



# COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

## *70th* SESSION ISSUES BOOK

MEASURES TO ENSURE EQUAL ACCESS TO AND EDUCATION FOR  
ALL, ESPECIALLY WOMEN AND GIRLS

ENSURING UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE  
HEALTH AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS AND ELIMINATING ALL FORMS  
OF HARMFUL PRACTICES AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

PROMOTING THE ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

MODEL UNITED NATIONS OF THE FAR WEST



# MODEL UNITED NATIONS OF THE FAR WEST

70TH ANNUAL SESSION

THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS: LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is the principal global intergovernmental body exclusively dedicated to the promotion of gender equality 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 rights, documenting the reality of women's lives throughout the world, and shaping global standards on gender equality and the empowerment of women.

In 1996, ECOSOC in resolution 1996/6 (see p. 20) 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.

(UNWomen.org)

THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN ISSUES BOOK WAS PREPARED BY  
THE STUDENTS OF HUMBOLDT STATE UNIVERSITY FOR THE 70TH SESSION OF  
MODEL UNITED NATIONS OF THE FAR WEST



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## COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN ISSUES BOOK

1. Measures to ensure equal access to and education for all, especially women and girls
2. Ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights and eliminating all forms of harmful practices against women and girls
3. Promoting the economic and political empowerment of women

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## **MEASURES TO ENSURE EQUAL ACCESS TO AND EDUCATION FOR ALL, ESPECIALLY WOMEN AND GIRLS**

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MUNFW 70th Session – Committee on the Status of Women

It is no secret that we are failing our world populations in our promise to ensure equal education for all. Ever since its adoption in 1948, the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights has outlined the vital role education has in Article 26, stating that "everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit."<sup>1</sup> With this promise in mind, we must begin to address the astounding rates of uneducated populations in the world today. This year's theme, "Leave No One Behind", offers the opportunity for us to closely examine not only the ways in which education can empower those that have access to it, but also the ways in which unequal access holds people back - particularly women and girls. This brief will present information on the widespread nature of the issue, the role Sustainable Development Goal 4 has in addressing this issue, the challenges to ensuring equal access to education, the current international efforts, and finally the ways in which we can achieve and accelerate educational success to fulfill our goals for the 2030 Agenda.

## **SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 4 AND ENSURING ACCESS TO EDUCATION FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS**

It is also important to keep in mind the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals that the United Nations set in 2015 to achieve by 2030. These seventeen goals, engulfing a range of topics from addressing economic poverty, environmental challenges, and reducing inequalities,<sup>2</sup> represent some of the most pressing issues the international community faces as a whole today and outline the ways in which we can begin to address each topic. In debating the different measures needed to

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<sup>1</sup> "Universal Declaration of Human Rights." *United Nations*, United Nations, [www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/](http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/).

<sup>2</sup> "SDGs: Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform." *United Nations*, United Nations, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs>

ensure equal access to and education for all, especially women and girls, we must pay particular attention to Sustainable Development Goal 4. SDG 4 is the goal aiming to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all."<sup>3</sup> SDG 4 has various targets including but not limited to:

ensur(ing) that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education (4.1), "ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education (4.2), and eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations (4.5).<sup>4</sup>

With SDG 4 in mind, we must now focus on how to implement these targets in terms of ensuring that equal access can be provided for all, particularly women and girls especially.

## **UNEQUAL ACCESS TO EDUCATION ACROSS THE WORLD**

To be able to accurately and effectively address the lack of equal access to education for all, we must first be able to understand the full scope of the issue. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) published a study in early September 2019 on the statistical data of children out of education. Audrey Azoulay, Director-General of UNESCO explained that, "according to our projections, nine million girls of primary school age will never start school or set foot in a classroom, compared to about three million boys."<sup>5</sup> Azoulay goes further to elaborate that roughly four million of those nine million girls live in Sub-Saharan Africa, an area that could be

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<sup>3</sup> "Goal 4: Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform." *United Nations*, United Nations. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg4>

<sup>4</sup> "Goal 4: Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform." *United Nations*, United Nations. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg4>

<sup>5</sup> "Around 12 Million Children May Never See a Classroom, UN Data Reveals | UN News." *United Nations*, United Nations, 13 Sept. 2019. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/09/1046272>

prioritized to decrease the number of uneducated women and girls in the world.<sup>6</sup> This new statistical evidence does not help to diminish the already alarmingly-high numbers of children in the world without access to educational institutions; UNESCO also has evidence of approximately 258 million adolescents between the ages of 6 and 17. Furthermore, according to UNESCO projections, "at the present rate, by 2030, one-in-six children will not be attending primary and secondary school at all, and only six in every ten young people will complete secondary education."<sup>7</sup>

Data from the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) also highlights the wide-spread severity of the issue. Of the estimated 7.1 million refugee children, only about half are enrolled in programs in host countries that give them access to education.<sup>8</sup> Only about six in ten refugee children are enrolled in primary school programs. The number decreases as refugee children age: only two in ten are enrolled in secondary-school programs. The reasons for such staggeringly low numbers of enrolled refugee children vary. Typically, impoverished host countries already have low school enrollment numbers for their native adolescent populations, so the likelihood of adolescent refugee populations gaining access to educational programs that native adolescent populations already have trouble accessing is incredibly low. Similarly, some wealthier host countries often have policies that aim at integrating adolescent refugee populations into the mainstream educational programs for their native-child populations, while others, such as Greece and some Balkan states have refugee populations that await asylum-request processing. The UNHCR high commissioner's spokesperson, Melissa Fleming, has voiced the concerns that:

It's not just sad, but it's also dumb... Not investing in refugees, people who have fled war zones...is not investing very simply in the future of its people; the people have to be the future teachers, architects, the peacemakers, artists, politicians who are interested in reconciliation, not revenge.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>8</sup> "More than Half of World's Refugee Children 'Do Not Get an Education', Warns UNHCR | UN News." *United Nations*, United Nations, 30 Aug. 2019. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/08/1045281>

<sup>9</sup> "More than Half of World's Refugee Children 'Do Not Get an Education', Warns UNHCR | UN News." *United Nations*, United Nations, 30 Aug. 2019. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/08/1045281>

Similarly, 750 million adults worldwide are illiterate, about two thirds of them are women.<sup>10</sup> Studies done by UN Women have found that there are currently approximately 15 million primary school aged girls are out of school worldwide, this compared to 10 million boys.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, UN Women reports that up to 48.1% of girls do not attend educational institutions in some regions and often drop out of secondary school programs due to "early pregnancy and the expectation that they should contribute to household work."<sup>12</sup> Unequal access to education affects adult women as well. Evidence from UNESCO shows that a number of Sub-Saharan African states have a female literacy rate of under 50%, which has the potential to increase a woman's likelihood of experiencing deprivation and vulnerability to exploitation.<sup>13</sup> It is important to realize that missing out on education at the adolescent level leaves women vulnerable later in life to a range of challenges.

It is clear from the available statistical evidence that unequal access to education is a widespread issue. It affects a range of children and adolescents, whether experiencing this issue in their home countries or abroad as refugees. Similarly, adult women are affected by unequal access to education.

## **CHALLENGES TO ENSURING EQUAL ACCESS TO EDUCATION FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS**

There are a number of reasons that prevent women and girls from accessing education. Firstly, it appears that there is some correlation between the education levels of women and girls of a country and that country's economic income (measured through GDP). For example, UNESCO's Institute for Statistics (UIS) figures show that about 19% of six to eleven year-olds in lower-income countries do not attend educational institutions whereas, looking at the same age range, only about 2% do not attend educational institutions in higher-income countries.<sup>14</sup> Similar findings come from

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<sup>10</sup> "Education - United Nations Sustainable Development." *United Nations*, United Nations, [www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/education/](http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/education/)

<sup>11</sup> "Sustainable Development Goal 4: Quality Education." *UN Women*, [www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/women-and-the-sdgs/sdg-4-quality-education](http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/women-and-the-sdgs/sdg-4-quality-education)

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>13</sup> "Women ED Facts and Figure: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization." *Women ED Facts and Figure / United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization*, [www.unesco.org/new/en/unesco/events/prizes-and-celebrations/celebrations/international-days/international-women-s-day-2014/women-ed-facts-and-figure/](http://www.unesco.org/new/en/unesco/events/prizes-and-celebrations/celebrations/international-days/international-women-s-day-2014/women-ed-facts-and-figure/)

<sup>14</sup> "Around 12 Million Children May Never See a Classroom. UN Data Reveals | UN News." *United Nations*, United Nations, 13 Sept. 2019. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/09/1046272>

studying older adolescents: 61% of fifteen to seventeen year-olds in lower-income countries do not attend educational institutions compared to a much lower 8% of fifteen to seventeen year-olds in higher-income countries. Apart from the income levels of a country, there are several other reasons that hinder access to education. As pointed out by the United Nations outline for SDG 4:

The reasons for the lack of quality education are due to lack of adequately trained teachers, poor conditions of schools and equity issues related to opportunities provided to rural children. For quality education to be provided to the children of impoverished families, investment is needed in educational scholarships, teacher training workshops, school building and improvement of water and electricity access to schools.<sup>15</sup>

A 2019 SDG 4 progress update report also agreed with these findings, describing that many regions of the world still lack the proper infrastructure and facilities that help to establish a safe and productive learning environment.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has discussed the importance of location, explaining "children from rural areas are more than twice as likely to be out of primary school than their urban peers. In conflict zones, 27 million children are out of school."<sup>17</sup> Keeping in mind the different challenges we face in ensuring equal access to all, we can now study what has been done thus far to combat the issue and push us closer to our 2030 goals.

## **INTERNATIONAL EFFORTS THUS FAR**

Despite the disheartening numbers of uneducated women and girls globally, there are several ways in which the international community has acted to ensure success in achieving the 2030 agenda. As of 2019, a reported 7 in 10 children aged three and four are now "on track in at least three of the following domains: literacy-numeracy, physical development, social-emotional development and

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<sup>15</sup> "Quality Education – United Nations Sustainable Development Goals." *United Nations*, United Nations, <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/education/>

<sup>16</sup> "Goal 4: Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform." *United Nations*, United Nations, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg4>

<sup>17</sup> "Education." *UNICEF*, United Nations, [www.unicef.org/education](http://www.unicef.org/education)



learning."<sup>18</sup> Funding and financial aid has also increased in order to ensure access to education. For example, official development aid (ODA) for educational scholarships from states such as Australia, France, Japan, and the United Kingdom has increased by \$1.3 billion since 2017.<sup>19</sup> Within the United Nations, particular organizations are working towards accelerating the promises of SDG 4 through adolescent education. UNICEF, for example, is currently taking an active role in addressing three main points of focus that have led to the staggering statistics of women and girls without education. As UNICEF reports, their focus lies in three areas: (1) access, (2) learning and skills, and (3) emergencies and fragile contexts. In regards to the first focus area, the goal is to "[ensur] gender-equitable access to quality education from early childhood to adolescence, including for children with disabilities, marginalized children and those living in humanitarian and emergency settings;"<sup>20</sup> the second focus area aims to "[achieve] quality learning outcomes and skills development that come from strong education systems and innovative solutions."<sup>21</sup> Finally, by recognizing the circumstances of women and girls living in fragile or emergency situations, UNICEF hopes to "improve learning and protection for children in emergencies and on the move."<sup>22</sup> If the international community as a whole were able to recognize the various challenges to ensuring equal access to education for women and girls, we could then make headway in ensuring that progress is not only made, but accelerated to meet our 2030 goals.

## LOOKING FORWARD

It is clear that lack of education, particularly for women and girls, is a worldwide issue. The staggering statistical evidence of not only the widespread nature of the issue, but the ways in which it is holding back masses within world populations later in life, alludes to the totality of the issue and can cast doubt on the effectiveness in any attempts to combat it. However, despite the alarming rates of uneducated children and adults in the world, we can look to the admirable efforts of many

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<sup>18</sup> "Goal 4: Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform." *United Nations*, United Nations, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg4>

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>20</sup> "Education." *UNICEF*, United Nations, <https://www.unicef.org/education>

<sup>21</sup> "Education." *UNICEF*, United Nations, <https://www.unicef.org/education>

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*

international organizations in addressing it. These organizations, as well as many bodies within the United Nations, are focused on addressing the various barriers to equal education access, including but not limited to: income inequalities, infrastructural inequalities, lack of educators, lack of educational institutions, and environmental challenges such as location and refugee status. In recognizing and discussing these various circumstances, we can begin the important work of addressing the issue.

We are now only eleven years away from the deadline for the 2030 agenda. What started out as a desire to address seventeen important global issues has, over the years, been met by challenges to the completion of those goals. This committee has been given the immense responsibility to discuss and address the potential measures to ensuring equal access to and education for all, especially women and girls, and with it, the responsibility in determining the best courses of action in accelerating Sustainable Development Goal 4. Alone, no individual country will be able to complete such a goal,<sup>23</sup> but coming together as an international community will help take us closer to achieving our 2030 agenda to bring education - and all of its benefits - to the peoples of our world.

## **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER**

1. What kinds of political, economic, and security conditions are necessary to ensure that quality education can be accessed and maintained?
2. Has the international response thus far been effective in combating the issue of education insecurity? Why or why not?
3. What efforts of the current international response could be enhanced? What efforts need to be changed?
4. How does unequal access to education, particularly for women and girls, affect your country? What measures could your country take to help countries more affected?
5. Of the other sixteen Sustainable Development Goals, which could be addressed while dealing with Sustainable Development Goal 4?
6. How can we accelerate efforts to achieve the goals of the 2030 Agenda?

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<sup>23</sup> Delegates are advised to read their country's 2019 opening Plenary speeches. Many delegations (though not all) have made comments about the different challenges to education access for women and girls within their country, as well as steps they are currently taking to tackle the issue. It might be helpful to look over your country's comments while writing your stances on the issue.

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## **ENSURING UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS**

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The fifth Sustainable Development Goal of the United Nations is Gender Equality. Specific targets within SDG 5 include ending all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere, enhancing the use of enabling technology-- in particular information and communications technology-- to promote the empowerment of women, and the elimination of all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation.<sup>1</sup> In total, nine targets were created by the United Nations to ensure that women and girls will be treated equally relative to their male counterparts.

Around the world women and girls bear a disproportionate share of unpaid work, are shut out of politics, and have more limited access to proper health care, credit, governmental services, and so much more. When Member States work towards meeting the targets laid out in SDG 5, they are ensuring not only more opportunities for women, but healthier and happier lives for them as well. That is why target 5.6, which calls for universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development as well as the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences, is so important.<sup>2</sup>

### **REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS**

Indicator 5.6.1 of SDG 5 says that women aged 15-49 years should be able to make their own informed decisions regarding their sexual relations, contraceptive use and reproductive health care.<sup>3</sup> This means that all women should be able to tell their partner or husband no in regard to sexual

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<sup>1</sup> "SDG 5: Achieve Gender Equality and Empower All Women and Girls." *UN Women*, [www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/women-and-the-sdgs/sdg-5-gender-equality](http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/women-and-the-sdgs/sdg-5-gender-equality).

<sup>2</sup> "Sustainable Development Goal 5 - Achieve Gender Equality and Empower All Women and Girls." *United Nations*, [United Nations.sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg5](http://United Nations.sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg5).

<sup>3</sup> "Sustainable Development Goal 5 - Achieve Gender Equality and Empower All Women and Girls." *United Nations*, [United Nations.sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg5](http://United Nations.sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg5).

intercourse, have the ability to use any form of contraceptive, and make their own choices about their health care.<sup>4</sup> According to the SDG Tracker, only a woman who can say "yes" to all three components of reproductive rights is considered a woman who makes her own decisions regarding sexual relations and reproductive health care. Having the opportunity to do this is considered a basic human right, which is why it is outlined in SDG 5. The United Nations is asking Member States to meet this indicator by 2030. However, the amount of freedom that women have to make these decisions varies throughout the world.

In 2015 the SDG Tracker collected data from approximately 27 countries. Of these countries Senegal, Mali, Niger, and Chad were in the 0-20% category while there were no countries in the 80-100% range of women who are able to say yes to all three components. Additionally, the United Nations Stats says that indicator 5.6.1 data only looks at women who are married or in unions with male partners. Of the data collected by the United Nations and shared at the Gender Statistics Meeting in October 2017, only 45 Member States protected a woman's right to decline sexual intercourse with their husband or partner. For question two, women who are married or in unions and using contraceptives were asked if they are the sole person deciding if they use the contraceptives they are on and 59 countries were able to answer "yes." Further, no countries were able to indicate that women make their own decisions in regard to their own reproductive health care; however, when asked about health care in general, 60 countries responded "yes." Finally, 45 countries had data that said "yes" to all three questions. But, of these 45 countries the highest percentage of women who were able to answer "yes" to all three components was, as of 2007, Ukraine with 81%. More recently the highest percentage was, as of 2015, Rwanda at 70%. Unfortunately not all of these estimates have been validated, which means Member States and the United Nations as a whole still have a lot of work to do in order to meet SDG 5 indicator 6.1.<sup>5</sup>

#### Reproductive Rights are Human Rights: A handbook for National Human Rights Institutions

was created to lend a helpful hand to national human rights institutions by giving them the tools that

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<sup>4</sup> Ritchie, Roser, Mispy, Ortiz-Ospina. "Measuring progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals." *SDG-Tracker.org, website* (2018).

<sup>5</sup> Jhamba, Tapiwa. "Update on Development of SDG Indicators 5.6.1 & 5.6.2." *United Nations Statistics Division, unstats.un.org/unsd/iaeggs/Meetings/Rome\_October\_2017/docs/1.1%20UNFPA.pdf*.

they may need in order to better integrate reproductive rights into their countries. "Maternal mortality, gender-based violence, lack of access to appropriate health care and an absence of family planning services drive violations of reproductive rights across the world."<sup>6</sup> With the help of the United Nations Population Fund (UNPFA), the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR), and the Danish Institute for Human Rights, this lengthy handbook not only gives guidance on what reproductive rights look like but also provides individual complaints that have been made and talks about regional information.

One individual complaint that is provided in the handbook is CEDAW/C/50/D/22/2009. This case was about a young girl who was sexually abused in 2006 and became pregnant. After surviving a suicide attempt in March 2007, she had to undergo surgery, but due to the pregnancy her operation was cancelled. The girl and her mother requested an abortion but were told no by the hospital over a month later. The Deputy Defender for Women's Rights stepped in to help during this time. In June of 2007 the girl suffered from a miscarriage and was told that the decision the medical board had come to was not subject to appeal. In early July 2007 she underwent surgery and is now paralyzed from the waist down. Ultimately the committee found the State in violation of the girl's human rights and right to health and gave recommendations such as reviewing their laws on therapeutic abortion.<sup>7</sup>

Another example of how nations are addressing reproductive rights in their country is Malaysia. According to the handbook, "the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia conducts regular sessions with school students to raise awareness about human rights issues." Further, the commission has helped the Malaysian government in areas that they aren't doing as well in through their population policy. By addressing these issues and giving the government guidance, they are able to help prevent Malaysia from taking away its peoples human rights.

The United Nations and other entities suggestions are not always accepted by Member States; however, this evidence shows that the suggestions being given can be impactful. Each day Member

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<sup>6</sup> *Reproductive Rights Are Human Rights*, O HCHR, UNPFA, and the Danish Institute for Human Rights, 2014. Accessed on 8 July 2019. [Online]. Available: <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/NHRIHandbook.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> *Reproductive Rights Are Human Rights*, O HCHR, UNPFA, and the Danish Institute for Human Rights, 2014. Accessed on 8 July 2019. [Online]. Available: <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/NHRIHandbook.pdf>



States progress towards equality, but not without help or resources. By taking advantage of the help and resources that are provided to them, Member States can work towards being less harmful to women's human rights as in the previously mentioned case of the girl who was sexually abused, and instead be more supportive as in Malaysia. However, it is important to point out that the United Nations has done much more than just create handbooks and track Member States' progress in implementing and protecting reproductive rights as a way to provide help to them.

## **SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH CARE**

SDG indicator 5.6.2 tracks "the number of countries with laws and regulations that guarantee full and equal access to women and men aged 15 years and older to sexual and reproductive health care, information and education."<sup>8</sup> In 2006, the Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health reiterated in A/61/338 that every person deserves the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. This explicitly includes women's right to sexual and reproductive health care that is not only good quality but also accessible both physically and economically and without discrimination.<sup>9</sup> This right necessarily extends beyond just having access to healthcare. It also includes education for both sexes on the issues involved with sexual and reproductive health, including but not limited to sex education in regard to opposite sex as well as same sex relationships.<sup>10</sup>

The United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) meets every year to discuss humanitarian affairs. This year E/RES/2019/14 was developed and two paragraphs were added in regards to sexual and reproductive health. Clause 42 urges Member States to guarantee reliable and safe access to reproductive health care services as well as health care and psychosocial support services. It also recognizes that to help prevent mortality and morbidity in women, girls, and infants during emergency situations relevant reproductive services may be needed. Further, clause 47 urges

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<sup>8</sup> Ritchie, Roser, Mispy, Ortiz-Ospina. "Measuring progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals." *SDG-Tracker.org, website* (2018).

<sup>9</sup> "Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights." *United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Women/WRGS/Pages/HealthRights.aspx.*

<sup>10</sup> "Sexual and Reproductive Rights." *Amnesty International, www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/sexual-and-reproductive-rights/*

Member States to ensure the basic humanitarian needs of people such as food, clean water, sexual and reproductive health care, and education. It also urges Member States to address these things as components of humanitarian response with sufficient and adequate resources.<sup>11</sup>

While in session, the United States spoke out against these clauses, which were agreed language from past resolutions, and asked for a vote to remove them. They disagreed with clause 42 and 47 because they believed that "while women should have equal access to health care, these paragraphs should not be interpreted as providing a right to abortion and that the definition of "sexual and reproductive health" needs clarification." Other countries such as the Holy See and Brazil agreed with this point made by the U.S.<sup>12</sup>

Other organizations--both within the United Nations system and outside it--are dedicated to helping the world reach the goals laid out in SDG 5. Some work on an international basis, while others stick to their home turf. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), for example, works to demonstrate the interconnectedness of the Sustainable Development Goals and how progress in meeting one goal will help the international community succeed in another. More specifically, UNFPA contends that "population dynamics - including growth rates, age structure, fertility and mortality, migration and more - influence every aspect of human, social and economic development."<sup>13</sup>

UNFPA also keeps data on how different regions of the world are progressing with respect to a variety of health-related areas, including program expenses, family planning, midwifery, and child marriages. For instance, the Adolescent and Youth Dashboard shows that of the 28 African countries that there is data for, only 11 reported that over 30% of women and girls aged 15-24 have comprehensive knowledge on HIV. Furthermore, the World Population Dashboard shows that, as of 2019, 12% of the world's women who are aged 15-49 and married or in a union have an unmet need for family planning. The highest percentage is in Africa and the Arab States, while the lowest percentage is in regions such as North and South America and Europe.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> "E/RES/2019/14," *United Nations Economic and Social Council*, 8 July 2019, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N19/202/70/PDF/N1920270.pdf?OpenElement>.

<sup>12</sup> McBride, Michael, "Report for UNHCR on ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment, 2019."

<sup>13</sup> "Frequently Asked Questions," *United Nations Population Fund*, United Nations, [www.unfpa.org/frequently-asked-questions](http://www.unfpa.org/frequently-asked-questions).

<sup>14</sup> "UNFPA Data," *United Nations Population Fund*, United Nations, [www.unfpa.org/data](http://www.unfpa.org/data).

## CONCLUSION

At the September 2019 SDG Summit, the General Assembly adopted the final draft of the Political Declaration. This declaration stressed ECOSOC's theme of interconnectedness among the SDG's while also providing a framework for tracking the progress of Member States in meeting the 2030 goals. Commitment number ten in the declaration affirms that gender equality is not only crucial to achieving other SDG's but that "...full human potential and sustainable development is not possible if one half of humanity continues to be denied full human rights and opportunities." In addition to this, commitment number 20 acknowledges that progress is too slow in numerous areas such as lowering starvation rates, addressing climate change, and promoting gender equality. Based on this assessment, it is clear that Member States still have much work to do not only on the international level, but on a national one as well. The Political Declaration recommits the General Assembly and its Member States to "leave no one behind" and ensure that Member States focus on the poorest and most vulnerable communities, including indigenous people, those living with HIV/AIDS, migrants, children, and other historically marginalized groups. Finally, this call also asserts a commitment to "...targeted and accelerated action to remove all legal, social, and economic barriers to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, and the realization and enjoyment of their human rights."<sup>15</sup>

Sustainable Development Goal 5 is in place to ensure that women and girls enjoy not only the same human rights as their male counterparts, but also as each other throughout the world. Target 5.6's goal is to ensure that women and girls have equal and universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, overcoming global and regional inequalities in areas such as access to contraceptives, sex education, and HIV/AIDS knowledge. The United Nations recognizes that progress is too slow and more needs to be done, but it is also important to not disregard the progress that has been made. By keeping that progress in mind, ECOSOC's recognition of how the SDG's are interconnected, and the areas that need more focus or adjustment, Member States should

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<sup>15</sup> The General Assembly, "Gearing up for a Decade of Action and Delivery for Sustainable Development: Political Declaration of the SDG Summit." United Nations, September 2019.

be able to work together to not only meet the goal of universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, but meet the goals of all of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

### **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER**

1. Does your country protect women's sexual and reproductive health in its constitution? If so, how? What other de facto and de jure protections exist?
2. Are there cultural and/or religious reasons your country has for preventing some types of sexual and reproductive health care such as abortions or contraceptives? Do other countries with similar cultural and/or religious profiles have similar limits? Why or why not?
3. What are some of the financial obstacles that the women in your country face in regard to sexual and reproductive health care? Has your country found ways to overcome them?
4. Does your country provide sex education? If so, what approach does it take?

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## **PROMOTING THE ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN**

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MUNFW 70th Session – Commission on the Status of Women

Gender inequality and violence against women is one of the most widely spread issues in the world, with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) stating that almost 20% of women aged 15-49 reported sexual or physical violence from an intimate partner within the last 12 months. Women are more likely than men to live below 50% of the median income, women representation in national Parliaments is about 23% and only 52% of women married or in a union are able to freely make decisions about their sexual relations, contraception, and health care. In 18 countries, husbands can legally prevent their wives from working; in 39 countries, daughters and sons do not have equal inheritance rights; and 49 countries lack laws protecting women from domestic violence. Globally, over 200 million women and girls around the world have been subjected to female genital mutilation and over 750 million will be married before the age of 18.<sup>1</sup>

United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 is to achieve gender equality and empowering all women and girls. Many targets set forth for this goal are far from being achieved: eliminating gender inequality in its entirety; eliminating harmful practices such as forced, early and child marriage; ending female genital mutilation and eliminating all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation. Despite efforts to achieve these targets, gender discrimination still exists in every corner of the world.

## **PROGRESS OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 5**

According to the article, "Trends in Global Gender Inequality",<sup>2</sup> literacy rates among women since 1970 have increased dramatically, jumping from 11.2% to 44%. While this is still not representative

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<sup>1</sup> UNSDG 5 Reports and Figures

<sup>2</sup> Shawn F. Dorius and Glenn Firebaugh, 'Trends in Global Gender Inequality', *Social Forces*, 88.5 (2010), 1941–68  
<<https://doi.org/10.1353/sof.2010.0040>>.



of parity, this shows that global trends of gender inequality are declining. The Global Gender Gap<sup>3</sup> report published in 2018 also shows that overall progress for closing global gender gaps is at an average of about 68%. The subindexes closest to parity are Education Attainment and the Health and Survival gaps, those being at just 4.4%. The larger gaps are somewhat staggering; the Economic Participation and Opportunity gap is at 41.9% while the Political Representation gap is the largest gap at 77.1%. overall, the average gender gap still remains to be closed. Only the Economic Participation and Opportunity gap has declined slightly since the year before the 2017 report.

In "Gender Inequality in Political Representation: A Worldwide Comparative Analysis,"<sup>4</sup> studies found that possible cultural and political obstacles to equal political representation include religious ideals, certain political systems, enforcement of traditional roles for women, the fact that several nations have not ratified the UN Convention on Eliminating Gender Discrimination, and the small share of women in professional occupations. Political systems with multi-member district electoral systems are reported to have a positive effect on women's political representation, as well as countries that experienced an early women's suffrage movement. Marxist and Leninist governments also seem to promote political representation for women.

The practice of child marriage has continued to decline around the world, with most of the progress taking place in South Asia, where a girl's risk of being married as a child has decreased by about a quarter between 2013 to 2018. Female genital mutilation has decreased by about a quarter in 30 countries where the practice is concentrated and representative data is available. Progress has been made on the issue of gender based budgeting: based on data from 69 countries, 13 have met the criteria of having a tracking system that measures and makes public their available gender based budgeting system, while 41 countries are approaching the criteria.

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<sup>3</sup> 'Global Gender Gap Report' *World Economic Forum*, (2018) <[http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GGGR\\_2018.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2018.pdf)>

<sup>4</sup> Kenworthy, Lane, and Melissa Malami. "Gender Inequality in Political Representation: A Worldwide Comparative Analysis." *Social Forces*, vol. 78, no. 1, 1999, pp. 235–268. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/3005796](http://www.jstor.org/stable/3005796).

## ECONOMIC STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE UNITED STATES

According to the American Psychological Association, the socioeconomic status of women highly affects the overall quality of life and well-being of women. In a report by the U.S. Census Bureau in 2015, poverty rates for women were substantially higher than those of men, with more than 1 in 7 women living in poverty in 2014. In 2012, the poverty rates for women was 14.5% compared to 12% for men,<sup>5</sup> while in all ethnic groups women faced higher poverty rates than that of white, non-Hispanic men.<sup>6</sup>

In recent years, the pay gap between men and women has essentially plateaued, despite steady progress over recent decades. In the 10 years between 2004 and 2014, the earnings ratio slightly increased from 78 percent in 2013 to 79 percent in 2014, the pay gap remains at 21 percent.<sup>7</sup> This percentage places the United States at rank 19 in the Global Gender Gap report for economic participation and opportunity. In 2015, women with a high school diploma were paid 80 percent of what men with a high school diploma were paid. Women with postgraduate degrees were paid 74 percent of what their male counterparts were paid.<sup>8</sup>

Women in lower socioeconomic classes face a variety of negative health issues and outcomes for them and their children. Results of breast cancer studies indicate that women living with breast cancer are 11 percent more likely to die if they live within lower income communities;<sup>9</sup> women with a lower socioeconomic status who have no insurance have the lowest rates of mammography screening among women aged 40-64, increasing their risk of death from breast cancer.<sup>10</sup>

Along with these harmful physical health issues, a number of negative psychological problems affect women of a lower socioeconomic status such as pre and post-partum depression, anxiety,

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<sup>5</sup> Entmacher, J., Robbins, K. G., Vogtman, J., & Frohlich, L. (2013). *Insecure and unequal: Poverty and income among women and families 2000-2012*. Washington, DC: National Women's Law Center.

<sup>6</sup> Eichener, A., & Robbins, G. (2015). *National snapshot: Poverty among women & families, 2014*. Retrieved from <https://nwlc.org/resources/national-snapshot-poverty-among-women-families-2014/>

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (XXXX). Current population survey (CPS), 2014 annual social and economic (ASEC) supplement, 2013 poverty table of contents, POV29. Years of school completed by poverty status, sex, age, nativity and citizenship. Retrieved from [http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/cpstables/032014/pov/pov29\\_100.htm](http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/cpstables/032014/pov/pov29_100.htm)

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (2006). American Community Survey: Selected economic characteristics. Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/acs/www/index.html>

<sup>9</sup> Du, X. L., Fang, S., & Meyer, T. E. (2008). Impact of treatment and socioeconomic status on racial disparities in survival among older women with breast cancer. *American Journal of Clinical Oncology*, 31, 125-132. doi:10.1097/COC.0b013e3181587890

<sup>10</sup> Sabatino, S. A., Coates, R. J., Uhler, R. J., Breen, N., Tangka, F., & Shaw, K. M. (2008). Disparities in mammography use among U.S. women aged 40-64 years, by race, ethnicity, income, and health insurance status, 1993 and 2005. *Medical Care*, 46, 692-700. doi:10.1097/MLR.0b013e31817893b1

addiction and violent victimization. At two and three months postpartum, women with low income have been found to experience significantly more depressive symptoms than women with high-income,<sup>11</sup> which the WHO cites as a direct result of the daily stressors and reduced support systems that are attached to low employment rank.

## **POLITICAL STATUS OF WOMEN AROUND THE WORLD**

UN Women published statistics on the political power held by women around the world and found it varies widely by region. Nordic countries vastly outnumber every other region in the world for average percentage of women in parliament, with 42.5% as of February 2019. The Americas follow at 30.5%; Europe including Nordic countries, 28.6%; Europe excluding Nordic countries, 27.2%; sub-Saharan Africa, 23.9%; Asia, 19.8%; Arab States, 19%; and the Pacific, 16.3%.

According to the data from the UN SDG Report of 2019, in 103 countries women's representation in locally elected bodies varied from less than one percent to over 50%. UN Women reports that as of June 2019, there are 11 women serving as Heads of State, 12 serving as Head of Government, while as of February 2019, there are 27 States in which women account for less than 10% of parliaments, including three chambers with no women at all.<sup>12</sup> Rwanda currently has the highest percentage of women serving in parliament at 61.3% of seats in the lower house.<sup>13</sup> Rwanda is only one out of three countries that have parliaments consisting of over 50% women, followed by Cuba with 53.2% and Bolivia with 53.1%.<sup>14</sup> As of February 2019, 55 countries have reached 30% of parliamentary representation of women including 22 countries in Europe, 12 in Sub-Saharan Africa, 12 in Latin America and the Caribbean, two in the Pacific and one each in Asia and Arab States.<sup>15</sup> Most of these countries have applied some form of quotas that open space for women in political participation and decision making.

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<sup>11</sup> Mulia, N., Schmidt, L., Bond, J., Jacobs, L., & Korcha, R. (2008). Stress, social support and problem drinking among women in poverty. *Addiction*, 103, 1283-1293. doi:10.1111/j.1360-0443.2008.02234.x

<sup>12</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union. "Women in national parliaments," as at 1 February 2019.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> UN Women calculation based on IDEA, Stockholm University and IPU, Global DataBase of Quotas on Women, <http://www.quotaproject.org/>, and IPU, <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm>.

In the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, gender balance in political participation and decision making is an internationally agreed upon target.<sup>16</sup> Leadership by women in political decision making and participation has been proven to improve those processes.<sup>17</sup> Research on local councils in India found that the number of drinking water projects increased by over 62% in areas with women-led councils compared to those within areas with male-led councils.<sup>18</sup> Research in Norway also found that there was a direct causal relationship between funding for childcare coverage and the presence of women in municipal councils.<sup>19</sup>

## Conclusion

Organizations such as UN Women and the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women have taken great strides in covering the gaps that have existed in gender equality for centuries. These gaps, however, is still very present and until complete parity in gender rights and status is achieved women will always be at a disadvantage. Gender violence such as female genital mutilation and forced marriages remains rampant across the world and the economic and political status of women suffer as a result. This is why more initiatives and policies must be enacted in order to lessen the consequences of such actions and free women around the world of these misogynistic practices. It is not enough to simply end the violence against women, but the level of economic and political participation of women must be increased in order to fully embrace gender equality. The upheaval of archaic gender roles is also a step many countries will have to consider in order for women to lift their status within a region that still clings to old cultural beliefs. The promotion of the economic and political status of women has far reaching benefits beyond that of just gender equality and the fight for equal opportunities and participation for women is of utmost importance.

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<sup>16</sup> Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Critical Area G 'Women, Power and Decision-Making'

<sup>17</sup> UN Women. 'In Brief: Women's Leadership and Political Participation.'

<sup>18</sup> R. Chattopadhyay and E. Duflo (2004). "Women as Policy Makers: Evidence from a Randomized Policy Experiment in India," *Econometrica* 72(5), pp. 1409–1443

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## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What gender gaps still exist in your state? What steps has your state taken to reduce them?
2. Has your country ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women? Why or why not?
3. Does your state have prevalent cultural beliefs on gender roles? Do these impede the improvement of the status of women?
4. What has your country done to help with the promotion of the status of women within your country? What about around the world?
5. How has your country's past policies affected the current status of women? Current policies?
6. When did women gain suffrage within your country? How much has their status improved since then?
7. What do you think the international community should do to improve the status of women?

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