



# The Hague International Model United Nations

**Forum:** General Assembly 3

**Issue:** Measures to give access to citizenship, education, and justice for women worldwide

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## Introduction

Globally, women make up half the population, yet barriers to citizenship, education and justice persist. Today, women enjoy less than two thirds of the legal rights available to men and merely 4% of Official Development Assistance flows contribute directly to the emancipation of women. Challenges to gender equality, more present in certain regions compared to others, continue to impede women's efforts to overcome legal and societal obstacles that perpetuate and sustain the disparities between genders.

The issue at hand is not only one of social injustice but also one of global importance. Empowering women has been demonstrated to foster economic growth, reduce poverty and promote economic and social stability. Access to fundamental rights such as citizenship, education and justice are crucial to allowing women to fully participate in social, and economic life as well as development.

Despite the progress made through initiatives like the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), no country as of 2024 has achieved gender equality, with one in three countries not making any progress since 2015. At the current rate, legally achieving complete gender equality will take up to 131 years.

The United Nations has played a pivotal role in advocating for women's rights through specialized agencies such as UN Women and initiatives targeting gender-based disparities. Particularly, Goal 5: Gender Equality and Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions that are included in UN's Sustainable Development Goals aim to directly solve the issue. However, as the digital era advances, new challenges and opportunities arise in addressing these disparities.

This report aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the barriers to women's access to citizenship, education, and justice, examining the historical context and ongoing challenges. It explores the roles of major stakeholders. The report also examines the timeline of efforts to resolve these challenges and evaluates the success of previous initiatives. Finally, it proposes feasible solutions to ensure women worldwide can fully exercise their rights.

## Definition of Key Terms

### Gender Equality

Gender equality is the concept that all individuals, regardless of gender, should have equal rights and opportunities as well as access to resources. In this context, it specifically addresses the equal treatment of women in areas like citizenship, education, and justice. Achieving gender equality involves dismantling the barriers that prevent women from enjoying the same opportunities as men and ensuring that they can fully exercise their rights in every aspect of life

### Citizenship

Citizenship refers to the legal recognition of an individual as a member of a specific country or state. This status grants individuals essential rights, such as the ability to vote, access public services, and enjoy social protections. For women, securing citizenship is crucial for participating fully in society. However, many women face legal and cultural barriers. These include laws that restrict their ability to pass on citizenship to their children or that tie citizenship to their husband's nationality.

### Intersectionality

Intersectionality is an approach that examines how different forms of discrimination, such as those based on gender, race, class, or disability, overlap. This concept is vital for understanding the experiences of women who are a part of multiple historically marginalized and oppressed groups. As an example, women of colour or women with disabilities may experience unique challenges that cannot be fully addressed by focusing on gender alone.

### Legal Pluralism

Legal pluralism is composed of the existence of multiple legal systems within one society. These

can include formal state laws, religious laws, and traditional or customary laws. In some regions, the coexistence of these legal systems can create conflicts, especially when national laws clash with local or religious customs. For women, this can lead to unequal access to justice, as customary or religious laws may limit women's rights, particularly in matters like marriage, inheritance and property ownership.

## Customary Law

Customary law represents unwritten legal traditions that are passed down through generations within specific communities. While these laws may be deeply ingrained in the culture, they can often discriminate against women. In certain regions, customary laws may limit women's rights to own property, inherit wealth, or make decisions about their own lives. These traditions, though not part of the legal system, continue to shape how women's rights are recognized.

## Patriarchy

Patriarchy is a societal structure in which men hold the majority of power, particularly in political, social, and economic spheres, while women are often assigned secondary roles. This system is entrenched in both culture and law, and it perpetuates gender inequality by restricting women's opportunities for full participation in public life.

## Affirmative Action

Affirmative action refers to policies designed to help individuals from historically disadvantaged or marginalized groups by creating better opportunities in areas like education, employment, and political representation. These measures often aim to counteract the effects of past discrimination. For women, affirmative action might include initiatives like gender quotas or scholarships to ensure that women have equal access to educational and professional opportunities[1]

## Background Information

### Historical context

The history of women's struggle for equality stretches over centuries. For most of history, women were confined to domestic roles and denied access to education, citizenship, and justice. These restrictions were not mere coincidences; rather, they were deeply rooted in societal systems designed to maintain gender inequality. Most often, women were excluded from education, which limited their opportunities and access to knowledge. In many parts of the world, girls were not allowed to attend school, or their education was confined to domestic tasks. Even when education systems began to expand in the 19th century, women were frequently excluded from higher learning. It took until the 20th

century for many countries to allow women to pursue university education.

Women were also frequently denied citizenship rights. A woman's legal identity in many countries was linked to her spouse or father. They were unable to actively engage in political and social life and had very little influence over their own citizenship. Women didn't start demanding the right to vote and run for office until the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when suffrage campaigns really gained momentum. Despite their initial slow progress, these movements led to important successes for women's involvement in public life, particularly during the first half of the 20th century.

Justice, too, was often inaccessible. Legal systems in many countries upheld discrimination against women, leaving them without protection against violence or property disputes. In the 19th century, early legal victories, such as the Married Women's Property Acts, marked progress by granting women more control over their earnings and property. Over time, legal reforms expanded, thereby addressing workplace rights, harassment, and domestic violence.

The progress made in education, citizenship, and justice was not without resistance. Societal norms and deeply entrenched structures fought to maintain the status quo. Women's movements have been instrumental in pushing for legal changes and demanding their rights. However, these victories have not always been permanent or universally applied.

Today in many regions, girls still face barriers to education, and citizenship laws continue to limit women's rights in subtle but impactful ways. Legal systems, although improved in some places, still often fail to ensure justice for women in cases of violence or discrimination.

## Education

Schooling as known today did not start until the 17th century, even then it was mostly reserved for upper classes. Women's right to education became widespread in the 19th century. Due to the idea that women were intellectually inferior to men, education for young girls was limited to instructions on domestic tasks. According to a report published by the British parliament in 1860, women were to be educated in order for them to become "decorative, modest and marriageable beings". Since then, significant progress has been achieved, yet barriers to women's education persist, varying in severity across different regions.

### Progress

Over the past few decades, women's education has made remarkable progress. Through the efforts of numerous treaties, global summits, and grassroots protests, the right to education for women has become almost universal. In Rwanda, government policies focused on gender equality have led to gender parity in primary and secondary education by the mid-2000s, and by 2017. This progress has led the country to have one of the highest rates of female students in secondary education in Africa.

In the United States, women now earn 57% of bachelor's degrees, surpassing men for the first time in history. The Malala Fund, founded by Malala Yousafzai in 2013, has been instrumental in advocating for girls' education, especially in regions with cultural and economic barriers. According to the World Bank, girls' enrollment rates in low-income countries rose by 16% over the past decade. In 2023, the "Transforming Education Summit" held during the United Nations General Assembly emphasized the need for inclusive and equitable education, calling for the removal of barriers to girls' education, especially in conflict zones.

Despite setbacks caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which saw millions of girls drop out of school, global efforts to advance girls' education continue to make progress.

### *Barriers to access*

Recognizing challenges faced by women in accessing education is the first and most important step in effectively addressing the issue. Poverty, conflict, child marriage, and persisting gender bias are all factors that determine if a girl can reach her full academic potential. Research consistently shows that girls facing disadvantages; such as low or unstable income, residing in conflict affected areas, or experiencing disruptions due to pandemics, are the least likely to successfully complete their education. For instance, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these challenges, with marginalized girls at increased risk of dropping out permanently following schools' closure.

To highlight the magnitude of the issue through statistics, girls in conflict and crisis settings are 2.5 times more likely to be out of school than their peers in stable environments. Moreover, recent data from the Global Women's Institute estimates that around 60 million girls are assaulted on their way to school or at school each year. [1]

### *Citizenship*

While citizenship is considered a fundamental right today, women's access to full citizenship is still an ongoing struggle. Historically, women were often excluded from political and legal systems and were viewed primarily as dependents of their male relatives. Even in democratic societies women were not given the same rights as male citizens, going as far back as to the Athenian democracy, where women were excluded from political life entirely, to the early years of the United States and France, where the ideals of equality applied only to men. Even today, in modern democracies like Saudi Arabia, women only recently gained the right to vote and run for office, a milestone achieved in 2015.

### *Current restrictions*

Today, in over 25 countries, women cannot pass their nationality to their children or foreign spouses, a right that men have without restriction. This ultimately creates a cycle of statelessness for millions and as a result leaves individuals unable to access basic rights such as education and healthcare.

Women remain vastly underrepresented in politics, holding only 26.7% of parliamentary seats globally as of 2023. In some countries such as Afghanistan, cultural stigmas and security threats prevent women from voting or running for office.

Furthermore, in over 100 countries, women are still legally restricted from working in certain industries or are required to obtain permission from male relatives to take on jobs. This while hindering their economic independence, also has negative outcomes on the country's economic state. These ongoing barriers underscore the need for continued efforts to make sure women can fully participate in society as equal citizens.

### *Recent progress*

In recent years, there have been promising steps toward improving women's access to citizenship rights. For example, Saudi Arabia made headlines in 2019 when it ended the rule requiring women to get a male guardian's permission to travel. Similarly, Sudan took a significant step in 2021 by changing its nationality laws to allow women to pass their citizenship to their children. Before this, only men could do so, leaving many children stateless. These changes are part of a broader global trend, with 15 countries amending discriminatory laws in the past two decades, according to UNHCR.

Women have also made gains in political representation, an essential part of citizenship. Rwanda leads the world, with women holding over 60% of parliamentary seats, thanks to strong government policies supporting gender parity. Mexico has also made remarkable progress. In 2021, women made up 50% of Congress after gender parity laws were introduced for electoral candidates.

### **Justice**

Alongside systematic, deeply-rooted gender biases, discriminatory legal frameworks and societal norms continue to obstruct women's access to justice and thereby access to equality. According to the World Bank's 2023 report on gender equality, 43% of countries globally have at least one legal restriction that prevents women from taking legal action on the same terms as men. In some regions, women are barred from owning property. This limits their ability to seek justice in disputes over land or inheritance. For instance, in many countries across sub-Saharan Africa, customary laws prioritize male inheritance, leaving widows without legal recourse.

Gender-based violence is another area where access to justice remains limited. The UN reports that 1 in 3 women worldwide experiences physical or sexual violence in their lifetime, yet only 40% of these cases are reported. Even when reported, conviction rates are low. According to the European Union, only 14% of reported sexual violence cases result in a conviction. Women in rural areas face unique challenges such as lack of nearby courts, limited awareness of legal rights, and fear of retaliation.

## Major Countries and Organizations Involved

### New Zealand

New Zealand has always been a pioneer in gender equality. It made history in 1893 by becoming the first country to grant women the right to vote, a milestone that set the stage for its ongoing efforts to promote women's rights. As of 2023, for the first time ever, over 50% of New Zealand's parliament is made up of women.

Beyond politics, New Zealand has made great strides in education and workplace equality. Women consistently outnumber men as university graduates and thanks to policies like paid parental leave and subsidized child care for working mothers, women in New Zealand can balance family and career. The country also takes gender-based violence seriously, with robust protections and support systems in place for survivors. Past and current initiatives show how New Zealand is not only committed to equality in principle but is actively working to create a society where everyone has a fair chance to succeed.

### Rwanda

Over the years Rwanda has made incredible progress in promoting gender equality, which has helped earn its reputation as a global leader in gender equality. Women hold over 60% of parliamentary seats, the highest in the world, thanks to strong policies and quotas encouraging gender parity in politics. Laws like the 1999 Inheritance Law, that guarantee women's equal rights to inherit property, have transformed gender dynamics within the nation.

Education has also been a key focus. Girls now make up nearly half of all students in primary and secondary schools, supported by initiatives like the Girls' Education Policy. Rwanda's efforts to tackle gender-based violence include one-stop centers that provide survivors with medical, legal, and emotional support. Rwanda, an African nation once marked by conflict, is a great example of how committed leadership and progressive policies can drive remarkable progress in gender equality.

### Iceland

Iceland is often hailed as the most gender-equal country globally. The nation consistently ranks first on the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Report. The Equal Pay Certification initiative, introduced in 2018, ensures men and women are paid equally for the same work. Women hold 47% of parliamentary seats and enjoy generous maternity and paternity leave policies. Iceland also takes a firm stance against gender-based violence, offering specialized support services for survivors.

### Malala Fund

The Malala Fund, founded by Malala Yousafzai, has quickly become one of the most influential voices in the fight for girls' education globally since its establishment in 2013. Its mission is to ensure that every girl receives 12 years of free, quality education. The fund operates in some of the world's most challenging regions, such as Pakistan, Nigeria, and Afghanistan.

Since its inception, the Malala Fund has invested nearly \$22 million in educational programs, directly benefiting over 130,000 girls and strengthening local initiatives aimed at breaking down barriers to education. Beyond its financial support, the Malala Fund works to influence policy change. The organization uses its platform to push governments to prioritize education for girls and to enact laws that protect them from violence and discrimination.

## UN Women

UN Women, established in 2010, has become a key player in advancing gender equality across the globe. With a focus on empowering women and girls, the organization works in over 90 countries to address the challenges women face. Whether it's combating gender-based violence, promoting economic opportunities, or ensuring women have a voice in decision-making, the organisation leads the charge for a world where equality is not just a goal but a reality. Through its efforts, UN Women has supported countless initiatives, from providing legal aid to survivors of violence to helping women gain access to financial resources and job opportunities.

One of its most impactful campaigns, HeForShe, invites men and boys to join the movement for gender equality, showing that everyone has a role to play. The organisation's influence extends to shaping international agreements like the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, where gender equality is seen as essential for progress in all areas. What sets UN Women apart is its ability to create real, lasting change. By partnering with governments and local communities.[III][IV]

## Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
March 2, 1839	In the United States, Oberlin College became the first higher education institution to admit women.
September 19, 1893	New Zealand became the first self-governing country to grant women the right to vote in parliamentary elections.
July 19, 1848	Seneca Falls Convention, the first women's rights convention was held in the United States, advocating for women's equality and suffrage.



November 18, 1870	The Education Act in the UK allowed girls to attend public elementary schools.
March 3, 1890	The Married Women's Property Act was passed in the UK, granting women legal control over their property.
October 10, 1903	The Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) was formed in the UK to fight for women's suffrage.
August 18, 1920	The 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was ratified, granting women the right to vote.
December 10, 1948	The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the United Nations, establishing the right to education as a human right.
March 31, 1953	Convention on the Political Rights of Women ensuring women's right to vote and hold public office without discrimination was adopted by the UN.
January 26, 1957	The Indian Constitution came into effect, granting women equal rights in education, employment, and other areas.
December 18, 1979	The UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) was adopted
May 16, 1984	Pakistan passed the National Education Policy, focusing on increasing girls' access to education.
August 13, 1997	The Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan case established legal protections for women against sexual harassment in the workplace in India.
May 16, 2005	Kuwait granted women the right to vote and stand for election after years of activism.
June 24, 2010	Saudi Arabia announced that women would be allowed to drive, breaking long-standing restrictions.
March 8, 2015	The World Bank launched a global strategy for women's legal empowerment, targeting discriminatory laws that hinder women's access to education and property rights
September 6, 2017	Morocco passed a law criminalizing violence against women, providing greater legal protections.

## Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

Efforts to improve women's access to education, citizenship, and justice have seen significant global initiatives, but many have fallen short in fully addressing the issue due to cultural, political, and logistical obstacles.

One prominent initiative is UNESCO's Global Partnership for Girls' and Women's Education, launched in 2011. This project, which focuses on promoting gender equality and ensuring that girls and women can access quality education, has been instrumental in raising awareness and advocating for policy reform. However, despite its achievements, it has struggled to overcome deeply ingrained societal norms. In numerous regions, girls continue to face considerable challenges such as child marriage, gender-based violence, and poverty, which often force them out of school. While the program has provided valuable resources and support, its impact has been constrained in conflict zones and rural areas where cultural expectations prioritize boys' education over that of girls.

Similarly, the Ciudadanar Project, overseen by UNESCO, seeks to foster a culture of legality, gender equality, and global citizenship education. The project's aim is to empower women and girls by integrating gender equality into education systems and encouraging active civic participation. Despite its promising goals, its success has been impeded by local resistance and a lack of political commitment to effectuate such changes. In many countries, governments either remain unwilling to implement reforms or encounter significant barriers to doing so.

Graduate Women International (GWI), with its network of over 60 national affiliates, has worked to empower women through education and leadership initiatives. Founded in 1919, GWI advocates for women's rights and strives to ensure that women have equal access to education and leadership opportunities. However, the organization still encounters challenges in low-income and conflict-affected countries where women face barriers to basic education. Despite its widespread network, GWI has struggled to ensure that its work reaches the most marginalized women in these environments.

A key international effort focused on women's access to justice is the U.S. Department of State's Safe from the Start Initiative. This program addresses and seeks to prevent sexual violence in conflict zones by providing legal assistance, humanitarian support, and protection services for women and girls. Although the initiative has made notable progress in raising awareness about sexual violence in conflict, it has struggled to guarantee that victims receive proper legal justice. In many conflict regions, the justice system is either non-existent or heavily biased. Furthermore, cultural norms and persistent security risks have hindered the program's ability to provide comprehensive support to survivors, which limited its long-term effectiveness.

## Possible Solutions

While previous initiatives have made valuable progress in addressing the issue, there remains

much work to be done. As we move forward, it is crucial to ensure that any new solutions are not only innovative but also adaptable and feasible across diverse regions of the world. This section of the report aims to provide delegates with ideas that can be helpful when formulating clauses.

Firstly, delegates may consider establishing a global education fund specifically designed to support girls in conflict zones. This approach directly addresses the key issue that past solutions have struggled to tackle: the severe disruption to education in war-torn or displaced areas. Existing initiatives often fail to reach girls in these settings due to the lack of targeted financial support and resources. A dedicated fund would ensure that education is not just an abstract goal but a tangible possibility for girls who would otherwise be left behind.

Delegates can also advocate for gender-responsive policies within national legal frameworks. This would address a critical gap in past initiatives, which have often failed to provide the legal reforms necessary for women's full participation in society. In many countries, women still face legal obstacles to owning property, passing citizenship to their children, or seeking justice in cases of discrimination and violence.

Additionally, delegates may propose the creation of community-led advocacy networks that raise awareness and promote women's legal rights. Many previous efforts have fallen short because they were too top-down, failing to engage local communities in the process. By focusing on grassroots mobilization, this suggestion ensures that the advocacy for women's rights is culturally relevant, locally supported, and more likely to succeed in overcoming the resistance often encountered in certain regions. Empowering local leaders and organizations to lead the charge ensures that the changes made are meaningful and sustainable.

Finally, delegates may recommend implementing educational outreach programs to challenge cultural norms that restrict women's rights and participation in society. This solution would address a major shortcoming of past attempts, which have focused primarily on legal and policy changes without sufficient attention to shifting societal attitudes. Cultural norms and deeply ingrained biases often prevent women from accessing education, justice, and full citizenship, even where laws have been reformed.

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## Appendix or Appendices

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