



UNCSW

UNITED NATIONS
COMMISSION ON THE
STATUS OF WOMEN

BACKGROUND GUIDE

Letter from the Executive Board

Greetings Delegates,

At the outset, we would like to inform you that it gives us immense pleasure to welcome you all to this simulation of United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW) at CBITMUN 2025. The Executive Board members hope that this simulation turns out to be an experience worth cherishing for all the participants, while accommodating a praise-worthy debate.

Throughout the conference, we will be addressing the Agenda: *Discussing the challenges and possible solutions to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*. This simulation shall be adhering to the UNA-USA Rules of Procedures, with a few necessary amendments which are required for the easy functioning of the committee.

The sole purpose of preparing this background guide is to deliver an insight about the committee as well the agenda to the delegates. To begin with, this guide will serve as the knowledge repository, and will serve as a map for you to navigate through the mass of information which you may come across in your preparation for the conference. However, this guide is by no means the end of the research.

The Executive Board will be delighted to hear you all, bringing in solid argumentations while incorporating several new realms to the agenda. Thus, as the name 'guide' may be hinting, it will not provide you with all the information on the agenda at hand; you will have to work a bit beyond reading these papers/files. In addition, it is necessary to understand that being in such a competitive environment, we don't look out to hear what statistics or legislations you have read while researching. Rather, we will recommend you to analyze these facts and present your country's perceptions over the relevancy of these laws.

All the best!

Satrajit Sahani

Chairperson

Rishika Malyala

Director

Sakshi Joshi

Director

Abdul Raheem

Head of Committee Affairs



Points to Remember

Role of the Executive Board: The Executive Board is appointed to facilitate the debate. The committee shall decide the direction and flow of debate. The delegates are the ones who constitute the committee and hence must be uninhibited while presenting their opinions/stance on any issue. However, the Executive Board may put forward questions and/or ask for clarifications at all points of time to further debate and test participants.

Foreign Policy: Following the foreign policy of one's country is the most important aspect of a Model UN Conference. This is what essentially differentiates a Model UN from other debating formats. To violate one's foreign policy without adequate reason is one of the worst mistakes a delegate can make.

Nature of Source/Evidence: This Background Guide is meant solely for research purposes and must not be cited as evidence to substantiate statements made during the conference. Evidence or proof for substantiating statements made during formal debate is acceptable from the following sources:

A. United Nations:

Documents and findings by the United Nations or any related UN body is held as credible proof to support a claim or argument. Multilateral Organizations: Documents from international organizations like OIC, NAFTA, SAARC, BRICS, EU, ASEAN, the International Criminal Court, etc. may also be presented as credible sources of information.

B. Government Reports:

These reports can be used in a similar way as the State Operated News Agencies reports and can, in all circumstances, be denied by another country.

C. News Sources:

C.1.Reuters: Any Reuters article that clearly makes mention of the fact or is in contradiction of the fact being stated by a delegate in council.

C.2.State operated News Agencies: These reports can be used in the support of or against the State that owns the News Agency. These reports, if credible or substantial enough, can be used in support of or against any country as such but in that situation, may be denied by any other country in the council. Some examples are – RIA Novosti (Russian Federation), Xinhua News Agency (People's Republic of China), etc.

Please Note -

Reports from NGOs working with UNESCO, UNICEF and other UN bodies will be accepted. Under no circumstances will sources like Wikipedia, or newspapers like the Guardian, Times of India, etc. be accepted.

However, notwithstanding the criteria for acceptance of sources and evidence, delegates are still free to quote/cite from any source as they deem fit as a part of their statements.

About the Committee

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is the principal global intergovernmental body exclusively dedicated to the promotion of gender equality, the rights and the empowerment of women. A functional commission of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), it was established by ECOSOC resolution 11(II) of 21 June 1946.

The CSW is instrumental in promoting women's and girls' rights, documenting the reality of their lives throughout the world, and shaping global standards on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

In 1996, ECOSOC in resolution 1996/6 expanded the Commission's mandate and decided that it should take a leading role in monitoring and reviewing progress and problems in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and in mainstreaming a gender perspective in UN activities.

During the Commission's annual two-week session, representatives of UN Member States, civil society organizations and UN entities gather at UN headquarters in New York. They discuss progress and gaps in the implementation of the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the key global policy document on gender equality, and the 23rd special session of the General Assembly held in 2000 (Beijing+5), as well as emerging issues that affect gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Member States agree on further actions to accelerate progress and promote women's and girls' enjoyment of their rights in political, economic, and social fields. The outcomes and recommendations of each session are forwarded to ECOSOC for follow-up.

Introduction to the Agenda

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action is a visionary agenda for the empowerment of women. It is also one of the reference frameworks to analyze the situation of women around the world and to assess the efforts of States in support of women's empowerment.

Adopted by consensus in 1995 following the mobilization of over 40,000 government delegates, experts and civil society representatives at the Fourth World Conference on Women, the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action embodies the commitment of the international community to achieve gender equality and to provide better opportunities for women and girls. The platform of action responds to the collective effort of women and girls around the globe who have fought to achieve gender equality and women's rights and acts as a continuum of the international community's commitment to address civil, political, social, economic and cultural inequalities. It remains relevant today, affirming that women's rights are human rights and that equality between women and men benefits everyone.

The Platform also sets an agenda for governments, international organizations, civil society and the private sector to safeguard women's human rights and to ensure that gender is taken into account in all national, regional and international policies and programmes.

Progress on implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) is reviewed by the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) every five years. In this regard, and since the first review in 2000, the United Nations Regional Commissions, including the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), have been mandated to prepare, in collaboration with regional organizations, regional reports on progress made towards the implementation of the BPFA. These reports are based on national reviews conducted by each of the United Nations member countries, and feed into a global report which is consolidated by the CSW Secretariat at UN Women and presented by the Secretary General to the General Assembly.

To date, five reviews have been conducted – in 2000, 2005, 2010, 2015 and 2020 – with each review resulting in an outcome document in which countries pledge to continue their efforts towards achieving global commitments relating to the rights of women and girls. The outcome document further outlines priority actions for the coming five years.

The Platform of Action covers 12 critical areas of concern:

Women and the environment



Violence against women



The girl child



Women and the economy



Institutional mechanisms



Women and armed conflict



Human rights of women



Education and training of women



Women and poverty



Women in power and decision-making



Women and health



Women and the media



A Few Critical Areas of Concern

Women and Poverty:

More than 1 billion in the world today, the great majority of whom are women, live in unacceptable conditions of poverty, mostly in the developing countries. Poverty has various causes, including structural ones. Poverty is a complex, multidimensional problem, with origins in both the national and international domains.

Education and Training of Women:

Education is human right and an essential tool for achieving the goals of equality, development and peace. Non-discriminatory education benefits both girls and boys and thus ultimately contributes to more equal relationships between women and men.

Women and Health:

Women have the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. The enjoyment of this right is vital to their life and well-being their ability to participate in all areas of public and private life.

Violence against Women:

Violence against women is an obstacle to the achievement of the objectives of equality, development and peace. Violence against women both violates and impairs or nullifies the enjoyment by women of their human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Women and Armed Conflict:

An environment that maintains world peace and promotes and protects human rights, democracy and the peaceful settlement of disputes, in accordance with the principles of non-threat or use of force against territorial integrity or political independence and of respect for sovereignty as set forth in the Charter of the United Nations, is an important factor for the advancement of women.

Women and the Economy:

There are considerable differences in women's and men's access to and opportunities to exert power over economic structures in their societies. In most parts of the world, women are virtually absent from or are poorly represented in economic decision-making, including the formulation of financial, monetary, commercial and other economic policies, as well as tax systems and rules governing pay.

Women in Power and Decision Making:

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone has the right to take part in the Government of his/her country. The empowerment and autonomy of women and the improvement of women's social, economic and political status is essential for the achievement of both transparent and accountable government and administration and sustainable development in all areas of life.

Human Rights of Women:

Human rights and fundamental freedoms are the birthright of all human beings; their protection and promotion is the first responsibility of Governments. The Platform for Action reaffirms that all human rights - civil, cultural, economic, political and social, including the right to development are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated, as expressed in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action adopted by the World Conference on Human Rights.

Women and the Media:

During the past decade, advances in information technology have facilitated a global communications network that transcends national boundaries and has an impact on public policy, private attitudes and behaviour, especially of children and young adults. Everywhere the potential exists for the media to make a far greater contribution to the advancement of women.

The Girl Child:

The Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes that "States Parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or status".

Existing Context

The Declaration is subject to a review and appraisal every five years—the 30-year review and appraisal took place March 2025. This review covered current progress and challenges towards the implementation of the Platform for Action and its contribution towards the full realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The agenda first unveiled in 2015 is a plan for transformative action for peace and prosperity for the people, planet, and the future. It encompasses 17 interlinked Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets. Offering a universal approach to development, the Declaration recognizes that inequalities in development exist within developed and developing nations. It resolves amongst other things to eradicate poverty, protect human rights, promote gender equality, empower women and girls, and ensure the lasting protection of the planet and its natural resources.

The Good and the Bad

- In the quarter-century since the Beijing Conference there have been major improvements towards global gender equality. Compared to generations ago, a young woman in 2020 is less likely to live in poverty, be a young mother, and she also has greater access to education. This is all thanks to shifts in laws, policies, and social norms—approximately 274 legal and regulatory reforms in support of gender equality were passed over the last decade across 131 countries. Through gender quotas, women have a voice in politics and thus create representation for other women. Amongst many other achievements: Sudan criminalized female genital mutilation (FGM), New Zealand passed a bill to ensure equal pay, and the number of female CEOs for Fortune 500 companies is at the record high of 52.
- However, there remain numerous challenges as detailed within the UN Women report. UN Women assert that economic independence of women is crucial to ensure gender equality. Yet, an increase in access to education has not created equal labor market opportunities for women. Wins in the formal labor sector are yet to be extended to informal labor where over 740 million women work. Women spend three times as many hours as men in unpaid work and domestic care which can then limit access to paid work.
- Violence against women is still rampant with around 30 countries not explicitly criminalizing marital rape and 19, such as Saudi Arabia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where women are required by law to obey their husbands. Victims of violence are often highly shamed and stigmatized resulting in less than 40% reporting crimes or seeking any sort of help.
- Globally, women now account for 25% of all parliamentary seats: an 11% increase from 1995 but still underrepresented in government. Where able to secure a place, female politicians are more likely to face violence and harassment. Even where almost 80% of countries have national plans for gender equality, only a third of these are funded.
- The global community as a whole “talked the talk” during the Beijing Conference but has failed to “walk the walk,” as decisions are not being backed up by resources or accountability. Only 5% of development resources goes to gender equality leaving a funding gap, whereas global annual military expenditure, for example, is at USD 1.8 trillion.

Women's Rights Globally

The promotion and protection of the human rights of women, through the full implementation of all human rights instruments, especially the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)(1979) is one of the Beijing Declaration's strategic objectives. Still, the challenges and failures to fully realize the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action are aggravated within CEDAW.

CEDAW is the main body of legislation governing human rights for women and is based on the conviction that discrimination against women violates the key principles of equal rights and respect for human dignity. It is legally binding, providing means of redress for victims, whereas the 1995 Beijing Declaration is simply a declaration and is not binding. Although ratified by 186 state parties, CEDAW is subject to numerous reservations that often seem to go against the heart and fundamental values of the treaty. Most worrying are reservations to core provisions of article 2, which impose obligations to review and change constitutions, laws, and policies as well as article 16 on equality within the family. Other widely reserved provisions include: article 5 on the abolition of discriminatory customs and traditions and of gender stereotyping; article 7's provision for women's participation in public life; article 9 on nationality; and article 15's legal capacity, including choice of domicile.

The reservation situation surrounding CEDAW exemplifies the current situation where rights for roughly half the world's population are often overlooked in favour of "traditional values".

Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women

1. Introduction

The Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women celebrated the 20th anniversary of its adoption by the UN General Assembly on the 18th of December 1999. On The 10th of December 1999 the Optional Protocol to the Convention was opened for signature by State Parties to the Convention. This is a unique and global anniversaries present to humankind in general and to women in particular.

As at January 2000, 165 countries have signed, acceded to or ratified the Convention, and 24 States parties have already signed the Optional Protocol. This is a commendable achievement. Governments, the entire United nations Family, the whole Civil society, particularly Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and all Women human rights activists deserve to be commended. I wish to commend in particular the CEDAW Committee, its Expert Consultant to the CSW Working Group, Dame Sylvia Cartright of New Zealand and the very effective

Chairperson of the Working Group, Ms. Aloisa Worgeter of Austria for outstanding roles played in making this remarkable achievement a reality

The Fourth World Conference on Women (FWCW) was a major human rights accomplishment for women. On a global scale, FWCW underscored the centrality of human rights to the struggle for equality between women and men. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action is built on a rights framework. It reaffirms the substance and the language of human rights throughout the document, and refers specifically to the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women as well as to the other human rights treaties.

The Beijing + 5 review provides an opportunity for Governments, UN agencies, bodies and funds as well as NGOs, and indeed the entire Civil Society to re-commit themselves to the implementation of the Platform. The CEDAW Convention provides a clear framework for pursuing and monitoring implementation of the Platform for many years to come.

2. The CEDAW Convention and the Beijing Platform for Action

The Platform for Action is the first global political agreement in which the CEDAW Convention is clearly reflected, thanks to a massive international NGOs effort in defining the rights issues and their participation in the UN and the regional preparatory processes. Governments in Beijing called for restraint from violating women's human rights and placed new emphasis on "promotion " and "protection" of rights.

The Platform for Action "upholds" the CEDAW Convention (paragraph 7) and notes that since 1985, there had been many "violations of and failure to protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms of all women and their civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights including the right to develop" (paragraph 42). From a rights perspective, the Platform moves beyond the Convention in some areas and even adds breadth to others. For example, the Platform includes a whole section on Violence against women, which is not specifically mentioned in the Convention because in the 1970's when the Convention was drafted, the issue had not yet received international attention. Also, very little data and evidence had been collected. The Platform states clearly that violence against women violates and impairs or nullifies women's enjoyment of their human rights (paragraph 112). As mentioned earlier on, the Convention is silent on this. However, in 1991, in accordance with Article 21 of the Convention, the Committee adopted General Recommendation No. 19, which indicates the manner in which each Article of the Convention should be invoked to deal with the issue. The section of the Platform on conflict also reflects a new level of attention, and the same can be said of the section on the girl child.

The effect of the media on women's lives and women's roles as portrayed in the media is only indirectly dealt with under Article 5 of the Convention. It is however extensively covered in the Platform for Action.

3. The Work of CEDAW after Beijing

1. The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) has the primary mandate for monitoring the implementation of the Platform for Action. However, the Platform makes it clear that the CEDAW Committee also has an important role in this regard. Accordingly, the Platform specifically invites States parties to the Convention to include information on measures taken to implement the Platform when reporting under Article 18 of the Convention (paragraphs 322, 323) in order to facilitate the Committee's effective monitoring of women's ability to enjoy the rights guaranteed by the Convention. The Committee is also tasked with taking the Platform into account when considering these reports. Subsequently, at its fifteenth session the Committee invited States parties to take into account the 12 critical areas of concern in preparing their reports or in supplementary oral and/or written materials supplied in connection with reports already submitted. The Committee also noted in its new guidelines that the 12 critical areas of concern are compatible with the Articles of the Convention and therefore within the mandate of the Committee.
2. Since the adoption of the Platform for Action, the CEDAW Committee has considered the reports of over 50 State parties. Although the majority of the reports had been prepared and submitted prior to the FWCW, measures to implement the Platform have been addressed by State parties in their oral presentations before the Committee during the constructive dialog phase of the State Parties presentation. Since the Committee's eighteenth session, each of the Committee's concluding comments has included a recommendation to disseminate the Platform for Action, particularly to women's and human rights organizations. Commitments made by individual States at the Conference have also been highlighted. Where State parties have failed to address the Platform, the Committee has noted this with concern and sometimes suggested that their plans for the implementation are inadequate.
3. The reports considered by the Committee since the adoption of the Platform have provided a detailed picture of the situation of women world-wide. This has made it possible for the Committee to assess progress in the implementation of the Platform and also identify areas that require further action.

4. Challenges to the implementation of the Convention

As stated above, consideration of State Parties reports has made it possible for the Committee to identify challenges to the implementation of the Convention and the Platform. New and emerging issues such as the adverse economic impact on women as a result of transition to a market economy, particularly with regard to employment, health, education, economic recession, the

negative impact of structural adjustment, economic restructuring and privatization, trade liberalization and globalization. These have often resulted in deepening poverty among women, particularly women heads of households and also change in lifestyles such as drug and substance abuse, e.g. tobacco consumption, and the perception of good national values.

Persistence of stereotypical attitudes towards the gender roles of women and men is a concern and a critical challenge to the implementation. Stereotypical attitudes perpetuate traditional practices and customs prejudicial to women, such as violence against women, polygamy, forced marriage, son-preference and "honor" killings. These attitudes additionally create a pervasive environment of discrimination concerning the role of women in the family and their participation in public life.

- In several State parties, economic, social and cultural changes have deepened stereotypical attitudes and, in some cases, have led to the introduction of legal measures, which are overprotective and place women in a disadvantage in a market economy.
- Discriminatory laws, particularly those governing marriage, administration of marital property, divorce and the family also do persist. A number of State parties continue to have laws discriminating against women in relation to nationality and penal law, particularly with regard to rape, or penalties with regard to "honor" killings.
- Human rights principles, particularly the Convention, are often not incorporated into domestic law. This will be more serious when the Optional Protocol enters into force since all domestic remedies must have been exhausted.
- Some State parties still have reservations on Articles that are at the core of the Convention, thereby negatively affecting the implementation of the Convention and also of the Platform.
- Measures to sensitize the law-enforcement agencies, judiciary, health professionals and the public about violence against women and the girl child have not been adopted by some State parties.
- In the area of health, challenges persist particularly in reproductive health, sometimes as a result of financial constraints. Maternal and infant mortality rates are high in several State Parties. Lack of provision of adequate family planning information particularly to rural women, as well as costs related to contraceptives, sometimes as a result of privatization of health care services, have led to high levels of abortion. In some State Parties abortion is resorted to as a method of family planning.
- The prevalence of the human immuno-deficiency Virus / acquired Immuno-deficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS) is a serious concern not only in the area of health but also the economic development of States. The Committee has noted the high rate of HIV infection among young women. According to "Global Summary of the HIV/AIDS epidemic of December 1999", a World Health Organization (WHO) publication, the overwhelming majority of people with HIV – some 95% of the global total – live in the developing world which is already overburdened with debt servicing.

- The proportion is set to grow even further as infection rates continue to rise in countries where poverty, poor health systems and limited resources for prevention and care, fuel the spread of the virus.
- Due to the enormity of the challenges in the implementation of the Convention and the Platform, I have limited myself to just a few.

Ratification of the CEDAW

The Women's Convention was adopted in 1979 by the United Nations General Assembly and remains the most ambitious and comprehensive treaty for women's rights, seeking to end discrimination against women in all domains (Simmons 2009). The treaty embodies a multidimensional conception of equality that includes formal and substantive equality. Formal equality requires that state parties abolish discriminatory laws, while substantive equality focuses on outcomes and women's experience of equality (Englehart and Miller 2014). The CEDAW emphasizes women's de facto enjoyment of rights, recognizing that there can be a discrepancy between law and practice. The treaty addresses women's rights in the public and private spheres, including the home and the family, a historically neglected area of women's equality in human rights treaties and research.

For instance, the CEDAW explicitly asserts women's reproductive rights, notably the only human rights treaty to do so (Simmons 2009). The treaty recognizes that cultural norms often hinder women from enjoying their human rights and emphasizes that state parties are obliged to modify social and cultural patterns to eliminate bias and practices that harm women.

The near universal ratification of the treaty is notable: more states have become party to the Women's Convention than the two oldest and most foundational human rights covenants. The CEDAW has 189 state parties, in comparison to the 173 state parties to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the 170 parties to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights 2014). Table 1 shows a map of the world by CEDAW ratification, highlighting the two states that have signed but not ratified (the United States and Palau) and states that have taken no action (Somalia, Sudan, Iran, Holy See, Tonga, and Niue).

Reservations

While ratification of the CEDAW is nearly universal, reservations to provisions and whole articles of the treaty are abundant. As defined by the Vienna Convention, a reservation is any statement made by a state representative when ratifying a treaty that “purports to exclude or to modify the legal effect of certain provisions of the treaty in their application to that State” (United Nations General Assembly 1969). While a state has the right to make reservations to articles or provisions, these reservations are deemed impermissible if they are incompatible with the fundamental aims of the treaty. Reservations are often considered a public declaration of the state’s intention to only partly implement a particular section of a treaty or to avoid implementing all together. After the Convention of the Rights of the Child, the CEDAW is the human rights treaty with the most reservations: there are 108 non-technical reservations to the CEDAW (Cho 2013). Against this backdrop, scholars have argued that reservations to the CEDAW are problematic, as they indicate that many states are party to the treaty without truly committing themselves to its goal: achieving equality for women. For instance, Keller argues that “reservations purport to allow states to become parties in name only, while not requiring crucial changes in the country’s laws or society’s practices.” (Keller 2014).

Report-and-review

The CEDAW mandates state parties to submit a report on the legislative, judicial, and administrative measures they have taken to implement the treaty one year after ratification and every four years thereafter or at the request of the CmDAW (UN Women 2020). The reports are taken under consideration by the Committee. The CmDAW convenes three times per year and during these sessions state representatives present their reports to the Committee on a rotating basis. The initial report from each country is meant to describe the status of women in the country, and subsequent reports are intended to build on the initial one, noting trends in women’s equality and obstacles to treaty implementation. The Committee members may ask for clarification, and state representatives are given time to respond. After considering the state party’s report, the Committee formulates concluding comments that include positive developments, areas of concern, and recommendations for implementing the treaty going forward.

Critics have emphasized the shortcomings of self-reporting as a means to ensure treaty implementation; critiques include the lack of expertise among “expert committees,” the backlog in reporting, the varying quality of reports, and that countries simply ignore the recommendations (Creamer and Simmons 2018). While state parties are expected to report every fourth year following their initial report, in reality, there is a significant backlog of submissions. Capacity issues can make reporting to various treaty bodies burdensome and states express concerns about

“reporting fatigue.” To ease the burden, the Committee has allowed state parties to submit combined periodic reports. However, delays are still widespread: an estimated 67 reports are currently delayed, suggesting that timely reporting is not a state priority. Despite severe backlogs, all state parties but two have submitted their initial reports to the CmDAW (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights 2020).

Inquiry and Complaints Procedures

In 1999, the UN General Assembly adopted the Optional Protocol to CEDAW, which established inquiry and complaints procedures, allowing the Committee to hear complaints from individuals or launch inquiries into “grave or systematic violations” of the Women’s Convention (United Nations General Assembly 1999). Only 114 of the 189 state parties to CEDAW have ratified the Optional Protocol to date (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights 2014). Since the Optional Protocol was implemented in 2000, the CmDAW has issued jurisprudence on 38 cases of individual complaints (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights 2021). Areas include domestic violence and forced sterilization. CmDAW has also launched inquiries in six countries on issues like the systematic killing of women in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. Individuals, CSOs, or state parties can bring cases to the Committee if domestic remedies have been exhausted. If the Committee finds that the state has violated the Convention, it transmits recommendations to both the state and the complainant. The state needs to provide a written response to the Committee within six months after receiving the recommendations, outlining their progress.

CEDAW Compliance Mechanisms and Women’s Rights

The argument that self-reporting to treaty bodies contributes to compliance by improving access to information domestically, which results in the mobilization of domestic groups that put pressure on the state to improve compliance specifically, the international review process triggers the mobilization of civil society, generates media attention which increases citizens' expectations of compliance, and leads to legislative deliberation over the CmDAW recommendations. We suggest that self-reporting provides useful tools for domestic stakeholders: “Self-reporting is important not because it completely reorients human rights, but rather because it sets in motion processes that cumulatively nudge implementation and practice in the right direction.” (Creamer and Simmons 2019, 1054).

In the case of the CEDAW, the experts conclude that cumulative reporting through periodic review has a modest yet statistically significant positive effect on women's rights. The report-and-review process puts women's rights on national agendas and encourages local actors to demand change. The mechanism involves local and international civil society organizations (CSOs) that follow the process closely and provide supplementary information to the treaty bodies and demand change domestically. This occurs in tandem with increased media reporting on women's rights during the review period, which leads domestic legislatures to factor in CmDAW recommendations in the law-making process. While one might assume that the review process goes unnoticed in mainstream media, the experts find evidence supporting substantial media interest: "Far from finding that no one pays attention to this process outside the halls of Geneva, in Latin America at least the review process literally piques the media's—and potentially the public's—interest." (Creamer and Simmons 2018, 37). In their Latin American case study, the experts find that each engagement in the report-and-review process is followed by an uptick in media mentions of the CEDAW, suggesting a link between state participation, public awareness, and mobilization. Their theory lays the groundwork for how compliance mechanisms improve women's rights but fails to factor in the role of reservations.

The Relationship between Reservations and Compliance

Compared to treaty ratification and compliance, fairly little scholarly attention has been paid to the role of reservations in compliance with human rights treaties (Zvobgo, Sandholtz, and Mulesky 2020). The literature on the relationship between reservations and compliance can broadly be divided into two perspectives. The position held by CmDAW maintains that reservations are problematic and signal an unwillingness on behalf of state parties to implement the necessary domestic legal, administrative, and substantive changes to fully comply with treaty obligations. CmDAW has invoked the impermissibility principle for reservations to Article 16, arguing that reservations to core articles are incompatible with the goals of the CEDAW. Specifically, the Committee suggest reservations to the core articles, "...whether lodged for national, traditional, religious or cultural reasons, are incompatible with the Convention and therefore impermissible," (Committee on the Elimination of Violence Against Women 2009) yet 34 state reservations remain (Freeman 2009). In line with this perspective, Simmons (2009) finds that democracies are less likely to make reservations than non-democracies. She attributes this to preferences; democracies are less likely to make reservations, because they are aligned with the content of human rights treaties.

The competing perspective suggests state parties who make reservations take their obligations seriously and are committed to complying with human rights treaties. Goldsmith and Posner (2006) argue that authoritarian states are *less likely* than democracies to issue reservations, because they have no intent to comply with the treaty in the first place. Particularly, the low cost of non-

compliance with human rights treaties allows authoritarian states to ratify treaties without making reservations. Their idea on the motivation behind reservations aligns with the logic of *sincere ratifiers* and *strategic ratifiers*: the former join treaties because they value their content and anticipate compliance, while the latter ratify to reap immediate diplomatic rewards or avoid criticism, predicting low compliance costs in the future (Simmons 2009). Neumayer (2007) explores the characteristics of states with reservations to six core human rights treaties and finds that liberal democracies *tend to have more, not fewer*, reservations to human rights treaties. However, this was not the case for CEDAW, which raises questions about the role of reservations and compliance with women's rights. Neither perspective seems to fit the CEDAW pattern of reservations.

Other scholars argue that states enter reservations to prevent costly legal obligations. Hill (2016) rejects the idea that reservations relate to regime type, suggesting instead that they are driven by expectations that human rights treaties will be enforced by domestic courts. Hill finds that states are more likely to use reservations when treaty provisions are stricter than domestic law, and domestic courts are powerful and likely to enforce the treaty. A reservation "...allows governments to have it both ways, expressing commitment to widely shared norms about human rights while avoiding the legal consequences of ratification" (Hill 2016, 1150). In a similar vein, Zvobgo, Sandholtz, and Mulesky (2020) suggest that factors at the treaty provision level can affect the likelihood that a state will enter reservations. Specifically, states are more likely to reserve against provisions that are more demanding, qualified as provisions that contain obligations that are strong, precise, and require domestic action. Combined, these studies suggest that states selectively apply reservations to specific provisions of treaties to avoid having to implement costly changes, where domestic laws are laxer, and courts are likely to enforce the obligations. This theory seems to fit the CEDAW case, since reservations are most frequently applied to Article 16, which contains provisions that are strong and precise. Countries with weak domestic law in these areas should be most likely to enter reservations to avoid costly legal changes.

Follow-Up Actions by the UN

- Beijing +5 (2000), Beijing +10 (2005), Beijing +15 (2010), Beijing +20 (2015): Reviews to assess progress in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action.
- Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5) (2015): Focuses on gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls.
- Generation Equality Forum (2021): Launched to accelerate progress on gender equality commitments made in Beijing 1995.

- UN Women (2010): Established to lead and coordinate efforts for women's empowerment and gender equality.

Top 20 Issues Women Are Facing Today

Women's rights have improved over the years, but continued progress is not guaranteed. In a time of escalating conflicts, rising authoritarianism and devastating climate change impacts, women face many issues related to education, work, healthcare, legal rights, violence and much more. By understanding these issues, the world can work together to achieve gender equality, stronger human rights protections and safety for all people. The following are 20 of the most important issues affecting women and girls today¹.

1. Unequal Pay

For centuries, society has undervalued the work women perform. Women are even paid less than men for the same work. According to the International Labour Organization, there has been some progress, but gender wage gaps still exist and are widening in certain jobs. Gaps can't be blamed on educational differences, which means that in most countries, men still earn more than women. Factors include gendered job segregation (women tend to dominate jobs with lower salaries) and unjust pay practices. According to data from Moody's Analytics, the gender pay gap could be costing the economy as much as \$7 trillion.

2. Racial Injustice

All women face discrimination, but women belonging to ethnic minorities face compounded inequalities. According to expert groups like the UN, race and gender intersect in employment, housing, poverty and more. As an example, while no group of women makes the same wage as non-Hispanic white men in the United States, the gender wage gap is significantly wider for most women of color. Over a 40-year career, Hispanic women lose over \$1 million in earnings, while Native women lose \$986,000 and Black women lose \$964,000.

3. Gender-Based Violence

Gender-based violence (GBV) refers to acts that cause (or are likely to cause) physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women. According to experts, over 1/3 of women and girls

experience some kind of violence during their lifetimes. The risk increases during conflicts, natural disasters and other emergencies. Intimate partner violence is the most common form of GBV. Around 1 in 4 women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner. While anyone can experience GBV, young people, older women, refugees, ethnic minorities and LGBTQ+ people are most vulnerable.

4. Inadequate Healthcare

Healthcare access is a human right, but women face unique stigmas and discrimination. According to the World Economic Forum, there are persistent gaps in research and treatment for things affecting women, such as maternal healthcare. This leads to worse health outcomes for conditions that should be treatable and preventable. Women are also undervalued in the healthcare profession. According to reporting from NPR, women hold just 25% of senior leadership roles despite making up 70% of the global healthcare workforce. The pandemic also increased burnout rates for women healthcare workers, added to their workloads and exacerbated gender biases.

5. Threats to reproductive Rights

According to the Center for Reproductive Rights, 40% of women live under restrictive laws, which represents over 750 million women of reproductive age. 6% of women live in countries where abortions are prohibited completely. Access to contraception increased from 900 million in 2000 to almost 1.1 billion in 2021, but barriers like misinformation about contraception, fear of side effects and access remain. According to the UN Populations Fund, around 257 million women who don't want to become pregnant still aren't using safe and modern contraception.

6. Lack of Education

All children deserve access to education, but girls have historically faced more discrimination. Progress has been made, but according to UNICEF, 119 million girls are still not in school. Reasons include poverty, gender-based violence, early marriage and a lack of safety, hygiene and sanitation resources. Low-income countries have the widest gaps, according to the World Bank. While the world average of girls enrolled in primary school is 88%, it's 78% in low-income countries.

7. Food Insecurity

Women face more food insecurity than men, Research from the World Food Programme identifies a few reasons why. The first is that women are more likely to live in extreme poverty. Globally, women earn just 82 cents for every dollar earned by men. Women also face unequal treatment during times of crisis and are more vulnerable to malnutrition during pregnancy. All these factors contribute to a lack of food security, which in turn negatively impacts other areas of a woman's life.

8. Climate Change

Research consistently shows that women are more vulnerable to the effects of climate change. One reason is that women depend on natural resources, so during times of famine or other disasters, women face the added burden of trying to obtain food. In lower-income countries, women also make up a large percentage of the agriculture industry, which is hardest hit by climate change. Women also face increased risks of violence and sexual exploitation during climate-related emergencies.

9. Unequal Political Representation

Society can't achieve gender equality until there's equal political representation. According to a survey conducted by Plan International, women still feel "consistently excluded" from politics. Half of the survey participants lived in communities where they felt like it wasn't okay for girls and young women to be involved in politics. 19% said they had been actively discouraged from getting involved. The UN estimates that it will take 130 years for the world to reach gender equality in the highest positions of power.

10. Discriminatory Social Institutions

Social institutions are the laws (formal and informal), norms and standards that determine how society functions. Unfortunately, gender inequality is embedded into just about every country's social institution in one way or another. According to the OECD, many countries have instituted legal reforms that untangle gender discrimination from their institutions, but 40% of women and girls still live in countries with "high or very high" discrimination. Social norms have progressed the best, but economic empowerment got worse between 2014 and 2022. Until discriminatory practices are eliminated, gender inequality will persist.

11. Human Trafficking

All genders can be victims of human trafficking, but women and girls are especially vulnerable. According to research from 2017, girls and women made up 71% of all victims of trafficking. They also make up 96% of the victims trafficked for sexual exploitation. Causes of gendered trafficking include poverty, a lack of employment opportunities for women, limited access to education and gender-based violence. Conflict also makes women more vulnerable.

12. Limited Freedom of Movement

Freedom of movement is an individual's right to live, travel and move within a country or between different countries. According to Human Rights Watch, many countries in the Middle East and North Africa still have laws requiring women to get permission from a male guardian before traveling abroad or even traveling within their own country. This violates a woman's right to travel and increases her risk for exploitation and abuse. Activists had been fighting for more rights for years, and while some progress has been made, restrictive laws remain.

13. Threats During Migration

Migration – forced and voluntary – can be risky. Women face more threats than men due to discrimination, gender-based violence and sexual exploitation. According to the International Organization for Migration, more women are migrating independently, especially from the Caribbean and Central America. While moving can provide opportunities, it's also dangerous. Displacement, which can be caused by conflict and climate change, is especially dangerous for women who are traveling alone, pregnant, heads of households, disabled, or older.

14. Discrimination Based on Disability

Human Rights Watch estimates there are around 300 million women with mental and physical disabilities. In low and middle-income countries, women represent 75% of people with disabilities. Women are more likely than men to become disabled and face increased discrimination due to the intersection of their gender and disability. According to research, women with disabilities are more than 2.5 times more likely to experience sexual abuse by an intimate partner than women who don't have disabilities.

15. Poor Mental Health

The state of mental health can be difficult to measure, but according to data, more women are diagnosed with mental health conditions. In a 2017 report from the UK, women are three times more likely than men to experience common mental health issues like depression and anxiety. Young women are also more likely to experience anxiety-related conditions than any other population. This disparity could be due to stigma, as men may feel less comfortable seeking help. In the United States, while more men die by suicide, more women attempt to take their own lives.

16. The Digital Divide

Access to technology increases a person's opportunities for employment, education, public resources, and more. Women don't get equal access. According to UNICEF, up to 90% of girls and young women in low-income countries can't access the internet, compared to 78% of boys and young men. Girls also have weaker digital skills and less access to mobile phones. This inequality disadvantages women and costs the global economy billions of dollars in GDP every year, according to the World Economic Forum.

17. Online Harassment

Online harassment is hard to measure, but there's little doubt it disproportionately affects women and girls. According to one study from Europe, women are 27 times more likely to experience online harassment than men. Online harassment has a terrorizing effect which damages a person's mental health, discourages them from spending time online and frightens them away from other public spaces. Online harassment can also translate into real-life violence.

18. Unpaid Labor

Women aren't only paid less than men in most places; they also take on more unpaid labor. Globally, women take on three times more unpaid work than men, while women in low and middle-income countries do more unpaid labor than their peers in high-income countries. Unpaid labor includes tasks like household chores and caring for family members. In Japan, women lose around \$761 billion a year through unpaid tasks, while men take on less than a third of what women do. Consequences aren't limited to the economy. According to research, the added burden of unpaid labor is associated with worse mental health in women.

19. Inadequate Maternal Healthcare

Pregnancy and childbirth are inherently risky, but maternal healthcare is inadequate for many people. According to the WHO, almost 800 women died in 2020 from preventable causes related to pregnancy and childbirth. A striking 95% of these maternal deaths occurred in low and middle-income countries. 75% of deaths result from issues like severe bleeding, high blood pressure, infections and complications from delivery. These conditions are preventable and manageable with the proper care.

20. Period Poverty

Periods are a fact of life for many people, but about 500 million women and girls don't have the supplies they need, according to the OHCHR. "Period poverty" is defined as a lack of access to products, hygienic spaces, education and other resources. Along with feeling ashamed or embarrassed, a girl may experience violations of her human rights when her period comes. Early marriage, sexual violence, unintended pregnancy and disrupted education are some of the more serious effects.

Recommendations towards Accelerated Implementation of the Platform for Action

- There is the need for temporary special measures aimed at accelerating defacto equality between women and men as provided for under Article 4.1 of the Convention. The introduction of such measures in the area of political and public life with numeric goals and quantitative targets and timetables is necessary in order to ensure defacto equality with regard to political participation and decision-making positions. Additionally affirmative Action such as quotas with respect to all governmental appointments may be introduced.
- Law reform is a critical element of implementing the Convention and the Platform. Review of customary and other laws to determine compatibility with international Conventions and national legislation, and the incorporation of the principles of equality and non-discrimination between women and man are necessary ingredients
- The importance of human rights education including the Convention should be part of educational curriculum and also to professional groups such as the judiciary, judges, lawyers, health professionals, journalists, teachers and the general public.
- In order to achieve equality in the area of health, there must be a close monitoring of the impact of privatization of social services on health care for women.

- Intensive programmes to combat the spread of HIV/AIDS, including information particularly aimed at young girls and boys and women in prostitution are indeed critical. Sub-Saharan Africa's tragedy concerning HIV/AIDS must be seen and handled as a global tragedy since we are living in a global village.
- Governments are being urged to design, implement and strengthen prevention programmes aimed at eliminating or at least reducing drug and substance abuse including tobacco, by women and girls.
- Finally, the CSW, acting as the preparatory body for the Beijing + 5, and the CEDAW Committee may consider developing a method of appraising progress under the Platform for Action that takes into account achievements and shortfalls in each individual country.