



# GENERATION EQUALITY FORUM PARIS DEBRIEFING

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REFLECTIONS AND  
OPPORTUNITIES FOR  
GENDER EQUALITY  
AND SRHR ADVOCATES



# INTRODUCTION

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On the 7th of July 2021, Share-Net Netherlands and WO=MEN Dutch Gender Platform, in collaboration with Rutgers and CHOICE for Youth & Sexuality organised a virtual debriefing meeting on the Generation Equality Forum Paris. This event was moderated by **Yvonne Bogaarts** (Manager Advocacy, Rutgers) and **Nadia van der Linde** (Programme Manager International Processes, WO=MEN) and provided a space for civil society in the Netherlands and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to share reflections and discuss strategic opportunities for advocacy following the Generation Equality Forum in Paris (30 June - 2 July 2021).



The Generation Equality Forum (GEF) is a global process initiated by UN Women to celebrate progress since the Beijing Conference on Women in 1995 and to keep gender equality and women's rights on the international political agenda. Due to the pandemic, the GEF took place mainly virtually apart from a few in-person participants. Over the past year, six thematic multi-stakeholder action coalitions (AC), a global Compact and a Youth Taskforce were launched to develop priority actions and foster new commitments to further the Beijing agenda. Each AC was led by a multi-stakeholder group consisting of governments, foundations, civil society actors, private sector and UN organisations and came with a set of concrete and ambitious actions (the so-called blueprint). UN Women announced that the GEF raised 40 billion dollars and it came with a bold, action-oriented agenda.

# YOUTH PARTICIPATION AT THE GEF

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**Before the GEF Paris:** The fact that there was a dedicated GEF Youth Task Force, Youth Journey and regular mention of youth participation suggests that the GEF acknowledges the crucial role young people play in achieving the GEF's goals and objectives. However, **Mori Plaschinski** (Advocacy Coordinator, CHOICE for Youth & Sexuality) pointed out that the implementation of meaningful youth participation has fallen behind expectations, particularly around the areas of (1) Youth leadership and co-ownership, (2) Feminist leadership, (3) Intersectionality and (4) Transformative design and leadership.

Based on the concerns of young people regarding the clarity of engagement in the GEF, and their need to discuss what true youth leadership entails and how to envision young feminist leadership in this process, [the Young Feminist Manifesto \(YFM\)](#) was written. It expresses the concerns of young people regarding the lack of clarity of youth engagement during the GEF and gives specific recommendations to positively impact the GEF/ACs and make it a truly feminist, transformative and intersectional space and process. A variety of youth constituencies of the GEF and youth activists mobilised and organised an autonomous, youth-led pre-conference: The Young Feminists Unconference.<sup>1</sup> Looking back at the event, Mori Plaschinski concluded: *"It is a great example of young people organising to create an inclusive transformative space. 2000 young people between the ages of 12-35 joined. Young people are the experts of their lives, there is value in youth led events and young people have the knowledge and capacity to lead."*

**During the GEF Paris:** During the forum, daily youth checkouts were organised where young people could get together to talk about the events of the day. These spaces turned out to be crucial as during the forum there was limited opportunity to connect. The way the platform and conference was set up, it was not accessible to many people including people with disabilities, people with different language skills and people with limited internet access and technical skills. This had been addressed with the organisers and advice and support had been offered for example by organisations of people with disabilities, and this was turned down/ ignored by the Paris organisers. This was deliberate exclusion.



In addition, there were many tech problems during the forum which denied many participants (civil society activists and government and other participants alike) the opportunity to join or interact. The communication from the organisers around this was abysmal, and it didn't really improve either over the days. As Mori put it: *"If people cannot participate, then it is not participatory. This should not go without attention."* Young people decided to livestream the sessions hereby allowing young people and others facing technical difficulties to follow the programme. Further, Mori Plaschinski criticised the tokenistic use of young people who had been invited to the opening ceremony and a photo session but were not included in the rest of the forum.

**After the GEF Paris:** Looking forward, it is important to work towards inclusivity and a more participatory process investing in co-leadership and co-ownership of youth, accountability, substantive and meaningful participation, funding and resourcing and capacity strengthening of young people!

# GOVERNMENT PERSPECTIVE

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**Karin Weber** (Senior Policy Advisor Taskforce Women's Rights and Gender Equality, Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs) looked back at the GEF as making history in terms of mobilizing 40 billion dollars of investment for gender equality and women's rights. Nearly half of the investment came from the private sector and philanthropy, which was never seen before.

Nearly 50.000 people attended. Outraged about the youth representatives being asked to leave the forum after day one, Karin Weber acknowledged the before mentioned problems in relation to youth participation, emphasising: "For the Netherlands, it is an important chance to learn and reflect about meaningful youth participation." Karin Weber mentioned sharing the concerns about the lack of translation support, disability access and many technical problems related to the forum. She also acknowledged they also faced challenges in the process leading up to and during the GEF Paris whereby timelines were not always clear or realistic and information was shared late. They tried to get the Prime Minister or Minister Kaag on stage, but that didn't work out. This unfortunately contributed to little attention for the Dutch commitments to the GEF and to the GEF in the Netherlands.

**Overall, the Netherlands made 17 commitments in five out of the six action coalitions,<sup>2</sup>** although none of these commitments are new due to the care-taker government situation in the Netherlands. Out of these, nine commitments are international collective commitments in collaboration with other stakeholders. The Netherlands acted as a leader in AC6: Feminist Movements and Leadership, continuing to advocate for more political and financial support for women's rights organisations, movements activists and women's rights defenders in the global south through their commitment to a co-creation process for a Global Alliance for Sustainable Feminist Movements. The Netherlands also participated in AC3: Bodily autonomy and SRHR where Ambassador for Gender Equality and Women's Rights, PASCALLE GROTENHUIS, together with the Youth Ambassador for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, Gender Equality and Bodily Autonomy, Lisa de Pagter, shared a commitment on behalf of like-minded governments together with IPPF to realise 50 million more adolescent girls and women having access to SRHR

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2. No commitments were made on Technology and Innovation for Gender Equality.

and services. Karin Weber recognised that the Netherlands does not have a formal feminist foreign policy yet but were seen as an example feminist leader: “There was a lot of appreciation for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Leading from the South programme and partnerships.”

**Next steps:** UN Women will coordinate annual reports on the Global Acceleration Plan for Gender Equality and the Netherlands will also follow up on reporting on their commitments. In closing, Karin Weber reminded us that the GEF was a voluntary forum. Not all UN member states participated and participants cannot formally be held accountable on the follow-up. There is a current backlash against women’s rights and gender equality. The decision to make commitments was up to individual countries, which resulted in very ambitious language at times but lack of commitments from others. In a worrying development, Russia, for instance, is already trying to block mentioning the GEF within the UN Women strategic plan.



# ACTION COALITION 2: ECONOMIC JUSTICE AND RIGHTS

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**Paulien Boone** (Lobby & Advocacy Coordinator, Care Nederland) shared CARE's experience co-leading within AC2: Economic justice and rights and their perceived lack of clarity around this selection process. In this role, Care aimed at creating space for civil society organisations and ensuring that smaller women's rights and feminist organisations were better able to access the process.

In the context of the action coalitions and UN Women's multi-stakeholder approach, involving the private sector was considered relevant and important for achieving the ambitions of the forum. Yet, it became evident that bringing together a diverse group of stakeholders for these global processes can be challenging due to huge differences in size, objectives, priorities, financial means and influence between all involved. Paulien Boone reflected on the unfortunate process around involving private sector actors at quite a late stage: *"Co-leads who were already involved in the process would have appreciated being made aware or even consulted on the selection process of private sector partners."* A key outcome of GEF is the launch of the Global Alliance for Care.

After all, Care was satisfied that many of their priorities are reflected in the final programme of work. They remain committed to the process and the action coalitions, eager to make sure that the commitments are actually brought to life and all stakeholders have the tools to hold each other to account.

# THE COMPACT ON WOMEN PEACE AND SECURITY AND HUMANITARIAN ACTION

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**Anne-Floor Dekker** (Programme Manager Gender, Peace and Security, WO=MEN) reported on the Compact on Women, Peace, Security and Humanitarian Action (WPS-HA) that launched on the 2nd of July. It operates as a global movement calling for the redesign of the peace and security and humanitarian process to systematically and meaningfully include women and girls in the decisions that influence their lives. This call for participation includes peacebuilders, refugees and other forcibly displaced women and girls. The compact was established in response to strong lobby efforts by WO=MEN and other civil society organisations worldwide who did not see these issues sufficiently included in the six action coalitions. Anne-Floor Dekker emphasized that the Compact builds on existing commitments and humanitarian treaties; *“We don’t want new commitments. There are plenty of commitments on paper already.”*

Currently there are over a 100 stakeholders pledging to strengthen coordination on existing mechanisms for WPS-HA, to improve monitoring of progress and to increase financing and visibility of the WPS-HA agenda. The signatories are committed to take concrete action for women and girls in the following five key areas:

- Increased financing for women, peace, security, gender equality and humanitarian programming
- Meaningful participation in peace processes
- Economic security and access to resources
- Leadership and agency
- Protection and promotion of human rights in conflicts and crises

WO=MEN will remain active in the Compact, pushing for follow-through on commitments, as Anne-Floor Dekker put it: *“as a critical friend.”*



# MAIN TAKEAWAYS FROM THE PANEL DISCUSSION

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- The Netherlands did not make any new commitments because of an outgoing government. Commitments can still be added at a later stage.
- In response to the pushback in the EU and globally against gender equality and women's rights, there has also been greater collaboration between countries, especially over the past year ('pushback against the pushback').
- There is much value in participatory processes and youth-led action, as demonstrated by the successful Young Feminist Unconference. The methodology was developed in a co-creating manner, ensuring an enabling and safe environment and completely without expert panels.
- We cannot achieve gender equality if we do business as usual. This holds true for civil society, as well as for the private sector. The private sector needs to make a shift in their way of working to live up to their commitments to gender equality and it is important to hold them accountable.
- We all need to do our part; keep the conversation going, take everyone into account, work really transformative and participatory. We need to work together to hold common ground and use it to address the pushback.
- There is some disappointment about the GEF processes and results. There was little media attention for GEF and there is also not yet a public platform where all the commitments can be accessed. But some of the structures and commitments, like the Compact and joint alliances and coalitions for funding, care work and feminist foreign policies can be opportunities.
- Organising constructive opposition is complicated in a virtual setting, but not entirely impossible. Feminists with disabilities organised a 'shadow' side-event to protest their lack of access to and inclusion in the GEF process and platform. Young feminists started live-streaming GEF sessions to make them more accessible. #GiveFeministsTheMic became a popular hashtag during the opening ceremony to highlight the need for civil society activists to be heard.
- The Netherlands is part of a co-creation process to set up the Global Alliance for Sustainable Feminist Movements and setting up a reference group. If you would like to receive more information on this Alliance and/or how to join, reach out to Nadia van der Linde at [n.vanderlinde@wo-men.nl](mailto:n.vanderlinde@wo-men.nl).
- Closing with a call to action: It will be important for those in leadership positions within the action coalitions to push for accountability in these processes by demanding public reporting and ensuring space for civil society to discuss the progress that we are all making.

# ANNEX

## COMMITMENTS MADE BY THE NETHERLANDS DURING THE GEF PARIS PER ACTION COALITION

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### A. Gender-Based Violence:

1. Commit to make one (1) contribution to the Office of the UN Special Representative of the Secretary General **against Sexual Violence in Conflict** of EUR 574.000 in 2021, to support the execution of its mandate.

### B. Economic justice and rights:

2. Commit to take a gender-responsive approach to promote women's **equal rights and opportunities** in the Netherlands' development cooperation policies on decent work, including our focus on living wage and income.
3. Commit to supporting **women's entrepreneurship** by improving access to finance for women-owned businesses in Africa together with the African Development Bank, other development financial institutions and donors.
4. Collective: We collectively commit to identify information and **data gaps** and compile a set of rights-based indicators, drawing on and reinforcing related processes underway, to, by 2026, have strengthened our collective ability to measure, analyze and deepen our advocacy on civic space trends and progress for feminist mobilization, organizing and action, in all its diversity.

### C. Bodily autonomy and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR):

5. Collective: The Governments of the Netherlands, together with the governments of Canada, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Japan, New Zealand, Norway and Sweden, in collaboration with IPPF and other global partners will work together towards the realization of **universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights, quality care and services, information and education, including comprehensive sexuality education**, and thus contribute to achieve the Action Coalition 3 target of 50 million more adolescent girls and women in all their diversity who have access to these sexual and reproductive health and rights and services by 2026.

6. Collective: Movements for safe abortion rights from around the world, including a range of actors from the grass-root level to the international community, came together to establish a **Common Agenda for Comprehensive Abortion Care in April 2021**. We will implement this common agenda and its eight cross-cutting and mutually reinforcing priorities: intersectional and inclusive movements from the local to the international; responsive funding; person-centred quality abortion care; more and greater coordination across and beyond the movement, supporting risk, creatively, advocacy and accountability; addressing the opposition to abortion and SRHR; and improving access to comprehensive abortion care in humanitarian settings. The signatories commit to creating platforms for continued dialogue and collaboration, including at least one more Global Safe Abortion Dialogue in the coming five years.
7. Collective: The Global Financing Facility (GFF) and partners will deliver on the Generation Equality Forum agenda through the Acceleration Plan, which will over the next five years:
  - Expand access to family planning for more than 25 million additional adolescents and women
  - Integrate comprehensive SRHR services for the health systems in at least 20 additional countries and catalyze increased and more efficient financing for SRHR
  - Advance legal and policy reforms in 10 countries to create more opportunities for women, girls and adolescents to access SRHR services and information
  - Increase support to women and youth-led organizations networks and movements with at least 3 million USD per year

#### **D. Feminist action for climate justice:**

8. Commit to contributing to **sustainable forest management, strengthening the livelihoods and governance of people in forested landscapes, and reducing CO2 emissions** by halting deforestation, integrating gender as a cross-cutting factor and targeting women to make up at least half of our beneficiaries
9. Commit to provide 50 million people with access to **renewable energy** by 2030 ensuring that at least half of them are women.

#### **E. Feminist movements and leadership (NL co-lead):**

10. Commit to establishing a statutory quota of at least 30% women and 30% men in **supervisory boards** of listed companies in the Netherlands through a new law that is set to pass in 2022.

11. Commit to programming gender diversity in the **top echelons** of the semi-public and public sector in the Netherlands.
12. Collective: We, the leaders and commitment makers of the Action Coalition on Feminist Movements and Leadership collectively commit to **increase resources and support** for existing funding mechanisms, programs, and funds that provide direct, core, flexible, progressive, multi-year and sustainable funding to feminist organizations, groups, movements\* and activists including those that are often hard to reach, and/or who have been historically marginalized and criminalized.
13. Collective: We commit to, by June 2022, **co-create a Global Alliance on Sustainable Feminist Movements** as a multi-stakeholder initiative focused on exponentially increasing, sustaining and improving financial and political support for women's rights and feminist organizations and movements. The Global Alliance will work to enhance coordination to this end as well as collaboration to address emerging challenges facing feminist movements, bringing in new actors, funders and supporters, and engaging in review and exchange of best practices and funding modalities to ensure funding reaches feminist movements and organizations.
14. Collective: We, the leaders and commitment makers of the Action Coalition on Feminist Movements and Leadership, collectively commit to continue deepening our **understanding of intersectional feminist principles, practices, approaches and leadership and further integrate them into the work** of our organisations and institutions, as well as the Action Coalition, and across the Generation Equality process and accountability framework.
15. Collective: Across all the Action Coalitions and the Compact, we collectively commit to recognize **women's human rights defenders** of all ages and in all their diversity, including LGBTQI activists (including trans, intersex and nonbinary people), indigenous women, women and persons with disabilities, journalists, women and girl leaders and feminist advocates, to protect and enable safe environments, especially online, and to counter the gender-based discrimination, stigma and hate speech against them. We commit to support positive narratives, campaigns, and calls for their protection, among other actions, and in solidarity with them, so that by 2026 women human rights defenders are better recognized, supported, protected and empowered in their communities, organizations and movements.
16. Collective: We collectively commit to **identify information and data gaps** and compile a set of rights-based indicators, drawing on and reinforcing related processes underway, to, by 2026, have strengthened our collective ability to measure, analyze and deepen our advocacy on civic space trends and progress for feminist mobilization, organizing and action, in all its diversity.

## F. Bodily autonomy and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) & Feminist movements and leadership:

17. Commit to advancing women's rights and gender equality through the **SDGs fund of EUR 510 million**, which consists of the following grant instruments: the SRHR Partnership Fund, Leading from the South, Power of Women and Women, Peace and Security. The SRHR instrument funds seven strategic partnership consortia of civil society organizations advocating for bodily autonomy and SRHR. Secondly, the Leading from the South instrument supports (Southern) women's organizations and networks dedicated to the political, social and economic empowerment of women. Thirdly, the Power of Women instrument aims to accelerate action to strengthen the capacity of women's rights organizations in the area of lobby and advocacy. Lastly, the Women, Peace and Security instrument aims to support the lobby and advocacy of NGOs and women's rights organizations to strengthen the role of women in conflict prevention, resolution, peacebuilding and reconstruction and protect women and girls in conflict situations.



