

NORTH AMERICA

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Structural barriers and negative trends

The 1995 BPfA identified 12 critical areas of concern with a call for **urgent** action. While there is evidence of limited progress, there is little evidence of urgency. The biggest barrier to women's equality is patriarchy. Patriarchy is threaded throughout the lack of progress in every critical area. While creating opportunities for women to collude with power, it marginalizes the voices of those who don't. Patriarchy creates an environment where individual rights supersede the rights of women and girls collectively.

The U.S. and Canada have both unique and common structural barriers that burden progress on women and girls' human rights. In the US, many areas of the Platform are determined by the 50 states, rather than national decisions. Hence, women and girls have lost progress in many areas while benefiting in others. This Sovereignty determines ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment, limits the right to abortion, and sets the legal age of marriage, for example. Poverty, education, health care, affordable housing, funding, access to abortion, human rights, judicial equity and pay equity are among the areas legislated in the states. Racial inequities are also an issue for the US.

In Canada, health and education are in provincial jurisdiction and throughout the country women's access to abortion and other health services are not consistent. Colonialism in North America has meant that Indigenous women's traditional societies were disrupted, and patriarchal worldviews imposed upon Indigenous societies. In Canada, this was legislated through the Indian Act which stripped Indigenous women of their political and familial roles. The impacts of this reach far and wide and are evidenced by the marginalization of Indigenous women and girls.



Progress on implementing the Beijing Platform for Action

Women in poverty: Women in North America (NA) are more likely to be living below the poverty line than men across all racial and ethnic groups, with single mothers twice as likely to be poor than single fathers. 26.6% of U.S. women who are poor are single with dependent children. Nearly 15% of CDNs with disabilities live in poverty, 59% are women; Indigenous Peoples are overrepresented among the homeless population in almost all urban settings. Indigenous women's incomes in Canada, were 55% of non-Indigenous men, meaning there is a 45% income gap between Indigenous women and non-Indigenous men, as a result 25.1% of Indigenous women lived in a low-income situation. The U.S. ranks 51st in the world in gender gap parity and ranks 94th in economic parity trailing way behind CDN which ranks 16th in global gender parity and 27th in economic parity.

Violence against women and girls: U.S. intimate femicides are increasing, primarily because of gun violence, after almost four decades of decline. Gun-related domestic killings increased 26 percent from 2010 to 2017. In 2017, 926 gun-related femicides were inflicted by partners with guns; in 2014, it was 752 of 1,321 women. In CDN 85% of victims of intimate partner violence are female with femicide occurring every six days. Violence disproportionately affects half of Indigenous women in CDN including the most severe forms of violence/non-state torture - sexual assault, beatings, choking, or threats with a deadly weapon such as a gun or knife. 50% of trafficking victims are Indigenous women and 25% are underage girls yet Indigenous Peoples in CDN represent only 4.7% of the population. The Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, highlighted high rates of violence against Indigenous women in Canada including sexual violence, human trafficking, missing and murdered Indigenous women, forced sterilizations, and high rates of child apprehension by children's aid societies. The report also noted a shortage of shelters for victims of abuse, particularly for Indigenous women.

The criminal justice system allows perpetrators to act with impunity, while victims are often left without support. More and more traffickers solicit young women and girls for sexual exploitation. Pornographic violence against children report in 2009 shows 83.0% of images were of girls and involved babies, with torture, bondage, and degradation; the U.S. produces 55% of child pornography globally.

Health care: The U.S. does not provide universal healthcare or nationally-mandated paid maternity/paternity/family leave. The U.S. has the highest maternal mortality rate among wealthy nations, and women of color are 3 to 4 times more likely to die as white women. Women's reproductive rights remain at risk. In the U.S., state legislatures have enacted a number of extreme abortion restrictions. The U.S. Congress has also passed abortion restrictions and denied public funds for abortion funds overseas. In addition, the President has implemented a gag rule, prohibiting providers of Title X funds for family planning services from even verbally discussing abortion. Finally, while abortion in CDN is legal at all stages of pregnancy, it remains an issue which is often debated by federal and provincial parliamentarians. Smoking, vaping and opioid use have become serious health risks in both countries. Many political leaders in NA (notably in the U.S.) deny that climate

change exists despite scientific evidence, including the impact on women's health. Climate change has been associated "with an increase in asthma in adolescent girls; higher risk of acquiring lung cancer and heart disease in mid-life as well as heart attacks, strokes, and dementia in older women." Indigenous women's health is intimately connected to climate change and the resulting environmental impacts. Indigenous women are disproportionately impacted as many are still living off the land and need access to strong sustainable forests. Food insecurity is a result of the degradation of traditional lands. Health issues facing Indigenous women include higher rates of chronic diseases, poor mental health and addictions stemming from trauma.

Education and training of women and girls: CDN's overall SDG Gender Index Rate for education in 2019 is 36 with the U.S. at 28. In NA young women are underrepresented in science, technology, engineering, mathematics and computer science (STEM) fields. In U.S. academia, only 31% of full professors and 27% of college presidents are women. (Women's Leadership Gap). Young women find themselves saddled with huge debt and their jobs do not compensate the high expenditure. Locally there are funding and educational inequities such as a lack of access to quality education, racial justice, teacher salaries. Safe and affordable transportation, financial support and social services such as child care and housing must be provided for women who are married and/or head of their households in order to work or further their education. The digital gap which still exists for women or girls must also be eliminated. In Canada there are persistent barriers for Indigenous women in terms of education, including underfunding of on-reserve schools, ongoing impacts of the Canadian Residential School system and multiple socioeconomic factors limiting access.

Women, economic justice, and the economy: The gender gap in (CDN) is 87 cents per dollar earned by men and 80 cents for the U.S., with the gap widening for women of color, Latina and Indigenous women. Economic justice is also widening in (NA), and its negative impact on the global economy must be acknowledged. There are several reasons why women experience this wage injustice which include, women's disproportionate share of unpaid work; women are more likely than men to work part-time due to these responsibilities which is also related to unavailability of affordable, quality childcare; many women also work in female-segregated sectors in historically undervalued and low-paying jobs which are valued less. Women also face implicit and explicit discrimination in the workplace and in hiring, promotion and compensation practices of corporations.

Recognizing the destructive role of (NA) companies on human rights and the environment, through trade and other policies and practices, change must occur before the planet and women or girls' human rights are destroyed.

Climate change: It is estimated that there is now a one-in-twenty chance per decade that heat, drought, and flood events will cause a simultaneous failure of maize production in the world's two main growers, China and the U.S. Microplastic fibres are found in 83% of the world's tap water. Parents aware that their children may become part of the statistic of one child dying every minute from contaminated water may migrate to an area where this is not a threat. Climate change induced displacement will increase the magnitude and frequency of natural disasters affecting billions, with women and girls most affected. Women's lower incomes relative to men, their gendered roles and social statuses, and the ways in which these interact with changing environments and related policies and programs affect women's experiences of climate change. Their capacity to cope with the effects of natural disasters may be impaired by prevailing inequalities in loss of property, economic income-generating activities, access to vital health services, and heightened risk of gender-based violence as a result of climate change. Indigenous women throughout Canada and the US are

disproportionately affected by climate change. Their traditional roles as the primary caregivers, users and managers of natural resources, and keepers of the home mean their livelihoods depend on resources that are put most at risk by climate change. Indigenous women have experienced the effects of climate change for generations. They have also been leaders in conserving the environment, and their knowledge and unique experiences greatly contribute to climate change adaptation and mitigation actions in their communities.



Recommendations beyond Beijing+25

Renew urgency for action in all 12 critical areas of concern and to the SDGs.

Develop National Action Plans in each country, including Indigenous Women's Specific Action Plans, to eliminate violence against Women and girls. Plans should also include responsible & effective gun laws, non state torture, and the recognition of the targeted violence towards marginalized and historically discriminated against communities including widows, elderly and disabled, Indigenous, migrant, other racialized women.

- Recognize the importance of a strong women's rights movement in each country through the provision of sustainable core funding for women's organizations doing advocacy and service provision to ensure the protection of women's human rights including sexual and reproductive rights, consent-based sex education, as well as strong, universal social services.
- Comply with all sections of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, especially articles 5 & 7, legislate against non-state torture; CDN government to ensure that Indigenous Women lead the implementation of the National Action as related to MMIWG.
- Develop action plans to implement SCR 1321. Develop and implement plans to eliminate violence against women and girls using strategies in the Istanbul Convention, CEDAW, and consider the Every Woman Treaty.
- Adopt a universal healthcare system in the U.S. that provides equal access for women and girls, especially in underserved and rural areas.
- In the U.S., ratify and implement the ERA and CEDAW and sensible gun control laws. NA governments should support and sign the Binding Treaty on Transnational Corporations and Human Rights.
- Support life-long learning and education for all women and girls through the provision of free or affordable education at all levels including day care, prekindergarten to post-secondary, increase access for women and girls to STEM education and to non-traditional fields.