



UN Women

Chairs:

Stephanie L. Yuen

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Letter from the Chairs

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to MITMUNC UN WOMEN!

My name is Kristen, and I'm a senior physics major. I loved doing Model UN in high school, and I really enjoyed chairing the Human Rights Council at MITMUNC for two years and ASEAN this past year. I'm looking forward to co-chairing UN WOMEN for the first time this conference!

My name is Stephanie, and I'm a senior majoring in math with computer science. I was on the debate team in high school and first started participating in Model UN during college. I have chaired ASEAN for two years and am excited to co-chair UN WOMEN this year!

Our two topics for this committee are Women's Access to Education and Gender Inequality in Employment and the Wage Gap. We hope you find this background guide informative as a starting point for your research. However, please make sure to seek additional sources, particularly those pertaining to your specific country. Our committee will be much more interesting with a variety of perspectives!

When writing your position papers, remember to cite your references. Please feel free to reach out to us at any time if you have any questions or concerns. We look forward to reading your position papers and meeting you all at the conference!

Best,

Stephanie L. Yuen and Kristen M. Surrao

Topic I: Women's Access to Education

Background Information

Article 26 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights states that “everyone has the right to education” [1]. Moreover, education “shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages.” The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child further established education as a fundamental human right [2]. Even more, the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action listed women's education and training as one of twelve major concerning issues, and one of the United Nation's Millennium Development Goals was to achieve universal access to education by 2015 [3]. However, many nations still have a long way to go in achieving these standards. In particular, young girls are often given much fewer opportunities for educational advancement than their male counterparts. While 89% of men worldwide are literate, this figure is only 80% for women, and the gap is even worse in developing regions, where only 51% of women are literate [3].

Why is it so important that we rectify this disparity? It is important to note that lack of access to education for women not only has direct consequences on their lives, but also largely impacts society as a whole. In fact, in India, the “mortality rate of babies whose mothers have received a primary education is half that of children whose mothers are illiterate” [4]. Moreover, one extra year of school decreases women's fertility rates by around 5-10%, and women see a larger increase in salary than men for each additional year of education received. In South Sudan, a girl is more likely to die in childbirth than finish primary school, and by the fifth grade, half as many girls as boys attend school in Kenya and Uganda [5].

What are some reasons for such a divide? Reference 5 enumerates a few of the factors that hinder girls' ability to obtain the same education as boys:

1. Pressure to fulfill traditional “female” roles as housekeepers

2. High bride prices for girls who stay home and forced early marriages for impoverished families who rely on the bride price
3. Female genital mutilation is still practiced in some areas
4. Risk of sexual assault at school and on the way to school
5. Lack of proper sanitation facilities for girls in schools

Reference 6 illustrates disparities in education in relation to the Sustainable Development Goal 4: Equity in Education. In particular, one can investigate the role of gender in literacy, early childhood care, education, and training in various countries. We encourage you to check out this website and see what trends you can find involving gender and education.

Progress

Although we are far from a world in which every woman has adequate access to education, major strides have been made in the right direction. For instance, between 1970 and 1992, girls' combined primary and secondary education enrollment increased from 38% to 68% [4]. Today, 90% of children in developing regions and 96% in developed regions have access to a primary education [3].

Individual countries are making quite a bit of progress as well. In the Dominican Republic, the Gender and ICT's (Information and Communication Technologies) project aims to promote interest in math for girls as well as help to close the gender digital divide [7]. In Iran, many Afghani refugees are offered access to education from primary school through the university level [8]. In Jordan, students at three UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) schools were chosen to implement a program designed to bring STEM programs to UNRWA schools [9]. In Somalia, the first midwifery school was opened in Mogadishu, not only helping pregnant women, but also providing many women with an education that leads to their employment [10]. In many African countries, the

African Educational Trust works to alleviate the disparity between education for boys and girls by improving sanitation facilities for girls, providing grants to girls from struggling facilities, providing accelerated secondary school education, and training women in the community to mentor young girls [5]. In fact, programs such as these are now very common in many countries. The 2020 Gender Equality Forum will address the issue of education along with other issues pertaining to gender equality. This forum will encompass Beijing+25 regional meetings in Africa, Europe and Central Asia, Asia and the Pacific, the Arab States, and Latin America and the Caribbean [11].

Potential Solution Avenues

Reference 4 lists potential ways to address women's access to education. These are listed below:

1. Parental and community involvement
2. Low cost and flexible timetables
3. Schools close to home with women teachers to serve as role models
4. Preparation for school from a young age
5. Relevant curricula that uses girls' native languages and avoids gender stereotyping

Reference 12 also lists a number of solutions avenues for both inside and outside the classroom. A few of these are listed below, but you are encouraged to read this entire reference for more context and information.

Inside the Classroom:

1. Making a child-centered, gender-sensitive classroom
2. Paying teachers suitable wages and providing them with training on how to accommodate teaching different genders
3. Eliminating gender bias from learning materials such as textbooks

Outside the Classroom:

1. Providing opportunities for young mothers to return to school
2. Providing opportunities for overaged children
3. Creating special programs for reaching girls in rural and developing areas
4. Providing more early childhood programs

Questions to Consider

When thinking of ways to address the issue of women's access to education, there are two main routes that may be considered:

1. Directly improving the quality of education for women
 - a. How can we ensure that the education system treats men and women equally and does not conform to gender stereotypes?
 - b. How can we encourage more women in developing countries to become teachers, thus inspiring more young girls to pursue further education?
 - c. How can we encourage countries to support women in education and vocational training?
 - d. How can we improve sanitation facilities for women in schools?
2. Addressing the causes that prevent women from receiving an education
 - a. How can we financially assist struggling families so that they are not reliant on the bride price and keeping women as housekeepers?
 - b. How can we work towards preventing sexual assault?
 - c. How can we educate local communities about the importance of providing women with educational opportunities?

In considering how one might tackle these issues, we encourage you to more fully read the references listed below, but to also seek out additional resources to shed more light on your

country's specific situation, ideologies, and progress toward overcoming gender inequalities in education.

Suggested Reading:

1. <https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>
2. <https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention>
3. <https://beijing20.unwomen.org/en/in-focus/education-and-training>
4. <https://www.unicef.org/sowc96/ngirls.htm>
5. <https://africaeducationaltrust.org/girls-and-women/>
6. <https://www.education-inequalities.org/>
7. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2012/7/closing-the-science-and-technology-gender-gap-in-the-dominican-republic>
8. <https://www.unhcr.org/539ef62d6.html>
9. <http://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/features/bringing-stem-unrwa-girls>
10. <https://www.unfpa.org/news/somali-midwifery-school-helps-tackle-harsh-conditions-women>
11. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/get-involved/beijing-plus-25/generation-equality-forum>
12. https://www.unicef.org/sowc06/pdfs/sge_English_Version_B.pdf

Topic II: Gender Inequality in Employment and the Wage Gap

Introduction

Gender equality is one of the 17 global UN Sustainable Development Goals, which provide a blueprint to achieving a better, sustainable future by focusing on global challenges such as “poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace and justice.”¹ These issues are hoped to be resolved by 2030.² One way that you can measure gender inequality is through looking at the gap between women and male opportunities, pay, and rights. A common statistic that people look at is the gender pay gap. In 2018, women made 82 cents for every dollar that men earned, yielding a gender pay gap of 18%. Although there has been slight progress over the years, the changes that we are seeing are very slow and are even slower for women of colour.³ In fact, it was found that for every dollar earned by a white male executive, a black female executive would only make 63 cents.⁴

According to the Institute of Women’s Policy Research, equal pay would add \$513 billion to the US economy and cut poverty for working women and their families in half.⁵ The benefits of greater gender equality in the workforce extend beyond creating a more just world, allowing for a reduction in income inequality and increased economic resilience due to diversification.⁶

¹ <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>

² Ibid.

³ <https://iwpr.org/issue/employment-education-economic-change/pay-equity-discrimination/>

⁴ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/shaharziv/2019/07/11/gender-pay-gap-bigger-than-you-thnk/#7055c84e7d8a>

⁵ <https://iwpr.org/issue/employment-education-economic-change/pay-equity-discrimination/>

⁶ <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/Policy-Papers/Issues/2018/05/31/pp053118pursuing-womens-economic-empowerment>

Despite this great value add, gender inequality is far from being resolved. At the current rate, the World Economic Forum estimates that it will take 108 years to close the global gender gap.⁷ For economic empowerment gap specifically though, this will take 202 years to close.⁸ Furthermore, although the economic gender gap saw improvement over the past year, health, education and political empowerment moved in the opposite direction.⁹

Although this data paints a very clear picture of the problem, it is not even clear that everyone understands how pervasive and large the issue at hand is. In fact, an article put out by the Time magazine in September, 2019 revealed that even American men had a skewed perspective of gender inequality. A survey indicated that 62% of men believed that female workers are paid less than their male counterparts as opposed to the 86% of women that shared this belief. Another poll indicated that 82% of people believed women spend more time than men doing unpaid work, but also showed a skew in that men believed this to be less of the case.¹⁰ According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), US women spend 67% more time than men doing unpaid tasks, such as household duties and childcare.¹¹

In addition to the role that unpaid tasks have on gender wage inequality, women also tend to be concentrated in different job functionalities than men. Despite equal or more effort and skill, these jobs tend to be valued and thus paid less than. The “motherhood penalty” contributes slightly to this lower pay and also pushes female into more casual and part-time jobs. This trend is more apparent in developing countries than developed countries.¹²

⁷ <https://www.weforum.org/press/2018/12/108-years-wait-for-gender-equality-gets-longer-as-women-s-share-of-workforce-politics-drops/>

⁸ <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2018/key-findings/>

⁹ <https://www.weforum.org/press/2018/12/108-years-wait-for-gender-equality-gets-longer-as-women-s-share-of-workforce-politics-drops/>

¹⁰ <https://time.com/5667397/gender-equality-opinions/>

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/csw61/equal-pay>

In order to counter these skews and issues, UN Women began a #StopTheRobbery campaign to raise awareness of this gender pay gap.¹³

Key Statistics

According to the Global Gender Gap Report 2018 published by the World Economic Forum, the economic participation and opportunity gap is 41.9% (as compared to the political empowerment gap at 77.1%, the educational attainment gap at 4.4% and the health and survival gaps at 4.6%). We see this gap exemplified by the fact that of 149 countries surveyed, only 17 have women as heads of state. On average, 34% of managerial positions are held by women. In the four worst-performing countries (Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Pakistan), this fraction is below 7%. Yet, these findings are not all so negative – in the Bahamas, Colombia, Jamaica, Lao PDR and the Philippines, women and men hold an equal number of managerial positions. In addition, there are 19 countries where 40% of managerial positions are occupied by women.¹⁴

With education being vital for economic empowerment, it is key that we focus on the educational attainment gap as well. Although this gap is seeing a lot more progress than other factors of gender inequality, there are still 44 countries with over 20% female illiteracy.¹⁵

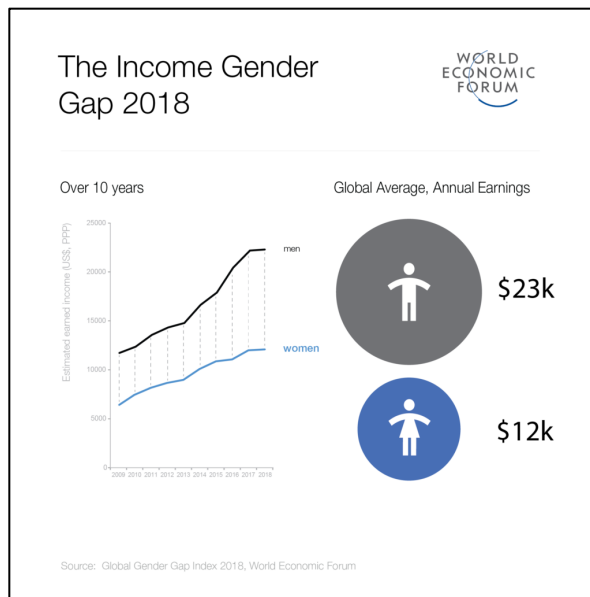
Below, we can see some statistics related to the income gender gap.¹⁶

¹³ Ibid.

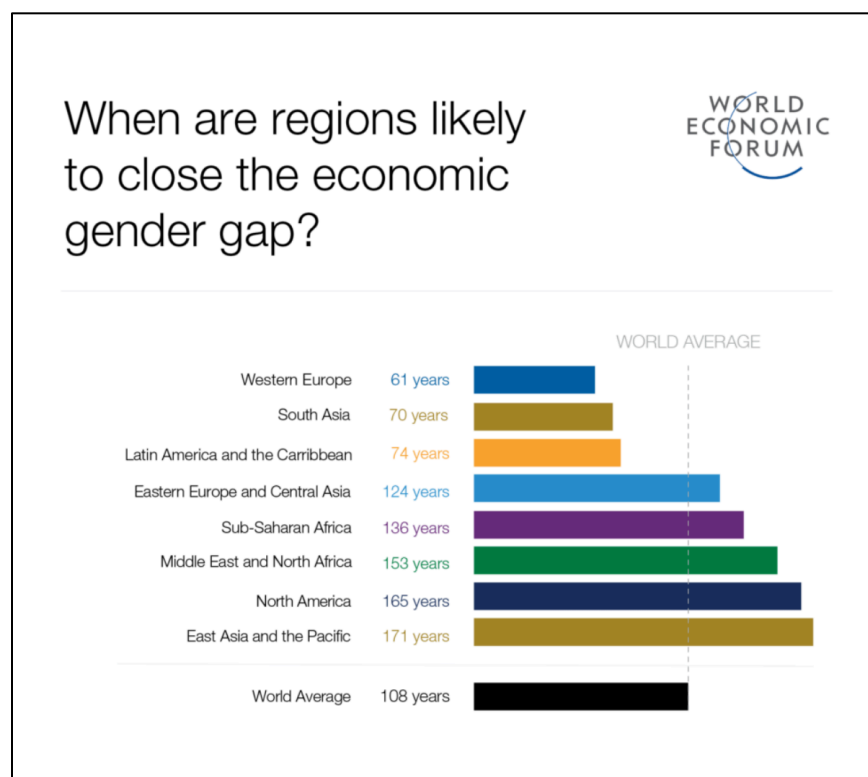
¹⁴ <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2018/key-findings/>

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

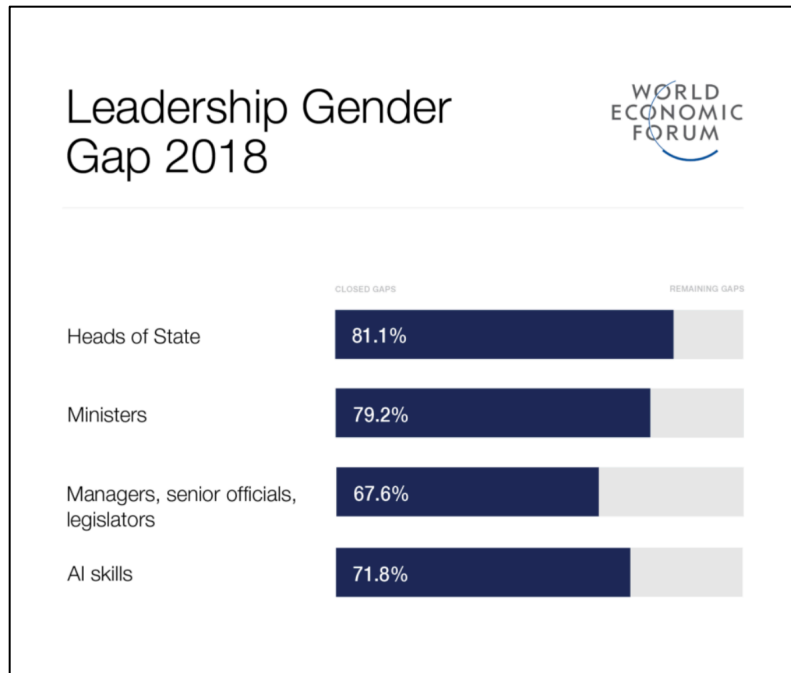


The graph below shows the specific variation between regions in terms of economic gender gap.¹⁷



¹⁷ <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2018/shareable-infographics/>

We can also see the gender gap progress for different leadership positions globally.¹⁸



These statistics make the necessity of change extremely clear.

Current Initiatives

One of the initiatives already in place that focuses on the economic gender gap is the World Economic Forum's Closing the Gender Gap project. It prioritizes doing so through three strategies: national action, business commitments and global exchange. National action focuses on "closing gaps in labour force participation, remuneration and leadership, and preparing companies and countries for gender parity in the future of work."¹⁹ The business commitments strategy focuses on leading companies and encourages their participation. Global exchange aids with global knowledge exchange.²⁰

¹⁸ <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2018/shareable-infographics/>

¹⁹ <https://www.weforum.org/projects/closing-the-gender-gap-gender-parity-task-forces>

²⁰ Ibid.

Another initiative already in place is run by the Center for Human Rights and Global Justice (CHRGJ). CHRGJ launched a program on Inequality, the Global Economy, and Human Rights in 2015 to examine international human rights laws and its impact on inequality.²¹

Potential Actions

There are a few ways that countries can narrow the gender pay gap, the most effective and fastest being wage floors and universal social protection. Such a floor would benefit all low-paid workers, dramatically improving female pay since they largely fall into this category. Universal social protection would resolve a lot of issues that arise due to the fact that women are overwhelmingly in the informal economy, participating in homecare and childcare.²²

Another action that countries could take would be to allow for collective bargaining. According to an interview done with Chidi King, the Director of the Equality Department of the International Trade Union Confederation in 2017, wages of women in unions was on average 30% higher than their non-unionized counterparts.²³

Finally, greater transparency within companies about issues regarding pay and feedback will allow for more checks-and-balances to ensure that gender bias is avoided.²⁴

Focus Areas

For this topic, research and understand your country's stance and current initiatives regarding economic gender inequality and consider the practicality of implementing the above

²¹ <https://chrgj.org/focus-areas/inequality-the-global-economy-human-rights/>

²² <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2017/2/take-five-chidi-king-equal-pay>

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

actions (for example, wage floors allow for more deadweight loss, collective bargaining causes other economic inefficiencies) in addition to brainstorming other creative solutions.