

**Houston Area
Model United Nations
Specialized Committee**



CSW

**Chair | Niamh Gerdes
Specialized Committee Background
Guide**

**Houston Area Model United Nations 47
January 27-28, 2022**

Copyright Notice

The contents of this document and any supplementary material are the sole intellectual property of Houston Area Model United Nations.

It may not be reproduced, republished, or used without the express written permission of Houston Area Model United Nations. Please email staff@houstonareamun.org with any questions.

Note to Delegates

Delegates,

My name is Niamh Gerdes, and I will be your chair for HAMUN 47s Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). I am currently a senior at the University of St. Thomas in the Honors Program, and I am majoring in International Studies and International Development, minoring in finance and economics, and have a concentration in diplomacy and conflict.

I have been active in MUN for many years and was the USG Deputy of Registration for HAMUN 46, and the USG of Registration in HAMUN 45. I have also been a delegate at Harvard National MUN and will do so again this coming spring. Additionally, I enjoy chairing and have done so four times. I am very excited to chair once again this year!

CSW is an important committee because 50% of the world's population is female. This means that 50% of the world's potential, 50% of output, and 50% of resources are women and come from women if given the power to do so. The two topics, elimination of gender-based violence and closing the gender-based wealth gap, are topics that are seen across the world and continue to be as relevant as ever.

I strongly encourage you all to raise your placards, it is normal to be nervous at first but in the end, this will help you grow as a delegate and as an individual. This will be an excellent learning experience that will help you understand the intricacies of the world and will broaden your horizons. I ask you all to remember that an important part of diplomacy is cooperation and remember to approach the topic from the point of view of the delegation you are representing.

Good luck everyone!

Niamh Gerdes

Chair of CSW

gerdesn@stthom.edu



CSW

Chair | Niamh Gerdes

Houston Area Model United Nations 47

January 27-28, 2022

CSW

CSW stands for Commission on the Status of Women and meets once a year at the UN headquarters in New York City for the span of two weeks to discuss the status of women and what can be done for further improvement. The recommendations that result from the conference are then sent to the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) which acts as the parent council to work on the implementation of said recommendations.

CSW aims to outline the world's standards of the status and treatment of women and allow for empowerment and equality. Equality is meant to be seen and felt socially, economically, and politically. The conference is guided by working towards the policies written in the Beijing Declaration and Platform

for Action written in 1995, " and the 23rd special session of the General Assembly in 2000" and includes new upcoming topics that may affect women [1]. CSW is also working towards the Agenda for Sustainable Development 2030 which stipulates equality and empowerment [2]



CSW Brief History

CSW first gathered in 1947 in New York with all the members being women and was supported by the UN, which had been created in 1945. Members of ECOSOC were invited to view the CSW conference which eventually led to it becoming the parent council. From the years 1947 to 1962, CSW's primary aim was to raise awareness of issues faced by women around the world and inspire changes in laws around the world to create equality. They began to gather and analyze data about women worldwide to better understand the circumstances and levels of inequality [3]. The 1950's and 1960's were a time of creating many conventions including that of minimum age of marriage and consent to marriage in 1962, and worked with the International Labour Organization to create the Convention concerning Equal Remuneration for Men and Women Workers for Work of Equal Value of 1951 [4]. 1975 became International Women's Year, and the UN

Decade for Women was from 1976 to 1985. In 1995 the Fourth World Conference on Women occurred which is where the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was created. The UN General Assembly appointed CSW to essentially be in charge of carrying out the Beijing Declaration and report to ECOSOC what can be done. As of 2011, the CSW is under UN Women [3].





CSW

Chair | Niamh Gerdes

Houston Area Model United Nations 47

January 27-28, 2022

6

Topic B: Closing the Gender-Based Wealth Gap

The gender-based wealth gap is an issue for women around the world ranging from all ethnicities to socio-economic levels. The wealth gap is a symptom of inequality that affects women by being paid less, decreasing their personal independence, and can contribute to the continuation of gender inequality. Women are less active participants than men in the labor force and are more likely to work part time jobs. Additionally, women of minority groups are more susceptible to the wealth gap as seen in countries such as Brazil and Costa Rica [5].

There are two general parts to the gender-based wealth gap; women tend to be paid less

than men due to inequality, and women tend to face issues such as working part time jobs and working jobs with lower skill levels [6]. The former can be seen through a decrease in pay within work fields as women enter that particular workforce. The latter part of the gender-based wealth gap may be due to various factors such as having higher levels of illiteracy, lower levels of education, sexual abuse in the workplace, difficulties with balancing work and family, and lesser access to health institutions [7, 8].

The gender-based wealth gap affects all countries with both low income and high income. South Korea is the high-income country with the largest wage gap where women make 36.6% less than men on average [7].

Closing the gender-based wealth gap is a moral matter of treating women with equality and equity, but it can also aid economies around the world. By closing the gap women's wealth will be more than doubled and the entire world's wealth will increase by about one fifth [10]. Additionally, the gender-based wealth gap is tied to issues such as women's rights, increased access to education, and poverty. Countries with more education tend to have small gender-based wealth gaps and have strong economic growth [8].

COVID-19 highlighted the inequalities of the gender-based wealth gap because there are more women in service-oriented jobs such as retail and tourism which suffered heavily particularly during lockdowns. Meanwhile more men than women were able to transition to online work. Once women wanted to return to work, there were and are more limited childcare services preventing some women from being able to work again [14].

It is important to note that the gender-based wealth gap heavily revolves around the socially accepted norm of what work is. Work in its formal sense describes performing a certain job for pay and is formal labor. Women account for 75% of the world's informal labor such as taking care of children and the sick, and performing household chores and heavily contributes to being less able to gain access to gaining wealth [13].



It is important to note that the gender-based wealth gap heavily revolves around the socially accepted norm of what work is. Work in its formal sense describes performing a certain job for pay and is formal labor. Women account for 75% of the world's informal labor such as taking care of children and the sick, and performing household chores and heavily contributes to being less able to gain access to gaining wealth [13].

Among the countries that are making the most advances in achieving equal economic participation are [8]:

- Norway
- Mongolia
- Burundi
- Malawi
- Bahamas
- United States
- Luxembourg
- Laos
- Canada
- Barbados



Among the countries that are making the least advances in achieving equal economic participation are [8]:

- Syria
- Pakistan
- Saudi Arabia
- Algeria
- Yemen
- Mauritania
- Iran
- Morocco
- Jordan
- Turkey

History

Throughout history, there has always been a considerable gender-based wealth gap. It was customary for women to grow up in their parent's home then getting married and moving to their husband's house. Men were allowed some freedoms in their occupations and had inheritance laws and property laws on their side while women would get married and have children. One of the most notable times in history where this was strongly the norm was during the Regency era as described in Jane Austen novels. Despite this, throughout history there were victories for women and contributed towards closing the wealth gap slightly.

Certain ancient cultures were more advanced in women's rights which later dwindled as the centuries wore on. Ancient Egypt allowed women to have financial rights equal to men, ancient Hinduism allowed for women to hold property rights before marriage, and ancient Jewish women were always allowed property rights. Ancient Rome

allowed women to own and inherit property. Empress Theodora and Emperor Justinian of the Byzantine empire also extended property rights to women, as did the Middle East under the beginnings of Islam in the 600's, and Europe with the Anglo-Saxons in the 800's [16]. Property rights play a role in closing the gender-based wealth gap because it is heavily linked to investments and the creation of wealth.

The next several centuries saw a decreased amount of rights that contributed negatively towards the gender-based wealth gap and women in the Western world, while overall women around the world suffered a great lack of rights and had to fight for rights.

The start of the industrial revolution began changing the lives and economic systems of the world and began seeing the employment of women in factories. The mid 1800's saw a rise in laws to protect families, such as child protection laws and laws to limit the number of hours women could work as well as not allowing them to work certain jobs

that could be dangerous such as in the UK. This began marking men as the heads of families financially and enforced the idea that women stayed at home for domestic activities [17].

As more women began working in the early 1900's, particularly as nurses and teachers for example, women were paid less than men under the assumption that they did not have to feed an entire family. This was further underlined by women tending to work while single if at all and would stop working when they would marry [17].



During the World Wars, women were working the jobs that men had vacated to fight in the war, and although they went back to their traditional domestic life when the men came back, working all types of jobs left a mark on society [17].

As economies developed overtime, jobs in health and education increasingly emerged which were primarily staffed by women. This helped lead towards gender norms of what jobs were held by women versus men. The 1970's saw women truly enter the workforce for the first time especially as technology had advanced so that jobs that were traditionally highly physically demanding became more suitable for the average women; however, by then it had become ingrained into society that women were to be paid less than men and other aspects of wealth still fell primarily unto men [17].



This model of the industrial revolution started in the western world and eventually followed in other regions of the world and countries began to industrialize.

United Nations Actions

Since the creation of the United Nations, there have been several initiatives and strategies that have aided women and as an extension the gender-based wealth gap. Below are a few UN actions that have contributed to the topic.

The UN gathers data, creates statistics, and designs possible policies for governments to use. There is a myriad of information open not only to governments but also to the world so that the general public may be educated. Education is a powerful tool and helps guide people, organizations, companies, governments, and more towards increasingly conscientious decisions for the betterment of the world.

As explained previously, the Commission on the Status of Women is dedicated to aiding women and is guided by the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action [2].

Additionally, the Sustainable Development goals include eliminating poverty, zero

hunger, quality education, gender equality, reducing inequalities, climate action, and more [18]. All of these goals contribute to closing the gender-based wealth gap either through mental health, or through basic building blocks such as no poverty and quality education. By removing blocks from the lives of women around the world, the gender-based wealth gap will start to close.

At the UN's 4th World Conference on Women in 1995 in Beijing, the UN highly promoted gender budgeting. This is where a government allots money specifically for the needs of women in the given country. This started with Australia and has since been implemented by several countries including Thailand, Egypt, Zimbabwe, Croatia, Bolivia, and more, and it has been proven to be useful [7].

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women has been around for about 40 years and has been ratified by 185 members of the UN. This has been useful in bringing the issue into the forefront for governments all around the world to be more aware and beginning to take steps towards eliminating discrimination to women [7]. A willing government is a huge step towards helping women and closing the wealth gap.

Solutions

Resolving topics such as closing the gender-based wealth gap requires solutions that target the issue both from an interior and exterior manner. There need to be laws and policies as well as sociological change from within. Although a government can create laws trying to create equity and equality for women, those who literally pay the women must undergo a change of their mindset, a sociological change is needed. Additionally, to truly inspire change within a society, women must feel empowered to demand equality. This may be difficult because societies and social norms are a powerful force that dictates how one must be and act which places invisible barriers in the minds and hearts of many.

Psychosocial Empowerment

Women in rural impoverished areas may be more affected by the gender-based wealth gap and benefit the most from psychosocial empowerment to feel the ability to participate in their own life and work choices as much as possible. One such example is rural areas of India. There are various causes to feelings of disempowerment such as poverty, rape, lack of sanitation (diseases), lack of education, high birth rates, and early marriage. Psychosocial empowerment can be achieved through education, access to financial tools such as micro-loans, encouragement in characteristics such as optimism, access to aid programs, educating men on equality and the effects of sexism, and solutions that address the effects of poverty [11].



Childcare and Children

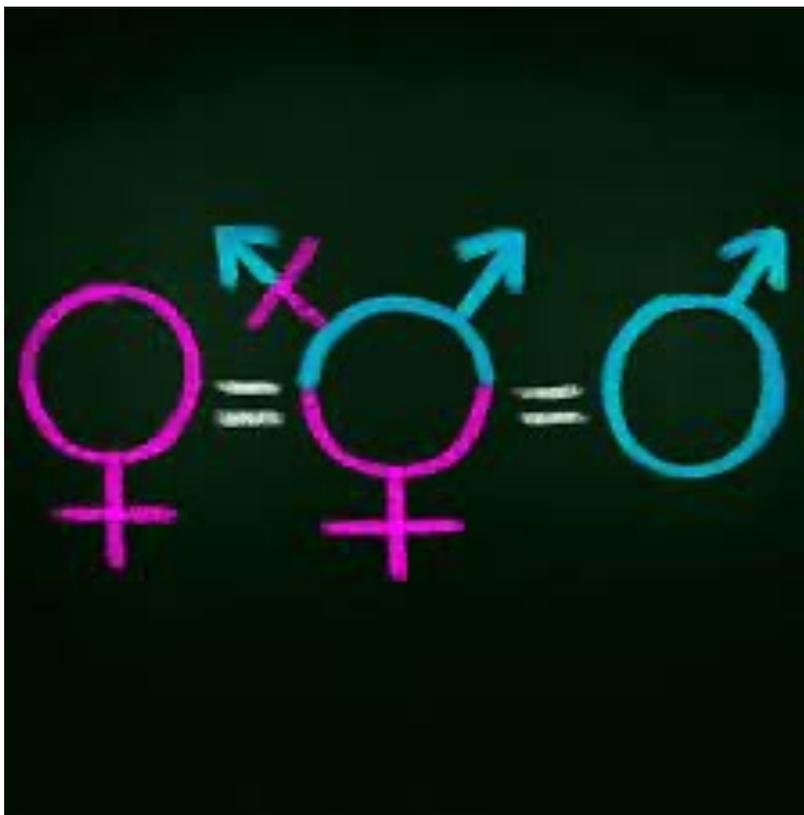
Having children can greatly contribute towards the wealth gap. As women have kids the responsibility of childcare often falls on them. This causes many women to go in and out of the labor force and can be paid less out of speculation of having future children. Access to birth control and education can help women take control of their futures and allow them to work more freely [10]. Additionally, childcare support such as access to childcare services and encouraging men in the family to take equal responsibility for children can help close the gap [9].

Other Policies

There are various policies that may be enacted by legislatures to close the gender-based wealth gap. Some policies may work better in more or less developed economies while other policies may be universally beneficial. Some policies include:

- Removal of laws that discriminate against women in any form. Inequalities affect women's abilities to gain wealth whether it be on a practical level or a psychological level. One such example is how women were not able to drive until 2018 in Saudi Arabia [12]. Since then, the percentage of women who work has risen.
- Increase access to bank accounts. More men than women in the world have bank accounts which are essential financial tools to growing wealth [13].
- Laws to prohibit sexual harassment and abuse at work. By placing and enforcing these laws, women's mental health, safety, and psychosocial empowerment can increase to allow optimal work conditions [13].
- Hold meetings with leaders from public and private sectors for legislation to better understand what is necessary to transform the lives of women and their money [9].

- Paid maternity leave, paid family, and paid medical leave.
- Strong property rights [15].
- Caregiver credits give these citizens money that goes towards their pension as done in countries such as Sweden and Japan [7]. This may include children, the sick, and the elderly depending on the country.
- Laws ensuring equal pay for the same work between men and women [7].
- Laws against pay discrimination [7].
- Laws to pay back those who have experienced pay discrimination [7].
- Protection to employees discussing pay raises with their employers as to eliminate punishment for discussing said raises [7].
- Creation of databases, policies for companies to publish the average pay of a certain job [7].
- Gender auditing for reports of gender equality in workplaces to be created and create consequences if equality is far from achieved [7].
- Set minimum wages to liveable standards (more information under historical case - United States [5,7].
- Make it illegal for companies to ask for a potential employee's salary history [5].
- Legislation that provides protection to gender-neutral families [5].
- Educate men on equality and women's issues [6,9].
- Gender responsive budgeting: this is where a government allots a certain amount of money for women's needs [7].



Example Cases

United States

The United States is a prominent example of how the gender-based wealth gap exists in developed economies. Not only are women earning 80% of what men earn, but it varies demographically. For example, none-white Hispanic women earn lowest amount at 54% of what white none-hispanic men earn [7].

One contributing factor to the gender-based wealth gap are the weak minimum wage laws. This is because it enforces economic inequality between socio-economic levels, it affects lower skilled labor which tends to be disproportionately worked by women. Women account for 67% of all employees making minimum wage [14]. Work fields most often run by women tend to be paid less as well to begin with causing the weak minimum wage laws to affect them even further. This thus causes further divides in the wealth gap between genders and accentuated by race [7].

At the current trajectory, it will take about 158 years for

women to earn as much as men in the United States. About half of the gap is due to a difference in jobs men and women take, 14% of the wealth gap is accounted for by taking care of children, and 33% to 38% of the gap is unexplainable by pure data indicating that sexism and discrimination is at play. Because caring for children contributes to the wealth gap, it is necessary for laws to allow for more affordable childcare, paid medical leave, paid maternity leave, and sick days being paid as well [7].



The 1970's and 1980's witnessed the beginning of closing the gender-based wealth gap as feminism from this era focusing on issues such as breaking the glass ceiling. During this time, states such as Minnesota enacted comparable-worth wage laws that eliminated the gap between 20 to 33%. Today, states such as California and Massachusetts use comparable-worth wage laws to ensure equal pay [7].

Many countries such as Sweden and Japan have been giving caregiver credits to their citizens who care for children thus causing them to leave their work. Caregiver credits give these citizens money that goes towards their pension and would be noticeably useful in closing the wealth gap in the United States if implemented [7].

Sub-Saharan Africa

Sub-Saharan Africa is an area of the world with great potential but currently has immense levels of gender inequality which consequently affect the gender-based wealth gap.

There are various contributing factors to this issue within Sub-Saharan Africa such as poverty, strong gender norms, gender inequality, and gender-based discrimination [20].

Many women go unpaid for their labor particularly for labor involving One of the biggest issues with extreme poverty is that women typically end up working on a farm for subsistence farming or they face possible starvation. This keeps women essentially stuck in the same position for decades with difficulties moving anywhere else. Many other women particularly from slightly less poor households stay at home to take care of the children and the elderly due to social pressure to conform to gender norms and may even be discouraged from working low skilled jobs [20].



Women need to learn to not comply with the strict gender norms regardless of the pressure and expectations. Once they gain this “rebellious” will, they will be empowered and could get a job.

Due to strong gender norms, once poor women get a job it isn't guaranteed that they will be paid as much as men, or even paid at all [20].

Women from wealthier and wealthier households do not face the same pressure to comply with gender norms, which is heavily linked to higher levels of education [20].

It is thus clear that education should become more accessible to girls which can empower them and equip them in the long run. This can be done by strengthening infrastructure. Additionally, women should have access to finance such as microloans and increased accessibility. Boys should be educated that there's nothing wrong with working a physically labor-intensive job such as working in a factory. The government can also focus on improving laws that promote gender equality which will then

translate to closing the gender-based wealth gap [20].



Questions to Consider

- What policies may be beneficial in closing the gender-based wealth gap in both developed and developing countries?
- How might the intersection between race/ethnic group and gender affect the gender-based wealth gap?
- How can the UN and international organizations contribute to the elimination of the gender-based wealth gap?
- How might the empowerment of women play a role in closing the gender-based wealth gap?
- Should informal work such as child rearing be considered formal work? How might these wages be carried out? What does this imply about our definition of formal work?
- How do poverty and low wages contribute to the gender-based wealth gap?
- How do women's issues such as early marriages and rape intersect with the gender-based wealth gap?
- What do Sub-Saharan Africa and the United States have in common regarding the given topic?

References

1. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/csw>
2. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/2030-agenda-for-sustainable-development>
3. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/csw/brief-history>
4. http://www.ilo.org/declaration/info/factsheets/WCMS_DECL_FS_84_EN/lang-en/index.htm
5. <https://www.cgdev.org/publication/closing-gender-pay-gaps>
6. <https://ourworldindata.org/economic-inequality-by-gender>
7. <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/international-approaches-closing-gender-wage-gap/>
8. <https://www.prb.org/resources/top-10-countries-closing-gender-gap/>
9. <https://www.weforum.org/projects/closing-the-gender-gap-accelerators>
10. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/03/03/world-could-achieve-gender-dividend-of-172-trillion-from-closing-lifetime-earnings-gaps>
11. <https://psychologycoalitionun.org/activities/statements/55-psychological-perspectives-empowering-rural-women-girls.html>
12. <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/saudi-women-barrel-into-workforce-changing-kingdom-2021-11-04/>
13. <https://www.cfr.org/womens-participation-in-global-economy/>
14. <https://inequality.org/facts/gender-inequality/#gender-inequality-covid>
15. <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/27491/412387-Gender-and-Property-Rights.PDF>
16. <https://www.theguardian.com/money/us-money-blog/2014/aug/11/women-rights-money-timeline-history>
17. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/history-of-work-organization-648000/Women-in-the-workforce>
18. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/women-and-the-sdgs>
19. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2020/01/23/closing-the-gender-gap-in-african-labor-markets-is-good-economics/>
20. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2020/01/23/closing-the-gender-gap-in-african-labor-markets-is-good-economics/>
21. https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/CSW/PFA_E_Final_WEB.pdf
22. <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/followup/beijing+5.htm>
23. <https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2021>

