

Background Guide

UN Women

Topic: Closing the Gender Gap in Social Protection

I. Introduction to the Committee

For many years, the United Nations faced serious challenges in its efforts to promote gender equality, including inadequate funding and no single recognized driver to direct UN activities on gender equality issues. In July 2010, the United Nations General Assembly created UN Women, the United Nations entity for gender equality and the empowerment of women, to address such challenges.

UN Women focuses on priority areas that are fundamental to women's quality. It was established to accelerate progress on meeting women and girls needs worldwide. UN Women supports UN Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality and they work with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programs and services needed to ensure that the standards are effectively implemented and benefit women and girls worldwide. It works globally to make the vision of the Sustainable Development Goals a reality for women and girls in all countries. UN Women stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on four strategic priorities: women lead, participate in and benefit equally from governance systems, women have income security, decent work and economic autonomy, all women and girls live a life free from all forms of violence, and women and girls contribute to building sustainable peace and resilience, and benefit equally from the prevention of natural disasters and conflicts and humanitarian action.

UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality, and in all deliberations and agreements linked to the 2030 Agenda. The entity works to position gender equality as fundamental to the Sustainable Development Goals, and a more inclusive world.

Over many decades, the United Nations has made progress in advancing gender equality. Working for the empowerment and rights of women and girls, UN Women's main roles are to support inter-governmental bodies, such as the Commission on the Status of Women, in their formulation of policies, global standards and norms, to help Member States implement these standards, providing technical and financial support to those countries that request it, and to forge effective partnerships with civil society, and to lead and coordinate the UN system's work on gender equality, as well as promote accountability.

They do a lot by advocating for women's leadership and political participation, investing in economic empowerment, ending violence against women, implementing peace and security through research initiatives, data collection, learning exchanges, and documentation of good practices, engaging in humanitarian action, committing to women in governance and national planning, inspiring the youth and accelerating progress on gender equality at a young age, recognizing women and girls with disabilities, and reducing the increase spread of the HIV and AIDS epidemic.

UN Women acts in different ways to help spread awareness about gender differences. UN Women have developed a series of flagship programs to deepen its efforts and achieve results. They use a human-rights-based approach to strengthen the voice of women and girls. They also use innovation and technology to provide opportunities to those left behind. They receive intergovernmental support and coordinate with the United Nations to advance the full realization of women's rights.

II. Statement of the Problem

Women lack access to decent work and deal with occupational segregation and gender wage gaps. They are often denied access to basic education and healthcare. Women all over the world suffer from violence and discrimination, and they are under-represented in a lot of decision making politically and economically (UN Women).

Social protection systems help poor and vulnerable people cope with crises and shocks, find jobs, invest in the health and education of their children, and protect the aging population (World Bank). Worldwide, more than half of the global population is not covered by any type of social protection scheme, and less than 30 percent have comprehensive social protection (International). Women are disadvantaged in social protection systems, experiencing lower coverage rates and substantially lower benefit levels. Gender gaps in access to social protection; however, vary by region and country, as they are highly dependent on the characteristics of the labor market and the structure of the social security system.

The coverage of contributory social protection schemes for women is particularly low, and in the absence of social protection floors, women are often left without any support. This is especially the case with regard to old-age pensions, unemployment benefits, and maternity protection. Globally, only 26.4 percent of working-age women are covered by contributory old-age protection, compared to 31.5 percent of the total working-age population (International). For example, in North Africa, about 63 percent of elderly men receive a pension, but only 8 percent of women do. Again, in South-East Asia, women are less protected against unemployment, and many women around the globe are not covered by maternity protection (International).

In addition to women's lower social protection coverage, gender gaps in benefit levels are extremely high in some countries. In the European Union, women's pensions are on average 40.2 percent lower than those of men (International). Nearly 65 percent of people above the retirement age living without a regular pension are women (International). This puts women at a substantially greater risk of poverty than men, also because women on average live longer than men do. In the European Union, 20.6 percent of women above the age of 65 are at risk of poverty, compared to 15 percent of men (International). In some countries, such as Bulgaria, the difference in risk of poverty between men and women is over 15 percent (International).

In many countries, social protection has been designed around a male. Women tend to have lower contributions because they are underrepresented in the labor market. Also, in many parts of the world, women are the main responsibility for care tasks within a household. This causes women to interrupt their careers and work shorter hours. Lastly, the gender pay gap shows that women get paid less compared to men. This prevents women from making the same number of contributions as men, which leads to lower benefits.

III. History/Past UN Action

Over many decades, the United Nations has made significant progress in advancing gender equality, including through landmark agreements such as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (UN Women).

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted by 189 countries, is the most comprehensive and transformative global agenda for the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls (UNDP). It made comprehensive commitments under 12 areas of concern. The Platform for Action pushes for a world where women and girls can exercise her freedoms and choices, and realize all her rights, such as to live free from violence, to go to school, to participate in decisions and to earn equal pay for equal work (UN Women). The Beijing process released political will and worldwide visibility. It connected and reinforced the activism of women's movements on a global scale (UN Women).

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly, is often described as an international bill of rights for women (UN). It defines what constitutes discrimination against women and sets up an agenda for national action to end discrimination (UN). CEDAW tries to incorporate the principle of equality of men and women in their legal system, abolish all discriminatory laws and adopt appropriate ones prohibiting discrimination against women, to establish tribunals and other public institutions to ensure the effective protection of women against discrimination, and to ensure elimination of all acts of discrimination against women by persons, organizations or enterprises (UN).

In 2015, countries agreed on the need for comprehensive financing for development, adopted a new sustainable development agenda, and charted a universal and legally binding global agreement on climate change (UN Women). Concluding a negotiating process that spanned more than two years and featured the unprecedented participation of civil society, governments united behind an ambitious agenda that features 17 new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets to be achieved by 2030. Achieving gender equality and women's

empowerment is integral to all 17 goals. Goal number 5, “Gender Equality,” specifically focuses on gender equality.

IV. Latest Developments

Closing the gender gap has not been a priority for the United Nations in recent years; however, turning this around is a priority of the UN in 2020. 2020 marked the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the 20th anniversary of Security Council resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security, and the 5th anniversary of the Sustainable Development Goals (UN Women). The 2030 Agenda is clear: Gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls is a goal in itself (Sustainable Development Goal 5) as well as a catalyst for the achievement of all the other goals. Ultimately, development will only be sustainable if its benefits accrue equally to both women and men.

Recently, 131 countries have added 274 gender-related reforms to laws and regulations. However, more than 2.5 billion women and girls live in countries with at least one discriminatory law on the books. This restricts women’s ability to make decisions. With that, violence against women remains a human rights abuse on a massive scale. Progress has been made with feminist activism (United Nations).

Extreme poverty has declined dramatically between 1990 and 2015, but generally, women aged 25-34 are 25 percent more likely than men to live in extreme poverty. Despite progress in girls’ education, only 39 percent of rural girls attend secondary school. However, based on current trends, the education gap can be fully closed in twelve years due to advancement in some developing countries. Maternity care has also become more accessible; fewer women die in childbirth than twenty years ago (United Nations).

The past decades have seen important progress for women and girls. Overall, however, change has been uneven and incremental. At the current rate of change, the global gender gap will not close for another 100 years. As the Secretary-General warned, “Change is coming at a pace that is too slow for the women and girls whose lives depend on it.” Over the next 10 years, the global community must act with urgency and determination to accelerate progress and achieve gender equality for all women and girls everywhere (United Nations).

V. Problems a Position Paper and Resolution Should Address

A resolution should address issues aimed towards women's inequality and social protection. Resolutions should focus on global community help along with leaders across the globe. Legal reform, strengthening social protection, women's representation, and support for women's movements is important to a better future for women and girls.

Problems a position paper should address:

1. How are women fairing as compared to men in the issues of wage equality, education, access to banking/finance, and labor protections?
2. What is the role of women often in the informal economy?
3. How are workers in the informal economy, but especially women, less able to access social protection programs and policies?
4. How do NGOs sometimes fill the gaps in providing social protection assistance in many countries?
5. How can it be ensured that women have a seat at the table when discussing social protection?

VI. Helpful Sources

UN Women Website: <https://www.unwomen.org/en>

United Nations—Closing the Gender Gap:
https://www.un.org/en/un75/women_girls_closing_gender_gap

The World Bank and Social Protections:
<https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/socialprotection/overview>

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