

# **United Nations Women**

## **Committee Overview**

Delegates in UN Women will be simulating Commission on the Status of Women through the course of the conference. It is the delegate's responsibility to respond to the two topics laid out in the background guide by delivering innovative approaches to the problems listed, while accurately representing the views and values of the assigned countries. Delegates must also keep in mind the limits of power UN Women has, and must therefore use diplomacy, and most importantly creativity, to create interventions.

## **What is CSW?**

The Commission on the Status of Women is a commission within the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Established in 1946, the commission is held for two weeks each year at UN headquarters in New York City, and delegates work to evaluate successful international women's rights campaigns and the improvements they bear for women globally. They also identify challenges to successful rights promotion and think of solutions to address these shortcomings. From there, delegates pass resolutions and try to shape global standards on gender equality and women's rights.

## **Topic 1: Sustainable Development and Gender Equality**

UN Women's goals and the Sustainable Development Goals go hand in hand. Sustainable Development Goals, or SDGs, make up the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The agenda was agreed upon at a UN summit in September 2015, and essentially works to meet the needs of this world's generation, and works to ensure that the next generation's needs will be

met. Sustainable development refers to the continuation of worldwide economic, political and social growth, while at the same time ensuring that future generations's needs will not be compromised.

Sustainable development has three core elements: economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental protection. As simple as it seems, maintaining all three core elements can be tricky for all countries, and often requires the compromise of at least one value in order to further the impact of development. SDGs are monitored by using a set of global indicators. These indicators are created as benchmarks for progress, and will be continuously reviewed and reassessed by each member state. The following sections focus on the 6 SDGs that UN Women will focus on throughout the conference. Memorizing all 17 SDGs will not be necessary, but incorporating the values and beliefs of the goals is pertinent to expanding gender equality.

### *Poverty and Economic Growth*

Global poverty disproportionately affects women. SDGs 1 and 8 tackle global economic empowerment, and the first step toward global economic empowerment is focusing on the empowerment of women. Although statistics represent that women are in similar states of poverty as men, there are major gaps in this research- the statistics do not account for gaps within households, such as access to resources, goods and services. These statistics also are not sufficient in areas with high poverty concentration, such as sub-Saharan Africa.

Single mothers with children have higher poverty rates than their male counterparts, and studies suggest that female-headed households are economically vulnerable. Gender inequalities also restrict access to income- women have much lower cash income than men, have lower rates of formal financial institution use, and are often excluded from economic decision making. For

example, one in three women have no financial say on major decisions, and in sub-Saharan Africa, 46% of married women earned a cash income compared to 75% of men. Inclusive economic growth must be maintained worldwide. Women make major contributions to the global economy, whether it be through business or unpaid labor in the home, women continue to be disproportionately affected by poverty, discrimination and exploitation.

### *Health*

Both SDGs 2 and 3 are interrelated with gender equality and the goals of UN Women. True gender equality means equal access to health care and health related resources. Only half of women in developing countries receive the health care they need, and more than 225 million women do not receive necessary access to contraception. Current gender norms create health gaps between men and women, due to interrelated resource gaps leading to exposure of risk factors (such as stress, low socioeconomic status, etc), low access to health services, and low investment in health care related needs (such as nutrition). Although women have lower mortality rates than men, they have greater morbidity rates- meaning that although they live longer, they have a lower quality of life than men.

HIV/AIDS is a key example of gender inequalities impacting health, and is a major target for UN Women. Adolescent girls constitute more than 60% of all adolescents living with HIV/AIDS, due to global exploitation and lack of resources. Factors that fuel HIV/AIDS include gender violence, early marriage, rape, lack of property rights, and the criminalization of an illness. Women, especially pregnant mothers, must have access to anti retroviral therapy (ART) in order to slow the spread of HIV/AIDS.

### *Education*

SDG 4 is crucial for the state of gender equality. Women must have access to education in order to create a stable, functioning economy. Access to education impacts all areas of life- low education levels are associated with poor health, low socioeconomic status and low quality of life. Increasing access to education affects all other aspects of gender inequality- for example, girls with 8 years of education are 4 times less likely to be married as children. A child born to a literate mother is 50% more likely to live past the age 5, and educated mothers are twice as likely to send their children to school.

Educating women is related to great global economic gains- a girl with an extra year of education can earn up to 20% more as an adult (increasing flexible spending income). In fact, if India enrolled 1% more girls in secondary school, its GDP would rise by 5.5 billion USD. Currently, there are 33 million less girls than boys in primary school, and there are 66 million girls out of school around the world. Giving a proper education to girls around the world reduces health risk factors and bumps the global economy.

### *Political Participation*

SDG 16 is crucial for women worldwide. Women as political leaders and participants are restricted both domestically and globally. Gender norms lead to women failing at gaining political power, leading to a lack of representation that manifests itself in a lack of laws concerning gender equality. Only 21% of national parliamentarians were female, and only 8 women have served as the head of state in their respective countries.

Equal pay and paid parental leave laws must be upheld around the world, especially in countries without them. Women are underrepresented as voters, as well as leaders in all areas, whether it

be academia or government. The continuation of male dominated governments leads to discriminatory laws, the reinforcement of gender norms, and the continuation of unequal access of education and health care. By registering female voters and training potential female candidates, UN Women works to increase female legislators.

### *Resources*

<http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do>

<http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/development-agenda/>

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

<http://beijing20.unwomen.org/en/in-focus/poverty#facts>

<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/gender/chapter8/chapter8.html>

<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs403/en/>

[http://globalclassrooms.weebly.com/uploads/2/3/8/4/23841948/gr\\_curriculum\\_resources\\_statistics-1.pdf](http://globalclassrooms.weebly.com/uploads/2/3/8/4/23841948/gr_curriculum_resources_statistics-1.pdf)

## **Topic Two: Reproductive Rights**

Reproductive rights were not defined explicitly until 1969 in the Declaration of Social Progress and Development, which proclaimed that parents have the right to determine how many children to have and when to have them.

### *Cairo Programme of Action*

In 1994, at the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), the 20-year Programme of Action was adopted. The Programme defines reproductive health as:

“a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, in all matters relating to the reproductive system and its functions and processes. Reproductive health therefore implies that people are able to have a satisfying and safe sex life and that they have the capability to reproduce and the freedom to decide if, when and how often to do so. Implicit in this last condition are the right of men and women to be informed [about] and to have access to safe, effective, affordable and acceptable methods of family planning of their choice, as well as other methods for regulation of fertility which are not against the law, and the right of access to appropriate health-care services that will enable women to go safely through pregnancy and childbirth and provide couples with the best chance of having a healthy infant.”

The Programme of Action recommended that states provide affordable and accessible family planning services, safe childbirth conditions, treatments for sexually transmitted infections, and proper post-abortion care. While viewed favorably by many countries, the Programme of Action is non-binding, and so many states have been slow to make changes in the way they address reproductive rights in their own territories. Additionally, several Latin American and Middle Eastern countries made formal reservations to the programme because of their governments' opposition to sexual freedom and abortion access.

### *The Importance of Reproductive Rights*

Women's reproductive rights refer to many individual rights, such as that to legal and safe abortion and reproductive healthcare, access to birth control, freedom from forced sterilization and genital mutilation, information about and access to legal and accessible treatment for HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, and access to general accurate information related to

reproductive health. While these rights are fundamentally connected, they have differences that reach into different political, social, cultural, and economic realms. For this reason, reproductive health is connected to all aspects of a woman's life. So, it comes at no surprise that reproductive health violations create a barrier to women's success. Addressing these rights is imperative to creating an equitable system that addresses poverty, mortality, and a patriarchal culture of subordination and discrimination in its multiple facets. For example, to address issues of global poverty that hurt women, it is necessary to discuss the accessibility and affordability of abortion procedures, STI tests, and birth control.

Despite the importance of women's rights to reproductive health, much of the world still opposes the idea that reproductive health is a human right at all. A primary reason for this opposition is grounded in religion; most pro-life people, as well as those who oppose access to birth control, take these positions for religious reasons. Additionally, some oppose this issue on the grounds that it is not the government's business to become involved in it - those who wish to shrink the size and scope of government certainly oppose creating additional government programs, and those which address reproductive health are no exception. While efforts have been made to find common ground on this issue, they have been mostly unsuccessful.

### *Reproductive Rights Today*

While the Cairo Programme is over 20 years old, reproductive rights today are still under fire on both a domestic and global level. In the United States, *Roe v. Wade* held that a woman's right to an abortion during the first trimester was constitutional. This affected reproductive health laws in 46 states. Since then, however, states have gone to great lengths to restrict women's access to safe and legal abortions. From allowing individual healthcare providers to refuse to perform

abortion procedures to creating inconvenient waiting periods and required counseling prior to getting an abortion to removing government funding for abortion procedures, states are continuing to restrict women's access to their own reproductive health. Furthermore, many states require abortion recipients to pay for their procedure out of pocket, or through private insurance. Abortions are expensive. So, this issue affects people differently based on their socioeconomic background, as not everyone can bear the costs of the procedure (to which fiscal conservatives often reply "you should have been more responsible.") When this is the case, the economic disparities infiltrate women's lives even more, as this argument seems to hold that only affluent women should be free to live sex-positive lives, since it can prove to be costly.

On a global level, less than 40% of the world's population lives in countries where abortion access is viewed to be very accessible, and 26 percent lives in areas where abortion is severely restricted, if not prohibited entirely. However, this information should be viewed carefully; the United States, by these measures, is included in the most lenient group of countries listed. It is clear, therefore, that the vast majority of the world's countries engage in reproductive rights violations, either explicitly or through "well-intentioned" restrictions. There is still much to be done to promote reproductive health rights globally.

#### *References*

<https://www.reproductiverights.org>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reproductive\\_rights](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reproductive_rights)

<http://www.unwomen.org/en/csw>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United\\_Nations\\_Commission\\_on\\_the\\_Status\\_of\\_Women](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_Commission_on_the_Status_of_Women)

<https://www.gutmacher.org/state-policy/explore/overview-abortion-laws>