency, and looking at best practices in this area;

- Scanning and analyzing data across the system based on UN-SWAP reporting;
- Promoting a harmonized coding scale for gender markers across the UN system;
- Providing advice on capacity strengthening on gender responsive budgeting tools and concepts to enable use of the gender markers;
- Promoting the UNDG guidance note on gender markers and its supplementary guidance.

The **Second Working Group** will focus on defining the scope of the investment required to strengthen the gender architecture system-wide and proposing innovative recommendations for Member States to incentivize increased spending on gender equality and women’s empowerment. This may include:

- Defining criteria for the establishment of a universal minimum financial target of funding allocated to gender equality and women’s empowerment work including in common budgetary frameworks, joint funding mechanisms and joint mobilization efforts;
- Look at costing exercises and their usefulness/replicability;
- Identifying good examples of incentives for increased funding of gender equality work by Member States and other stakeholders.

The working groups will produce succinct papers to bring key recommendations to the attention of the Task Force, which will validate them for submission to the Secretary-General.

Advisory Group

To benefit from outside expertise and to ensure wide engagement in this work, an Advisory Group will be established in support of the work of the Task Force. The Advisory Group will be composed of selected representatives from government, academia, international institutions and civil society with unique expertise in financing and resource tracking for gender equality and women’s empowerment. Members will be invited to serve on the Advisory Group by the co-Chairs of the Task Force. In addition to bringing an external perspective, the Advisory Group will share best practices and lessons learned from other sectors/institutions.

The size of the Advisory Group should not exceed 6 members and will meet with the Task Force and at least once with each Working Group. Additional meetings may be arranged by the Chairs of the Working Groups. As much as possible, meetings will be held virtually.

Secretariat

The Task Force will be supported by UN Women, which will provide substantive support, schedule meetings and support the co-Chairs in all their tasks. All related backstopping, coordination and collaboration will be provided by UN Women.

UN Women will identify resources in staff time and funding for consultants in support of the Task Force’s work. In addition, a request will be made to relevant Departments and entities through EOSG to dedicate some of their staff time to support the work of the Task Force.

Timeline of work

The Task Force will hold its inaugural meeting shortly after its announcement. It will complete its work by December 2018.

Working Groups will meet at least three times at technical expert level.

The Advisory Group will be consulted at least twice with the Task Force and each Working Group. It may meet more often with the Working Groups at the request of the Chairs.

Outcome

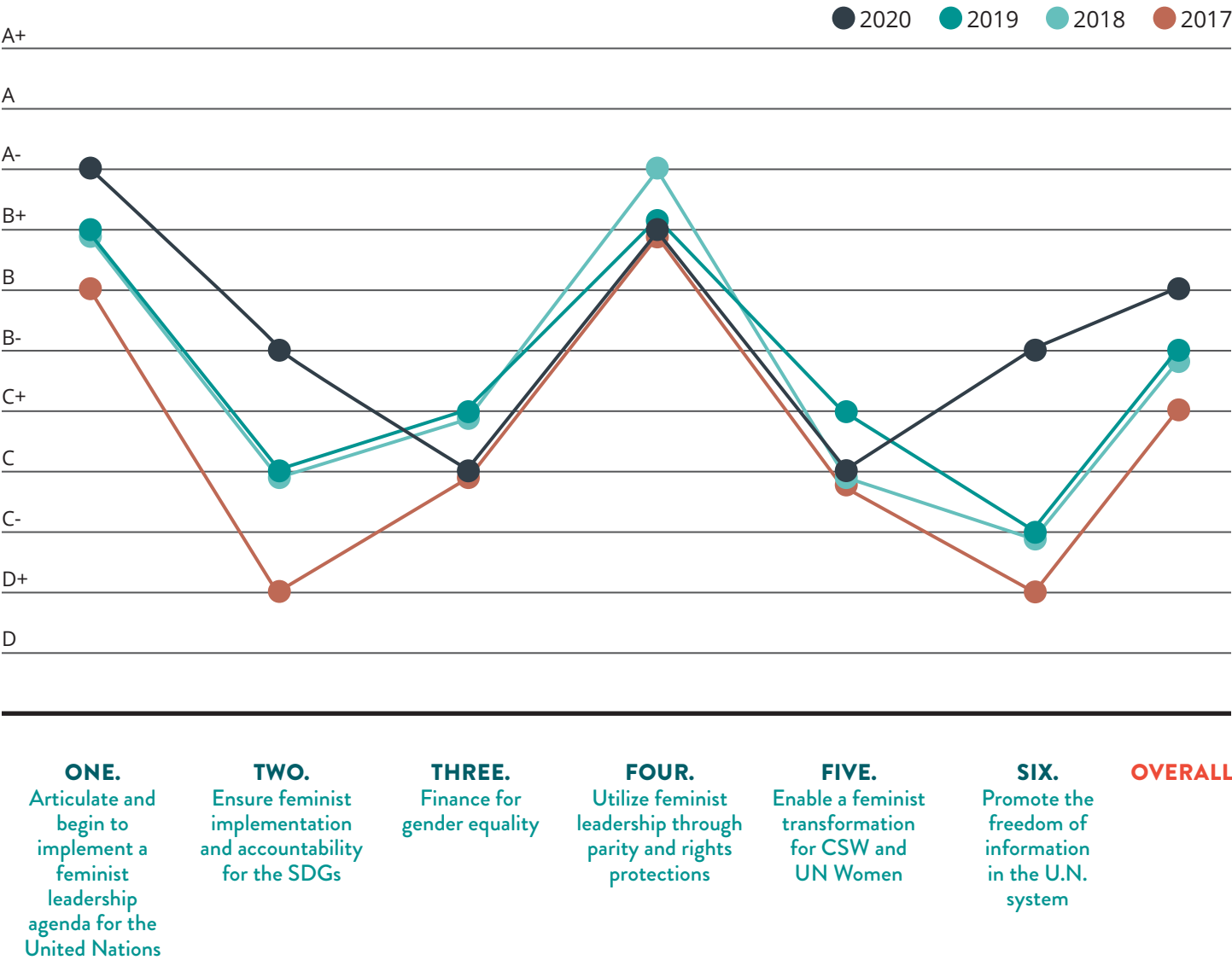
The High-Level Task Force will provide a short report to the Secretary-General with a set of actionable recommendations. The report will be shared broadly in a public event.

The Task Force may also recommend a mechanism to ensure implementation and tracking of its implementation.

Proposed Structure:



REPORT CARD GRADES FROM 2017-2020



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