



Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)

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- Bahrain
- Brazil
- China
- Croatia
- Czech Republic
- Denmark
- Estonia
- France
- Germany
- Ghana
- Hungary
- India
- Ireland
- Israel
- Jordan
- Kuwait
- Latvia
- Mexico
- Netherlands
- Niger
- Norway
- Poland
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- Saint Vincent and the Grenadines
- Saudi Arabia
- South Korea
- Sri Lanka
- Thailand
- Tunisia
- Turkey

- United Kingdom
- United States of America
- Vietnam
- Yemen

Purview:

The [Commission on the Status of Women](#) (CSW) was established in June 1946 to promote implementation of the principle that men and women shall have equal rights. The Commission has 45 members elected by the Economic and Social Council to four-year terms with broad regional representation. It meets annually for a period of ten working days to prepare recommendations and reports to ECOSOC on promoting women's rights in political, economic, civil, social and educational fields. CSW also makes recommendations to the Economic and Social Council on urgent problems requiring immediate attention in the field of women's rights.

Topics:

Women, the girl child and HIV/AIDS

Since the start of the HIV/AIDS pandemic in the 1980s, [over 30 million people have died from the disease](#), especially concentrated in sub-Saharan Africa and among groups long associated with high HIV disease burdens. While the international response to this pandemic was slow at first, partially due to latent discriminatory attitudes towards the gay men, drug users and sub-Saharan Africans most at-risk for the disease, there now exist medical interventions that allow infected individuals to live nearly-normal lives. Despite this progress, however, the situation remains dire. While anyone can become infected with HIV through intravenous drug use, sexual transmission or several other routes, the experiences and risk factors between people of different gender identities differ greatly. Women in sub-Saharan Africa represent [56% of new infections in the](#)

[region](#), and, globally, young women and girls between the ages of 15 and 24 are twice as likely to become infected as their male peers. These disparities have deadly consequences: As of 2020, [AIDS was the leading cause of death for women aged 15 to 49 years](#).

Following the international humanitarian response of the 1980s, the United Nations began considering secondary causes and effects of the virus. In 1995, the [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#) was adopted, emphasizing the devastating effects of HIV/AIDS on women's health and indicating that a gendered perspective is necessary when considering diseases such as HIV/AIDS and their consequences. Several key populations of women and girls, including [young women and adolescent girls](#), are particularly vulnerable. Women have [less access to sexual and reproductive health services than men](#); moreover, even when these services are available, women who utilize them may face [stigma and even violence](#). In 2000, the United Nations adopted the [Millennium Development Goals](#), including a target to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS by 2015. By 2013, [much progress had been made on this front](#), as new infections dropped by 40 percent in absolute numbers and millions gained access to antiretroviral therapy over this time period.

In 2014, on the eve of the 15-year target of the Millennium Development Goals, the [fifty-eighth meeting of the Commission on the Status of Women](#) focused on the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals in relation to women and girls. This report particularly focused on the need to address the vulnerability of young women and adolescent girls, and the severity of stigma toward women and girls living with HIV/AIDS. This continued a tradition of special considerations of the effects of HIV/AIDS on women and the girl child, and the intervening years have yielded a series of special meetings and reports by the CSW and the Secretary-General. Successive reports marked improvements as intersectionality and women's access to justice increased, but the [most recent reports](#) still highlight the disproportionate impact of HIV/AIDS on women and girls. Although the international community has made significant progress in reversing the spread of HIV/AIDS, completely eradicating these conditions will require special attention to the groups most disproportionately burdened with infections. The [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) includes [several key targets](#) that are particularly relevant as part of a global response to HIV/AIDS. [Sustainable Development Goal 3.3](#) includes the promise made by Member States to achieve the end of AIDS by 2030.

In recent years, the United Nations and Member States have made substantial progress to address the intersection of gender and HIV/AIDS. Currently, more women have access to [HIV testing and antiretroviral treatment than ever before](#). Medical strategies for preventing HIV infection in women have also improved. In particular, pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) is [very effective at preventing HIV infection](#) to women who would otherwise be at high risk of infection, so long as regular adherence to the treatment is possible. Such progress has been made possible through collaborative international, regional and national efforts. One such effort has been Option B+, where pregnant women with HIV are given antiretroviral therapy regardless of CD4 T-cell count. In many South and Southeast Asian countries, this has [greatly increased the rate at which HIV-positive pregnant women receive treatment](#), reducing the rate of mother-to-child transmission and HIV-related pregnancy complications. In 2016, the United Nations General Assembly [set a target goal](#) for reducing the number of new infections among young women to below 100,000 by 2020. However, progress toward this goal has varied across regions, often in a manner correlated with the level of development in the region. Meanwhile, most developed countries contribute a [smaller proportion of global funds for addressing HIV/AIDS](#) than their share of world gross domestic product, highlighting the need for developed countries to contribute more to providing treatment to particularly vulnerable regions.

Despite the medical advancements, in many countries, the [stigma arising from unequal gender norms](#) prevents women from accessing HIV information and services, in particular surrounding the fact that HIV/AIDS is often transmitted through sexual activity. Without such resources, women and girls are unable to make informed decisions regarding their health and are left vulnerable to HIV infection. [Structural inequalities, gender based violence and gender norms](#) that prevent women and girls from having control over their health outcomes compound this issue. Despite the increased risk of infection for women and girls due to inadequate access to prevention and treatment, [national policies and strategies](#) typically underfund gender responsive interventions regarding HIV and AIDS and do not prioritize research with a gendered perspective. Previous work to combat HIV and AIDS has been extremely successful, but the fight is far from over. As new strategies are designed, special consideration must be given to the unique position of women and girls and the specific challenges they face.

Questions to consider from your country's perspective:

- What actions can be taken to make HIV resources more readily accessible to the women and girls who are most vulnerable to infection?
- How can the stigma surrounding women and girls' access to medical resources, particularly related to sex, be lessened?
- How can successful small scale measures to reduce the burden of HIV/AIDS on women and girls be scaled up to national, regional and international levels?

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Women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work

In developed and developing countries alike, the nature of work and the workplace has changed markedly in recent years. Where women had previously been employed in labor-intensive industries such as textiles in large numbers, automation is decreasing labor requirements in many industries and women are disproportionately likely to be [displaced from their jobs](#). Informal and non-standard working arrangements comprise a growing share of the workforce, especially for women. These jobs are a key part of most developing and developed economies, but [generally afford less social protection or labor rights than formal employment](#). As the world of work has changed, women have remained both [underrepresented in the labor market and underpaid](#), and subject to gender discrimination and inequality. Such [inequalities have been exacerbated](#) by the changing nature of work toward a greater use of information technology and the Internet in the workplace, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. There is a strong digital divide by gender, as well as socioeconomic class, in access to the internet due to [lack of education regarding the Internet, lack of access to Internet-capable devices and family opposition to women using the Internet](#). Ensuring that the barriers to economic empowerment caused by the changing nature of work are addressed is essential to realizing gender equality as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and is an important step to securing sustainable [economic development](#).

The United Nations has previously addressed economic issues concerning women through an anti-discrimination framework, with the [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women](#) in 1979. The economic clauses of the Convention focus on rights to family benefits, free choice in employment and the special concerns of rural women working in the informal economy. The [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#) of 1995 provided an empowerment-focused framework, calling for the promotion of women's economic independence, including employment. Today, this declaration serves as both a roadmap to empowerment and a call to action. The Declaration also promotes the discussion of gender in all matters of development, a process known as gender mainstreaming. The Commission on the Status of Women, as part of its long history of [being heavily involved in international efforts](#) to empower women and secure gender equality, built upon this foundation in its

sixty-first session in 2017 and [emphasized the path to the economic empowerment of women in the changing world of work](#). The commissioners further introduced actions to be taken in order to achieve the empowerment of women and gender equality by 2030 following the goals proposed in the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#).

[UN Women](#), the United Nations entity dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women, developed the [Women's Empowerment Principles \(WEPs\)](#) in 2010 to attain gender equality and empower all women as described in the Sustainable Development goals. The WEPs offer guidance to promote gender equality in the workplace and further the economic empowerment of women. Globally, some [four thousand companies](#) have committed to the WEPs in 2017, doubling the number committed in 2016. One of the Principles is representation of women at the highest levels of corporate governance. Within the past year, the [Asia-Pacific region](#) has made notable progress along these lines as part of the UN Women's WeEmpower Asia Initiative, with Thailand raising its percentage of women in executive positions to [24 percent, as compared to 20 percent globally](#). However, more progress must be made to achieve ambitious goals—no country is on track to achieve gender equality by 2030.

The COVID-19 global pandemic has, in many regards, stalled the progress being made toward economically empowering women. The world of work drastically changed at the onset of the pandemic with women facing disproportionate economic challenges. When most communities closed schools and daycare centers to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, women disproportionately left formal work in order to complete unpaid domestic labor, such as childcare. Furthermore, when employed, women often have more vulnerable jobs than men: During the pandemic, women have experienced a [19 percent higher risk of job loss](#) than their male counterparts. In December 2020, UN Women and the International Finance Corporation published a [report](#) featuring practices being used by companies to encourage women's economic empowerment throughout the pandemic. Despite these efforts, women remain economically vulnerable and the efforts to promote gender equality have stagnated due to two main factors. First, women are expected in many cultures—in developing and developed countries alike—to bear [primary responsibility](#) for childcare and domestic tasks in their homes. Second, employers often expect a [degree of commitment](#) from workers that detracts from the ability of a parent of any gender to care for their children.

The rapidly evolving world of work poses unique challenges for the economic empowerment of women, making the issue critically important. In crafting their proposals, CSW must be conscious of the diverse needs of the women they seek to empower. This means changes that include [promoting job security for women](#), especially those caring for their families, empowering the voices of women through [increased presence in corporate leadership](#) and promoting social and economic policies that support women in each stage of their careers are necessary to achieve the empowerment of women. CSW will need to consider how Member States can be prompted to strengthen their legal frameworks to ensure equitable access to work for all women. To promote empowerment, this Commission should work to [ensure women have the necessary education and leadership skills to attain economic success](#). When women are empowered, society as a whole benefits both socially and economically, which is more important than ever in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Questions to consider from your country's perspective:

- How can the effects of the burden of unpaid labor on women's economic independence be mitigated?
- What can the CSW do to ensure gains in women's economic empowerment are resilient to future changes in the world of work?
- How do existing legal frameworks hinder women's economic empowerment, and how can Member States improve them?

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