

# UNCSW

## STUDY GUIDE

#LETSBEEUNITED

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## Letter from the Secretariat

Dear Delegates,

It is with great honor and enthusiasm that I welcome you to ITUMUN 2025, where innovation, diplomacy, and collaboration come together to shape a brighter future. As Secretary-General, it is my privilege to witness the incredible passion and dedication each of you brings to this conference.

For this year's ITUMUN, we challenge you to think beyond borders and redefine the possibilities of multilateral cooperation. As a university rooted in engineering and technical excellence, we have embraced our unique identity by curating committees and agendas that emphasize industrial development, technological advancement, and critical technical issues. Whether debating economic policies, grappling with emerging technologies, or navigating historical turning points, you will be tasked with crafting solutions that not only address the challenges at hand but also inspire progress.

Model United Nations is more than just an academic exercise—it is a platform for you to develop critical thinking, refine your communication skills, and foster a spirit of teamwork. This conference is your opportunity to step into the shoes of world leaders, embracing the responsibility and influence that comes with these roles.

On behalf of the entire ITUMUN team, I wish you the best of luck in your preparations and during the conference itself. We are here to support you every step of the way, ensuring that your ITUMUN experience is both impactful and unforgettable. I look forward to seeing the energy and ideas you bring, and the lasting connections you will forge throughout this journey.

Warm regards,

Roya Alhariri  
Secretary-General  
ITUMUN 2025



## Letter from the Chairboard

Distinguished delegates,

We are honored to welcome you to the United Nations Commission on Women. We are excited to welcome students from diverse backgrounds and from various universities joining us. But before we deep dive into the committee and the agenda items. Firstly, we are going to introduce ourselves.

We are excited to introduce our first committee board member, Yekta Can Tursun. Currently an Informatics master's student at the Technical University of Munich (TUM) in Germany. While he is in the process of writing his thesis, he is also an active member of both the MUNTUM and ITUMUN societies. In addition to this, he has been involved with ITUMUN since 2017.

Our second committee board member is Tuğba Kapacak. She is currently a sophomore in Istanbul University as a tourism management major. Other than her studies and internship, she has been serving as an active academic member of the IUMUN society since last year. Furthermore, this committee is actually going to be her first experience in ITUMUN.

Final member of the board is our academic assistant Cemre Yüksel. She is a 2nd year student in Marmara University business major. She is a former member of VefamUN, her high school club, and current member of MarmaramUN. It is her 7th year in MUN society.

For the committee, you are going to represent your country or your non-governmental organization in the United Nation Commission on Women or shortly UNCSW. This committee is very special committee for both of us with rich history aligned with the women empowerment. We are happy that it is being included in the ITUMUN '25 edition.

For the debate, we are proposing two agenda items that align with the theme of ITMUN '25. The first is "**The Impact of Innovation and Technological Change on Gender Equality and Empowerment.**" There is no doubt that we are living in a fast-paced, technology-driven world. And this rapid change will impact many people and groups. However, in this committee, we aim to focus specifically on women. What challenges will they face in the new AI and data-driven world? This agenda item seeks to explore those challenges and invite potential solutions from your perspectives.

Our second agenda item is "**Gender Equality and Empowerment in Climate, Environment, and Disaster Policies.**" Climate, environmental issues, and disasters will play an increasingly important role in our lives in the future. These challenges affect everyone. As delegates of the UNCSW, we will focus on the impact of these issues on women. We will

explore why women might be more vulnerable to these challenges compared to men, considering their gender and related factors.

The following study guide will serve as your foundation for preparing for the conference. Representing a country or non-governmental organization is a responsibility that demands extensive research beyond this guide. Therefore, we are very looking forward you to see in the committee and see you in the sessions where you share your ideas that you come up with during the debate. If you feel you wish to ask questions, please feel free to do so. See you in our beautiful ITU campus in Istanbul this February.

Best regards,  
Yekta Can Tursun & Tuğba Kapacak & Cemre Yüksel  
The board of United Nations Commission on Women

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## 1. Introduction to the Committee

### 1.1. The committee: The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women

The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW) established in 1946 by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). In its first meeting at the same year, it defined the function of itself to prepare recommendations and reports to the ECOSOC on promoting women's rights in political, economic, civil, social and educational fields (United Nations Economic and Social Council, 1946). It further states that men and women shall have equal rights and calls for new proposals to implement measures that achieve this aim. Therefore, it operates under the ECOSOC, and it serves as a vital platform for discussing policies, sharing best practices, and setting global standards to advance women's rights (UN Women, n. d.).

### 1.2. Its mandate

To better understand the committee, its mandate needs to be stated. This is crucial for the debate during our sessions where delegates should not step out of the committee's mandate. The UNCSW is tasked with monitoring the implementation of international commitments on gender equality. These international commitments can be any commitment from members states regarding to gender equality. These can be the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), which serves as a comprehensive framework for advancing gender equality, or the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), often referred to as the international bill of rights for women. Additionally, the UNCSW plays a vital role in assessing the progress made toward achieving the gender-related goals outlined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly Sustainable Development Goal 5: Gender Equality. The commission also examines commitments made in regional agreements, national policies, and declarations by Member States that align with its mandate.

Therefore, during its sessions, the UNCSW identifies gaps in implementation, provides recommendations for bridging these gaps, and ensures that international commitments translate into meaningful action at the national and local levels.

These are the responsibilities of the UNCSW. When preparing for this committee, each delegate should have a general understanding of their country's commitments and positions regarding mentioned obligations.

### 1.3. History and Scope

The commission was one of the first commissions under the newly founded United Nations (UN). One of the first tasks was participating the drafting process of Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Then it fully drafted the Convention of the Political Rights of Women (1953) which promoted women's political rights prominently. Despite initially focusing on setting legal standards, its scope has expanded to address more complex and intersectional issues.

These includes violence against women, and women's participation in decision-making processes.

In today's age, the UNCSW serves as a global forum where Member States, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders come together to address current and future challenges. It holds annual sessions to review progress and make recommendations for further action. In ITUMUN '25 edition, we have two agenda items which they will be explained further in this guide.

#### 1.4. Relationships with Other International Bodies

Another important part of the UNCSW is its relations with other international bodies. This is important where it can recommend its solutions to other international bodies. The most important one is UN Women, which acts as its secretariat and supports its mandate. Furthermore, the commission also engages with Human Rights Council (HRC), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). In addition to this, World Health Organization (WHO) is vital to ensure for the health related gender inequalities. While the UNCSW works only within UN but also works with non-UN bodies. These can be regional organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to align local efforts.

Therefore, it can be stated that the UNCSW's recommendations has an influence on policymaking across the UN system. It shapes international agreements and resolutions. It impacts programs that aim to create more equitable worlds for all genders. Hence, the committee archives the critical role of gender equality for sustainable development and human rights.

#### 1.5. UNCSW and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

As previously mentioned, UNCSW can work with various non-governmental organizations (NGOs). However, these NGOs need to have "Consultative Status" with ECOSOC. Therefore, when the committee addresses any NGO, that NGO should hold that status<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, NGOs can participate in the annual sessions of UNCSW. Therefore, besides the 45 members of UNCSW, there will be additional NGOs present during the debate.

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<sup>1</sup> It is possible to query which NGOs under Consultative Status of ECOSOC here:  
<https://esango.un.org/civilsociety/displayAdvancedSearch.do?method=search&sessionCheck=false>

## 2. Agenda Item: The Impact of Innovation and Technological Change on Gender Equality and Empowerment

There is no doubt that we are living in the fast-paced technological changes. These changes, including artificial intelligence, robotics, automation, blockchain, and big data, bring many challenges to gender equality and empowerment. Therefore, it is a necessity to investigate these changes regarding how they affect gender equality. In this agenda item, delegates of the UNCSW should investigate how these changes can disturb women across the world and what the responsibilities of the committee and member states are.

In this section, this study guide provides key terms that are important in the debate. Then, it explains how the past technological changes affected the women's equality and empowerments. Which previous actions are taken by the UNCSW and other UN bodies. Then current situation will be explained with some number of case studies. In the end, potential risks and challenges for the future will be explained which should be guide the debate during the sessions.

### 2.1. Key Terms

**Algorithmic Decision-Making** involves using computer algorithms to decide on tasks that traditionally require human judgment. These algorithms can use rules already defined by humans or rules derived from data sources. Furthermore, it may involve statistical models, machine learning, or other AI models. It aims to bring efficiency to tasks, but it raises concerns such as ethical issues, bias, and accountability (Corbett-Davies, Pierson, Feller, Goel, & Huq, 2017).

**Artificial Intelligence (AI)** is a broad term that can encompass many types of computer systems and software. However, not all software is AI. There have been some attempts to define AI in the past, but they are not always consistent or clear. In today's world, when we talk about AI, we usually mean a software system that learns from a dataset. These systems can range from simple statistical models with few parameters to complex models with billions of parameters, such as large language models. Therefore, for the purpose of this committee, we define AI as follows; A statistical system (from machine learning to neural networks) where it learns from data or environment to complete certain tasks. Therefore, this system should learn from collected data.

**Contraceptive Technology** includes methods or tools that designed prevent pregnancy thus giving individuals control over reproduction. This control brings both individuals and families to control their family planning. However, side effects and its accessibility remain important (Sitruk-Ware, Nath, & Mishell Jr, 2013).

**Digital Literacy** is the ability to effectively use digital tools and platforms for both personal life and professional life. These tools might include, internet, social media platforms or even now AI services (Tinmaz, Lee, Fanea-Ivanovici, & Baber, 2022).

**Equitable Access to Technology** is ensuring that all individuals, regardless of their background, identify, or gender, have fair opportunities to use and benefit from digital tools (Lee & Templeton, 2008).

**Gender Bias** is unfair treatment or assumptions made about individuals based on their gender. It also includes favoring one gender over another. It can manifest in various areas of daily life such as in workplace, education, healthcare and more (Deaux & Taynor, 1973).

**Gender Digital Divide** is a gap in access and use of digital technology between men and women. This divide is affected by many factors such as socioeconomic inequalities and cultural norms. In addition to this, it may be affected by education disparities (Acilar & Sæbø, 2023).

**Online Harassment** is abusive, threatening or harmful behavior conducted via digital platforms. These platforms include social media, email, or instant messaging apps. It can have many forms such as cyberbullying, doxing, stalking or hate speech. It can affect victims seriously including emotional, psychological and even physical (Blackwell, Dimond, Schoenebeck, & Lampe, 2017).

**Women's Empowerment** can be defined as a process of enhancing women's ability to make decisions, access opportunities, and exercise control over their lives. It may take many forms such as promoting and enabling equality in various fields such as education, employment, healthcare, and art. It also includes political participation for elective and non-elective positions (Cornwall, 2016).

## 2.2. Historical Background

Women's rights and opportunities have been significantly impacted by new technologies and inventions throughout history. Even though many of these innovations were not originally created to promote gender equality, they have still helped women in many ways, earning their own money, and empowering them to make critical decisions. Hence, this section of the study guide investigates some significant changes and how they affected women's empowerment in the past.

### Printing Press

The printing press is unquestionably one of the greatest inventions that has altered the course of history. It is invented in the 15th century, made it much easier to print and share books and other written materials. This allowed more people, including women, to learn how to read and write. Over time, educated women began to speak up against unfair societal rules. For example, Mary Wollstonecraft used books to share her ideas about women's rights, which inspired many others to push for change (Forster, 2019). In addition to this, the printing press also helped women gain access to literature, scientific texts, and religious materials that had previously been out of reach, encouraging broader intellectual engagement and participation in debates that shaped society.

## **Industrial revolution**

Another great change happened with the industrial revolution started from Great Britain in 1760 and spread around Europe then US and across the world. It brought big changes to how goods were made. Factories, with their machines, created many new jobs for women, especially in industries like textiles (Fuentes & Ehrenreich, 1983). While these jobs often had poor working conditions, they gave women a way to earn their own income, helping them become more independent. This financial independence also encouraged later movements for workers' rights and gender equality. Additionally, the introduction of mechanized tools and production systems allowed women to demonstrate their capability to adapt to and excel in roles that had traditionally been dominated by men, gradually shifting societal attitudes.

## **The Sewing Machine**

During the industrial innovation, one of the inventions played vital role for women. It is the sewing machine, invented in the 19th century. It changed both household and professional work. It made it easier and faster to produce clothing, saving time and effort for women who worked at home. It also gave women new job opportunities in sewing and tailoring, both in factories and as independent workers (Fuentes & Ehrenreich, 1983). For many women, especially those from lower-income families, this was a way to support themselves financially. The sewing machine also fostered creativity and entrepreneurship, with some women establishing their own tailoring businesses or participating in growing fashion industries.

## **Contraceptive Technology and Birth Control**

Another innovation that helped women is the invention of contraceptives. These can include the birth control pill. They are invented around 1960s and it was a major turning point for women. These innovations allowed women to make choices about their reproductive health, helping them focus on education and careers without worrying about unplanned pregnancies (Sitruk-Ware, Nath, & Mishell Jr, 2013). This control also enabled women to take on more leadership roles and break traditional expectations about their place in society. Access to reliable contraception also played a crucial role in reducing poverty, as women could plan their families and ensure better economic conditions for themselves and their children.

## **Mobile Communications**

When the new millennium began, mobile phones became widespread across the world. This was also followed by the rise of smartphones which transformed how we communicate and access information. There is no doubt that they are also powerful tool for women's empowerment. In areas where it's hard for women to travel freely, phones allow them to access important services like banking, healthcare, and education. Mobile technology has further enabled women to stay connected with family and communities, breaking isolation and providing a platform for self-expression and collective action. Furthermore, social media platforms have also played a key role in helping women organize movements for social and political change. One of the prominent examples is the #MeToo which enabled women to

share their experiences, raise awareness about sexual harassments. Additionally, it advocated for accountability and systemic change (Ozkazanc-Pan, 2019).

### 2.3. Current Situation

These innovations bring the society to today. Despite all the change and today's effort, women have less access to technology than men globally. According to International Telecommunication Union, shortly ITU, conducted research regarding to internet access globally. There is a gap in between women and men but this gap widens in the low-income regions as shown in the Figure 1 (International Telecommunication Union (ITU), 2023).

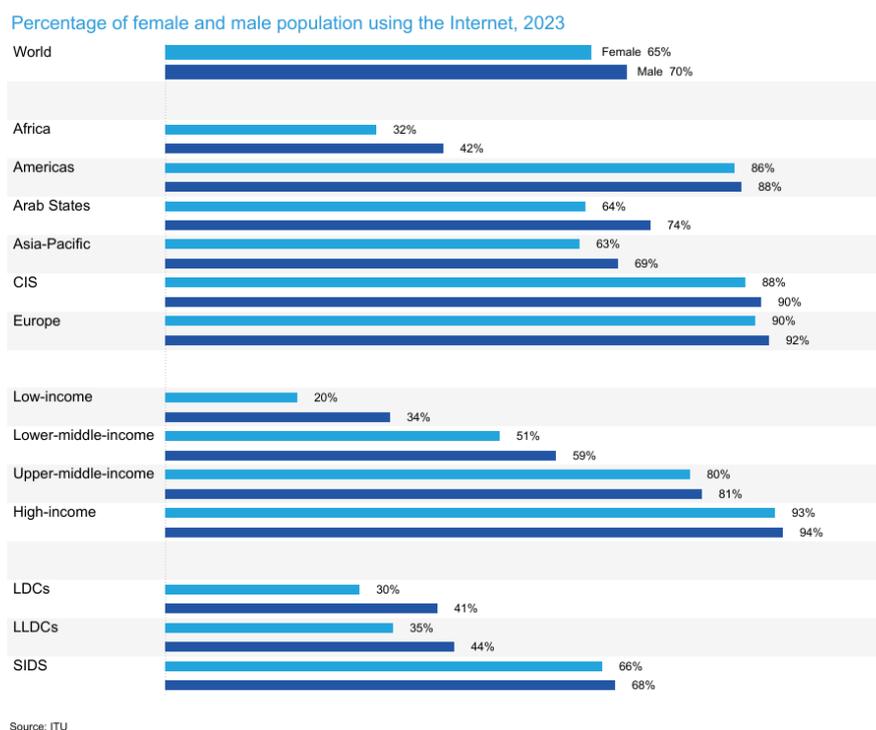


Figure 1: ITU's 2023 study regarding to internet usage comparing the genders. It is possible that difference amplifies in the Least Develop Countries (LDCs) and Landlock Developing Countries (LLDCs) (International Telecommunication Union (ITU), 2023).

It is possible to define this gap as a **gender divide**. This divide is driven by many factors. One of them is affordability; due to economic disparity, women are less likely to afford technological devices and services. Another factor is cultural norms, where societal expectations discourage women from using technology. This, unfortunately, leads to a lack of digital skills for women, where they cannot develop their necessary digital literacy. Thus, women will be demotivated from pursuing careers in tech sectors. Hence, these factors are important and need to be addressed to ensure equal participation in the digital economy and close gaps in education and income.

This lack of digital literacy contributes to another area where women are underrepresented. It is in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields with already

mentioned the tech industry. Globally, women make up only about 20% of the workforce in STEM-related careers (Goulas, Griselda, & Megalokonomou, 2024). In leadership positions within tech companies, the percentage is even lower (Eagly, 2021). This lack of representation perpetuates stereotypes and creates fewer role models for young girls interested in STEM. Initiatives such as mentorship programs, scholarships, and inclusive hiring practices are essential to improving women's presence in these fields (Verdugo-Castro, García-Holgado, & Sanchez-Gomez, 2022).

One key area that it is also possible to observe gender digital divide is in digital financial services. These services include mobile banking and digital wallets. They have revolutionized how people manage money. However, many women, particularly in low-income countries, still face barriers to accessing these services due to limited technological literacy and restricted autonomy over financial decisions (Vasile, Panait, & Apostu, 2021). Expanding access to digital financial tools can help women save money, access credit, and grow small businesses, significantly improving their economic independence.

From the printing press to modern AI technologies, innovations have significantly improved the lives of women. These advancements have created new opportunities but also show the need to ensure fair access for all. As technology continues to develop, it is essential to focus on closing gender gaps and supporting women's empowerment worldwide. Therefore, the lessons of history remind us that while innovation can drive progress, it requires intentional effort to ensure that progress is inclusive and equitable for everyone.

#### 2.4. Challenges and Risks

In today's world, societies are facing numerous challenges. While these challenges are not gender-specific, it can be highlighted that women may be disproportionately affected due to their gender.

##### **Security of the personal data**

One critical area is the safety of personal data, which can include sensitive information such as banking details, health records, financial data, and location. Ensuring its safety is a significant concern particularly for women. Data breaches and cyberattacks can expose sensitive information. This leaked sensitive information can be used maliciously and can put women at risk of identity theft, blackmail, or other forms of exploitation. For instance, women in abusive relationships are particularly vulnerable when their personal data is compromised. In these situations, the abuser may gain access to location data, communication records or financial details. These can be used to intimidate the victim. The breach of data further exacerbates the risk of emotional and physical harm. Even in some cases, this violation of privacy can make it more difficult for the women to seek help due to blackmailing and other factors. Women in these situations might fail to escape the abuse and lead into abusive loop.

One example can be seen in the Türkiye. Series of leaks happen from both public and private sectors which lead to millions of people personal sensitive information leaked. Some malicious groups collected these leaked data into a website called "Panel," where anyone, even without advanced computer knowledge, can access and query personal information for a small fee. The popularity of these platforms widespread across social media especially in a platform called Discord. These social media platforms, while empowering for women as stated previously, have also become spaces where women are frequently targeted with abusive messages, doxxing, and stalking. These threats can create serious harm both mentally and physically to women where their sensitive personal data can be accessed effortlessly. To combat these issues, Turkish officials banned the Discord in its jurisdiction since 2024.

So, it is crucial to develop robust data protection measures and educating users about online safety are critical to mitigating these risks. The responsibility should be not only on the public sectors but also the private sectors (Avllazagaj, Ayday, & Çiçek, 2016). Strengthening laws and implementing stricter platform policies are essential steps to ensure women's safety both online and real life.

### **Artificial Intelligence**

One of the new technologies that started to affect the society as whole is artificial intelligence, short as AI. As it is defined previously, it learns from the data. It is called training of AI model where the AI tries to capture the pattern of its training data. Therefore, it is critical which type of data and its content being put to AI model. If data has bias inside, the AI model learn this bias. There are many types of bias could occur in during the training of AI model (Suresh & Guttag, 2021). Two of them are important in the context of this agenda item.

One is called **historical bias**. It occurs when the data used to train an AI system reflects the socio-cultural prejudices and beliefs of the past, which may no longer be accurate or fair in the present (Hellström, Dignum, & Bensch, 2020). One example can be given that a system trained on historical data from resumes submitted to the company over a 10-year period, which mostly came from male applicants. As a result, the system learned to favor male candidates and penalize female candidates, even if they had the same qualifications. This is an example of how historical bias can lead to discrimination and unfair outcomes in AI systems.

Another is called **representation bias**. It occurs when the data used to train an AI system is not representative of the target population or domain (Shahbazi, Lin, Asudeh, & Jagadish, 2023). It can affect the performance and fairness of an AI system that relies on the data. One example of representation bias is geographic bias in image datasets. This happens when the images used to train an AI system are not diverse enough in terms of the geographic regions they capture. For example, a study found that 45% of the images in the ImageNet dataset, a popular training dataset for image recognition, were from the United States, while only 3% were from Africa (Suresh & Guttag, 2021). Therefore, same conclusion can be made

regarding to gender bias. If the data collected do not represent women truly, models that being trained on these datasets might have bias in themselves.

These two mentioned types of biases can lead to create a general gender bias in the AI systems. And as AI becomes more prevalent, this gender bias in algorithms poses a serious challenge. AI systems trained on biased data can reinforce and even amplify existing stereotypes, leading to unequal opportunities for women.

Furthermore, UNESCO highlighted that popular Large Language Models (LLMs), including GPT-3.5 by OpenAI and Llama 2 by Meta, exhibit gender bias against women when they instructed to create stories. For instance, in these stories, GPT3.5 assigns high-status jobs, such as engineer or doctor, to men while relegating women to traditional roles such as domestic servant or cook. In the Llama 2 case, women were also described in domestic roles four times more often than men (UNESCO & on Artificial Intelligence, 2024). Therefore, in this debate, we want to also focus on some current and possible future use cases of AI and the associated risks for discrimination against women within them.

Since these models adapted by many industries. This type of gender bias is a problem for women. One example would be the **AI in hiring**. It is a huge market on the rise but met with a similar level of controversy. Many different studies by scientists and journalists alike prove biases of different AI systems when presented with similar but slightly different applications (Albaroudi, Mansouri, & Alameer, 2024). Minor details such as the background or wearing a headscarf or not may influence the results heavily enough to invoke fears of gender biases. Regulation and transparency for application software is an important step to ensure fair treatment. However, the use alone remains highly controversial due to the risks of unfair treatments. This mentioned issue is generally about the decisions done by AI that could lead to discrimination against women. It is also possible to define this as algorithmic decisions.

However, there is another area that can create risk for the women. It is **generative AI** models. These models can produce images and videos with a prompt of text. Its applications can make it possible to generate or manipulate images, sound, or videos. While such technologies have legitimate uses in areas like entertainment, education, and design, they also present problems. Researchers investigated one of the popular image creation AI models called Stable Diffusion (Rombach, Blattmann, Lorenz, Esser, & Ommer, 2021). This image generation model demonstrated gender biases in term of stereotypes as demonstrated in the Figure 1 (Wang, Liu, Di, Liu, & Wang, 2023).



Figure 2: Researchers instructed Stable Diffusion to create images with and without gender-specific prompts. On the left side, the model produced male pictures for the career prompts without specifying the gender. Meanwhile, for the family prompts, it produced images that included women, even though it was not instructed to include them. Furthermore, when instructed to create "male in career" images, it generated more leader positions, whereas, in the women's case, it tended to produce careers traditionally associated with women (Wang, Liu, Di, Liu, & Wang, 2023)

While the gender bias is still a big issue in the generative AI. Another concerning application is the creation of deepfakes. They are hyper-realistic but fabricated images, videos or audio recordings (Verdugo-Castro, García-Holgado, & Sanchez-Gomez, 2022). These AI models can be used to generate explicit content featuring an individual's likeness without their consent. For women, this represents a particularly severe threat, as malicious actors can exploit these technologies to create fake intimate images or videos. Furthermore, these fabricated materials are often weaponized to intimidate, harass, or blackmail women, causing emotional distress, reputational damage, and even physical harm. The nature of the social media amplifies the impact, as such content can spread rapidly, thus making it nearly impossible to contain or erase.

Hence, as generative AI models continue to advance, it is critical to address these risks. One way to do is through regulations. In the next part of the guide, regulations will be explained. Another way is to increase public awareness to protect individuals, especially women, from their misuse.

## 2.5. Current Actions

When it comes to AI and Data regulation, the European Union (EU) provides a valuable example. The EU has implemented a regulatory framework, including the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which was passed in 2016 to establish guidelines for how governments and private sectors should handle personal data. The GDPR was one of the first regulations of its kind and has since set a global standard for data protection.

This influence is often referred to as the "Brussels Effect", a phenomenon where the EU's regulatory standards become adopted internationally. As a result, the GDPR has inspired similar data protection laws worldwide, cementing the EU's leadership role in setting global norms for data governance.

The EU hopes to create another "Brussels Effects" for AI field. Its regulation called AI act and it passed in 2024. It is one of the first regulation to regulate the AI. This AI act proposal is important since here, it is possible to observe how a legislative body reacts to new innovations.

From the UN side, it has been proactive in addressing the implications of artificial intelligence. They established a High-level Advisory Body on AI in 2020 to provide expert analysis and recommendations for AI governance. In 2021, they adopted the Recommendation on the Ethics of AI, the first global agreement defining common values and principles for AI development. Furthermore, in 2023, the UN Security Council held a meeting discussing the potential threats and opportunities of AI for international peace and security. These actions demonstrate the UN's commitment to ethical AI governance and international cooperation. However, within this debate we would aim to create a more comprehensive UN approach to encourage member states to implement fitting AI regulations.

## 2.6. Key Questions/Resolution should answer

In this section, we would like to general idea what the resolution should answers. These are not concrete requirements, but it should be giving lights on what it is expected from the committee.

- How can governments ensure equitable access to technology for all genders?
- What steps can be taken to address algorithmic biases in AI?
- How can innovation in education and healthcare be leveraged for gender equality?
- How can gender-based online harassment be effectively addressed?
- Which international bodies and governmental agencies are responsible for these issues?
- What is the specific role of the UNCSW in tackling these challenges?

### 3. Agenda Item: Gender Equality and Empowerment in Climate, Environment, and Disaster Policies

#### 3.1. Key Terms

**Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC):** A country's climate action plan under the Paris Agreement that outlines efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to climate change impacts.

**Zero-Carbon Solutions:** Technological and policy solutions aimed at eliminating or reducing carbon emissions.

**Agenda 21:** A non-binding action plan from the 1992 Rio Earth Summit that emphasizes sustainable development and the involvement of women in climate action and environmental issues.

**Paris Agreement:** An international treaty to limit global temperature rise and address climate change.

**Cultural Norms:** Traditional societal beliefs and practices that dictate gender roles and behaviors.

**Environmental Justice:** The concept that all people, regardless of gender, race, or socio-economic status, should have equal access to a clean and healthy environment.

**Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR):** A systematic approach to minimize the impacts of natural disasters through policies, strategies, and preparedness efforts.

**UNDRR:** United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction.

**Gender-Responsive Disaster Risk Management (GRDRM):** A framework for ensuring that both women and men are equally involved in disaster planning and response.

**Women's Economic Empowerment:** This term refers to the process of enabling women to gain control over their economic resources and decision-making.

#### 3.2. Historical Background

Environmental changes and disasters have historically affected men and women differently. Women often carried the burden of the adverse impacts. Especially in developing countries where gender inequalities are more apparent (Denton, 2022). This section of the study guide explores pivotal historical changes and their influence on women's empowerment.

#### Cyclone Sidr in Bangladesh

A tropical cyclone is a rapidly rotating storm that begins over tropical oceans, and they can vary in speed, size, and intensity. World Meteorological Organization rate it as the

second-most dangerous natural hazards, after earthquakes (World Meteorological Organization, 2024). Cyclone Sidr was one of them that resulted in one of the worst natural disasters in Bangladesh. Among the thirty districts of Bangladesh, four were classed as "severely affected," while eight were listed as "moderately affected" (OCHA, 2008). The Government of Bangladesh, with the help of international experts, had designed a comprehensive recovery plan. However, this plan did not reach the country's population diversely. Most the deaths were among women. Since the social norms that restrict their access to information made evacuation and preparedness efforts less effective (Ashraf & Azad, 2015).

### **Droughts in Sub-Saharan Africa**

Women, being primarily responsible for water collection, have to travel longer distances during droughts. This increases their risk of physical harm, including exhaustion, dehydration, and exposure to violence. Furthermore, the extended time required for water collection diminishes opportunities for women to engage in education and income-generating activities perpetuating cycles of poverty and inequality. Sub-Saharan is still one of these locations where women face these hardships simply because of their gender (Sorenson & Morssink & Campos, 2011).

Despite being disproportionately affected by environmental challenges, women have played critical roles in environmental management and climate resilience. Their involvement is often driven by the immediate and long-term impacts these challenges have on their families and communities. Let us examine the following foundations as illustrative examples (Fatema et al., 2023).

### **Green Belt Movement in Kenya**

Founded by Prof. Wangari Maathai in 1977, this foundation has planted over 51 million trees in Kenya. GBM works at the grassroots, national, and international levels. Their main goal is to promote environmental conservation and build climate resilience. They also work towards the empowerment of communities, especially women and girls, while fostering democratic space and sustainable livelihoods. This organization in particular, highlights how women's empowerment in taking environmental action can simultaneously be a solution for ecological degradation and gender inequalities (Maathai & Green Belt Movement, 2004).



Figure 3, Womenaid International, 1977

### **Women's Collectives in Watershed Management of India**

Women's organizations in Maharashtra have been actively engaged in watershed management, addressing various water-related challenges and enhancing agricultural production. Their efforts in constructing check dams, restoring water bodies, and promoting rainwater harvesting have resulted in improved groundwater levels and more effective irrigation methods. These interventions have strengthened community-based resilience to drought. Involving women in leadership and decision-making has also fostered their social and economic empowerment (Agarwal, 2010).

Furthermore, initiatives like the Maharashtra Rural Livelihoods Mission have bolstered these efforts, highlighting the critical role women play in rural development overall.

Over the decades, there has been a growing recognition of the need to integrate gender considerations into climate and disaster policies. Key milestones include:

- 1992: Rio Earth Summit: The adoption of Agenda 21 highlighted the importance of women's participation in sustainable development efforts (United Nations, n.d.).
- 2015: Paris Agreement: Acknowledges gender equality and women's empowerment as crucial for effective climate action (United Nations, n.d.).
- UN Frameworks on Disaster Risk Reduction: The Sendai Framework (2015-2030) emphasizes the role of women as leaders and stakeholders in building disaster resilience (Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, 2015).

### **3.3. Current Situation**

Overview of international agreements:

#### **Paris Agreement**

Climate change is a global emergency that goes beyond national borders, it is an issue that requires international cooperation and coordinated solutions at all levels. To address this, The Paris Agreement—a legally binding international treaty on climate change— was adopted by 196 Parties at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP21) in Paris, France, on 12 December 2015. So, what is its primary objective? Its main goal is to hold “the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels” and pursue efforts “to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels” (United Nations, n.d.).

#### *How does the Paris Agreement work?*

The Paris Agreement works on a five-year cycle. Every five years, each country is expected to submit an updated national climate action plan - known as Nationally Determined Contribution, NDC. In their NDCs, countries communicate actions they will take to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions in order to reach the goals of the Paris Agreement. Countries also communicate in their NDCs actions they will take to build resilience to adapt to the impacts of climate change.

In order to keep a track, countries established an enhanced transparency framework (ETF). Under ETF, starting in 2024, countries will report transparently on actions taken and progress in climate change mitigation and support provided or received (United Nations, n.d.).

#### *What did it achieve so far and what is the current status?*

Climate change action needs to be massively increased to achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement. However, its implementation has already achieved low-carbon solutions and new markets. More and more countries, regions, cities and companies are establishing carbon neutrality targets. Zero-carbon solutions are becoming competitive across economic sectors. For instance, in 2023, the first “global stock take” of the world’s efforts under the Paris Agreement concluded at COP28. This trend is most noticeable in the power and transport sectors and has created many new business opportunities for early movers. By 2030, zero-carbon solutions could be competitive in sectors representing over 70% of global emissions (United Nations, n.d.).

### **Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015-2030)**

It is a global agreement adopted in 2015 to reduce disaster risk and losses. It works by guiding countries and communities to take actions that minimize the impact of disasters, enhance resilience, and ensure sustainable development. The framework sets measurable targets to reduce disaster losses in terms of mortality, affected people, economic loss, damage to critical infrastructure amongst more.

They have four priorities for action:

- i. Understanding disaster risk: Gathering data, improving risk assessment, and sharing knowledge to better understand hazards and vulnerabilities.
- ii. Strengthening disaster risk governance: Creating strong institutions, policies, and strategies for disaster risk management at local, national, and regional levels.

- III. Investing in disaster risk reduction: Integrating disaster risk reduction into development policies, planning, and budgeting to ensure sustainable growth.
- IV. Enhancing disaster preparedness: Developing and implementing effective disaster response and recovery strategies, including early warning systems and community-based preparedness (Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, 2015).

*What did it achieve so far?*

Although challenges still remain, its implantation achieved some noticeable progress. Many countries have improved their understanding of disaster risks by conducting better assessments. More countries now have national disaster risk reduction strategies, increasing from 55 in 2015 to 123 in 2022. The framework is also closely linked with the Sustainable Development Goals, especially SDG 11, which also aims to make cities and communities more resilient.

*What are the challenges?*

Despite this progress, there are still challenges. The pace of action is too slow, and many countries are not on track to meet the goals by 2030. Progress is uneven, with some regions and countries moving faster than others. There are also issues with collecting consistent data and reporting disaster losses. Many countries lack systems to track these losses, which makes it harder to measure progress and plan for future risks. These gaps need to be addressed to ensure full implementation (Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, 2015).

*What is the current situation?*

Currently, implementation is still uneven across regions and countries. Some areas are making faster progress, while others are lagging behind. Japan, Australia, and the United States have been faster in implementing these strategies, due to strong governance and advanced infrastructure. While many developing countries in regions like Sub-Saharan Africa and parts of South Asia are moving more slowly due to limited resources and insufficient disaster risk management systems. Overall, even though 2024 report hasn't been published yet, the 2023 progress report emphasizes the need for more focused action to meet the framework's goals by 2030 (Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, 2015).

### 3.4. Case studies:

- <https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/15/20/15041>
- <https://www.women4biodiversity.org/earth-day-2023-investing-in-indigenous-women-and-their-knowledge-in-biodiversity/>
- <https://nepal.un.org/en/245046-preparing-women-disaster-risk-reduction-nepal>
- <https://www.un.org/fr/desa/climate-resilient-farming-model-helps-indian-women-bounce-back-after-drought>

- <https://www.care-international.org/news/care-urges-gender-focused-climate-solutions-asia-pacific>
- <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/stories/feature-story/2023/04/beyond-cop27-pacific-women-leaders-on-why-women-and-girls-must-be-included-in-climate-solutions>

### 3.5. Challenges and Risks

Women still face various barriers in basic human rights due to the social or cultural norms all around the world. Cultural norms and socio-economic inequalities often prevent women from participating in decision-making processes on climate change and disaster management. In most societies, traditional gender roles limit the leadership potential of women by relegating them to the domestic sphere or subordinate roles. This marginalization is further worsened by socio-economic disparities in education, financial resources, and employment opportunities. For instance, women in rural areas often suffer from a lack of training or economic independence. This makes them unable to consider activities in the name of climate action or disaster preparedness. This exclusion not only negatively affects gender equality but also weakens the overall effectiveness of climate policy, as women's specific insights and needs are disregarded.

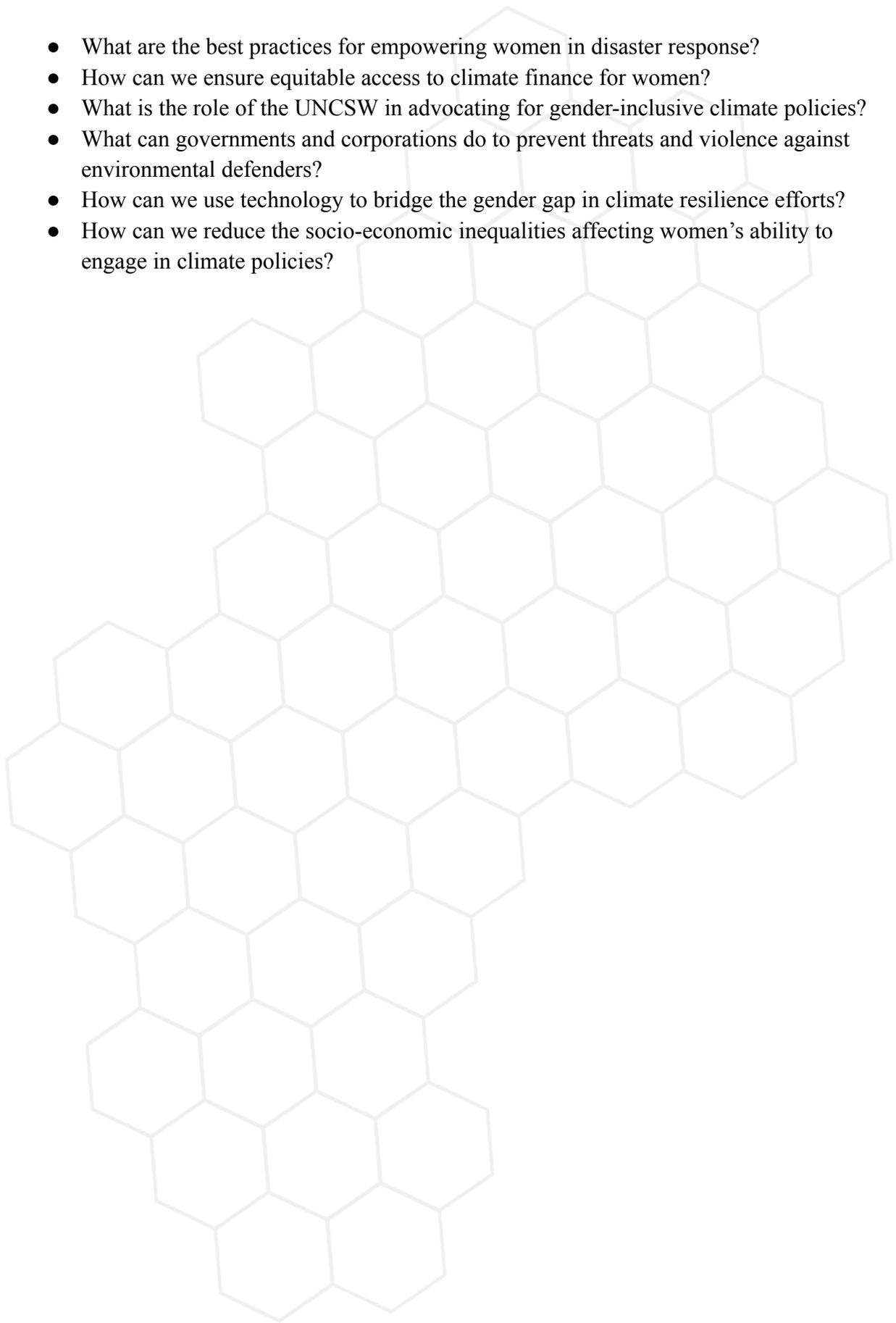
They also still remain underrepresented on the climate and disaster leadership stage globally. Only a small percentage of women hold executive positions in environmental agencies or policymaking bodies. This gender imbalance results in a lack of policies that adequately address the challenges women face, such as their disproportionate vulnerability to climate-related events. For instance, in the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, women faced a higher percentage of fatalities due to cultural restrictions on swimming and mobility. This is just one case where inequality persists without women's voices in decision-making.

Although disasters affect the majority of the population, they disproportionately impact women due to structural inequalities. Their attempt of changing these inequalities also lead them to face dangers that mainly involves harassment and violence in all forms. Their activism, which frequently intersects with advocating for land rights, water access, or combating deforestation, can provoke retaliation from corporations, government actors or from the population in general. For instance, Berta Cáceres, was a prominent Honduran Indigenous environmental activist. After years of constant harassment, death threats, and attempts, she got murdered in her own house by two men. This is just one of the few examples that highlights the extreme dangers women face in this field. These risks are further exacerbated by limited legal protections and a lack of international accountability mechanisms (Faces of Assassination, 2024).

### 3.6. Key Questions/Resolution should answer

- How can international frameworks better address gender in climate policies?

- What are the best practices for empowering women in disaster response?
- How can we ensure equitable access to climate finance for women?
- What is the role of the UNCSW in advocating for gender-inclusive climate policies?
- What can governments and corporations do to prevent threats and violence against environmental defenders?
- How can we use technology to bridge the gender gap in climate resilience efforts?
- How can we reduce the socio-economic inequalities affecting women's ability to engage in climate policies?



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