

Invisible News

ISSUE 9

Brought to you by the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions at the 2025 BRS COPs

28 April – 9 May, 2025

General

Kitchen

Bathroom

Lounge

Plate

Playroom

Bedroom

Environment

Gender

What's gender got to do with chemicals and waste?

Women and girls more affected than men by chemicals & waste exposure

Gender, together with other factors such as ethnicity, age, cultural and social norms, and geography, influences how resilient or susceptible people are to the harmful effects of chemicals and waste pollution.

However, due to a combination of socio-economic, cultural, and physiological factors, women and girls tend to be more vulnerable to the harmful impacts of pollution from chemicals and waste.

For example, women are often more exposed to chemicals and waste because of how their socio-economic roles are defined along gender lines. Women still perform the bulk of domestic work in and around the house, including the sorting, removal, and disposal of household waste. In some areas, this includes the open burning of plastics and other household waste. This practice can expose women to highly toxic persistent organic pollutants and heavy metals which have significant impacts on their health, including reproductive health and prenatal developmental health.

These differences in the socio-economic roles of men and women are compounded by the physiological differences between the two groups. Women tend to be smaller in size and have a major role in child-bearing and rearing, therefore, the impact of pollution from chemicals and waste on women is greater than on men, even if their exposure is the same. Did you know that up to 33% of a woman's chemical burden can be passed on to her baby during gestation, through the placenta, as well as via breastfeeding?



Considering gender is vital when planning for policies and interventions aiming to reduce the impact of chemicals and waste upon human health and the environment

Making the Invisible, Visible

The Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions are three leading MEAs with the common objective to protect human health and the environment from the adverse effects of chemicals and waste.

For more information visit us at: www.brsmeas.org

Got time for a quick quiz?

Let's test your knowledge of the relationship between gender and chemicals and waste

1. What percentage of named focal points, national contacts and designated national authorities to the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm (BRS) Conventions are women?
2. What fraction of the world's working hours are worked by women and girls?
3. According to the UN System Wide Strategy on Gender Parity, by when does gender parity have to be achieved across the UN system?
4. Does the Universal Declaration of Human Rights distinguish between men and women?
5. What was the first country in the world to give women the vote?

Answers

1: 34%; 2: 2/3; 3: 2026; 4. No; 5. New Zealand.

What is needed to tackle these challenges?

Because women and girls tend to be more impacted by exposure to chemicals and waste, we need to factor this into our decision-making, policies and programmatic activities that relate to the sound management of chemicals and waste.

There are now many initiatives that have sought to do just that. Women are increasingly stepping forward to take on leadership roles to protect the most vulnerable segments of our population from the potentially harmful effects of certain chemicals and wastes.

Both the Gender Heroes publication and the Gender Pioneers initiative of the BRS Conventions point to examples of the empowerment of women in marginalised communities. Such empowerment may reduce vulnerability to health impacts from chemicals and waste, for example, through the promotion of ecological agriculture, reduced use of highly hazardous pesticides, the protection of children from toxins in toys, and the safer recovery and management of recyclable elements of e-waste from landfill sites.

What can you do?

- Spread the word about the risks associated with chemicals and waste exposure, particularly the differences in impact between women, men, girls and boys;
- Visit the gender sections on our websites and ask the Secretariats for capacity building assistance and training on gender;
- Take an online training course such as the UNCC:e-Learn Open Online Course: <https://unccelearn.org/course/view.php?id=39&page=overview>
- See the UNEP webpage link on gender: <https://www.unenvironment.org/explore-topics/gender>