



Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

A briefing for libraries

- The 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action is an ambitious UN agenda to advance women's empowerment and gender equality. In 2020, the Beijing+25 review aims to assess the progress made towards implementing the Declaration and the Platform.
- Access to information, knowledge and learning play an important role in addressing several key strategic concerns spelled out in the Declaration and the Platform. They can help reduce gender inequalities in poverty and access to education, women's participation in the economy and decision-making, women's health and enjoyment of human rights, and address discriminatory attitudes and practices.
- The efforts of libraries to help address gender inequalities have been noted in several Beijing+25 national reviews. From supporting digital inclusion to raising awareness about violence against women, libraries can help deliver on gender equality and women advancement goals of the Beijing Declaration and Platform.

The [1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#) is a key United Nations document setting out an agenda and a roadmap to realise gender equality and empower women and girls worldwide. 2020 marks the 25th anniversary of the Declaration, and a global implementation review has been launched to assess what progress has been made in achieving these goals, what obstacles had been encountered, and what emerging issues and prospects are there today in the field of women's rights and gender equality.

This presents an opportunity for all interested stakeholders to assess the contributions they can make to achieving gender equality and, whenever possible, take part in the Beijing+25 process.

Access to Information in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

The Beijing Declaration expresses the parties' determination to ensure women's access to, *inter alia*, information, life-long education, literacy and training. The Platform outlines 12 *Critical Areas of Concern* - and access to knowledge, information and training plays an important role in several strategic objectives and actions associated with these areas.

Poverty and education (areas A, B, L). The text of the Platform points out that one of the key factors related to women's poverty is a lack of access to education. It also emphasises the importance of releasing women's productive potential; while access to information is one of the factors which can increase women's productive capacity – particularly in developing countries.

In the broader field of education, the Platform highlights the importance of investing in both formal and non-formal education and training to address socioeconomic gender inequalities. The Platform emphasises the strong link between investing in formal and non-formal education and sustainable development and economic growth.

Several key actions to be taken in this area are highly relevant for libraries: reducing female illiteracy, integrating literacy and numeracy programmes for out-of-school girls, and promoting lifelong education and training for women and girls.

Considering the role of libraries in providing access to learning and training materials, the Platform's recommendations regarding curricula and educational materials are also relevant. In particular, the text emphasises the need for educational materials and curricula which are sensitive to the needs of girls and women, and not gender-biased; and the need to make educational materials (in appropriate languages) available for refugee and displaced children so as to minimise the disruption of their schooling.

Access to health and legal information (C, I). Access to information plays an important role in addressing inequalities and inadequacies in healthcare, as well as protection and promotion of women’s rights. Access to health information is an important factor in ensuring women’s reproductive and overall health, preventing unwanted and too-early pregnancy and substance abuse. Access to information on health and nutrition should be provided throughout childhood and adulthood; it also plays an important role in helping women understand and adapt to ageing processes.

Similarly, legal literacy and information about women’s human rights (as well as available legal instruments and recourse mechanisms) are important factors in ensuring women’s enjoyment of their human rights. A lack of knowledge and understanding of human rights, as well as barriers to access to information in situations where a women’s rights are violated, can marginalise and disadvantage women. As such, key measures include widely disseminating relevant information and implementing awareness programmes with relevant stakeholders.

Information and Communication Technologies and Media (J). The Platform recognises the potential of ICT and media to advance gender equality and the empowerment of women – however, enhancing women’s access to ICT, building up their their skills and knowledge is important to help combat negative portrayals of women in media and help them access a broader wealth of information.

As such, the suggested actions include training women to make increasing use of ‘information technology for communication and the media’. Notably, the Beijing+5 outcome documents further acknowledge the barriers to ICT use among some women - including cost barriers, lack of access and lack of literacy and digital skills. Many libraries already work to help overcome such barriers by offering public internet and ICT access and digital literacy training.

Raising awareness and addressing inequalities (D, E, F, G, L). Finally, outreach, education and information campaigns can help eliminate factors contributing to violence against women, promote a culture of peaceful conflict resolution, and address discriminatory attitudes or practices. Such initiatives can, for instance, sensitise people to the effects of violence in the family and society and promote tolerance.

Providing public information can help address discriminatory practices when it comes to girls’ access to health services or nutrition; training and access to information can improve girl children’s self-esteem and enable them to participate in social, political and economic life. Outreach and information dissemination initiatives can help lower-income women (particularly rural residents) be aware of and take opportunities to participate in the economy.

Similarly, access to information and education is important to enable more women to participate in environmental decision-making. More broadly, self-esteem and leadership training can encourage more women – particularly those facing multiple barriers (e.g. special needs, belonging to racial or ethnic minorities, and many more) – to take part in political life, leadership and decision-making.

Access to information and knowledge, literacy and lifelong learning are key aspects of libraries’ work. As such, libraries can contribute to the goals and activities the Platform sets out. In doing so, it is paramount to keep in mind the Platform’s instructions to pay particular attention to the needs of women and girls facing additional barriers (rural residents, migrant, refugee or displaced women, women with disabilities, and many others).

How Libraries Fit Into Beijing+25

The Beijing Declaration and Platform emphasise the importance of engaging a wide range of stakeholders – governments, civil society and international organisations, educational institutions, private sector representatives, and more – in its implementation and women’s advancement at large.

Libraries can play an important role in helping deliver on these objectives and actions. As part of the “Beijing+25” review process, in May 2019 UN member states submitted [national reports](#) detailing the progress they had made towards implementing the Declaration and the Platform. Several national implementation reviews already noted various library initiatives; these examples show the wide diversity of activities libraries can launch or take part in to help promote gender equality:

- In [Estonia](#), the *e-Community* project aims to build a network of digital skills training centres in local libraries. Librarians help the public develop various digital competencies – from basic technology to social media use and more.
- Similarly, in [the UK](#), the national *Digital Strategy* emphasises the importance of digital inclusion and highlights the role of libraries in providing public internet access, digital skills training and support. Such measures can help encourage women’s participation in ICT and bridge the gender digital gap.
- In [Ghana](#), the national Library Authority has introduced a mobile library project to increase children’s access to books.
- In [Iceland](#), a civil society organisation – W.O.M.E.N – works together with the Reykjavik City Library to host a Women’s Story Circle for women of migrant and Icelandic descent to share their cultural backgrounds and promote integration.
- In [Lithuania](#), libraries cooperated with the government and the European Union to raise awareness around the issue of violence against women. Around 70 thousand bookmarks with crucial information on the subject were distributed in libraries and bookstores. The project focused on smaller cities to reach women less likely to be exposed to other media channels (social networks, outdoor advertisement, etc.)

Beijing+25 presents an opportunity to access the progress made towards gender equality – and catalyse further action. With 2020 marking the beginning of the ‘Decade of Action’ to deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals, the review process aims to [accelerate women’s empowerment](#). Since access to information plays an important role in addressing several *Crucial Areas of Concern*, the review offers libraries an opportunity to take further action and get involved in the accelerated delivery.

IFLA will provide further information as the opportunities become clearer.