

Womankind Worldwide

DO YOU BELIEVE IN EQUAL RIGHTS? DO YOU WANT TO BUILD A FAIRER FUTURE? DO YOU STAND AGAINST OPPRESSION?

Myths and Facts about Feminism

If the answer to these questions is a resounding YES, then read on to learn how you can help bring about meaningful change through our #EverydayFeminism campaign.

#EverydayFeminism is centred around the belief that we can all make a difference. It encourages us to recognise our own unique power and use this power to create a world where women, men and people of all genders enjoy equal rights. A world where everyone is safe, respected and free.

At Womankind, our feminism is inclusive. The #EverydayFeminism campaign recognises that there are no 'perfect feminists', because feminism requires us to be human: to be open, to grow, to learn and unlearn as we go along, always guided by our vision of a fairer, gender-just world.



The truth is, you don't have to do extraordinary things to call yourself a feminist. You just have to be committed to the belief that people of all genders should hold equal power, resources and rights - and ensure as best you can that your day-to-day actions, no matter how small, reflect this belief.

This factsheet aims to demystify feminism, and debunk a few myths around feminist movements. It also aims to give a snapshot of why feminism is needed - and ideas on how you can incorporate acts of #EverydayFeminism into your own life so that collectively, we can build a better future for everyone.

The problem with feminism...

...is that there are so many misconceptions around it. For some people, feminism is a scary word. There can be push-back when it comes to being labelled a feminist, with insults like 'anti-men' or 'angry woman' occasionally thrown about. But here's the thing: these accusations are completely at odds with the true meaning of feminism. While feminist movements are varied and, like all of us, constantly evolving, at the very heart of them is a commitment to equality and ending oppression in all its forms. Here we debunk the most common myths around feminism and shed light on what it actually means to be a feminist today.

"Feminists are man-haters."

This is an old trope, and one that is simply not true. Feminists aren't against men, they're against patriarchy: a system of oppression that favours men and discriminates against women and gender diverse people. This discrimination manifests in various ways: from women and girls doing the majority of unpaid care work, to the exclusion of women in decision-making spaces, to the high rates of gender-based violence globally. Feminism is about challenging discriminatory structures and beliefs to pave the way for a fairer world for everyone, regardless of their gender. While it is true that there are men (as well as women and gender diverse people) who staunchly uphold - or at least fail to challenge - patriarchal systems, there are also countless men across the world who are proud allies to feminist movements, advocating for justice and equality alongside women.

"Feminism isn't about equality, because feminism favours women over men."

Feminism isn't about women ruling the world, or thinking that women are better than men. It's about challenging current patriarchal systems which subjugate women and limit their freedom. This means advocating for power to be shared in more equitable ways - at home, at work and in communities - and ensuring that no-one is discriminated against because of their gender, race, age, sexual orientation, or any other characteristic that forms part of their identity.

"Feminists are angry!"

As things stand, there is a lot to be angry about if you're paying attention. Anger at the status quo should not be demonised - it is a justifiable reaction to global injustice. Anger can also be a useful tool when channelled into advocating for transformative change. However, being a feminist does not equate to always being angry. In fact, tapping into one's joy, prioritising it, and celebrating it is an important part of the feminist movement. The same goes for personal and collective wellbeing. This is because feminism isn't just about the absence of discrimination; it also advocates for a life filled with love, dignity, freedom and choice. In other words, feminism is about enabling women in all their diversities to thrive, not just survive.

“We don’t need feminism anymore. Women have enough rights now.”

Did you know that on average, more than 5 women or girls are killed every hour by someone in their own family? And that bans or lack of access to reproductive rights lead to over 800 maternal deaths daily? Did you also know that only 26.5% of parliamentarians globally are women? And that women own less than 15% of the land, despite making up approximately 43% of agricultural workers worldwide? The gender pay gap persists, and lack of affordable childcare prevents many women from entering employment and/or thriving at work. Feminism is not just about obtaining legal rights; it's also about challenging deeply ingrained societal norms and harmful attitudes that perpetuate gender inequalities which subjugate and endanger women. For example, the prevalence of honour killings in Asia and the Middle East is down to the belief that women must act a certain way and are considered family ‘property’.

While it’s true that some progress has been made, there is still a long way to go. It's important to acknowledge that women's rights vary globally, and marginalised groups – including Black women, women of colour, disabled women, and LBTQ women – are at heightened risk of discrimination. In certain countries like Afghanistan, women's rights have regressed dramatically, with Afghan women living under gender apartheid, a system which denies them their basic human rights, such as education, employment and even the freedom to leave their homes unchaperoned. Claiming that "women have equal rights now" overlooks the intersectional nature of discrimination experienced by women worldwide and tends to centre the realities of white, heterosexual women in the Global North. (And yet women who hold more privilege are also subjected to gender discrimination - from the denial of their reproductive rights in certain regions to the high prevalence of femicide).

It’s also important to remember that the rights we have can just as easily be taken away. This is why feminism is needed – to highlight and challenge the injustices perpetrated against women globally, but also to protect and secure existing rights.

“But men have issues too! What about men?”

In patriarchal societies, men hold most of the power, but that’s not to say that men don’t have issues too. Feminism isn’t about denying these issues; instead it seeks to challenge gender stereotypes and harmful social norms that negatively affect women, men and people of all genders. For example, patriarchal norms dictate that men, like women, are expected to look a certain way. Men are generally discouraged to show any vulnerabilities, which can seriously affect their mental health, happiness and relationships. By challenging and dismantling gender stereotypes, feminism seeks to benefit men as well. In Maya Angelou’s words, “The truth is, no one of us can be free until everybody is free.”



“Feminism isn’t for me because I love embracing my femininity.”

Feminists wear lipstick too! Feminism isn’t focused on outward appearance, it is about having the freedom to choose how you want to live your life, including how you want to present yourself. Feminism is about breaking the shackles of expectations when it comes to gender stereotypes. It’s about wearing whatever you like, not because you feel the weight of society’s expectations to be or look a certain way, but because you want to. As a feminist, you can embrace traditional aspects of femininity or you can reject them entirely - the point is it’s up to you. (The same goes for traditional gender roles. It doesn’t matter whether you’re a married stay-at-home-mum or a single, childfree CEO.) Feminism is about choice, not judgement.

“There are more pressing issues in the world to focus on, such as climate change.”

The feminist movement recognises that all systems of oppression are interconnected. It advocates for the dismantling of patriarchal power structures contributing to inequality in all its various forms. Climate justice is linked to gender justice, not only because women and girls are disproportionately affected by climate change, but also because the climate crisis amplifies existing gender inequalities. For example, as the climate crisis worsens, violence against women tends to increase, including child marriages. Within the wider feminist movement, eco-feminism focuses on the link between climate change, gender equality and social injustice and seeks to mitigate environmental harm while advocating for the needs of marginalised communities. This includes ensuring equitable access to natural resources and opportunities.

“Feminism denies there are differences between genders.”

In reality, the opposite is true. Intersectional feminism celebrates our differences and is an invitation to see people beyond the constraints of societal expectations and gender stereotypes. Recognising that people have diverse experiences of oppression based on intersecting identities - including gender, class, sexuality, race - is essential to addressing the unique challenges they face. The movement's aim is to create a world where everyone's experiences and identities are valued and respected, where no one is discriminated against because of their differences. In other words, feminism aims to eradicate inequality rather than difference.



Why do we ‘still’ need feminism?

Sometimes the facts speak for themselves. Here are a few revealing global statistics that illustrate why we continue to advocate for women’s rights and demand change:

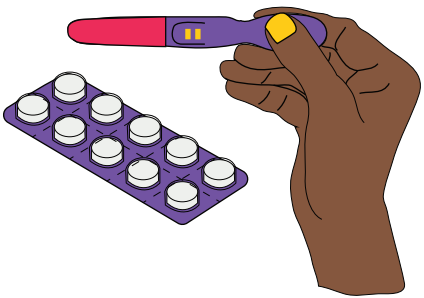
On women's participation and leadership

- Women serve as Heads of State and/or Government in **only 31 countries.** (UN)
- Women hold **just 26.5%** of parliamentary seats around the world. (UN)
- **11%** of the heads of state, and **10%** of the heads of government in the world are women. (UN)
- **Only 13 countries,** mostly in Europe, have gender-equal cabinets. **Only 22.8%** of cabinet ministers worldwide are women. (UN)
- Women account for l**ess than a third (29%)** of senior roles globally (Gitnux)
- Women make up **about 6%** of the chief executives of the world’s largest companies globally (Gitnux)



On reproductive rights

- **45%** of all abortions are unsafe, and could lead to complications, including death, for the woman. (WHO)
- In some cases, abortion is essential care, yet bans or lack of access lead to **over 800** maternal deaths a day, which are preventable. (CWGL)
- According to the Center for Reproductive Rights, **41% of women** worldwide live in countries with restrictive abortion laws. (CRR)



On violence against women



- It is estimated that **1 in 3 women** experience violence in their lifetime. (WHO)
- Every day, **more than 133 women** and girls are killed by someone in their own family. (UNODC)
- Globally, **nearly 89,000 women and girls** were killed intentionally in 2022, the highest yearly number recorded in the past two decades. **More than half (approximately 48,800)** were killed by an intimate partner or a family member. (UNODC)
- One in four young women (aged 15-24 years), who have been in a relationship, will have already experienced violence by an intimate partner by the time they reach their mid-twenties. (WHO)
- Research shows almost half of women who have experienced violence have never told anyone at all. (Action Aid)
- There are an estimated **5000 murders of women** in the name of 'honour' each year worldwide, although this is believed to be an underestimate. (WHO)
- **More than 200 million girls and women** alive today have undergone female genital mutilation (FGM) in 30 countries in Africa, the Middle East and Asia where FGM is practiced. (WHO)
- Worldwide, **more than 650 million women** alive today were married as children. (OHCHR)
- Every year, **at least 12 million girls** are married before they reach the age of 18. This is 28 girls every minute. (OHCHR)

On economic rights

- Globally, on average, women enjoy **only 77 percent** of the legal rights that men do. (The World Bank)
- **Nearly 2.4 billion women** around the world live in economies that do not grant them the same rights as men. (Open Knowledge)
- In 2022, the global pace of reforms toward equal treatment of women under the law slumped to a 20-year low. (The World Bank)
- Globally, women spend on average 2.8 more hours a day than men on unpaid care and domestic work. (UN)



on economic rights continued..

- **Around 2.4 billion** women of working age are not afforded equal economic opportunity and 178 countries maintain legal barriers that prevent their full economic participation (The World Bank)
- **Fewer than 15 percent** of agricultural landholders around the world are women and 85 percent are men. (Food and Agriculture Organization).
- In 86 countries, women face some form of job restriction and 95 countries do not guarantee equal pay for equal work. (The World Bank)
- In 2022, the World Economic Forum estimates that it will **take 132 years** to close the global gender gap (measured across four key dimensions: Economic Participation and Opportunity, Educational Attainment, Health and Survival, and Political Empowerment).

On funding for women's rights

- **0.2% of global aid** and development spending targeted gender-based violence in 2022 (UN)
- **Less than one percent** of all gender-focused aid is going directly to women's rights organisations and institutions. This is despite WROs being at the forefront of addressing gender inequalities and advancing women's human rights. (AWID)





What can YOU do to help build a feminist future?

Start by recognising your own power. While it is understandable to feel helpless in the face of global injustice, try and challenge this feeling by reminding yourself that - as a friend, partner, parent, colleague - you too hold power and there are many meaningful ways to use it. Whether it's by teaching your children to embrace diversity, or challenging misogynistic views when you hear them, there are plenty of #EverydayFeminism actions that might just change the world, little by little. Here are just a few ideas to inspire you:

- Confront your biases: we all have them, and that's OK. The important thing is to know this, then take steps to learn (and unlearn) certain behaviours. Start by investing in your own continuous learning by reading books on anti-racism and books by feminist authors.
- Ensure care and domestic work is evenly distributed in your household and doesn't fall disproportionately on the shoulders of women and girls.
- Whatever your identity, show solidarity by joining marches and signing petitions to demand justice and equality – including but not limited to issues related to global women's rights, racial justice, disability justice and LGBTQI+ rights.
- If it's safe to do so, challenge sexist language when you hear it rather than letting it pass; explain why it's not OK and offer an alternative.
- Choose a women's rights organisation to support through regular donations or set up your own fundraising challenge.
- Ensure events you're involved with are accessible for people with disabilities
- Get political: write to your local MP to demand fairer laws for all, not some.
- Use whatever privilege you have for good. Speak up for those less privileged than you, amplify their voices.
- Pass the mic to a member of a marginalised group when asked to speak on issues that affect them, rather than speaking on their behalf.
- Understand your history: learn more about the world today by reading about the past from different perspectives. For example, read the stories of those who were colonised, not those that were colonisers.
- When invited to attend an event or panel discussion, ask whether there is equal and intersectional representation before committing.
- Allow your children to play with different types of toys and wear clothes that feel right to them, or in other words, try not to force them to adhere to strict gender stereotypes but rather choose their preferences freely

Get involved in our #EverydayFeminism campaign.

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