



IOIT MUN'25
AISSMS IOIT, Pune



STUDY GUIDE



UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

Agenda

Promoting and Ensuring the Respect for Bodily Autonomy, Human Dignity, and Freedom of Choice as Fundamental Principles of Human Rights and Gender Equality.



Background Guide

Agenda:

Promoting and ensuring the respect for bodily autonomy, human dignity and freedom of choice as fundamental principles of human rights and gender equality

Introduction to the Committee

The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC), established in 2006 by UN General Assembly Resolution 60/251 to replace the former Commission on Human Rights, is the principal intergovernmental body within the UN system responsible for promoting and protecting human rights worldwide. Based at the UN Office in Geneva, the Council consists of 47 member states elected by the General Assembly for three-year terms, with seats distributed regionally (13 for Africa, 13 for Asia-Pacific, 8 for Latin America and the Caribbean, 7 for Western Europe and others, and 6 for Eastern Europe) to ensure equitable representation. The UNHRC addresses a wide range of human rights concerns through dialogue, investigations, and recommendations, emphasizing principles of universality, impartiality, and non-selectivity.

This background guide addresses the agenda: **Promoting and Ensuring the Respect for Bodily Autonomy, Human Dignity, and Freedom of Choice as Fundamental Principles of Human Rights and Gender Equality**. Bodily autonomy refers to the right of individuals to make decisions about their own bodies free from coercion, violence, or discrimination, encompassing areas such as reproductive health, medical consent, and protection from harmful practices. It is intrinsically linked to human dignity—the inherent worth and respect due to every person—and freedom of choice, which enables autonomous decision-making. These principles are central to achieving gender equality, as outlined in foundational instruments like the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)*, the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)*, and the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)*.



Mandate and Functions of the UNHRC

The UNHRC's mandate, defined in General Assembly Resolution 60/251, focuses on promoting universal respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms without distinction. It tackles both thematic issues, such as gender-based discrimination, and country-specific situations through various mechanisms.

Key Functions

Function	Description	Relevance to Agenda
Universal Periodic Review (UPR)	A peer-review process examining the human rights records of all 193 UN member states every 4.5 years.	Evaluates compliance with obligations on bodily autonomy, such as access to reproductive services in national policies.
Special Procedures	Independent experts, including Special Rapporteurs and Working Groups, who investigate and report on thematic or country-specific issues.	Relevant mandates include the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women and the Working Group on Discrimination Against Women and Girls, which address violations like forced marriages and reproductive coercion.
Resolutions and Decisions	Adoption of non-binding resolutions to guide state actions on human rights matters.	Includes resolutions promoting gender equality and bodily autonomy, such as those on eliminating violence against women.
Complaints Procedure	A confidential mechanism for individuals and NGOs to report systematic violations.	Processes claims related to gender-based breaches, including female genital mutilation (FGM) or denial of reproductive rights.
Annual Panels and Discussions	Thematic sessions, such as annual discussions on gender integration.	The 60th session (2025) features a discussion on strengthening gender perspectives in transitional justice, relevant to dignity and autonomy in post-conflict settings.

The Council convenes three regular sessions each year (typically February–April, June–July, and September–October) and can hold special sessions for urgent matters. As of **September 29, 2025**, the 60th session is ongoing, running from **September 8 to October 8, 2025**.



Limitations and Challenges of the UNHRC

Despite its role in advocacy, the UNHRC encounters structural, political, and operational constraints, particularly on contentious issues like bodily autonomy, where cultural, religious, or geopolitical differences arise.

Limitation/Challenge	Description	Impact on Agenda
Membership Composition	Members are elected via secret ballot, sometimes including states with poor human rights records, leading to politicization.	Can result in resistance to resolutions on reproductive rights or gender equality from conservative blocs.
Non-Binding Outputs	Resolutions and recommendations lack enforcement mechanisms, depending on state cooperation.	Hinders implementation of autonomy protections, such as in regions with persistent FGM practices.
Selective Focus	Disproportionate attention to certain situations (e.g., Israel–Palestine) while others receive less scrutiny.	May undervalue gender issues in the Global South amid broader geopolitical tensions.
Resource Limitations	Budget constraints, exacerbated by UN financial challenges, reduce meeting times and investigative capacity.	The 60th session was shortened by 10% due to cost-saving measures, potentially limiting in-depth gender discussions.
Global Backlash	Increasing pushback against progressive gender norms, including anti-LGBTQ+ policies and restrictions on reproductive rights.	Delays advancements on freedom of choice, as seen in ongoing debates over abortion access and SOGI rights.



Relevant UN Bodies and Mechanisms for Collaboration

The UNHRC collaborates with other UN entities to enhance its work, referring cases or incorporating expertise into reports and resolutions. Key collaborators include:

Body/Mechanism	Role	Collaboration with UNHRC
CEDAW Committee	Oversees implementation of CEDAW, emphasizing gender equality and autonomy.	UNHRC integrates CEDAW findings into UPRs and joint statements on reproductive rights.
UN Women	Coordinates UN efforts on gender equality and women's empowerment.	Supplies data for resolutions and co-organizes events on bodily integrity.
Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women	Examines causes and consequences of gender-based violence.	Submits reports to the UNHRC, such as the 2024 focus on economic autonomy and social security.
Independent Expert on SOGI	Addresses discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity; mandate renewed in 2025.	Contributes to UNHRC resolutions integrating SOGI into gender frameworks.
Working Group on Discrimination Against Women and Girls	Focuses on eliminating discriminatory laws and practices.	Provides input on autonomy issues, including backlash against women's rights.
OHCHR	Supports UNHRC operations and deploys experts on gender themes.	Collaborates on investigations, such as the 2025 FGM elimination efforts.



Background on the Agenda Topic

Bodily autonomy is protected under *UDHR Article 3* (right to security of person), *ICCPR Article 9*, and *CESCR General Comment 14* on health rights. It intersects with gender equality by challenging systemic controls over women's and girls' bodies, with **84%** experiencing lifetime physical or sexual violence globally. Human dignity (*UDHR Article 1*) and freedom of choice are foundational, yet progress is threatened by backlashes, with only **55%** of countries ensuring safe abortion access. Emerging issues include digital threats like deepfakes and climate impacts on women's autonomy.

Historical Context: Past Resolutions and Hearings

The UNHRC has advanced this agenda through evolving resolutions and sessions, shifting from general equality to targeted protections on autonomy and dignity.

Key Resolutions (Updated to September 29, 2025)

Resolution	Session/Year	Key Provisions	Outcome
A/HRC/RES/53/27	53rd (2023)	Promotes gender equality, dignity, integrity, and bodily autonomy; ensures access to reproductive health.	Adopted; calls for repealing discriminatory laws.
A/HRC/RES/56/22	56th (2024)	Addresses bodily integrity, gender-based violence; introduces menstrual health in UNHRC texts.	Adopted; emphasizes gender-responsive budgeting.
Elimination of Discrimination Against Women and Girls	56th (2024)	Tackles backlash; integrates sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR).	Adopted; focuses on economic autonomy.
Strengthening Women's Rights Through Human Rights Economies	58th (2025)	Promotes gender equality via economic frameworks.	Adopted; one of six gender-related resolutions at the session.
Elimination of All Forms of Violence Against Women and Girls	59th (2025)	Holistic approach to gender equality; recognizes structural inequalities.	Adopted; highlights autonomy in resource access.



IOIT MUN'25

AISSMS IOIT, Pune



Gender Equality in Sport	59th (2025)	Enhances participation and combats discrimination.	Adopted; promotes autonomy in athletic choices.
Women's Economic Autonomy and Social Security	59th (2025)	Recognizes rights to property and social protections.	Adopted; advances SRHR.
Rights of LGBTIQ+ Persons	59th (2025)	Addresses gender equality and SOGI discrimination.	Adopted; supports freedom of choice.
Elimination of FGM	59th (2025)	Targets FGM as an autonomy violation; promotes digital tools for prevention.	Adopted; rights-based focus.

Recent Hearings and Sessions (2023–2025, Updated to September 29, 2025)

- **53rd Session (2023):** Dialogues on women's autonomy and reproductive health; addressed backlashes in Eastern Europe (e.g., Poland).
- **56th Session (2024):** Annual gender integration discussion; resolutions on poverty, SRHR, with NGO input on autonomy.
- **58th Session (Feb 24–Apr 4, 2025):** Adopted 32 resolutions, including on women's rights and gender equality through human rights economies; UPR reviews with gender focus.
- **59th Session (Jun 16–Jul 11, 2025):** Adopted six gender-related resolutions; discussions on SOGI, violence against women, FGM, and women's rights in Afghanistan/Maldives; no hybrid format.
- **60th Session (Sep 8–Oct 8, 2025, Ongoing):** Annual gender discussion on transitional justice; urgent debate on Israel's actions (Sep 16); hearings on reprisals, racism, climate justice; side events on arbitrary detention; as of Sep 29, no new resolutions adopted yet on the agenda topic, but reports like A/HRC/60/CRP.4 reference autonomy across genders.

These efforts build on prior resolutions acknowledging equality backlashes since 2017.



Case Studies and Recent Incidents (Updated to September 29, 2025)

Case Study/Incident	Description	UNHRC Involvement	Lessons
Afghanistan: Taliban Policies (2021–Ongoing)	Restrictions on women's education, work, and attire undermine autonomy and dignity.	Condemned in 2024–2025 sessions; UPR recommendations unimplemented; addressed in 59th session.	Underscores need for international monitoring amid enforcement challenges.
United States: Post-Dobbs Restrictions (2022–Ongoing)	State-level abortion bans post-Roe v. Wade affect millions, limiting choice.	2025 shadow reports to UNHRC; UPR follow-up on autonomy.	Illustrates domestic regressions with global implications.
FGM in Affected Regions (e.g., Somalia, Egypt)	Over 200 million impacted; cultural norms perpetuate violations.	59th session resolution; Special Rapporteur reports.	Community education and UN partnerships show progress pathways.
Occupied Palestinian Territory: Gender-Based Violence (Ongoing, Hearings March 2025)	Systematic sexual violence, including rape and reproductive coercion by Israeli forces, violating dignity and autonomy.	Commission of Inquiry hearings (Mar 11–12, 2025); 60th session updates on control and rights abuses.	Highlights conflict-related breaches; calls for accountability.
Ukraine: Detainee Abuses (Ongoing)	Testimony of torture, rape, and executions by Russian forces, eroding dignity.	60th session hearings; ongoing monitoring.	Emphasizes gender-sensitive transitional justice.
McFall v. Shimp (1978, Referenced Ongoing)	U.S. case affirming right to refuse bodily donation.	Cited in UNHRC bodily integrity discussions.	Reinforces consent principles in medical ethics.
Husband Stitch Practices (Global)	Unauthorized post-birth procedures	Working Group reports (2024–2025) on reproductive coercion.	Exposes healthcare inequalities; urges training reforms.



IOIT MUN'25

AISSMS IOIT, Pune



	for non-medical reasons.		
--	--------------------------	--	--

Recent incidents (2025): Online harassment of women human rights defenders (60th session theme); SOGI violence in over 30 countries (IE SOGI reports); climate displacement exacerbating women's autonomy issues.

Key Issues and Debates

- **Universal vs. Cultural Standards:** Reconciling global rights with state sovereignty (e.g., abortion in religiously conservative contexts).
- **Intersectional Vulnerabilities:** How factors like race, disability, and poverty amplify violations (e.g., forced sterilizations of Indigenous women).
- **Digital and Emerging Threats:** AI-enabled harms to dignity; 2024–2025 dialogues on tech and rights.
- **Economic Factors:** Poverty's role in coercive choices; 2025 resolutions on gender budgeting and social security.