

Gender Pulse

January-March 2026

From the Country Representative's Desk



Photo: UN Women/Himanshi Saini

It is with great pleasure that I welcome this edition of Gender Pulse, and with it, a moment of personal reflection.

Over the past ten months, I have had the privilege of serving as Country Representative a.i. for UN Women in India. Steering the office through a period of significant institutional activity has deepened my appreciation for the extraordinary team that makes this work possible. Every story in these pages is a testament to their commitment and conviction.

The headline of this quarter and indeed of this newsletter is one that does not always make front pages but shapes millions of lives: the Gender Budget Statement for FY 2026–27. With 53 Ministries and Departments now reporting gender allocations, this is the highest since the Statement's inception.

The gender share of the total Union Budget reaching 9.37 percent reflects India demonstrating that gender-responsive public finance is not just an aspiration, but policy in motion. UN Women's sustained technical partnership with the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD), Government of India has been central to this progress, and I could not be prouder of what this collaboration has achieved.

This quarter also brought other landmark moments. We placed gender equality at the centre of India's AI governance conversation through the Casebook on AI and Gender Empowerment, launched jointly with Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) and MWCD at the India AI Impact Summit. We convened Members of Parliament to examine budgets as instruments of justice. We witnessed young women from government Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) speak with confidence and purpose before the United Nations Secretary-General. And through our work on safe supply chains, inclusive tourism, and urban childcare, we demonstrated that gender equality is not a single issue, it is the architecture of a more just society.

As I close this chapter and resume my duties as the Deputy Representative, I do so with pride in what we have built, and with full confidence in what comes next. I am delighted to welcome Ms. Shoko Ishikawa as UN Women's new Country Representative for India. She is a seasoned diplomat with extensive experience across the United Nations system and has served in several countries, including as Country Representative in Bangladesh and Vietnam.

To the team, thank you. You showed up, every day, for the women and girls whose lives this work is meant to change.

Kanta Singh

Country Representative, a.i.
UN Women India Country Office

Gender at the Heart of India's AI Moment

A Landmark Casebook, a Historic Summit, and Young Women Who Stole the Show

For the first time, the India AI Impact Summit 2026 came to the Global South – convening in New Delhi from 16–21 February. Anchored by the tagline People, Planet, Progress, the Summit centred policy dialogues around the realities of communities most affected by technological change. For UN Women in India, this was a pivotal moment to bring gender equality into the heart of the AI conversation: engaging global leaders, policymakers, and innovators on building inclusive AI that considers the aspirations and experiences of women.

A landmark moment was the launch of the Casebook on AI and Gender Empowerment, developed jointly with the IndiaAI Mission under Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), with support from the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD). The Casebook was unveiled by MeitY Secretary Shri S. Krishnan, MWCD Secretary Shri Anil Malik, and UN Women Asia-Pacific Regional Director Ms. Christine Arab

– offering policymakers and practitioners a practical resource for ethical, inclusive AI deployment.

At the [JanAI](#) Pavilion, a social impact expo at the AI Summit, UN Women's booth became a hub of powerful exchanges. UN Secretary-General António Guterres visited and engaged with young rural women from UN Women's WeSTEM project – supported by the European Union, Micron, Nokia, and implemented by Head Held High Foundation, who are using AI to build skills and explore their career aspirations. In a moment that captured the spirit of the day, one young woman confidently asked the Secretary-General to rate his own AI abilities. A copy of the joint MeitY-UN Women Casebook was also presented to the Secretary-General during the interaction. Antara Lahiri, Director, Micron Foundation, Asia Pacific and Europe, also visited the booth, interacting with the young women and reflecting on how AI can boost their careers.



Pictured: UN Secretary-General António Guterres' visit to the UN Women booth, alongside highlights from the Government [launch](#) of the Casebook, engagement with young women from the WeSTEM project, a visit by Micron Foundation, and a joint Women in Ethical AI event with UNESCO and partners.

In partnership with UNESCO, LinkedIn, The Quantum Hub, Women for Ethical AI, and Amrita University, UN Women also co-convened “Women in AI: A South Asia Outlook on Representation, Equity & Empowerment”, sharing findings from a landmark Gender and AI study spanning six South Asian nations. The session examined implications of AI for women's education, skills, and work while identifying actionable pathways toward gender-inclusive, ethical AI ecosystems across the region.

A Record Year for Gender Budgeting

Gender Allocations Reach an All-Time High

Government of India announced their Union Budget 2026-27 in February 2026. The share of Gender Budget allocation in the total Union Budget has increased to 9.37% in FY 2026-27 from 8.86% in FY 2025-26. This is an increase of 11.55% over the GBS allocation of Rs. 4.49 lakh crore in FY 2025-26.

As part of the ongoing project *Strengthening Gender-Responsive Planning and Budgeting*, UN Women, in close collaboration with the Ministry of Women and Child Development, undertook efforts to integrate gender analysis into the budgets of programmes/schemes of select Ministries and Departments.

This year a total of 53 Ministries/Departments and 5 UTs have reported allocations as against 49 Ministries/Departments and 5 UTs in FY 2025-26. This is the highest number of reporting by the Ministries/Departments in the GBS since its inception. Four new Ministries/Departments viz., Ministry of Development Of North East Region, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Ministry of Cooperation and Supreme Court have reported allocations in the GBS FY 2026-27.



From Compliance to Impact: The Consultation on Gender-Responsive Outcome Budgeting

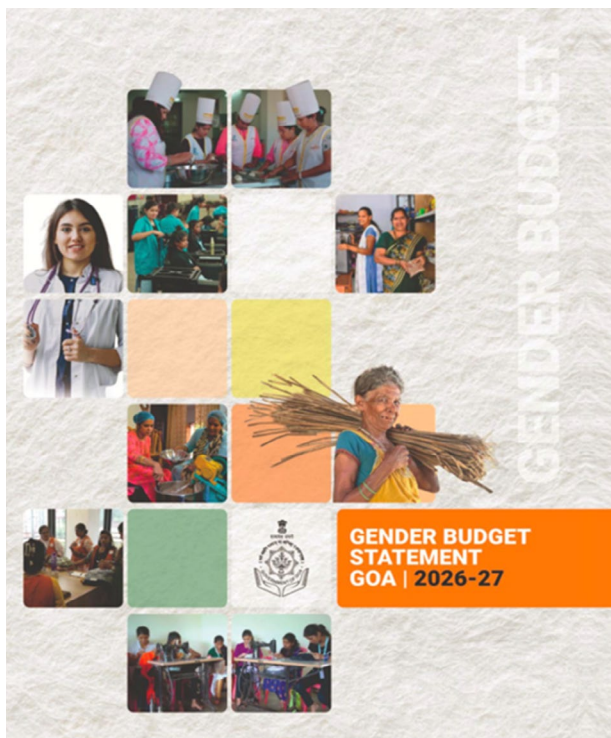


Secretary, MWCD, Shri Anil Malik addressing the Consultation on Gender responsive Outcome Budgeting. Photo: UN Women/Dr Anshul Sharma

As part of the ongoing project *Strengthening Gender-Responsive Planning and Budgeting*, UN Women, in close collaboration with the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD), organized a Consultation on Gender Responsive Outcome Budgeting on 25 Feb 2026.

The Consultation was chaired by the Secretary, MWCD, Shri. Anil Malik, IAS, and attended by senior representatives from NITI Aayog (Development Monitoring and Evaluation Office-Ministry of Finance (Department of Economic Affairs), Department of Health & Family Welfare, Department of Social Justice and Empowerment, Department of School Education and Literacy, Department of Rural Development, MWCD officials and UN Women.

The Consultation provided a structured platform to develop and refine gender-sensitive indicators, as well as to appropriately tag these indicators in the Output-Outcome Monitoring Framework (OOMF) across schemes reported in both the Gender Budget Statement and the OOMF. This process enables a transition toward a more outcome-oriented Gender Budget.



Bihar and Goa Gender Budget Statements. Photo: GBS Statement Cover Page of respective states

State Gender Budgets at a glance – FY 2026-27

A Comparative Overview: Bihar, Goa, Uttarakhand and Maharashtra

Parameter	Bihar	Goa	Uttarakhand	Maharashtra
Budget tabled on	25 February 2026	6 March 2026	9 March 2026	25 March 2026
Gender share of total state budget	18.4%	17.71%	17.63%	10.8%
Change from FY 2025-26	15.4% → 18.4% (significant increase)	17.4% → 17.71% (marginal increase)	16.76% → 17.63%	8.45% → 10.8%
Departments/ Grants covered	26 departments	56 departments	80 departments	19 departments
Schemes reported	909 schemes	345 schemes	836 schemes	350 schemes
Category/Part breakdown	15.4% → 18.4% (significant increase)	Part A (100% women-specific): 6.67% Part B (30-99% on women): 52% Part C (<30% on women): 3.15%	Cat I (100% for women): 10% Cat II (<100% for women): 89%	Part A1 (100% direct): 47% Part A2 (<100% direct): 52%

Safe and Inclusive Supply Chains

Equality in Every Thread: The Textile Industry Coalition Steering Committee



Representatives of the Steering Committee meeting led by Tmt P Geetha Jeevan, Hon'ble Minister of Social Welfare and Women Empowerment in Chennai. Photo: Sakshi

Textile Industry Coalition Steering Committee Convenes to Drive Structural Changes for Women Workers across Tamil Nadu.

The third Steering Committee meeting of the Textile Industry Coalition (TIC) was held on 16 February 2026 in Chennai, chaired by the Hon'ble Minister of Social Welfare and Women Empowerment, Tamil Nadu. Bringing together UN Women, ILO, global brands including H&M, factories, trade unions,

and civil society, the meeting reviewed progress across six districts on workplace safety and women's economic empowerment. TIC advisors stressed the need for deep structural changes in factory culture, sustained supervisor training, and the removal of barriers to safe reporting for women workers.

Looking ahead, the Government of Tamil Nadu announced the upcoming relaunch of the TN POSH Portal, featuring an integrated online complaint mechanism, supported by the numbers are good awareness campaign to encourage transparent reporting.

Advancing Workplace Safety for Women



Stakeholders at the Industry Meet in Tirupur, Tamil Nadu. Photo: SWASTI – The Health Catalyst/Upfront

An Industry Meet held on 12 February 2026 in Tirupur, organised in partnership with SWASTI – The Health Catalyst, brought together 41 stakeholders including factory management and industry associations under the DHAGA (Dignity, Health, Agency, Growth & Access) programme. Industry leaders emphasised that women's health, safety, and empowerment are central

to productivity and business performance. Participating factories shared how Wellness Clubs, capacity building, and strengthened management–worker dialogue are building safer workplaces – with particular impact for migrant women workers, strengthening their confidence, awareness, and community participation.

Building Safer Rural Supply Chains



Kerala State Women and Child Development Officer Ms. Sabeena Begum inaugurated the multi-stakeholder consultation. Photo: UN Women/Dr Peeja Rajan

On 24 February 2026, a State-Level Multi-Stakeholder Consultation in Kerala brought together government, civil society, and women leaders to advance safety and wellbeing in the spice sector's rural supply chains. The consultation reflects UN Women's commitment to extending gender-responsive approaches beyond factory floors into community-level supply chains – recognising that structural change requires sustained dialogue across industry, government, and civil society. Together, these engagements signal that safe, inclusive supply chains are built not by single actors, but through sustained collaboration.

Building Caring Cities

The Urban Childcare Innovation Challenge was launched on 16 March 2026, marking an important step towards strengthening childcare ecosystems in urban India. Led by UN Women, with support from UNDP and institutional backing from the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) and the Women Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP), the Challenge seeks to identify and support women-led enterprises delivering innovative, affordable, and scalable childcare solutions for low-income urban communities.

The initiative focuses on bridging gaps in access to affordable, quality care services while advancing women's economic empowerment through incubation, mentorship, and ecosystem linkages. The launch session, inaugurated by Dr. Sunil Kumar Yadav, Director of the National Urban Livelihoods Mission (NULM) at MoHUA, emphasised childcare as essential urban infrastructure – and highlighted the vital role of women-led enterprises in enabling inclusive urban growth and greater workforce participation.



Urban Childcare Innovation Challenge launched on 16 March 2026 to support women-led enterprises delivering affordable and scalable childcare solutions for low-income communities in urban India.

Gender Budgeting in the House

The Forum for Gender Equality Brings MPs to the Table

On 17 March 2026, UN Women convened the Forum for Gender Equality – a dedicated platform for Members of Parliament – to deliberate on gender budgeting alongside the ongoing Parliament Budget Session 2026. The session brought together representatives from the Ministry of Women and Child Development alongside leading subject matter experts, to examine milestones achieved, persistent systemic challenges, and the road ahead towards outcome-based architecture in India's public finance ecosystem.

14 Parliamentarians engaged in substantive discussions on deploying a gender lens across public finance mechanisms beyond the Union Budget, exploring how fiscal instruments at the state, district, and constituency levels can be more consciously aligned with gender equality outcomes. Drawing on direct experience from constituencies across the country, Parliamentarians identified barriers to gender-responsive governance and discussed practical solutions for embedding gender considerations into budget planning, allocation, and accountability processes.



RC Stefan Priesner addressing the MPs' Forum for Gender Equality. Photo: UN Women/Kavya Jain



Ms. Dakshita Das, former bureaucrat and Dr. Pankaj Shrivastav, Statistical Adviser, MWCD, discussing the nuances of engendering public finance with Kanta Singh. Photo: UN Women/Kavya Jain

Balancing the Scales: International Women's Day 2026

One UN Dialogue on Rights, Justice and Action in New Delhi

On 17 March 2026, the United Nations in India convened a One UN dialogue to mark International Women's Day, bringing together UN agencies, researchers, and civil society to chart pathways on gender justice. UN Resident Coordinator Stefan Priesner opened with a reminder that justice is not only about laws, but about the institutions that uphold and implement them. His remarks drew on outcomes from the 70th Commission on the Status of Women, which called for expanded legal aid and stronger accountability for violence against women.

A fireside conversation with Dr. Pinky Anand, Former Additional Solicitor General of the Supreme Court of India, and Ms. Shikha Srivastava of NALSA examined the gap between legal promise and lived reality. Dr. Anand underscored the need for institutional empathy alongside institutional access. Ms. Srivastava highlighted NALSA's paralegal volunteer network (over 45% women) and community-led innovations like Nari Panchayats in Gujarat as critical bridges to justice.

A panel discussion spotlighting women's voices and lived realities featured Swati Sumit, Nimisha Srivastava, Madhu Mehra, Medha Deo, and Roshni Shanker. The panel examined what 'access to justice' means in everyday life, offering recommendations drawn from lived experiences to strengthen institutional responses. It called for evidence-based advocacy and survivor-centred approaches—framing justice not as protection or punishment alone, but as a continuum of safety, dignity, and recovery.

The dialogue concluded with an invitation to explore the #BalanceTheScales digital photo exhibition curated by UN Women, featuring 30 stories from across UN's work in India. Link here: <https://visit.virtualartgallery.com/balancethescales>



UN Resident Coordinator Stefan Priesner opens the One UN International Women's Day dialogue at UN House, New Delhi (left), followed by discussions with legal experts and civil society leaders on strengthening access to justice for women (centre and right).

The 12th Ring the Bell for Gender Equality, Mumbai

On 13 March 2026, India's capital markets sent a powerful signal for gender equality. UN Women partnered with BSE Ltd and the National Stock Exchange of India (NSE) to organise the 12th edition of Ring the Bell for Gender Equality – bringing together leaders from financial institutions, government, and the private sector, including the European Union, the International Finance Corporation (IFC), and the Indian Institute of Corporate Affairs (IICA).



The Opening Bell ceremony at BSE Limited marked the 12th Ring the Bell for Gender Equality in India. Photo: BSE Limited

The programme opened with the Opening Bell at BSE, anchoring discussions on women's entrepreneurship and the role of financial ecosystems in enabling women-led enterprises to scale. Conversations acknowledged growing momentum while highlighting persistent barriers such as access to finance, investment networks, and market visibility.

The Closing Bell at the National Stock Exchange (NSE) focused on advancing women's leadership in corporate and financial sectors. A landmark moment was NSE's signing of the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs), reaffirming its commitment to gender equality across the workplace, marketplace, and community.



Signing of the Women's Empowerment Principles by National Stock Exchange. Photo: NSE

Across both convenings, stakeholders called for gender-responsive corporate practices, stronger pathways to leadership, and sustained collaboration between financial institutions, policymakers, and the private sector – underscoring that gender equality is not only a social imperative, but a market one.

One UN Dialogue: Closing the Gap Between Law and Life in MP

On 6 March 2026, UN Women, UNICEF, and UNDP jointly convened a high-level dialogue in collaboration with the RCVP Noronha Academy of Administration and Management, Government of Madhya Pradesh to mark International Women's Day in Madhya Pradesh. Titled "Rights – Justice – Action: Systems that Work for Women and Girls," the panel brought together government and civil society stakeholders to confront the persistent gap between constitutional guarantees and the lived realities of women and girls.

Structured around three pillars, the dialogue addressed structural inequalities and care burdens under Rights; survivor-centred responses and convergence across police, health, legal, and social protection systems under Justice; and gender-responsive governance and climate coordination under Action.

A significant thread running through the discussion was climate change as a risk multiplier – exacerbating gender inequalities, unpaid care work, and exposure to violence, and necessitating stronger integration of gender within disaster planning frameworks.

The dialogue concluded with a shared commitment from UN agencies and government partners to prioritise practical, time-bound institutional shifts in 2026 – moving beyond symbolic commitments toward systemic reform that delivers for women and girls.



Lighting of the lamp at International Women's Day event in Bhopal. Photo: Sunil Shukla

India at CSW70

Championing Women-Led Development on a Global Stage

The 70th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW70) concluded with a landmark focus on Ensuring and Strengthening Access to Justice for All Women and Girls. In a significant development, the session delivered a robust framework recognising community justice workers and paralegals as vital parts of the formal justice workforce. The Agreed Conclusions also broke new ground in digital justice, establishing safeguards against algorithmic bias in AI-driven platforms.

Representing India, Savitri Thakur, Minister of State for Women and Child Development, delivered India's national intervention at the United Nations Headquarters in New York on 10 March 2026, reaffirming India's commitment to women-led development in alignment with the Beijing Platform for Action.



Glimpses of CSW70 in Session. Photo: UN Women/Ryan Brown

India's progress was underscored by (Source: PIB):

- ▶ Economic Empowerment: Over 100 million women organised into nearly 9 million Self-Help Groups have transformed the rural economic landscape. Women lead over 1,000 start-ups under Atal Incubation Centres, and more than 8 lakh women directors are associated with active Indian companies.
- ▶ Political Participation: Over 1.4 million women, constituting 46 per cent of all elected representatives, serve in Panchayati Raj Institutions.
- ▶ Digital Inclusion: More than 25 million rural women have been trained under the Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (PM-DISHA) to expand digital access and literacy.
- ▶ Justice Infrastructure: India's comprehensive approach spans the full justice continuum: from Nari Adalats and 334 Gram Nyayalayas for grassroots dispute resolution, to the Tele-Law programme, which has delivered pre-litigation advice to approximately 4 million women across the country.

UN Women played a bridging role between global strategy and national action. Leading up to the session, the office provided critical technical support to the Ministry of Women and Child Development, ensuring that India's promising practices on women-led development were showcased on a global stage.

Our Partner in Gender Equality

Micron Foundation

Micron Foundation advances equitable access to STEM education and workforce development globally, with a growing focus in India on expanding opportunities for underserved youth, especially women. Since 2023, it has supported UN Women's WeSTEM initiative in India from its inception in tribal districts of Madhya Pradesh, and now expanding to Gujarat. Through this partnership, young women in Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) gain industry-relevant STEM skills, pursue non-traditional careers, and access meaningful employment. Read more: <https://in.micron.com/about/sustainability/micron-gives>

Staff spotlight



Photo: UN Women/Himanshi Saini

Meenu Kapoor, Operations Manager, UN Women India Country Office

You are one of the longest-serving professionals in the UN system in India. Tell us about your journey.

My journey with the UN began in 1996, soon after completing my Chartered Accountancy degree, when I joined UNDP as a Financial Analyst coordinating the audit function. I spent 11 years there, seven in programme management and four as Finance Officer. Seeking to expand beyond core financial management, I moved to FAO as Assistant Representative for Administration for six years, before joining UN Women as Operations Manager, a role I have now held for 12 years. Having worked across different UN entities, the mandate of UN Women is the one that resonates most deeply. I believe strongly in the principles of equality, and it is rewarding to witness how programmes and partnerships translate into real change in the lives of women and girls.

What motivated you to build a career in the UN system, and what keeps you here?

It was not a lifelong dream. I was initially pursuing opportunities with major audit and consultancy firms and nearly joined Bank of America. But my first short-term assignment with UNDP changed that trajectory. As a Chartered Accountant, I focus on ensuring financial compliance, maintaining the integrity of systems, and upholding ethical and sustainability standards. These functions are not peripheral to the mission – they are what make the mission credible. The UN is also an organisation of constant change. Current discussions on institutional restructuring as part of UN@80 make this a particularly important moment to be in the system. As someone focused on operational efficiency, I see these reforms as necessary.

What is your message for young professionals aspiring to join the UN system?

Don't lose heart. I have worked through insecure contracts, short-term roles, and funding uncertainties, and nearly 30 years later, I am still here. That uncertainty can be part of the system, but if you are aligned with its values and committed to doing your best, opportunities will come. The UN needs young professionals. Keep showing up and keep doing the good work.

Meenu Kapoor has been with UN Women since 2013. Prior to joining UN Women, she served with UNDP India and FAO India. She brings nearly 30 years of experience in UN operations and financial management.

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