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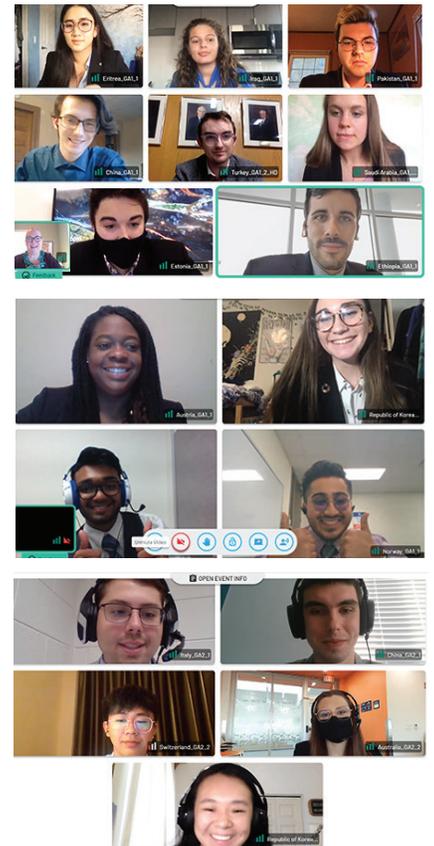
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# UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women Background Guide 2021

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# NATIONAL MODEL UNITED NATIONS



Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the 2021 National Model United Nations Conference in Washington, DC (NMUN•DC)! We are pleased to introduce you to our committee, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women). This year's staff is: Director Miranda Coleman and Assistant Director Janet N. Ekezie. Miranda holds a Bachelor of Arts with an emphasis in History and a Bachelor of Education. She is also an educator in Alberta, Canada. Janet holds a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Political Science and Philosophy from the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley.

The topics under discussion for UN Women are:

- I. Gender, Climate, Security
- II. The Digital Revolution: Implications for Gender Equality and Women's Rights

UN Women is the United Nations entity dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. UN Women supports Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with government and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes, and services needed to ensure the standards are effectively implemented and benefit women and girls worldwide. UN Women works to make the vision of the Sustainable Development Goals a reality for women and girls and promotes the UN systems work in advancing gender equality and respective agreements linked to the 2030 agenda. UN Women works to position gender equality as fundamental to the Sustainable Development Goals and focuses on four strategic priorities: leadership; socioeconomic autonomy; the eradication of all forms of violence; and equitable peace and security.

This Background Guide serves as an introduction to the topics for this committee. However, it is not intended to replace individual research. We encourage you to conduct additional research, explore your Member State's policies in-depth, and examine the policies of other Member States to improve your ability to negotiate and reach consensus. In preparation for the conference, each delegation will use their research to draft and submit a [position paper](#). Guidelines are available in the [NMUN Position Paper Guide](#).

The [NMUN website](#) has many additional resources, including two that are essential both in preparation for the conference and as a resource during the conference. They are:

1. The [NMUN Delegate Preparation Guide](#), which explains each step in the delegate process, from pre-Conference research to the committee debate and resolution drafting processes. Please take note of the information on plagiarism, and the prohibition on pre-written working papers and resolutions. Delegates should not discuss the topics or agenda with other members of their committee until the first committee session.
2. The [NMUN Rules of Procedure](#), which includes the long and short form of the rules as well as an explanatory narrative and example script of the flow of procedure.

In addition, please review the mandatory [NMUN Conduct Expectations](#) on the NMUN website. They include the conference dress code and other expectations of all attendees. We want to emphasize that any instances of sexual harassment or discrimination based on race, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, religion, age, or disability will not be tolerated. If you have any questions concerning your preparation for the committee or the conference itself, please contact the Under-Secretary-General Emma Ogg at [usgemma.dc@nmun.org](mailto:usgemma.dc@nmun.org) or Secretary-General Courtney Indart at [secgen.dc@nmun.org](mailto:secgen.dc@nmun.org).

We wish you all the best in your preparations and look forward to seeing you at the conference!

Sincerely,  
Miranda Coleman, Director  
Janet N. Ekezie, Assistant Director



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## Committee Overview

### Introduction

On a global scale, the world is far from achieving gender equality.<sup>1</sup> Given current rates of progress, it will take the international community 170 years to fully close the economic gender gap.<sup>2</sup> To advance efforts towards this goal at the international level, the General Assembly established the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) in July 2010 with the universal directive “to achieve gender equality, women’s empowerment, and upholding women’s rights.”<sup>3</sup> In 2010, civil society organizations (CSOs) and activists celebrated the decision of the General Assembly to consolidate the resources and mandates of the four existing gender equality-focused United Nations (UN) programs into one entity, in General Assembly resolution 64/289 titled “System-wide coherence.”<sup>4</sup>

The work of UN-Women is guided by the principles established in the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW), the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* (BPfA), UN Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on *Women and Peace and Security*, the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (2030 Agenda), which contains the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and other norms related to women’s rights and gender equality.<sup>5</sup> CEDAW and the BPfA are cornerstones of the activities of UN-Women and provide the overall guiding principles for its work.<sup>6</sup> Over the past 15 years, UN Member States have also gained greater awareness and understanding regarding the role women play in peace and security due in part to the adoption of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on *Women and Peace and Security*, and subsequent resolutions: 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009), 1889 (2009), 1960 (2010), 2106 (2013), 2122 (2013), and 2242 (2015).<sup>7</sup> These resolutions establish a foundation for improving the lives of women and girls in areas affected by armed conflict and guide efforts at the international, regional, national and local levels.<sup>8</sup> Supporting efforts to mainstream implementation of these global norms, as well as the principle of gender equality is central to UN-Women’s mandate and at the heart of the organization’s mission.<sup>9</sup>

At NMUN•DC 2021 we simulate the **Executive Board of UN Women** in terms of composition and size; however, we do not limit delegates to the strict mandate of the Executive Board as a budgetary and administrative body. At our conference we give permission for programmatic and policy decisions on issues within its mandate and overall function. This is in line with our educational mission and in recognition of our time and space constraints.

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<sup>1</sup> UN-Women, *United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women strategic plan, 2018-2021* (UNW/2017/6/Rev.1) 2017, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> UN General Assembly, *System-wide coherence (A/RES/64/289)*, 2010.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 8.

<sup>5</sup> UN-Women, *Guiding Documents*, 2018.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid; UN Security Council, *Women and Peace and Security (S/RES/1325 (2000))*, 2000; UN Security Council, *Women and Peace and Security (S/RES/1820 (2008))*, 2008; UN Security Council, *Women and Peace and Security (S/RES/1888 (2009))*, 2009; UN Security Council, *Women and Peace and Security (S/RES/1889 (2009))*, 2009; UN Security Council, *Women and Peace and Security (S/RES/1960 (2010))*, 2010; UN Security Council, *Women and Peace and Security (S/RES/2106 (2013))*, 2013; UN Security Council, *Women and Peace and Security (S/RES/2122 (2013))*, 2013; UN Security Council, *Women and Peace and Security (S/RES/2242 (2015))*, 2015.

<sup>8</sup> UN-Women, *Guiding Documents*, 2018.

<sup>9</sup> UN-Women, *United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women strategic plan, 2018-2021*, 2017.

## **Governance, Structure, and Membership**

UN-Women is governed by an Executive Board, which is responsible for intergovernmental support and supervision of all operational activities.<sup>10</sup> The Board consists of 41 members that are elected by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) for a term of three years and are allocated by regions as follows: ten from the group of African states, ten from the group of Asian states, four from the group of Eastern European states, six from the group of Latin American and Caribbean states, and five from the group of Western European and Other states.<sup>11</sup> The final six seats are allocated to contributing countries, from which four seats go to the countries that provide the highest voluntary contribution to UN-Women and two seats to developing countries.<sup>12</sup>

UN-Women is led by an Executive Director, who is considered a senior official at Under-Secretary-General (USG) level.<sup>13</sup> The current Executive Director, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, was appointed in 2013.<sup>14</sup> The Directorate performs the administrative functions of UN-Women and is responsible for human resources, including employment in operational activities.<sup>15</sup> The Executive Director also reports to the Secretary-General and works to improve system-wide coordination by seeking exchange with other agencies and programs both inside and outside the UN system.<sup>16</sup> The normative processes of UN-Women are funded by the regular budget of the UN.<sup>17</sup> However, its operational activities depend on voluntary contributions from its members.<sup>18</sup> In 2019, voluntary contributions from governments and member organizations to UN-Women added up to a total budget of US \$390.4 million.<sup>19</sup>

## **Mandate, Functions, and Powers**

The mandate for UN-Women, articulated in General Assembly resolution 64/289, is to provide “guidance and technical support to all Member States, across all levels of development and in all regions, at their request, on gender equality, the empowerment and rights of women and gender mainstreaming.”<sup>20</sup> The mandate is separated into policy and norm-setting activities, and operational activities in cooperation with UN Member States.<sup>21</sup> The work of UN-Women is a combination of four formerly separate UN agencies: the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, the Division for the Advancement of Women of the Secretariat, the United Nations Development Fund for Women, and the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women.<sup>22</sup>

UN-Women serves as the secretariat to the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW).<sup>23</sup> CSW is responsible for the overall formulation of standard-setting policies, while UN-Women is responsible for carrying out these policies in its operational activities in the field.<sup>24</sup> UN-Women also provides substantive policy support to the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), and the Security

<sup>10</sup> UN General Assembly, *System-wide coherence (A/RES/64/289)*, 2010.

<sup>11</sup> *UN-Women, UN-Women Executive Board Members, 2018*; UN General Assembly, *System-wide coherence (A/RES/64/289)*, 2010, p. 10.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>14</sup> UN-Women, *Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka*, 2018.

<sup>15</sup> UN General Assembly, *System-wide coherence (A/RES/64/289)*, 2010, pp. 11-12; UN-Women, *About Us: Directorate*, 2021.

<sup>16</sup> UN General Assembly, *System-wide coherence (A/RES/64/289)*, 2010, p. 10-12.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10-12.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10-12.

<sup>19</sup> UN-Women, *Annual Report 2019-2020*, 2020, p. 15.

<sup>20</sup> UN General Assembly, *System-wide coherence (A/RES/64/289)*, 2010, p. 9; UN-Women, *About UN Women*, 2021.

<sup>21</sup> UN ECOSOC, *Normative aspects of the work of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women: Report of the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (E/CN.6/2018/2)*, 2018.

<sup>22</sup> UN-Women, *About UN Women*, 2018.

<sup>23</sup> UN General Assembly, *System-wide coherence (A/RES/64/289)*, 2010, p.11.

<sup>24</sup> UN ECOSOC, *Normative aspects of the work of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women: Report of the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (E/CN.6/2018/2)*, 2018.

Council in their efforts to advance the global agenda on gender equality.<sup>25</sup> UN-Women is also mandated to hold the UN system accountable for its efforts to mainstream gender across all aspects of its work, including coordinating the UN's work for gender equality under the 2030 Agenda.<sup>26</sup>

UN-Women's areas of activity include ensuring gender equality in leadership and political participation, economic empowerment, ending gender-based violence, issues of peace and security, humanitarian response, youth and girls, the response to HIV/AIDS, governance and national planning, and supporting the 2030 Agenda.<sup>27</sup> To fulfill part of its mandate as a normative body, UN-Women works closely with other UN bodies, programs, and funds, as well as civil society organizations (CSOs) and Member States, in designing adequate policies, laws, programs, and services.<sup>28</sup> Within the UN system, UN-Women supports CSW in setting global standards and norms.<sup>29</sup> It does so by submitting an informative annual report to the Commission regarding the implementation of the Commission's policy guidance, and submits a second annual report to the General Assembly through ECOSOC on UN-Women's operational activities, as well as research, policy analysis, and recommendations for further action.<sup>30</sup> The chairperson of CSW can also be invited to address the Executive Board of UN-Women directly.<sup>31</sup> The General Assembly and ECOSOC can also request that UN-Women hold additional sessions for specific issues when deemed necessary.<sup>32</sup>

On an operational level, UN-Women facilitates regional conferences and meetings with CSOs and national policymakers and provides training for Member States in implementing standards through technical and financial support.<sup>33</sup> This includes support in formulating new laws or strategies, working on national educational programs, training women to run more efficient political campaigns, or assisting CSOs in becoming national advocates for gender equality.<sup>34</sup> Depending on the area of action, UN-Women can work together with other programs and funds, among them the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Food Programme (WFP), and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).<sup>35</sup> The results of UN-Women operational programs help drive the development of evidence-based normative standards and policies by CSW.<sup>36</sup>

### **Recent Sessions and Current Priorities**

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid; UN General Assembly, *Comprehensive proposal for the composite entity for gender equality and the empowerment of women: Report of the Secretary-General (A/64/588)*, 2010, p. 5.

<sup>26</sup> UN General Assembly, *System-wide coherence (A/RES/64/289)*, 2010, p. 9.

<sup>27</sup> UN-Women, *What we do*, 2018.

<sup>28</sup> UN-Women, *Annual Report 2017-2018*, 2017, p. ii.

<sup>29</sup> UN-Women, *About UN Women*, 2021.

<sup>30</sup> UN General Assembly, *System-wide coherence (A/RES/64/289)*, 2010, p. 11; UN ECOSOC, *Normative aspects of the work of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women: Report of the Under-Secretary-General/Executive Director of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (E/CN.6/2018/2)*, 2018; UN-Women, *About UN Women*, 2021.

<sup>31</sup> UN General Assembly, *Comprehensive proposal for the composite entity for gender equality and the empowerment of women (A/64/588)*, 2010, p. 16.

<sup>32</sup> UN-Women Executive Board, *Draft rules of procedure of the Executive Board of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) (UNW/2011/6)*, 2011.

<sup>33</sup> UN-Women, *Annual Report 2017-2018*, 2017; UN General Assembly, *Comprehensive proposal for the composite entity for gender equality and the empowerment of women: Report of the Secretary-General (A/64/588)*, 2010.

<sup>34</sup> UN-Women, *United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women strategic plan, 2018-2021*, 2017; UN General Assembly, *Comprehensive proposal for the composite entity for gender equality and the empowerment of women: Report of the Secretary-General (A/64/588)*, 2010.

<sup>35</sup> UN-Women, *United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women strategic plan, 2018-2021*, 2017, p. 3.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p. 13; UN General Assembly, *Comprehensive proposal for the composite entity for gender equality and the empowerment of women: Report of the Secretary-General (A/64/588)*, 2010.

UN-Women plays a significant role in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the achievement of the SDGs.<sup>37</sup> The 2030 Agenda provides a strategic roadmap for the international community to enhance human rights, ensure greater and equal access to basic services, and build capacity for the development of inclusive societies.<sup>38</sup> UN-Women is responsible for creating indicators for SDG 5, “Gender Equality,” and has developed an action plan to work with Member States, CSOs, and other UN agencies to develop the indicators for reporting on progress for SDG 5.<sup>39</sup> Of the 17 SDGs, 11 were determined to have gender-specific indicators, while the remaining 6 are “gender-blind.”<sup>40</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly disrupted progress towards the achievement of the SDGs and has caused regression in certain categories. Most notably, the COVID-19 pandemic is causing a resurgence in extreme poverty which disproportionately affects women, with 47 million women being pushed into poverty as a result of COVID-19.<sup>41</sup> Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to increased violence against women and girls, an increase in school drop-out rates for girls, and a rise in care responsibilities and child marriages.<sup>42</sup> Among all of the SDGs, 51 gender-specific indicators have been identified as of 2020, revealing specific inhibitors to women in key areas.<sup>43</sup>

In January 2018, the Executive Board received General Assembly resolution 71/243 on the “Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review of Operational Activities for Development of the United Nations System” (QCPR) (2018), which reviewed progress on UN-Women’s core initiatives.<sup>44</sup> The 2018 QCPR emphasized the need for enhanced gender mainstreaming across the international system and called for the additional reporting on gender targets by country program teams.<sup>45</sup> The annual session also reviewed the summary results for the Fund for Gender Equality and the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women, which together funded more than 145 projects and reached more than 390,000 direct beneficiaries.<sup>46</sup> These funds provide sponsorship of programs that directly aid women in: starting new businesses; gaining greater access to training and education; and preventing violence against women, including refugees and women with disabilities.<sup>47</sup>

UN-Women’s *Strategic Plan 2018-2021* outlines the organization’s priorities and expected outcomes, lessons learned, guiding principles, and outputs for UN-Women to achieve greater organizational efficiency.<sup>48</sup> The plan creates 5 key outcomes, driven by the 2030 Agenda, that intersect multiple SDGs and SDG targets.<sup>49</sup> It further notes the benefit of the organization’s combination of a normative and operational mandate, and that, although there is progress being made in achieving normative policy frameworks supporting women, peace, and security, there is still a significant gap when it comes to operational implementation.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> UN-Women, *Turning Promises into Action: Gender Equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, 2018.

<sup>38</sup> UN General Assembly, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*, 2015.

<sup>39</sup> UN-Women, *Turning Promises into Action: Gender Equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, 2018, p. 53.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>41</sup> UN-Women, *Press Release: COVID-19 will widen poverty gap between women and men, new UN Women and UNDP data shows*, UN Women, 2020.

<sup>42</sup> UN-Women, *Statement by Acting Executive Director of UN-Women, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, on International Women’s Day 2021: Change up the Pace: Women at the Table* on 8 March 2021.

<sup>43</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Gender Snapshot 2020*, 2020.

<sup>44</sup> UN-Women Executive Board, *Annex III: Implementation of General Assembly resolution 71/243 on the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review of Operational Activities for Development of the United Nations System (QCPR)*, 2018.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> UN-Women Executive Board, *Annex IV: Summary Results of the Fund for Gender Equality and the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women*, 2018.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> UN-Women, *United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women strategic plan, 2018-2021*, 2017.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

At its second session of 2020, UN-Women introduced the *Strategic Plan 2022-2025* which strongly reaffirms the dedication of UN-Women to its function of normative intergovernmental support.<sup>51</sup> The plan focuses in on the four following key areas: governance and participation in public life, economic empowerment and resilience, ending violence against women and girls, and peace, security, humanitarian action, and disaster risk reduction.<sup>52</sup> UN-Women’s consequent transformative actions will be underpinned by its triple mandate and align with three thematic areas including, ” (1) operational activities, with a focus on knowledge and evidence-based programming and delivering at scale; (2) supporting the development and implementation of intergovernmental norms and standards for women’s human rights; and (3) partnering and coordinating, including through further leveraging our UN System coordination mandate.”<sup>53</sup> Sessions throughout 2021 have and will continue to discuss outcomes from the *Strategic Plan 2018-2021* and debate the *Strategic Plan 2022-2025*.<sup>54</sup>

The Sixty-fifth session of the Commission on the Status of Women also took place in March of 2021 and resulted in the reaffirmation of the need to strengthen normative, legal, and regulatory frameworks, prevent and eliminate violence against women in public life, strengthen gender-responsive institutional reforms, increase the availability of high-quality financing in support of women’s participation in public life, strengthen women’s voices, and address root causes of gender inequality and eliminate barriers to women’s full and equal participation.<sup>55</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Since 2011, UN-Women has played a vital role in leading and coordinating the UN system in actions to achieve gender equality.<sup>56</sup> UN-Women’s three part mandate of strengthening normative policy frameworks, assisting Member States in operational activities, and coordinating with the UN system on issues related to gender equality; positions UN-Women to have substantial impact on achieving gender equality globally.<sup>57</sup> Upcoming priorities for UN-Women include: work related to the SDGs, and more particularly SDG 5 and ensuring that women and girls are safe and free from violence, have access to decent work and economic autonomy, play a greater role in peace-building, and benefit equally from humanitarian responses.<sup>58</sup> While UN-Women takes action in a number of important areas, their work relies on cooperation from the international community and commitments from Member States to implement policies and frameworks that support gender equality.<sup>59</sup>

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*This report of the USG of UN-Women to ECOSOC clarifies the linkage between UN-Women and the CSW. This source will help delegates identify the distinct features of the CSW as a functional commission reporting to ECOSOC, and UN-Women as a composite,*

<sup>51</sup> UN-Women, *UN-Women Executive Board First regular session 2021 Background note: Draft Strategic Framework for UN-Women’s Strategic Plan 2022 – 2025*, 2021.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> UN ECOSOC, *Commission on the Status of Women, Sixty-fifth Session, Women’s full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls (E/CN.6/2021/L.3)*, 2021.

<sup>56</sup> UN-Women, *United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women strategic plan, 2018-2021*, 2017, p. 7.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, p. 7.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, p. 7.

<sup>59</sup> UN-Women, *Turning Promises into Action: Gender Equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, 2018.

*operational entity. The report of the Executive Director of UN-Women will be helpful to understand how UN-Women supports and complements the work of CSW. The report highlights key CSW reports, the relationship with the General Assembly, ECOSOC, and the Security Council, and UN-Women's role in implementing policy advice and guidance from CSW.*

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women. (2017). *United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women strategic plan, 2018-2021 (UNW/2017/6/Rev.1)*. Retrieved 16 April 2021 from: <http://undocs.org/en/UNW/2017/6/Rev.1>

*The strategic plan gives a comprehensive outlook on UN-Women's current priorities, including UN-Women's work on the SDGs. It also deepens the understanding how UN-Women achieves its goals. It puts the work of UN-Women in context of the UN system and explains how UN-Women is influencing the work of other UN bodies. Delegates will find this source helpful as it also clarifies the UN-Women's role in improving coherence and coordination within the UN system, as well as the key outcomes that will be achieved by the work of UN-Women under the guidance of the strategic plan.*

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women. (2018). *Turning Promises into Action: Gender Equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. Retrieved 11 April 2021 from: <http://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2018/sdg-report-gender-equality-in-the-2030-agenda-for-sustainable-development-2018-en.pdf?la=en&vs=5653>

*UN-Women's flagship report "Turning Promises into Action" on the SDGs provides detailed information on the progress and on-going difficulties in implementing the 2030 Agenda, specifically regarding gender equality. Delegates will find this report an authoritative source on how gender issues are incorporated in the 2030 Agenda, and how data is being collected, monitored, and in some cases, where additional data is needed. The report focuses on the intersectionality of issues that face women and girls, and how mainstreaming gender equality is a critical component in implementing the 2030 Agenda.*

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## I. Gender, Climate, and Security

### **Introduction**

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) describes climate change as a change to the average weather in a region which persists for an extended period, often increasing the frequency and severity of extreme weather events.<sup>60</sup> Climate change contributes to rising sea levels, desertification, an increase in precipitation, flooding, drought severity, and temperature extremes.<sup>61</sup> The effects of climate change are exacerbated by a region, community, group, or individual's capacity to cope and adapt to the changes in the environment, and subsequent human security factors.<sup>62</sup> Human security is the absence of conflict, within the context of individuals and groups, and is reflected broadly through elements of development such as economic, health, environmental, food, and political spheres, while occurring in a variety of levels like households, Member States, and regions.<sup>63</sup> Insecurity, which disproportionately affects women and marginalized groups, undermines their capacity to adapt, recover, or prevent climate change, exposing them to new challenges or exacerbating existing threats.<sup>64</sup> Women often face additional challenges in controlling and accessing resources, holding decision making power, and having freedom of mobility and migration, all of which are exacerbated by climate change.<sup>65</sup>

Women and girls, especially from marginalized groups and in rural and remote settings, are more vulnerable and face more security threats in climate crises.<sup>66</sup> An independent report commissioned by the G7 states that climate change compounds threats to peace and security by amplifying economic, social, and political challenges, like climate-related natural resource scarcity that leads to armed conflict and instability.<sup>67</sup> The 2019 *Annual Report on Women, Peace and Security* further states that “the global threat of climate change and environmental degradation is poised to exacerbate the already increasing number of complex emergencies, which disproportionately affect women and girls”.<sup>68</sup> There is, therefore, an urgent need for better analysis and concrete, immediate actions to address the linkages between climate change and conflict from a gender perspective.”<sup>69</sup>

### **International and Regional Framework**

In 1974, the General Assembly first identified the link between security and gender, particularly within emergency contexts such as extreme weather phenomena, in the *Declaration on the Protection of Women and Children in Emergency and Armed Conflict (A/RES/3318 (XXIX))*.<sup>70</sup> In 1995, at the Fourth World Conference on Women, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action outlined UN Women's mandate to evaluate progress and make actionable recommendations to improve the lives of women and girls through gender equality, stating that it is essential for stakeholders to identify the links between women and climate challenges to achieve sustainable development, and that women face unique challenges around security.<sup>71</sup> At the high level meeting on the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Beijing Declaration in 2020, Member States noted that the Declaration has still not been realized, and, although progress has

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<sup>60</sup> IPCC, *Global Warming of 1.5°C*, 2018.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> UN Women, *Gender, Climate and Security: Sustaining Inclusive Peace on the Frontlines of Climate Change*, 2020.

<sup>63</sup> UN Trust Fund for Human Security, *Human Security Handbook: An integrated approach for the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals and the priority areas of the international community and the United Nations system*, 2016.

<sup>64</sup> UN Women, *Gender, Climate and Security: Sustaining Inclusive Peace on the Frontlines of Climate Change*, 2020.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Rüttinger, *A New Climate for Peace – Taking Action on Climate and Fragility Risks*, 2016.

<sup>68</sup> Security Council, *Women and Peace and Security: Report of the Secretary-General (S/2019/800)*, 2019.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> UN General Assembly, *Declaration on the Protection of Women and Children in Emergency and Armed Conflict (A/RES/3318 (XXIX))*, 1974.

<sup>71</sup> UN Fourth World Conference on Women, *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*, 1995.

been made, women are still disproportionately underrepresented in peacebuilding and decision making, and largely affected by gender-based violence.<sup>72</sup>

Between 2000 and 2019 the Security Council adopted 10 resolutions on Women, Peace and Security, most notably resolution 1325, which calls for the inclusion of women in peacebuilding and building gender parity within the UN itself, and resolution 2122, which calls for actionable policy to eliminate sexual violence in conflict.<sup>73</sup> The Security Council 2019 Open Debate on addressing the Impacts of Climate-Related Disasters on International Peace and Security reflected that only 5 out of the 75 present Member States recognized the need to include gender considerations when mitigating climate-related security risks, such as armed militia groups guarding scarce resources.<sup>74</sup> In 2020 the General Assembly drafted the “Protection of global climate for present and future generations of humankind” which identifies the need for a greater reduction in omissions and calls upon Member States to expand their commitments to the Paris Agreement to prevent further harm from the climate crisis.<sup>75</sup>

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development includes SDG5, Gender Equality; SDG13, Climate Action; and SDG16, Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions.<sup>76</sup> Target 13.B of SDG13 calls for effective gender sensitive climate change planning, while SDG16 calls for an end of violence and trafficking which disproportionately affects women and girls.<sup>77</sup> In 2019, UN Women published *Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The gender snapshot 2019* to evaluate the progress and gaps in achieving the sustainable development goals through a gendered perspective, and includes recommendations for progress on women’s empowerment and gender equality.<sup>78</sup> This report explains the connection between gender, climate change, and human security, particularly looking at the gendered security challenges women and girls face that are exacerbated by the effects of climate change.<sup>79</sup> Recommended actions in the report include funding and on the ground support for implementing gender-conscious climate change planning and support, as well as outlining the gender dimensions of conflict, where women are typically left out of decision making and peacebuilding, leading to less effective policy and impunity for crimes related to gender-based violence and trafficking.<sup>80</sup>

### **Role of the International System**

UN Women, partnered with the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), the Peacebuilding Support Office of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), compiled a 2020 report, titled *Gender, Climate and Security: Sustaining Inclusive Peace on the Frontlines of Climate Change*, on how the experiences of men and women differ while considering climate-related security risks based on cultural gender norms and regional power structures.<sup>81</sup> In this report, UN Women recommends that Member States to use gender expertise in capacity building in order to include women in peacebuilding and policy development around climate and security challenges.<sup>82</sup> UN Women is building policies and legislation that include women as peace stakeholders in advancing gender equality, improving climate resistance, and sustaining peace and

<sup>72</sup> UN DPI, *Progress Towards Gender Equality Under Threat, World Leaders Warn as General Assembly Marks Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of Landmark Women’s Rights Conference (GA/12275)*, 2020.

<sup>73</sup> UN Women, *What We Do: Peace and Security*, 2021.

<sup>74</sup> UN Women, *Gender, Climate and Security: Sustaining Inclusive Peace on the Frontlines of Climate Change*, 2020.

<sup>75</sup> UN General Assembly, *Protection of Global Climate for Present and Future Generations of Humankind (A/RES/75/217)*, 2020.

<sup>76</sup> UN Women, *Gender, Climate and Security: Sustaining Inclusive Peace on the Frontlines of Climate Change*, 2020; UN General Assembly, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*, 2015.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> UN Women, *Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The gender snapshot 2019*, 2019.

<sup>79</sup> UN Women, *Gender, Climate and Security: Sustaining Inclusive Peace on the Frontlines of Climate Change*, 2020.

<sup>80</sup> UN Women, *Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The gender snapshot 2019*, 2019.

<sup>81</sup> UN Women, *Gender, Climate and Security: Sustaining Inclusive Peace on the Frontlines of Climate Change*, 2020.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

security.<sup>83</sup> Working with advise from UN Women, the General Assembly has identified the inclusion of women in leadership, decision making, and peace building as essential to achieving peace and security during climate crises.<sup>84</sup> The General Assembly is also utilizing UNDP and UNEA to work with high risk Member States on building climate change capacity and resilience to promote security.<sup>85</sup> In 2016, the African Union Commission published the *Implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in Africa*, which identifies climate change as a growing challenge in mitigating gender issues in peace and security, especially as it relates to resource security and gender-based violence.<sup>86</sup> The European Union (EU) and UNEP are working collaboratively on supporting gender inclusive and climate resilient land and water resource management in Northern Africa.<sup>87</sup> With support from the EU, UN Women, UNEP, and UNDP developed the Programme on Women, which identifies women as agents of change for policy development and peacebuilding as the effects of climate change exacerbate insecurity.<sup>88</sup>

### **Addressing Conflict from a Gendered Perspective**

UN Women conducted a study with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) that revealed funding requests to support women and girls in climate-related conflict areas were fulfilled at only a rate of 51%.<sup>89</sup> To tackle this, UN Women is working with Member States to develop gendered action plans on climate and security.<sup>90</sup> As of 2020, there are 88 Member States that have established National Action Plans (NAPs) on Women, Peace and Security.<sup>91</sup> NAPs outline how Member States will implement their commitments and obligations under international frameworks, such as the ten Security Council resolutions on Women, Peace and Security.<sup>92</sup> Including women in the establishment of NAPs creates gender conscious public policy, while allowing Member States to identify priorities, such as eliminating gender-based violence, and allocating funding and resources, that best serve women and girls.<sup>93</sup> When women are not or only minimally included in the peacebuilding process, they are often left out of the agreements, resulting in a lack of support or planning for the unique needs of women and girls during recovery, and a less stable peace.<sup>94</sup>

According to UN Women, women are essential partners in increasing gender expertise in peacebuilding processes by bringing understanding of the causes and experiences of conflict, especially as women are disproportionately targeted in conflict for sexual and gender-based violence.<sup>95</sup> The UN defines conflict-related sexual violence as: “rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced abortion, enforced sterilization, forced marriage, and any other form of sexual violence... The term also encompasses trafficking in persons when committed in situations of conflict for the purpose of sexual violence/exploitation.”<sup>96</sup> According to a 2018 report from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 65% of human trafficking victims were female.<sup>97</sup> In 2019 the Security Council reported that 96% of documented conflict-related sexual violence globally targeted women or girls.<sup>98</sup> At the Security Council’s 7704th meeting, Member States identified sexual and gender-based violence as strategic elements of

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> UN DPI, *Progress Towards Gender Equality Under Threat, World Leaders Warn as General Assembly Marks Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of Landmark Women’s Rights Conference (GA/12275)*, 2020.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> African Union Commission, *Implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in Africa*, 2016.

<sup>87</sup> Climate Diplomacy, *Europe and Climate Security: Is Europe Delivering on its Rhetoric?*, 2020.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> UN Women, *Funding for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in humanitarian programming*, 2020.

<sup>90</sup> UN Women, *What We Do: Peace and Security*, 2021.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> UN Women, *National Action Plans*, 2016.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> UN Women, *Women, Peace and Security Annual Report 2019–2020*, 2020.

<sup>95</sup> UN Women, *What We Do: Peace and Security*, 2021.

<sup>96</sup> UN Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (S/2017/249)*, 2017.

<sup>97</sup> UNODC, *Global report on trafficking in persons*, 2020.

<sup>98</sup> UN Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence (S/2020/487)*, 2020

conflict, not incidental, meaning that armed groups use violence and the threat of violence against women and girls as a tactical strategy to take control over an area or group.<sup>99</sup>

According to a UN Women report, in the Asia Pacific region, changing weather patterns and an increase in the frequency and severity of extreme weather events has reduced availability of natural resources, impacting food security and increasing rates of lost livelihoods.<sup>100</sup> Food and financial insecurity have exacerbated social and political challenges, resulting in political instability and an increase in conflict.<sup>101</sup> These challenges are often compounded by environmental degradation from mining and other resource procurement, further increasing the effects of climate change in the area.<sup>102</sup> In response, UN Women has implemented a female police training initiative for gender responsive policing and encouraged the development of “peace villages” where local committees, that are 40% women on average, discuss peacebuilding and preventing violent extremism.<sup>103</sup> The Pacific Regional Action Plan notes the cycle of climate increasing insecurity and conflict affecting the climate, which exacerbates the vulnerabilities that women experience, and calls for climate planning, conflict prevention initiatives, and the inclusion of women in decision making.<sup>104</sup> UN Women has provided technical support in the region to draft NAPs by training women leaders and expanding the capacity of personnel to advocate in gender specific challenges in addressing security and climate.<sup>105</sup>

### **Resource Access, Management, and Security**

Women are disproportionately more dependent on agriculture, land, water, and other natural resources due to restrictions on mobility, decision making power, and financial independence, while often having little to no access to those resources.<sup>106</sup> These gender inequalities make women more vulnerable in conflict and environmental emergencies, impacting their ability to endure and recover from crises.<sup>107</sup> Women are disproportionately represented in poverty rates in regions that are more likely to experience natural disasters.<sup>108</sup> In most climate-related extreme weather events, the mortality rate for women is significantly higher than for men, due to having less access to healthcare and prioritization of children and the family over personal wellbeing.<sup>109</sup>

In central and northern Africa, climate change has impacted agriculture with a series of droughts and floods that have put strain on security.<sup>110</sup> Twelve million hectares of land are lost to desertification and drought annually, negatively impacting communities who rely on agriculture and livestock for their livelihoods.<sup>111</sup> Climate crises, such as flooding or drought, can shift pastoralist traditions and migration patterns, causing families to separate and increasing household burdens for women.<sup>112</sup> Women and girls’ time is almost exclusively used for unpaid care work such as childcare, cooking, cleaning, and care for the elderly, and they are often the sole care workers in the home.<sup>113</sup> In 80% of households that do not have piped water access, women and girls are responsible for the collection of water.<sup>114</sup> These gender norms leave women and girls highly vulnerable when experiencing food and water insecurity and lacking

<sup>99</sup> UN Women, *Gender, Climate and Security: Sustaining Inclusive Peace on the Frontlines of Climate Change*, 2020.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> UN Women, *Women, Peace and Security Annual Report 2019–2020*, 2020.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> UN Women, *National Action Plans*, 2016.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> UN General Assembly, *Improvement of the Situation of Women and Girls in Rural Areas: Report of the Secretary-General (A/74/224)*, 2019.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> UN Women, *Gender, Climate and Security: Sustaining Inclusive Peace on the Frontlines of Climate Change*, 2020.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> UN General Assembly, *Improvement of the Situation of Women and Girls in Rural Areas: Report of the Secretary-General (A/74/224)*, 2019.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

access to other resources due to a climate crisis.<sup>115</sup> For example, in areas that experience drought and desertification, women often travel long distances, typically on foot, to access water.<sup>116</sup> These long journeys are difficult for small children, so often mothers or teenage girls travel alone or in small groups while another female member of the family takes on the burden of child and elderly care.<sup>117</sup> In destabilized areas with little access to fresh water, water collection places are commonly areas of conflict or controlled by armed groups or militias, known for perpetrating sexual and gender-based violence.<sup>118</sup> The vulnerability women face in water collection is expected to increase in scope and severity as climate change develops over time.<sup>119</sup> Water scarcity is expected to displace 700 million people by 2030, further increasing the risks that women and girls face to meet their basic needs.<sup>120</sup> Additionally, large populations of men and boys are leaving their families to join armed militia groups or terrorist organizations, like Boko Haram, to secure an income, being radicalized from climate-related resource scarcity.<sup>121</sup> With the abdication of a perceived head of the household, women and children are left without access to resources and highly vulnerable to violence and theft.<sup>122</sup> This trend also exposes boys to becoming child soldiers and increases conflict and violence in already conflict-affected and insecure regions.<sup>123</sup> This increase in conflict leads to greater instability overall and an escalation in the climate-related scarcity of resources.<sup>124</sup> Improving women's access and ability to manage resources such as food, livestock, land, drinking water, and secure incomes mitigates some of the effects of climate change on gender, peace, and security.<sup>125</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Climate change amplifies threats to peace and security, and a lack of security inhibits a Member State's ability to adapt to climate change.<sup>126</sup> UN Women recommends that women contribute meaningfully to the establishment of National Action Plans on climate and security, as well as peacebuilding and stabilizations efforts.<sup>127</sup> Utilizing women's perspectives and experiences mitigates gendered challenges and risks brought about by climate and conflict crises.<sup>128</sup> Women are assets in all phases of peacebuilding and contributing to legislation and programs that support and improve access to, and management of, resources.<sup>129</sup> Listening to the voices of women addresses gender specific risks, especially in conflict fragile and insecure regions, while mitigating the effects of climate change.<sup>130</sup>

### **Further Research**

How can Member States amplify the perspectives of women in climate and security legislation and policies? What can Member States do to mitigate gender-related risks in crises? How can UN Women and Member States reduce food and water insecurity due to climate change? How can UN Women mitigate the effects of gender roles during times of scarcity? How can Member States minimize resource and financial insecurity for women?

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> UN Women, *Gender, Climate and Security: Sustaining Inclusive Peace on the Frontlines of Climate Change*, 2020.

<sup>119</sup> UN Statistics, *Ensure Availability and Sustainable Management of Water and Sanitation for All*, 2021.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> UN Women, *Gender, Climate and Security: Sustaining Inclusive Peace on the Frontlines of Climate Change*, 2020.

<sup>122</sup> UN Women, *Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The gender snapshot 2019*, 2019.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> UN Women, *Gender, Climate and Security: Sustaining Inclusive Peace on the Frontlines of Climate Change*, 2020.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> UN General Assembly, *Improvement of the Situation of Women and Girls in Rural Areas: Report of the Secretary-General (A/74/224)*, 2019.

<sup>129</sup> UN Women, *What We Do: Peace and Security*, 2021.

<sup>130</sup> UN Women, *Gender, Climate and Security: Sustaining Inclusive Peace on the Frontlines of Climate Change*, 2020.

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*This report conducted by the Secretary-General reviews strategies, policies, and legislation put in place by Member States to build climate resilience capacity for women and girls living in remote and rural areas. Economic stability reduces the effects of conflict and climate crises that exacerbate systematic discrimination and gender inequality that women already face. The document explains the economic connection between climate change and women, and how Member States and UN bodies, such as UN Women, can take actions to better support women's financial stability. Section 9 looks specifically to the link between climate and security, and sections 15-26 have concise, Member State specific case studies that show strategies to improve climate and security resilience for women. Delegates will find this document to be a detailed source for finding recommendations and a monitoring framework to improve the lives of rural and remote women.*

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. (2019). *Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The gender snapshot 2019*. Retrieved 22 February 2020 from:

<https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2019/progress-on-the-sdgs-the-gender-snapshot-2019-two-page-spreads-en.pdf?la=en&vs=5814>

*In this document, UN Women gives a detailed account of the strategies and progress that Member States and UN bodies have made in realizing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Goals. The document also identifies the gaps in service, including recommendations for improvement and monitoring, through a gender lens. The document includes concise infographics that clearly indicate gender specific indicators and statistics. It is recommended that delegates focus their research on the sections on SDG 5 Gender Equality, SDG 13 Climate Action, and SDG 16 Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions. The last section of this document lists the gender specific indicators of SDG achievement, which calls attention to commitments of policy that delegates can use as a launching point in research and when drafting resolutions.*

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. (2020). *Gender, Climate and Security: Sustaining Inclusive Peace on the Frontlines of Climate Change*. Retrieved 15 February 2020 from:

<https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/gender-climate-and-security-en.pdf?la=en&vs=215>

*This document provides delegates with definitions of key concepts, such as intersectionality in National Action Plans and climate-related security risks. This document also includes case studies on the effects of climate and conflict on women in 11 different Member States, in regions such as Asia-Pacific, Latin America, the Middle East, and Africa. In section 3, the link between gender, security, and climate is highlighted through on-the-ground regional reports and data, while section 4 focuses on making tangible change through actionable policy recommendations. Delegates will find this document essential when researching steps that UN Women can facilitate to narrow the gender gap while increasing security and building climate resilience.*

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. (2020). *Women, Peace and Security Annual Report 2019–2020*. Retrieved 22 February 2020 from:

<https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/women-peace-and-security-annual-report-2019-2020-en.pdf?la=en&vs=3910>

*This document, published by UN Women, specifically looks at women's role in achieving peace and security as well as mitigating the effects that conflict has on women, girls, and children. The report identifies six action areas in section 2: Shaping the Global Agenda. The document also includes recommendations on preventing radicalization, building and sustaining peace, and increasing access to justice for women. The document gives guidance in establishing and progressing gender conscious National Action Plans, through including women and other marginalized voices when developing policy. Delegates will find this report to be a critical source*

on the link between gender and security, as well as how UN Women can utilize that link for peacebuilding.

United Nations Security Council. (2020). *UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (S/2020/487)*. Retrieved 22 March 2020 from: <https://undocs.org/en/S/2020/487>

*This report outlines the link between conflict-related sexual violence and security challenges exacerbated by climate change. The document illustrates the crucial distinction that sexual violence is not a symptom of insecurity but a strategic tenant in conflict, and that women must be included in addressing security crises to eradicate conflict-related sexual violence. The report uses case studies from around the world and addresses each one individually with regional specific recommendations to eliminate conflict-related sexual violence. Delegates will find a wealth of region and Member State specific statistics and information on conflict-related sexual violence, as well as recommendations on mitigating this form of violence.*

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## II. The Digital Revolution: Implications for Gender Equality and Women's Rights

### **Introduction**

According to the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), the digital revolution (the shift from analogue to digital technology) can enhance global socioeconomic status, grow productivity, increase wellbeing, and be a tool of empowerment, inclusivity, and equality.<sup>131</sup> Techno feminists responded to the digital revolution with optimism, arguing that the digital revolution can empower women and encourage gender equality.<sup>132</sup> In Moldova, girls are learning digital, information and communications technologies (ICTs), and entrepreneurial skills digitally through GirlsGoIT.<sup>133</sup> During Sudan's 2019 protests, rural women who are constrained by patriarchal power structures were able to share and promote their positions via social media.<sup>134</sup> However, due to a lack of representation in gender-responsive digital education, women are deterred from entering the evolving digital world and STEM education, which continues masculine biases in programming and artificial intelligence (AI).<sup>135</sup> Women's access to the Internet and mobile phones is approximately 85% the level of men, and 1.7 billion women are unconnected to the internet.<sup>136</sup> The barriers women and girls face in connecting with the digital society can affect their ability to engage with the world efficiently.<sup>137</sup> In the digital gender divide, women face challenges in accessing technology, including ICTs, covering connection costs, and lacking computer literacy.<sup>138</sup>

Although the digital society can empower women, women are disparaged socio-politically in the information society, as digital technology is not a gender-neutral tool but part of the broader, socio-political context in which it is used.<sup>139</sup> Digital gender gaps are often a reflection of a society's and economy's existing gender inequalities.<sup>140</sup> Data mining, algorithms, and machine learning models can lead to increased surveillance by governments and corporations and, "entrench existing inequalities and power dynamics."<sup>141</sup> Men also may continue to control women's access to and use of ICTs through financial dependence and control of their freedom of movement.<sup>142</sup> Women's experiences with digital technologies in this context is not homogenous and intersects with race, class, sexuality, disability, and age.<sup>143</sup> Yet, ICTs increase access to an information-based digital society, where the use, manipulation, creation, and spread of information has socio-political significance.<sup>144</sup>

### **International and Regional Framework**

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) called for gender equality and women's rights, and the *Convention on the Elimination of All Form of Discrimination against Women* (1979) set an international agenda for action to end gender-based discrimination.<sup>145</sup> In 1995, the Beijing Deceleration

<sup>131</sup> UN Women, *The Digital Revolution: Implications for Gender Equality and Women's Rights 25 Years after Beijing*, 2020.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> United Nations University, *Advancing Research for Gender Equality in the Digital Age*, 2019; UN Women, *The Digital Revolution: Implications for Gender Equality and Women's Rights 25 Years after Beijing*, 2020.

<sup>136</sup> UN Women, *The Digital Revolution: Implications for Gender Equality and Women's Rights 25 Years after Beijing*, 2020.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Kiran, *Gender Digital Divide: Does it Exist?* 2018.

<sup>139</sup> Halfpenny, *Digital Society and the Information Age*, 2015.

<sup>140</sup> UN Broadband Commission Working Group on Broadband and Gender, *Doubling Digital Opportunities: Enhancing the Inclusion of Women & Girls in the Information Society*, 2013, p. 6.

<sup>141</sup> UN Women, *The Digital Revolution: Implications for Gender Equality and Women's Rights 25 Years after Beijing*, 2020.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid, pp. 4, 11.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid, p. 5.

<sup>144</sup> Halfpenny, *Digital Society and the Information Age*, 2015.

<sup>145</sup> UN General Assembly, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (A/RES/217/A (III))*, 1948; UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (A/RES/34/180)*, 1979.

went further to advance equality, development, and peace for women, including ensuring access to technology and ICTs, and links such access to sustainable development.<sup>146</sup> In its strategic objectives, the Beijing Declaration calls for education for women and girls in ICTs and other STEM fields.<sup>147</sup> The declaration also advocates for the participation of women in decision-making regarding how those technologies are used and developed, aiming to increase women's productivity in all aspects of the digital society as well as countering negative misinformation and stereotypes regarding women's abilities.<sup>148</sup>

The General Assembly adopted resolution 56/183, *World Summit on the Information Society* in 2002, and both it and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) continue to adopt resolutions following up on the summit.<sup>149</sup> The 2019 General Assembly resolution 74/197, *ICTs for sustainable development*, addressed the digital gender divide, including the issue that in parts of the world the gap between women's and men's access to technology has grown rather than shrunk, and women's participation in decision-making processes and empowerment related to ICTs.<sup>150</sup> The ECOSOC resolution 2019/24, *Assessment of the progress made in the implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society*, called for eliminating the gender digital divide through improved, "connectivity, affordability, access to information and knowledge, multilingual content, digital skills and digital literacy," and acknowledging the specific needs of persons with disabilities and vulnerable groups.<sup>151</sup>

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development includes women's empowerment and equality throughout, including Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5: Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment.<sup>152</sup> SDG 5 states women and girls must have equal rights and live free from violence and discrimination, and includes using ICTs to empower women.<sup>153</sup> UN Women's Strategic Plan 2018-2021 outlines their strategic direction, objectives, and approaches to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, in line with the SDGs, including promoting women as innovators, developing technology solutions for gender equality, and advocating for the participation and visibility of women and girls in STEM.<sup>154</sup>

### **Role of the International System**

There are many entities and initiatives within the UN system working toward women's empowerment in ICTs alongside UN Women, including the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).<sup>155</sup> UN Women and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) co-chair the Broadband and Gender Working Group, which provides policy recommendations on digital inclusion for women, developing gender-sensitive applications for technology, and empowering women and girls through skills training and digital entrepreneurship.<sup>156</sup> The Broadband and Gender Working Group publishes reports as part of its work, including information on the socio-economic impact

<sup>146</sup> UN Fourth World Conference on Women, *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*, 1995.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> UN General Assembly, *World Summit on the Information Society (A/RES/56/183)*, 2002; UN ECOSOC, *Assessment of the progress made in the implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society (E/RES/2019/24)*, 2019; UN General Assembly, *Information and communications technologies for sustainable development (A/RES/74/197)*, 2020.

<sup>150</sup> UN General Assembly, *Information and communications technologies for sustainable development (A/RES/74/197)*, 2020.

<sup>151</sup> UN ECOSOC, *Assessment of the progress made in the implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society (E/RES/2019/24)*, 2019.

<sup>152</sup> UN General Assembly, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*, 2015.

<sup>153</sup> UN Women, *SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls*; UN General Assembly, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*, 2015.

<sup>154</sup> UN Women, *Strategic Plan 2018-2021: Harnessing the Digital Revolution for the Achievement of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment*, 2017.

<sup>155</sup> UN ECOSOC, *Assessment of the progress made in the implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society (E/RES/2019/24)*, 2019.

<sup>156</sup> UN Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development, *Broadband & Gender*, 2021.

of women's limitations in access to ICTs, and the general disconnect between National Broadband Plans and national gender policies, which rarely mention gender or ICTs respectively.<sup>157</sup> The Women's Major Group for Sustainable Development is a group of civil society organizations which facilitates women's participation in information sharing and policy input at the UN, including implementing the SDGs, at the General Assembly, ECOSOC, the Commission on the Status of Women, Commission on Population and Development, and regional sustainable development policy processes.<sup>158</sup> The Women's Major Group has advocated for the use of technology to solve social issues and close gender gaps at the UN.<sup>159</sup> ITU has leveraged partnerships within the private sector, UN agencies, and civil society to use ICTs to help close the gender digital divide by improving women's access to technology, challenging stereotypes about women working in technology, and providing skills training to women.<sup>160</sup> ITU, UN Women, the Global System for Mobile Communications Association, the International Trade Centre, and UN University launched EQUALS.<sup>161</sup> EQUALS is a global partnership of businesses, Member States, NGOs, and academic institutions that aims to increase women's access to digital technology, women's and girls' education in STEM, the number of women in leadership in ICT, and sharing of data on digital gender equality.<sup>162</sup>

In 2003, the greater UN system and the ITU held the first World Summit on the Information Society in Geneva, which resulted in the first plan of action that acknowledged the need to remove gender barriers to ICT education.<sup>163</sup> In 2015 in response to the ten year follow up conference on the World Summit on the Information Society, UN Women committed to implement and monitor commitments by Member States in four challenges women face in digital contexts: cyber-violence against women and girls; engagement in the information society by women and girls; full participation of women in decision-making processes related to ICTs; and women's access to technologies and their development.<sup>164</sup> Women Count, a UN Women initiative, aims to end gender data gaps, including challenges in digital contexts.<sup>165</sup> In 2018, UN Women and the Global Innovation Coalition for Change created the Gender Innovation Principles, which provide benchmarks on including women in the innovation of digital technology.<sup>166</sup> In 2020, UN Women produced a report on the implementation of its strategic plan on the digital revolution, which discusses the relationship between gender and technology, highlighting education, work, and welfare services as opportunities and risks.<sup>167</sup>

### **Digital Technology: A Socio-Political Actor**

Once defined solely by inequality in access to digital technology, the digital gender divide is now also about deficiencies in learning, skills, social services, and welfare for women.<sup>168</sup> Many women and girls can afford technology, but lack digital literacy skills to leverage the technology to feel empowered in their communities.<sup>169</sup> Globally, 327 million fewer women than men have a smartphone or access to the Internet, and UN women considers the problem of "ICTs for women's rights" to be an issue of an imbalance in power and inequality.<sup>170</sup> Multilateral efforts to close the digital skills gender gap at the regional or global level can help Member States meet their international commitments to education and

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<sup>157</sup> UN Broadband Commission Working Group on Broadband and Gender, *Doubling Digital Opportunities: Enhancing the Inclusion of Women & Girls in the Information Society*, 2013.

<sup>158</sup> Women's Major Group, *About Us*.

<sup>159</sup> Women's Major Group, *ECERFSD 2019: Ena Peeva's Intervention on Technology*, 2019.

<sup>160</sup> UN Women, *Reshaping the future: Women, Girls, ICTS, and the SDGs*, 2017.

<sup>161</sup> EQUALS Global Partnership, *About EQUALS*, 2021.

<sup>162</sup> EQUALS Global Partnership, *About EQUALS*, 2021; EQUALS Global Partnership, *Projects*, 2021.

<sup>163</sup> ITU, *World Summit on the Information Society, Plan of Action*, 2003.

<sup>164</sup> UN Women, *Development of the Strategic Plan 2018-2021*, 2016.

<sup>165</sup> UN Women, *Women Count*, 2020; UN Women, *Development of the Strategic Plan 2018-2021*, 2016.

<sup>166</sup> UN Women, *Gender Innovation Principles*.

<sup>167</sup> UN Women, *The Digital Revolution: Implications for Gender Equality and Women's Rights 25 Years after Beijing*, 2020.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*

gender equality.<sup>171</sup> The gender-equality paradox suggests the more gender equality, the fewer women in STEM fields.<sup>172</sup> Globally women make up 24.4% of the computer science workforce, but this varies regionally, as Middle Eastern countries have between 40% to 50% of female participants in ICT programs.<sup>173</sup> Worldwide, nearly half of women who go into technology leave, which is double the percentage of men.<sup>174</sup> Gender norms, inherent biases, and lack of technical participation in STEM and ICTs education affect gender-conscious STEM programs and technological developments.<sup>175</sup> Yet, increasing digital access for women has a economic benefits, including women's entrance into the labor market, reducing the gender wage gap, improving productivity, and increasing innovation.<sup>176</sup> Though many organizations work to promote gender equality in education and technology, there is little policy promoting the participation of women and girls in technology globally.<sup>177</sup> In technology environments, women are less likely than men to be deemed high performers in STEM industries, largely due to inefficiencies in education and social welfare programs.<sup>178</sup>

International research has found that women are more reliable with family finances and commonly hold an unequal burden when trying to navigate public and private systems.<sup>179</sup> UN Women encourages combining mobile technology with existing public and private programs to prioritize women's access to health, financial and government services.<sup>180</sup> In some regions, the digital revolution has developed data-driven, automated systems that make decisions regarding social services and integrated gender equality in social welfare systems.<sup>181</sup> For instance, Aadhar platforms in India allows the government to identify recipients of social services and subsidies biometrically.<sup>182</sup> The platform found women expressed a strong preference for the consistency of digitally delivered benefits and the agency over their benefits.<sup>183</sup> There are, however, risks and challenges that come with implementing digital welfare.<sup>184</sup> The lack of transparency by technology companies and digital public services leads to algorithms that are not understood by recipients of social welfare.<sup>185</sup> Additionally, gender data gaps preclude gender equality in digital social and welfare services and a human rights-centered approach to the needs of marginalized individuals, although some initiatives are improving access to and quality of gendered data.<sup>186</sup>

### **Gender Diversity in Artificial Intelligence**

The digital revolution is characterized as the rapid development of technological advancements, such as the increasing use of smartphones, the Internet, social media, and AI.<sup>187</sup> AI extends from the most basic to the most advanced skills, including machine learning.<sup>188</sup> However, many women lack AI skills and access, particularly in the creation of norms, protocols, and processes.<sup>189</sup> Only 18% of workers in the AI

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> West et al., *Discriminating Systems: Gender, Race, and Power in AI*, 2019; UN Women, *The Digital Revolution: Implications for Gender Equality and Women's Rights 25 Years after Beijing*, 2020.

<sup>174</sup> West et al., *Discriminating Systems: Gender, Race, and Power in AI*, 2019.

<sup>175</sup> UN Women, *The Digital Revolution: Implications for Gender Equality and Women's Rights 25 Years after Beijing*, 2020.

<sup>176</sup> United Nations University, *Advancing Research for Gender Equality in the Digital Age*, 2019.

<sup>177</sup> UN Women, *The Digital Revolution: Implications for Gender Equality and Women's Rights 25 Years after Beijing*, 2020.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> AsiaSociety, *Microfinance and Women: The Micro-Mystique*.

<sup>180</sup> UN Women, *The Digital Revolution: Implications for Gender Equality and Women's Rights 25 Years after Beijing*, 2020.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Wheeler, T., *Placing a Visible Hand on the Digital Revolution*, 2020.

<sup>188</sup> United Nations University, *Advancing Research for Gender Equality in the Digital Age*, 2019.

<sup>189</sup> UN Women, *The Digital Revolution: Implications for Gender Equality and Women's Rights 25 Years after Beijing*, 2020.

field are women, and, at large technology corporations like Facebook and Google, women comprise of only 10-15% of AI research staff.<sup>190</sup> Within the labor market, bias exists in hiring algorithms that discriminate against female applicants, while gendered marketing algorithms are more likely to advertise STEM careers to men than to women.<sup>191</sup> AI can also be used, however to promote gender equality in the workplace, such as the #MeTooBots which flag communication that may contain harassment and Diversio's automated analysis of internal diversity and employee feedback.<sup>192</sup>

The underrepresentation of women in the AI industry results in gender biases in algorithmics and data.<sup>193</sup> Bias introduced at any stage of the design process can perpetuate and amplify a chain of biases, including through future design systems and data collection, especially in facial recognition and deep fakes.<sup>194</sup> Although AI systems are typically considered neutral and objective, they generally lack diversity and are built with a patriarchal structure.<sup>195</sup> These algorithmic entities can amplify inequities in society, which solidify inherent biases into perceived facts.<sup>196</sup> For example, in 2016 a Microsoft Twitter bot began using discriminatory language within an hour based on algorithms that it learned from a feedback loop that amplified discrimination.<sup>197</sup> To improve diversity and inclusiveness in AI, UN Women is launching an Action Coalition, as part of the Gender Equality Forum, in 2021 comprised of Member States, businesses, and NGOs.<sup>198</sup> This Action Coalition will look into policy recommendations and initiatives for more gender-responsive AI and overcoming issues with existing algorithms.<sup>199</sup>

### **Conclusion**

UN Women ascertains that technology should be regarded as a sociopolitical actor in the context of design, purpose, and use, instead of an autonomous gender-neutral entity.<sup>200</sup> Technology alone cannot address system bias that perpetuate the digital gender divide, which is why it is of utmost importance for the international community to continue to promote women's access to ICT education and resources.<sup>201</sup> Inclusive policy should promote content for women and girls via digital platforms to increase access and use of public and private services including healthcare and the financial industry.<sup>202</sup> Additionally, policy needs to promote technological innovation as means a to increase social inclusion and bridge the digital gender divide.<sup>203</sup> Moreover, policy that aims to diversify and amplify gender equality must encourage the inclusion of women and girls in the digital revolution, while addressing inherent biases that lead to discrimination and violence against women.<sup>204</sup>

### **Further Research**

When researching the digital revolution and its implication on gender equality and women's rights, delegates should consider: How Member States promote and regulate gender-inclusive technology? How

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<sup>190</sup> West et al., *Discriminating Systems: Gender, Race, and Power in AI*, 2019.

<sup>191</sup> UN Women, *The Digital Revolution: Implications for Gender Equality and Women's Rights 25 Years after Beijing*, 2020.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid; UN AI for Good, *United Nations Women (UN Women): Description of Activities on AI*, 2021.

<sup>195</sup> UN Women, *The Digital Revolution: Implications for Gender Equality and Women's Rights 25 Years after Beijing*, 2020.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> Rainie & Anderson, *Code Dependent: Pros and Cons of the Algorithm Age*, 2017; UN Women, *The Digital Revolution: Implications for Gender Equality and Women's Rights 25 Years after Beijing*, 2020.

<sup>198</sup> UN AI for Good, *United Nations Women (UN Women): Description of Activities on AI*, 2021; UN Generation Equality Forum, *Accelerating Progress for Gender Equality by 2030*, 2021.

<sup>199</sup> UN AI for Good, *United Nations Women (UN Women): Description of Activities on AI*, 2021.

<sup>200</sup> UN Women, *The Digital Revolution: Implications for Gender Equality and Women's Rights 25 Years after Beijing*, 2020.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> G20 Insights, *Bridging the Gender Digital Gap*, 2020

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> UN Women, *The Digital Revolution: Implications for Gender Equality and Women's Rights 25 Years after Beijing*, 2020.

can Member States and other actors increase digital literacy and programs for women girls in STEM? What deeper societal and patriarchal norms are hindering gender equality in the digital revolution and how can the digital revolution help deconstruct those norms? How can AI improve gender equality, and how do Member States and other actors ensure gender equality in AI?

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*The Broadband Commission Working Group on Broadband and Gender published this landmark report in 2013 to provide a comprehensive look at the links between digital technologies, especially ICTs, and gender. The report covers why gender matters in access to ICTs, gender gaps and different measures of gender inequality, and broadband policymaking. Delegates will find this resource useful for general, background research and when formulating recommendations, as the report contains policy recommendations in areas that have still not been addressed by the international community.*

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. (2020). *The Digital Revolution: Implications for Gender Equality and Women's Rights 25 Years after Beijing*. Retrieved 10 February 2021 from: <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/the-digital-revolution-implications-for-gender-equality-and-womens-rights-25-years-after-beijing-en.pdf?la=en&vs=1837>

*This is the most recent report by UN Women on the Digital Revolution and its effect on gender equality and women's rights. The report acknowledges technology's revolutionizing impact on women and also notes the gender disparities in that technology. The report goes into further detail in the topics of education, work, and social services and welfare. This is a comprehensive document that delegates will find very helpful in both understanding the context of gender in the digital revolution and formulating their own recommendations based on UN Women's current work and positions on the issue.*

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. (2017). *Strategic Plan 2018-2021: Harnessing the Digital Revolution for the Achievement of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment*. Retrieved 19 April 2021 from: <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/executive%20board/2017/second%20regular%20session%202017/unw-2017-6-strategic%20plan-en-rev%2001.pdf?la=en&vs=2744>

*This year is the final year of UN Women's current strategic plan, which specifically focuses on the intersection of the gender equality and the Digital Revolution. The plan presented five outcomes ranging from increasing women's access to decision-making systems and spaces, improve income security and economic autonomy, and incorporating women in peace building and humanitarian action. Delegates should use this source to start their research into how UN Women has implemented it's Strategic Plan thus far and areas that will be priorities for the next plan.*

United Nations, Generation Equality Forum. (2021). *Accelerating Progress for Gender Equality by 2030*. Retrieved 27 June 2021 from: <https://forum.generationequality.org/home>

*In summer 2021, UN Women, France, Mexico, and civil society organizations are convening a forum on gender equality, including investments and policy recommendations. The goal of the forum is "concrete, ambitious and transformative actions to achieve immediate and irreversible progress towards gender equality," including in the digital revolution. The forum will consider the effects of Covid 19 on gender equality as well as the compounded barriers women of color, indigenous women, and youth face. Delegates will be able to look up the most recent commitments and ideas coming out of the forum by using this source, including information on the Action Coalition working on AI.*

United Nations University Institute on Computing and Society. (2019). *Advancing Research for Gender Equality in the Digital Age*. Retrieved 10 February 2021 from: <https://ourworld.unu.edu/en/advancing-research-for-gender-equality-in-the-digital-age>

*United Nations University wrote this article on gender equality in the digital age in 2019. It provides a good, general overview of the issues in achieving digital gender equality, including skills gaps in the technology industry. The article also highlights the EQUALS initiative, a multilateral partnership including UN Women, and links the initiative to the Sustainable Development Goals. Delegates will find this source useful at the beginning of their research to gain understanding of the disparities in the digital society as well as some ideas to achieve gender equality in the digital revolution.*

West, M., et al. (2019). *Discriminating Systems: Gender, Race, and Power in AI*. Retrieved 24 April 2021 from: <https://ainowinstitute.org/discriminatingystems.pdf>

*Discriminating System: Gender, Race, and Power in AI written Sarah Myer West, Meredith Whittaker, and Kate Crawford highlights the diversity issues in AI. The report provides several statistics that showcase how women are underrepresented in the tech industry. The subsection titled Who Makes AI? beginning on page 10, is particularly important as it details how much of the workforce is women. This source is especially useful as it quantifies gender inequality in the AI industry.*

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