

BACKGROUND GUIDE



UN COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

*Closing the Gender Health Gap: Women's
Access to Reproductive and Mental Health Services*

Table of Contents

1. Letter to the Delegates
 2. Introduction to the Committee
 3. Introduction to the Agenda
 4. Definitions of Key Terms
 5. Background Information
 - Gender Bias in Global Health Systems
 - The Reproductive and Mental Health Divide
 6. Cross-Cutting Issues and Challenges
 7. Major Stakeholders
 8. Past International Actions
 9. Infographic-Ready Statistics
 10. Solutions Proposed by the Chair
 11. Questions Resolutions Must Answer
 12. Possible Moderated Caucus Topics
 13. Citations
- 

Letter to Delegates

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to UNCSW at MUN4Schools 2025. The Commission on the Status of Women is a vital forum where the world's future leaders advocate for gender equality and the rights of women and girls.

This year's agenda — "Closing the Gender Health Gap: Women's Access to Reproductive and Mental Health Services" — tackles a powerful and urgent global challenge. From unequal access to maternal care to social stigma around menstruation, from the silent toll of untreated depression to the barriers in rural health systems, millions of women are left behind in health systems that were not built with their needs in mind.

In this committee, you will step into the role of advocates, diplomats, and protectors of human dignity. You'll examine gaps in policy, education, funding, and representation — and propose realistic, country-sensitive, and rights-based solutions.

We encourage you to approach this issue with bold ideas, factual research, cultural sensitivity, and compassion. Your words and resolutions can shape how the global community protects women's health and autonomy.

Sincerely,

Manan Choudhary, Vedhashi

UNCSW Executive Board

UN COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW) is a functional commission of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

Established in 1946, it is the principal global policy-making body dedicated to gender equality and the advancement of women.

UNCSW meets annually in New York and is responsible for:

- Reviewing global progress on women's rights
- Shaping international policies and standards
- Promoting legal, economic, and social equality for women and girls

UNCSW draws attention to urgent issues like domestic violence, workplace inequality, reproductive rights, unpaid care labor, and health care access.

Introduction to the Agenda

Closing the Gender Health Gap: Women's Access to Reproductive and Mental Health Services

Health systems in many parts of the world do not serve women equally. Reproductive health — including family planning, safe childbirth, menstrual hygiene, and access to contraception — is often ignored, underfunded, or even criminalized.

Meanwhile, mental health — including depression, anxiety, postpartum disorders, and trauma from gender-based violence — is still stigmatized or underdiagnosed in women and girls.

Social norms, poverty, lack of education, restrictive laws, and underrepresentation of women in policymaking all contribute to this divide.

This agenda invites delegates to explore how inclusive, gender-sensitive healthcare systems can be built. You'll need to evaluate your country's approach to:

- Access to reproductive healthcare
- Funding for women's mental health
- Legal protections and education
- Healthcare in conflict and rural areas

Key Terms of ECOSOC

- **Reproductive Health:** Healthcare related to the reproductive system including contraception, pregnancy, childbirth, and menstrual care.
- **Gender Health Gap:** The difference in quality and availability of healthcare based on gender.
- **Postpartum Depression:** A mental health disorder affecting women after childbirth.
- **Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM):** The right to access sanitary products, clean water, privacy, and education about menstruation.
- **Intersectionality:** A framework that looks at how gender, race, poverty, and other factors overlap to affect access to healthcare.

Background Information

Gender Bias in Global Health Systems

- Women often report longer diagnostic delays, especially in non-reproductive conditions like heart disease or chronic pain.
- In some countries, **male-centered medical research** leads to misdiagnosis or neglect of women's symptoms.
- Rural women and girls face additional challenges such as long travel distances, cultural stigma, or lack of female medical staff.

The Reproductive and Mental Health Divide

- **Reproductive Health:** In many regions, abortion is illegal or unsafe. Over 800 women die daily from preventable complications during childbirth.
- **Mental Health:** Suicide is a leading cause of death among adolescent girls globally. PTSD and depression are often linked to gender-based violence.
- Lack of mental health care in post-conflict zones disproportionately harms women, especially survivors of sexual violence.

Background Information

CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

- **Stigma and Taboo:** Cultural silence around menstruation and mental illness
- **Low Representation:** Few women in government and health policy design
- **Lack of Health Literacy:** Girls unaware of health rights or biology
- **Legal Restrictions:** Bans on reproductive services like abortion or contraception
- **Economic Barriers:** Healthcare often unaffordable for women in poverty

MAJOR STAKEHOLDERS

- **National Governments and Ministries of Health**
- **UN Agencies:** WHO, UNFPA, UN Women, UNICEF
- **NGOs:** Like Marie Stopes International, Guttmacher Institute, and local health charities
- **Healthcare Workers:** Especially midwives and counselors
- **Faith-Based and Cultural Leaders:** Can support or block access depending on stance

Background Information

PAST INTERNATIONAL ACTIONS

- **Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995):** A global commitment to advance women's health and rights
- **SDG 3 & 5:** Ensure healthy lives (SDG 3) and achieve gender equality (SDG 5)
- **UNFPA Supplies Program:** Provides access to contraceptives in over 50 countries
- **Global Mental Health Action Plan (WHO):** Focuses on inclusion and stigma reduction

Women's Health Statistics

Contraception Access

Many women and girls lack access to contraception. This is a global issue that needs to be addressed.



Menstrual Products

Many girls in Sub-Saharan Africa miss school. This is due to a lack of menstrual products.



Mental Health

Globally, a significant number of women experience mental health disorders. Mental health is often underfunded.



Abortion Laws

Many countries still have restrictive abortion laws. These laws impact women's reproductive rights.



Background Information

STATISTICS

- **200** million women and girls lack access to contraception (UNFPA)
- **1 in 5** women globally experience a common mental disorder
- Only **2.5%** of total health spending goes to mental health (WHO)
- **1 in 10** girls in Sub-Saharan Africa miss school due to lack of menstrual products
- **45** countries still have highly restrictive abortion laws

SOLUTIONS PROPOSED BY THE CHAIR

1. **Mobile Reproductive Health Clinics** for rural and refugee populations
2. **National Menstrual Hygiene Programs** funded through education and health budgets
3. **Gender-Disaggregated Health Data** to identify gaps and biases
4. **Mental Health First Aid Training** in schools and communities
5. **Partnerships with Religious and Local Leaders** to address stigma through dialogue

Background Information

QUESTIONS RESOLUTIONS MUST ANSWER

- **What** legal and financial reforms can improve women's health access?
- **How** can governments normalize mental health discussions among young women?
- **Should** reproductive health be free or subsidized?
- **How** can health services be inclusive of all women — including LGBTQ+, disabled, and rural?
- **What** global partnerships are most effective in improving women's health access?

POSSIBLE MODERATED CAUCUS TOPICS

- Mental Health Literacy and Education in Developing Countries
- Role of Faith and Culture in Shaping Access to Healthcare
- Data-Driven Policy Solutions for Reproductive Health
- Technology's Role in Expanding Rural Healthcare Access
- Supporting Women in Post-Conflict and Crisis Regions

Citations

- **UNFPA.** "State of World Population Report, 2023"
- **WHO.** "Mental Health Atlas 2022"
- **UN Women.** Beijing +25 Reports
- **Guttmacher Institute.** "Reproductive Health and Rights Factsheets"
- **UNICEF.** "Menstrual Hygiene in Schools" Global Study

