

Review

# Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality in the G20 Context

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## Abstract

Ever since 2008, G20 summits have been held annually and within G20 there are several working groups that include Women 20 (W20), launched during the Turkish Presidency in 2015. W20 is established with the aim to give further impetus to women economic empowerment. In the age of digital transformation, technology has become a crucial enabler for women's empowerment. The G20 Digital Economy Task Force (DETF) has emphasized the importance of closing the digital gender gap by promoting digital literacy and skills development for women. Although G20 efforts have made significant strides in addressing gender inequality, numerous challenges remain.

**Keywords:** Women's empowerment, Social development, Gender equality, Economic development.

## Introduction

The G20 (Group of Twenty) represents a coalition of the world's major economies, including both developed and developing nations. With the growing recognition of gender equality and women's empowerment as critical drivers of sustainable economic growth and social development, the G20 has increasingly placed these issues at the forefront of its agenda. One of the significant themes that has emerged in recent G20 discussions is the focus on "women's empowerment" and "gender equality," acknowledging that achieving full potential across all sectors and economies requires the inclusion and active participation of women.

The G20 has realized the vital need for collective action to address gender inequalities. Despite considerable progress over the years, women continue to face disparities in education, employment, health, and leadership opportunities. Gender inequality persists in many regions of the world, limiting women's access to essential resources such as education, healthcare, and employment, which are crucial for their personal and economic development.

## G20 Initiatives Focused on Women's Empowerment

The G20's focus on women's empowerment first came into sharper relief in the 2014 Australian Presidency, where member states committed to reducing the gender gap in labor force participation by 25% by 2025, a goal now known as the Brisbane Target. This initiative underlined that closing the gender gap would significantly contribute to global economic growth and stability. Since then, women's empowerment has been highlighted in various G20 summits, including those led by Turkey, Argentina, Japan, and Saudi Arabia (Asia Pacific Issues, 2018).

Some notable areas where the G20 has worked to address gender disparities include:

### Education and Skills Development

The G20 emphasizes women's access to education and skills, especially in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) fields, as crucial steps toward ensuring women's competitiveness in a rapidly evolving labor market. Closing the digital gender divide has been a particular focus, as digital skills are increasingly vital for economic participation.

### **Employment and Labor Market Access**

In line with the Brisbane Target, G20 nations have strived to increase women's labor market participation. The goal is not only to provide more opportunities but also to ensure women's employment is equitable, decent, and free from discrimination. Furthermore, efforts are being made to reduce the global wage gap and ensure women receive equal pay for equal work (G20 Utoronto, 2018).

### **Leadership and Decision-Making**

Women's participation in leadership roles, both in the private and public sectors, remains a key goal for the G20. Empowering women to assume leadership positions strengthens decision-making processes and ensures that policies are more inclusive and representative of society as a whole (G20 Summit, 2018).

### **Health and Well-being**

Gender disparities in healthcare access, maternal health, and reproductive rights are often overlooked, but the G20 has increasingly recognized the importance of women's health as a core element of women's empowerment. Universal access to healthcare services is necessary for promoting women's well-being and economic participation.

### **Entrepreneurship and Access to Finance**

Supporting women entrepreneurs and ensuring access to finance and credit is a key area where G20 economies can enable more women to start and grow businesses. Female entrepreneurship is critical for innovation, job creation, and economic diversification (G20 Turkey, 2015)

### **The Role of Digital Technology in Empowering Women**

In the age of digital transformation, technology has become a crucial enabler for women's empowerment. The G20 Digital Economy Task Force (DETF) has emphasized the importance of closing the digital gender gap by promoting digital literacy and skills development for women. Women in developing nations are particularly vulnerable to being left behind in the digital economy due to limited access to technology, the internet, and digital education. Bridging this gap is vital to unlocking women's full potential.

G20 members have committed to advancing women's access to digital technologies and fostering an inclusive digital economy where women can thrive as innovators, entrepreneurs, and leaders. In this regard, initiatives like e-commerce platforms tailored to women entrepreneurs and gender-sensitive policies in the digital economy are being promoted.

### **The W20 Engagement Group**

The W20 (Women 20) is one of the official G20 engagement groups that focus on gender equality and women's empowerment. It brings together experts, civil society representatives, and women's organizations to formulate policy recommendations aimed at closing the gender gap and promoting the economic empowerment of women (G20 Turkey, 2015).

The W20's priorities include ensuring women's access to education, particularly in STEM fields, enhancing women's participation in the workforce, and increasing women's leadership in public and private sectors. W20 representatives also advocate for

policies to improve women's healthcare access and address gender-based violence, which continues to be a major impediment to women's empowerment globally.

The W20's work underscores the importance of engaging women at all levels of decision-making in G20 processes. The group's recommendations are presented at the G20 summit and have significantly influenced the inclusion of gender-related topics in G20 communiqués.

### **Progress and Challenges**

Although G20 efforts have made significant strides in addressing gender inequality, numerous challenges remain. For example, while women's labor market participation has increased in many G20 countries, gender gaps persist, particularly in leadership positions and high-paying industries. Women are often concentrated in low-wage sectors or part-time jobs, and the gender wage gap remains a significant issue worldwide.

Moreover, women continue to face barriers to accessing financial services and credit, which hinders their ability to start businesses or expand existing ones. Cultural and social norms that limit women's economic participation remain deeply entrenched in many G20 countries, particularly in developing nations.

### **The Importance of Women's Empowerment in Achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**

The G20's commitment to women's empowerment aligns closely with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 5, which seeks to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Gender equality is a cross-cutting theme that underpins the success of all SDGs, from eradicating poverty to promoting sustainable economic growth, ensuring quality education, and addressing climate change.

Women's empowerment is not only a matter of human rights but also a strategic economic imperative. Research has consistently shown that gender equality leads to more prosperous, inclusive, and resilient societies. Economies with higher levels of gender equality tend to grow faster, innovate more, and recover more quickly from crises. Thus, G20 efforts to promote women's empowerment are not only necessary from a social justice perspective but also vital for global economic recovery and growth.

### **The Future of Women's Empowerment in the G20**

As the world faces new and complex challenges, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath, the G20's focus on women's empowerment is more relevant than ever. The pandemic disproportionately affected women, particularly in terms of job losses, unpaid care work, and health outcomes. G20 members are now looking at how to build back better by ensuring that recovery efforts are inclusive and prioritize gender equality.

To achieve meaningful progress, the G20 must continue to prioritize policies that address the systemic barriers women face. These include expanding access to quality education and healthcare, promoting women's participation in leadership roles, and ensuring that women are included in the digital economy. Additionally, addressing gender-based violence and ensuring women's safety and security must remain a priority for the G20.

Looking ahead, the G20 has the potential to be a driving force for change. By placing women's empowerment at the heart of its policy agenda, the G20 can foster more inclusive and equitable economic growth. This requires sustained political will, commitment to gender-sensitive policy reforms, and collaboration between governments, the private sector, and civil society.

### Conclusion

Women's empowerment is not just a moral imperative but a critical component of global economic prosperity. The G20 has recognized this and made significant strides in promoting gender equality across multiple sectors. However, there is still much work to be done. As the world continues to grapple with economic uncertainty, climate change, and technological disruption, ensuring that women are not left behind is essential for building a more sustainable, equitable, and prosperous future for all. The G20 must continue to lead by example, fostering policies that empower women to realize their full potential, drive economic growth, and create resilient Societies

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