

Forum: Human Rights Commission (Sub Commission 2)

Issue: Promoting gender equality and women's empowerment

Student Officer: Melis Huda Kaya

Position: Deputy President



Introduction

Promoting gender equality and empowering women is the third out of eight MDGs. Almost every country has a history of women facing mistreatment, irrespective of the country's level of progressiveness, and in order to achieve their current status, women have had to exhibit resilience. Women still face obstacles as they're still not entirely entitled to the same rights as men. They generally have fewer opportunities, fewer resources, lower status, and less power and influence than men, preventing them from flourishing and exhibiting their full potential.

Women in the developing world are often denied opportunities for education. According to UN Women, "each additional year a girl spends in school can also boost her earnings as an adult by up to 20 per cent." However, denying women their fundamental right to education hinders their opportunities to learn and develop. Additionally, women in the workforce earn about 20 percent less than men, reducing their lifetime earnings and causing them to have less money to support themselves, care for their families and communities, and save and invest for the future. Devastatingly, women continue to face violence including but not limited to human trafficking, sexual violence, and forced marriages.

Due to COVID-19, these inequalities have been worsened as the pandemic has led to increased levels of violence against women, increased unpaid care work, unprecedented job losses, and school closures. Nations are now needed to cooperate with each other in order to help amplify gender equality and grant women the equal rights and opportunities they are entitled to.

Definition of Key Terms

Empowerment

The process of becoming stronger in controlling one's own life. For instance, the empowerment of women refers to the process of them gaining control over their lives by promoting their sense of self-worth and their ability to make their own choices.

Discrimination

Treating someone unfairly or differently based on factors such as their gender, background, or

race. Examples include denying them equal opportunities and rights, unequal pay, or exclusion.

Gender equality

The principle of making sure that women and men have the same opportunities and rights, allowing them to reach their full potential. It means recognizing their differences and similarities but recognizing them as equal. This equality ensures that rights and opportunities aren't determined by gender.

Gender-based violence

A broad term encompassing any harmful act committed against a person's will due to gender differences. Forms of GBV differs across cultures. Examples include sexual violence, domestic abuse, trafficking, forced marriage, and harmful traditional practices like female genital mutilation.

Gender bias

The unfair treatment of individuals solely because of their gender, or in other words, favoritism in attitudes, behaviors, or policies. For instance, a striking example of gender bias is manifested in the gender pay gap, where men get paid more than women.

Background Information

The issue of the lack of gender equality is not an unfamiliar issue that the world has come across; it is still a prominent issue even after several protests, movements, and conventions. However, this issue has gained significant attention and people have begun to realize that gender equality and women's empowerment are crucial on society's journey to development.

Between the late 19th century and early 20th century, the suffrage movement took place, which was a significant event in empowering women and enabling them to participate in politics. During the 19th century, there were discussions taking place regarding women's inability to vote. World War I provided the suffragists with an opportunity for them to argue that women played a key component in the war and used this to emphasize women's patriotism. Suffragettes persistently challenged societal norms and discriminatory laws that hindered women's political participation. As a result of their endless perseverance, the 19th Amendment in the United States was ratified, which granted women voting rights. The suffrage movement is a key example of an event that significantly influenced future movements that advocated for women's rights in spheres other than politics.

Although this movement inspired advancements in women's rights and gender equality by challenging oppressive norms, gender inequality unfortunately still remains as an enduring issue. This issue regarding the 'promoting gender equality and women's empowerment' will be split into three different sub-topics in order to further develop and expand understanding on this topic. Sub topic 1 delves into the establishment of a safe environment for women against gender-based violence. Sub topic

2 talks about the elimination of gender bias in education. Sub topic 3 focuses on rectifying the disparity in gender pay gaps. This section of the research report will look at each one of these subtopics in detail.

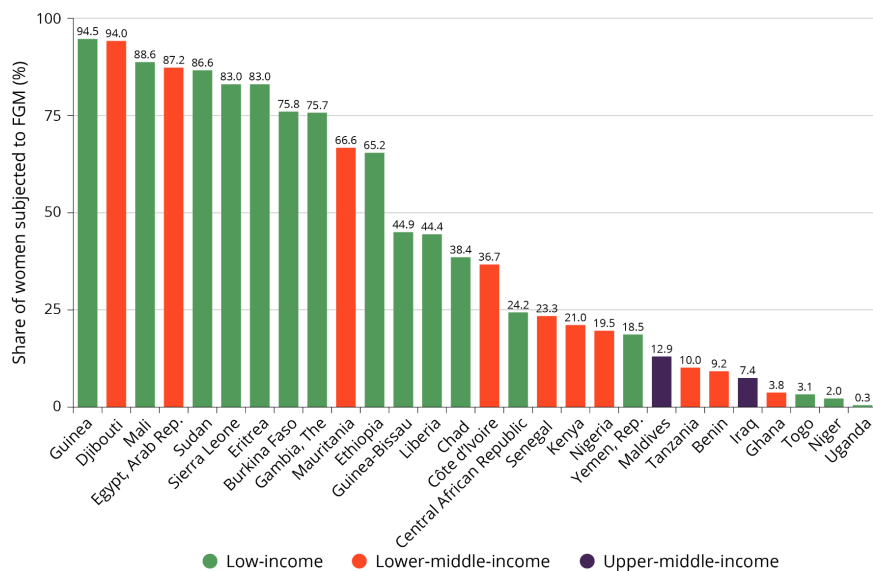
Sub-topic 1: Establishing a safe environment for women against gender-based violence

Although there are ongoing efforts to achieve gender equality, women still face inequality manifested in the form of gender based violence due to several reasons. One reason is due to culture. Society's deep-rooted beliefs and traditions often support fixed roles for men and women, forced marriages, and forms of GBV. This makes it hard to prevent gender-based violence, as these norms may make violence against women seem normal. According to UN Women, nearly half of child marriages globally occur in South Asia, and among those around 1 in 4 are married before the age of 15. As a result of child marriage, young girls are deprived of their childhood, education, their own opportunity to personally develop. In addition, they're more susceptible to domestic violence due to their limited autonomy. Another factor of culture is the persistent use of female genital mutilation (FGM), a term which refers to the partial or total removal of the external female genitalia for non-medical reasons. Although aware of its detrimental health effects on women, this practice is still on-going. Thus, these deeply-rooted beliefs and traditions unfortunately give men a sense of entitlement and power over women.

The second reason is due to legal reasons. According to UN Women, about 33 out of the 195 nations in the UN have no laws against domestic violence and 48 do not have laws on sexual harassment in the workplace. This causes a lack of trust in public authorities, therefore contributing to low reporting rates as women may be victims to being unfairly blamed for the violence that they've experienced. In addition, some countries fail to separate the public sphere from the private sphere, causing women to be vulnerable to domestic violence.

The third reason is due to economic factors. For instance, the COVID-19 pandemic led to increased economic strain for several individuals due to job losses, lockdowns, business closures, and disruptions in employment. This economic stress, along with being in lockdown with their abusers, led to an increase in abusive behavior. Furthermore, there's the issue with economic dependence. For instance in relationships, economic dependence can create power imbalances, therefore reducing the sense of independence the financially dependent person has. This dependence and lack of resources could therefore make it difficult to leave abusive situations or seek help against GBV. Poverty also plays a crucial role in this, as families who are in need of money will make use of forced child marriages in order to earn financial support from the new son-in-law, which can lead to further forms of GBV such as sexual violence for the young brides.

This leads us to the issue of the lack of political representation women get. According to UN Women, “only 26.5 percent of parliamentarians in single or lower houses are women, up from 11 per cent in 1995.” This statistic emphasizes how laws are being taken into consideration without considering the impact on those most affected. However, increasing women's representation faces challenges, as women in the parliament are also victims of GBV, with 82% reporting psychological violence with social media accounting for 44% of incidents. Additionally, 65% have experienced sexist comments at work.



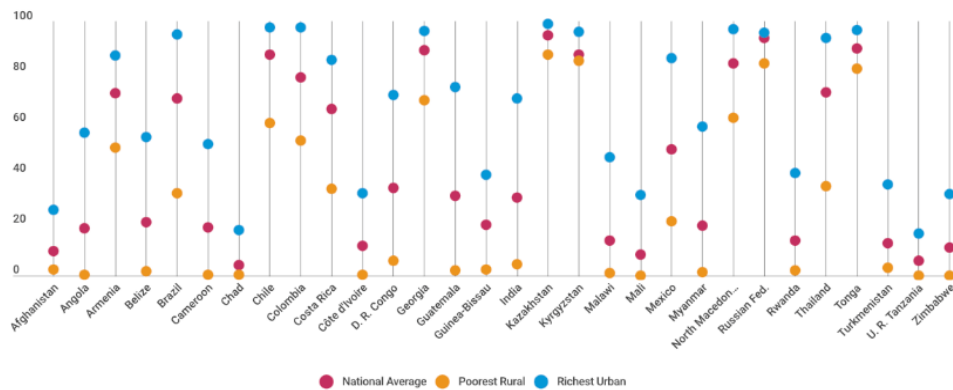
Sub topic 2: Eliminating gender bias in education to safeguard the universal access to education for all genders

Women and young girls are still denied the right to education, which is a fundamental human right. This exclusion limits girls' access to quality learning opportunities and also limits society from prospering. According to UN Women, “each additional year a girl spends in school can also boost her earnings as an adult by up to 20 per cent.”

Traditional gender norms and culture strongly affect the disparity in education. For instance, many societies expect girls to focus on household chores and caregiving instead of focusing on their education, which hinders their opportunity to learn. Parents might think that educating boys will lead to better jobs for them, which adds to the challenges girls face in education. In addition, early marriages play a crucial role in this disruption. When girls marry young, there's a very low chance that they'll be able to continue with their education, continuing the cycle of gender inequality. Pregnancy as a result of young marriage is also crucial. Pregnant girls get denied the education they have a fundamental right to because after getting pregnant, they're not considered children anymore. Furthermore, they often don't get provided with support, services, or resources during and after their birth.

Another factor is economic constraints. Due to a lack of money in the families, it's harder for girls to do well in school and remain there. If their parents can't afford things such as school fees, books, uniform, transportation, and lunches, girls are more likely to struggle and even quit in order to support their family. Furthermore, parents tend to depend on girls' income to survive and support their family. Sending their girl to school means that they're going to spend less time gaining money and earning income. If families can't afford the costs of school, they're more likely to send boys than girls. When parents have to make the decision between buying necessities like food over sanitary napkins, girls are forced to stop learning because they can't manage their periods. Families will also allow their girls to enter child marriages if they can no longer afford to provide for them.

Women aged 20-29 who have completed upper secondary school, by location and wealth, selected countries, 2015-2019 (percentage)



Sub topic 3: Addressing and rectifying the disparity in gender pay gaps

One factor that plays a huge role in gender pay gaps is the fact that women tend to pursue lower-paid careers. This is due to social norms and stereotypes, as women sometimes go on to pursue fields that are perceived as “easier” or more “feminine”, which hinders them from participating and potentially excelling in male-dominated fields. These jobs that are perceived as more “feminine” are therefore unfortunately subjected to receiving lower pay while men often secure jobs with a higher pay. Additionally, in some workplaces, women and men are segregated as some workplaces are predominantly male or female.

Another factor is motherhood. Women often face challenges in trying to balance their work life with their family life, as being a mother can often lead to career interruptions or reduced working hours. Women take more job-leaves than men, often due to medical factors such as childbirth, or even due to child-caring. These lower-paying jobs tend to offer more flexibility to them and allow them to prioritize their child. Moreover, due to the fact that women often adjust their working hours to fulfill caregiving

responsibilities and other unpaid commitments, they have a higher likelihood of engaging in part-time employment. This part-time status provides them with lower hourly wages and fewer benefits when compared to their full-time workers.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women)

UN Women actively advocates for gender equality and women's empowerment by enacting laws, offering services, and fostering awareness to combat violence against women and girls in some countries. For instance, they've strengthened the legal frameworks against domestic violence in Serbia, Ukraine, and Kosovo, aligning their Criminal Codes with the Istanbul Convention. UN Women aids in developing National Strategies and Action Plans in Georgia, North Macedonia, and Moldova, acting as tools for government accountability. Through the program 'Implementing Norms, Changing Minds' in the Western Balkans and Turkey, UN Women empowers marginalized women by amplifying their voices through community representation. Additionally, UN Women promotes gender equality and women's rights through educational programs and training in China and Kyrgyzstan. The #StopTheRobbery campaign by UN Women raises awareness about the global gender pay gap, highlighting the impact of women losing 23% of their salary.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1979

CEDAW, established by the United Nations in 1979, is a vital human rights treaty for women, currently ratified by 189 states. CEDAW empowers women globally to combat discrimination, addressing issues like violence, poverty, and legal disparities. The treaty has played a significant role in shaping citizenship, inheritance, property, and political rights in various countries, including Botswana, Japan, Tanzania, and Costa Rica. Additionally, CEDAW has encouraged many legislative changes worldwide, influencing gender equality laws, domestic violence regulations, and anti-trafficking measures.

Norway

Norway, also one of the top-three donors for UN Women, is very committed to gender equality, which is reflected in their development policy which prioritizes girls' education, women's political participation, economic empowerment, and ending violence. Norway's contributions in 2020 were significant, ranking fourth in total resources and eighth in regular resources for UN Women. Norway's support has played a crucial role in empowering women in conflict zones, such as Syria and Colombia, and facilitating the inclusion of indigenous and Quilombola women in Brazil. In Malawi, Norway supports

the Women's Empowerment Programme, which focuses on gender equality, changing harmful social norms, ending GBV, and enhancing women's participation.

Sweden

Sweden, one of the top-three donors for UN Women, is one of the countries most dedicated to gender equality, involving annual consultations to assess progress. Their goals include promoting women's and girls' rights, economic empowerment, ending violence, supporting women's roles in peace processes, and advocating for sexual and reproductive rights. Sweden co-leads the Generation Equality Action Coalition on Economic Justice and Rights, which strives to amplify women's voices and concerns. Furthermore, Sweden provides support to women in Turkey's political leadership, combating violence against women in South Sudan, and ongoing efforts to enhance women's representation in leadership roles. The Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) generously funds programs fostering gender equality, and Sweden maintains an active National Committee for UN Women, contributing to the Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women.

Timeline of Events

Date (start - end)	Name	Description
July, 19-20, 1848	Seneca Falls Convention	This was the first woman's rights convention, where 68 women and 32 men signed the Declaration of Sentiments, which listed the injustices endured by women.
May, 29th, 1851	"Ain't I a Woman?" speech	Sojourner Truth, a former slave, passionately challenged gender and racial inequalities with her speech at the Women's Rights Convention.
May 15, 1869	Formation of the National Woman Suffrage Association	Co-founded by Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, this association was dedicated to advocating for women's rights and coordinated

		the national suffrage movement.
April 2, 1917	Jeanette Rankin	Jeannette Rankin was a dedicated supporter of women's suffrage and she went on to become the first woman to be elected to Congress as a member of the House of Representatives.
August 18, 1920	The Ratification of the 19th Amendment	This amendment granted American women the constitutional right to vote.
June 10, 1963	Equal Pay Act	President John F. Kennedy signed this act into law, which aimed to address gender-based wage disparities by authorizing equal pay for equal work.
July 2, 1964	Civil Rights Act	President Lyndon B. Johnson signed this act into law, which outlawed discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin.
June 23, 1972	Title IX of the Education Amendments	President Richard Nixon signed this act into law, which prohibits sex-based discrimination in educational programs and activities.
January 22, 1973	Roe V. Wade	This decision established the constitutional right to access safe and legal abortion.
July 7, 1981	Sandra Day O'Connor	Sandra Day O'Connor was the first woman to serve on the U.S.

		Supreme Court.
January 20, 2021	Kamala Harris	Kamala Harris becomes the first woman and first woman of color to be the vice president of the United States, which symbolizes a breakthrough in gender and racial barriers.

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, CEDAW 1979 (**A/RES/34/180**)
- Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 21 Oct 2015 (**A/RES/70/1**)
- Resolution 1325, 31 October 2000 (**S/RES/1325**)
- Women's participation in peacebuilding, 07 September 2010 (**A/65/354–S/2010/466**)
- Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, 24 December 2015 (**A/70/674**)

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

In order to aid in the empowerment of women and promotion of gender equality, there have been solutions to ensure long term development and aid. UN Women provides education, allows women to voice their concerns and stories, and holds member states accountable. Their program, 'Implementing Norms, Changing Minds,' focused on amplifying the voices of marginalized women in the Western Balkans and Turkey. Furthermore, UN Women conducted educational programs, revised curricula, and provided training for teachers, students, and parents to promote gender equality. In regions like China and Kyrgyzstan, UN Women implemented specific projects, including training sessions for teachers, students, and guardians, addressing issues such as child sexual abuse and harmful practices like bride kidnapping. Additionally, their #StopTheRobbery campaign was launched to raise awareness of gender pay gaps, emphasizing the global issue where women effectively lose 23% of their salary.

Possible Solutions

Sub-topic 1: Establishing a safe environment for women against gender-based violence

For the first sub topic of establishing a safe environment for women against gender-based

violence, solutions can include implementing and enforcing laws that specifically target gender-based violence, making sure that these laws carefully cover all aspects of these offenses. These laws would ensure a swift and fair legal process. Alongside these legal measures, it's important to train law enforcement to handle these cases with sensitivity and awareness. Furthermore, the creation of accessible and confidential reporting mechanisms, for example helplines and online platforms, can encourage survivors to come forward and voice their case without fear. Additionally, spreading awareness is key in order to change how people think and to challenge stereotypes that make it acceptable for GBV to occur. This solution could be achieved by running campaigns that challenge harmful societal norms, providing training, educating one another, and making sure that the topic of gender equality is ingrained in education. Moreover, it's important to work together. Collaborating with local organizations, NGOs, religious and community leaders, and grassroots movements can create a shared dedication to tackling this problem.

Sub-topic 2: Eliminating gender bias in education

For the second sub topic of eliminating gender bias in education, solutions can include implementing inclusive and diverse courses in schools that challenge stereotypes and shine a light on the women's achievements all throughout history. Through this, we would offer students a richer and more accurate portrayal of women's contributions. Additionally, schools should encourage girls to explore STEM fields by promoting mentorship programs and extracurricular activities that foster interest and confidence in these subjects in order to emphasize the unique perspectives and talents women are able to bring. Through the implementation of targeted policies and investments in school, we can ensure equal access to educational resources, facilities, and opportunities for both genders, especially in underprivileged areas. Furthermore, it's important to make teachers and administrators aware of gender bias and provide training that allows them to create inclusive learning environments.

Sub-topic 3: Addressing and rectifying the disparity in gender pay gaps

For the third sub topic of addressing and rectifying the disparity in gender pay gaps, solutions can include raising the minimum wage for women and promoting pay transparency. Promoting pay transparency allows employees to decipher whether they're being paid fairly and empowers employees to advocate for equal pay. In addition, offering flexible work hours and affordable childcare can make it easier for women to balance their jobs and family responsibilities. Instead of relying on salary history as a determining factor, employers should determine a salary range for the specific position being filled instead of deriving it from an individual's prior work experience. Since women are more likely to take leave, for instance for medical reasons such as birth or serious health conditions, implementing paid leave policies would provide them with a portion of their wages for a limited period when they need to take time off. Additionally, it's important to address the issue of sectoral segregation by encouraging

women to join fields that aren't typical for them through special hiring, training programs, and making workplaces safer.

Bibliography

- “About the Programme.” *UN Women – Europe and Central Asia*,
<https://eca.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/regional-programme-in-the-western-balkans-and-turkey/about-the-programme#issue>. Accessed 4 Dec 2023.
- “CEDAW in Your Daily Life | OHCHR - UN Human Rights Office.” *OHCHR*,
<https://www.ohchr.org/en/treaty-bodies/cedaw/cedaw-your-daily-life#:~:text=Adopted%20by%20the%20United%20Nations.currently%20has%20189%20states%20parties>. Accessed 3 December 2023.
- “Developing Data to End Violence against Women and Girls.” *The World Bank*,
<https://wdr2021.worldbank.org/spotlights/developing-data-to-end-violence-against-women-and-girls/>. Accessed 6 December 2023.
- “Education and Training of Women.” *UN Women*,
<https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/ending-violence-against-women/2014/education>.
 Accessed 3 December 2023.
- “Equal Pay for Work of Equal Value.” *UN Women – Headquarters*,
<https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/csw61/equal-pay>. Accessed 3 December 2023.
- “Facts and Figures: Ending Violence against Women .” *UN Women – Headquarters*,
<https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures#83921>. Accessed 4 Dec 2023.
- “Facts and Figures: Women’s Leadership and Political Participation.” *UN Women – Headquarters*, 7 Mar.2023,
<https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures>. Accessed 4 Dec 2023.
- “Global Norms and Standards: Peace and Security.” *UN Women – Headquarters*,
[https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/peace-and-security/global-norms-and-standards#:~:text=Resolution%201325%20\(2000\)%20%5BS.post%2Dconflict%20peacebuilding%20and%20governance](https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/peace-and-security/global-norms-and-standards#:~:text=Resolution%201325%20(2000)%20%5BS.post%2Dconflict%20peacebuilding%20and%20governance). Accessed 3 December 2023.
- “The Impact of Covid-19 on Women” *UNSDG*, 9 Apr. 2020,
<https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-04/Policy-Brief-on-COVID-Impact-on-Women.pdf>.
 Accessed 3 December 2023.
- “Leaving No Girl Behind in Education.” *UN Women – Headquarters*, 11 Oct. 2022,
<https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/feature-story/2022/10/leaving-no-girl-behind-in-education>. Accessed 4 Dec 2023.
- “Preventing Violence Against Women and Girls Through Social Norm Change, *UN Women*,

<https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20ESEAAsia/Docs/Publications/2016/11/Social-Norm-Report-25-Nov.pdf>. Accessed Dec 4 2023.

“Realisation of the Equal Enjoyment of the Right to Education by Every Girl.” *OHCHR*,
<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Women/WRGS/ReportGirlsEqualRightEducation.pdf>. Accessed 4 Dec 2023.

“UN Women and Norway.” *UN Women*,
<https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Partnerships/Donor%20Countries/Partners-for-change-Norway-en.pdf>. Accessed 3 December 2023.

“UN Women and Sweden.” *UN Women*,
<https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Partnerships/Donor%20Countries/Partners-for-change-Sweden-en.pdf>. Accessed 3 December 2023.

Wack, Margaret. “9 Strategies for Narrowing the Gender Pay Gap.” *Money Under 30*, 31 Aug. 2023,
<https://www.moneyunder30.com/strategies-for-narrowing-the-gender-pay-gap/>. Accessed 3 December 2023.

“Why Do Women Earn Less?” *UN Women*,
https://africa.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-10/gpg_regional_report_un_women.pdf.
Accessed 4 Dec 2023.

“Women’s History Milestones: A Timeline.” *History.Com*, A&E Television Networks,
<https://www.history.com/topics/womens-history/womens-history-us-timeline>. Accessed 3 Dec. 2023.

“Women’s Suffrage.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 17 Oct. 2023,
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/woman-suffrage>. Accessed 3 December 2023.