

Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) Background Guide

**Cleveland Council on
WORLD AFFAIRS**



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The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is the United Nations' principal intergovernmental body dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women. Established by ECOSOC Resolution 11(II) in 1946, CSW functions as a subsidiary body of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and plays a critical role in shaping global standards on women's rights, documenting the lived realities of women and girls worldwide, and advancing normative progress across political, economic, civil, social, and technological domains.¹ In 1996, ECOSOC Resolution 1996/6 expanded the Commission's mandate to include a leading role in monitoring the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, while mainstreaming a gender perspective throughout all United Nations activities.²

Each year, the Commission convenes a two-week session at UN Headquarters in New York, bringing together Member States, UN entities, and civil society representatives to evaluate progress and challenges in gender equality.³ These sessions culminate in Agreed Conclusions and recommendations submitted to ECOSOC, which help guide international efforts to protect and advance the rights of women and girls.

As digital technologies continue to reshape the global landscape, they have opened new spaces for political engagement, expression, and opportunity, but also new arenas for discrimination, exploitation, and harm. Women face growing threats in online environments, from gendered algorithmic bias and invasive surveillance to the rapid proliferation of digitally facilitated gender-based violence (GBV).⁴ Simultaneously, technologies like artificial intelligence (AI), predictive policing, and facial recognition are often deployed without ethical safeguards, which only reinforces existing inequalities and excludes marginalized groups on a

¹ UN Women, "How We Work: Commission on the Status of Women," *UN Women*, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/how-we-work/commission-on-the-status-of-women>.

² United Nations, *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women, 1995)*, <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/BDPfA%20E.pdf>.

³ UN Women, "About the Commission on the Status of Women," *UN Women*, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/how-we-work/commission-on-the-status-of-women/about-the-commission>.

⁴ UN Women, "Digital Abuse: Trolling, Stalking, and Other Forms of Technology-Facilitated Violence Against Women," *UN Women*, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/articles/faqs/digital-abuse-trolling-stalking-and-other-forms-of-technology-facilitated-violence-against-women>.

greater scale. Given its role in norm-setting and rights protection, the Commission on the Status of Women has an urgent responsibility to spearhead international efforts on feminist digital governance, gender-responsive AI regulation, and robust mechanisms to ensure accountability and safety in online spaces.

I. Technology, Surveillance, and Digital Rights

Statement of the Issue:

As digital technologies rapidly evolve, so do the risks they pose to gender equality. Women and girls around the world face targeted abuse in online spaces – ranging from deepfake pornography, doxxing, and cyberstalking to platform-enabled harassment and algorithmic marginalization.⁵

No coherent international or legal framework currently exists to define, prevent, or address digital gender-based violence (GBV), despite its global prevalence.⁶ Private technology companies remain largely unregulated, while national laws struggle to keep pace with the transnational nature of digital harms. This legal vacuum leaves those targeted by online abuse with no real protection, while allowing perpetrators to act without consequence.

Simultaneously, artificial intelligence (AI) and other automated systems – which are now central to hiring, healthcare, policing, and border control – replicate and reinforce structural inequalities. Facial recognition software disproportionately misidentifies women of color; predictive policing systems perpetuate racial bias; and hiring algorithms often filter out non-male applicants based on historical datasets.⁷ These design flaws are not accidental but reflect a broader failure to include diverse perspectives in the development of emerging technologies.

Online platforms have also become breeding grounds for misogynistic ideologies. The “manosphere” – a loose network of communities that claim to address men’s struggles – and the rise of hypermasculine influencers like Andrew Tate, weaponize algorithms to spread antifeminist rhetoric and promote misogynistic attitudes.⁸ These digital ecosystems have been

⁵ UN Women, “Digital Abuse: Trolling, Stalking, and Other Forms of Technology-Facilitated Violence Against Women.”

⁶ 2020 Centennial Initiative, *UN Declares 2025 the Year to Combat Digital Violence Against Women: Global Measures and National Responses*, 2025, <https://www.2020centennial.org/un-declares-2025-the-year-to-combat-digital-violence-against-women-global-measures-and-national-responses>.

⁷ National Organization for Women (NOW) in collaboration with Incogni, *Online Abuse Survey Report*, March 2025, https://now.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/NOWxIncogni_Online-abuse-survey.pdf.

⁸ UN Women, “Explainer: What Is the ‘Manosphere’ and Why Should We Care?,” *UN Women*, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/articles/explainer/what-is-the-manosphere-and-why-should-we-care>.

linked to radicalization, harassment campaigns, and real-world acts of violence, yet remain largely outside the scope of formal gender security discussions.

The rise of digital systems has intensified gender inequality, creating an urgent mandate for the Commission on the Status of Women. With technology now central to the access of rights and opportunity, CSW must lead in setting ethical norms, enforcing accountability, and protecting those targeted by digital harm. Promoting feminist tech governance, gendered AI audits, and legal protections for online abuse are essential steps to ensure that digital progress is inclusive. Whether the digital world empowers or marginalizes women will depend on whether institutions confront its gendered consequences and act decisively.

History:

Technology-facilitated gender-based violence (GBV) emerged in the 1990s through email harassment, chatroom abuse, and early online forums, marking the internet's transformation into a new frontier of gendered harm.⁹ As platforms evolved, so did the forms of abuse. By the early 2010s, image-based sexual abuse, particularly "revenge porn," had become widespread, exposing systemic gaps in law enforcement, platform accountability, and support.¹⁰

In 2013, the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW57) addressed violence against women and girls broadly in its Agreed Conclusions, calling for multisectoral prevention and legal reform.¹¹ However, it did not yet address the digital dimension of this violence, reflecting an institutional lag between technological change and gender policy.

The Gamergate controversy in 2014 marked a turning point in global awareness of digital misogyny. Sparked by a false online accusation against game developer Zoë Quinn, the controversy quickly escalated into a widespread harassment campaign targeting women in the video game industry, involving death threats, doxxing, and online stalking.¹² Those involved in harassment campaigns claimed to be fighting for the integrity of "gamer culture," but in practice, they exposed how anonymous online spaces were being weaponized to silence feminist voices.¹³

⁹ Danielle Keats Citron, *Law's Expressive Value in Combating Cyber Gender Harassment*, Boston University School of Law Working Paper No. 10-03, 2009, https://scholarship.law.bu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1617&context=faculty_scholarship.

¹⁰ Danielle Keats Citron, *Law's Expressive Value in Combating Cyber Gender Harassment*.

¹¹ UN Women, *Agreed Conclusions of the 57th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women*, 2013, <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/CSW/57/CSW57-AgreedConclusions.pdf>.

¹² *Encyclopedia Britannica*, "Gamergate Campaign," <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Gamergate-campaign>.

¹³ *Encyclopedia Britannica*, "Gamergate Campaign."

That same year, CSW58 acknowledged the digital gender divide as a barrier to women's rights but continued to frame technology primarily as a tool for empowerment rather than a site of gendered harm.¹⁴

In 2015, UN Women published “Cyber Violence Against Women and Girls: A Worldwide Wake-Up Call,” one of the first international reports to describe online abuse as a growing human rights crisis.¹⁵ It urged collective responsibility among states and tech platforms to establish safeguards, laying the groundwork for the governance frameworks and accountability mechanisms now under global debate.

Meanwhile, the 2010s saw the consolidation of misogynistic ideology in digital spaces. “Incel” communities, originally based on Reddit, migrated to alternative platforms like 4chan, forming online echo chambers that normalized hate speech and glorified gender-based violence.¹⁶ From 2018 onward, influencers like Andrew Tate gained millions of followers by promoting misogynistic content through YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram, which was amplified by algorithmic design.¹⁷ These ideologies increasingly reached boys and young men, drawing them into online spaces where misogynistic narratives intertwined with far-right extremism. In these environments, gender equality is framed as a threat to social order. Their global reach cuts across language, region, and culture, and can be seen as a reflection of how online radicalization is both a gendered phenomenon and a geopolitical risk.

Simultaneously, evidence of algorithmic discrimination began to surface. In 2018, Amazon shut down an AI hiring tool that penalized resumes mentioning “women’s” organizations, revealing how male-dominated training data can encode structural bias.¹⁸ But despite growing evidence of bias, regulatory oversight remained scattered and inconsistent.

Between 2022 and 2023, countries including South Korea, India, and the United Kingdom reported spikes in deepfake pornography – a new generation of image-based abuse

¹⁴ UN Women, *Agreed Conclusions of the 58th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women*, 2014, https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/CSW/58/CSW58_Agreed_Conclusions.pdf.

¹⁵ UN Women and UN Broadband Commission, *Cyber Violence Against Women and Girls: A Worldwide Wake-Up Call* (2015), <https://www.broadbandcommission.org/Documents/reports/bb-wg-gender-discussionpaper2015-executive-summary.pdf>.

¹⁶ Emerson T. Brooking and Valerie Wirtschafter, *The “Third Generation” of the Manosphere: Growing Extremism among Young Men Online*, George Washington University Program on Extremism, June 2023, <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs5746/files/2023-06/third-generation-final.pdf>.

¹⁷ Emerson T. Brooking and Valerie Wirtschafter, *The “Third Generation” of the Manosphere*.

¹⁸ Jeffrey Dastin, “Amazon Scraps Secret AI Recruiting Tool That Showed Bias Against Women,” *Reuters*, October 10, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-amazon-com-jobs-automation-insight/amazon-scraps-secret-ai-recruiting-tool-that-showed-bias-against-women>.

driven by generative AI and platform inaction.¹⁹ These tools allowed perpetrators to fabricate explicit content from real images, often targeting women in politics, journalism, and education. Though the psychological and reputational damage inflicted on women was severe, most accountability mechanisms failed to keep pace with rapidly evolving technologies.²⁰ Many digital platforms faced widespread criticism for lacking effective systems to detect, remove, or remedy online abuse.

In March 2022, the Biden Administration, in coordination with UN Women, launched the Global Partnership for Action on Gender-Based Online Harassment and Abuse: a coalition of governments, tech companies, and civil society organizations focused on creating shared prevention principles, standardizing data collection, and coordinating cross-sector responses.²¹ This initiative marked an early attempt to build multilateral infrastructure around online gender-based violence.

One year later, CSW67 (March 2023) signaled a notable shift in institutional focus, anchoring online GBV within the broader agenda of digital rights and structural accountability. Under the priority theme “Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age,” CSW elevated technology-facilitated violence to the forefront of global gender policy.²² The Agreed Conclusions explicitly urged Member States to address violence against women and girls in digital contexts – including doxxing, cyberstalking, deepfake abuse, and algorithmic marginalization – naming these as core threats to public participation and human rights.²³ It was the first time a CSW session formally recognized online GBV as a structural and legal challenge, not merely a byproduct of platform misuse.

Parallel CSW67 sessions, co-hosted by Equality Now and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), built on this momentum. Feminist advocates used these forums to call for a Global Digital Compact: a binding, normative UN framework designed to protect gender

¹⁹ Asia News Network, “Deepfake Pornography Haunts South Korea,” January 15, 2024, <https://asianews.network/deepfake-pornography-haunts-south-korea>.

²⁰ UN Women, *Accelerating Efforts to Tackle Online and Technology-Facilitated Violence Against Women and Girls* (2022), https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/Accelerating-efforts-to-tackle-online-and-technology-facilitated-violence-against-women-and-girls-en_0.pdf.

²¹ White House Gender Policy Council, “*Launching the Global Partnership for Action on Gender-Based Online Harassment and Abuse*,” White House, March 18, 2022, <https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/gpc/briefing-room/2022/03/18/launching-the-global-partnership-for-action-on-gender-based-online-harassment-and-abuse/>.

²² UN Women, “CSW67 (2023): Innovation and Technological Change, and Education in the Digital Age for Achieving Gender Equality and the Empowerment of All Women and Girls,” UN Women. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/csw/csw67-2023>.

²³ United Nations Economic and Social Council, *Draft Agreed Conclusions on the Sixty-Seventh Session of the Commission on the Status of Women*, E/CN.6/2023/L.3. <https://docs.un.org/en/E/CN.6/2023/L.3>.

rights in digital spaces and establish inclusive, accountable governance structures.²⁴ This push reflected a growing recognition that gender justice must extend beyond physical environments to encompass the algorithms, platforms, and ideologies that increasingly mediate daily life.

Analysis:

Despite growing recognition of technology-facilitated abuse, international law still lacks a formal, universally accepted definition of digital-gender based violence. The United Nations Population Fund defines technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) as an act of violence that is “committed, assisted, aggravated, and amplified in part or fully by the use of information and communication technologies or digital media against a person on the basis of gender.”²⁵ This framing recognizes that online abuse is not an isolated phenomenon but part of a greater continuum of gendered harm that extends offline. However, pre-digital-era human rights instruments, like the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), offer little guidance on addressing such abuses in the online sphere.²⁶ The absence of a binding international definition leaves major interpretive gaps in coverage, enforcement, and victim protection, resulting in fragmented national responses and inconsistent accountability.

Artificial intelligence systems, which are often assumed to be neutral tools, consistently reflect and reinforce existing gender and racial hierarchies. This is not incidental but structural: most AI is trained on biased datasets and developed within male-dominated, Western-centric institutions.²⁷ The landmark Gender Shades study by Joy Buolamwini and Timnit Gebru found that commercial facial recognition tools misidentified darker-skinned women up to 47% of the time, compared to an error rate below 1% for lighter-skinned men.²⁸ These disparities are not abstract: they shape the behavior of technologies that directly influence policing, hiring, and

²⁴ Equality Now, “CSW67 Week One: The Urgent Need for the Global Digital Compact,” <https://equalitynow.org/news/news-and-insights/csw67-week-one-the-urgent-need-for-the-global-digital-compact/>.

²⁵ United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), *Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence: A Growing Threat*, UNFPA, <https://www.unfpa.org/TFGBV>.

²⁶ GREVIO, *Combating Technology-Facilitated Violence Against Women: Discussion Paper* (Council of Europe, September 11 2024), <https://rm.coe.int/gec-pc-evio-2024-5-gec-cdpcevioidiscussionpaper11sep24-2749-5696-6410-1/1680b1cbf3>.

²⁷ Christina Hu, “Algorithmic Bias in Facial Recognition Technology on the Basis of Gender and Skin Tone,” *Research and Analysis on Public Policy (RRAPP)*, Princeton University, <https://rrapp.spia.princeton.edu/algorithmic-bias-in-facial-recognition-technology-on-the-basis-of-gender-and-skin-tone/>.

²⁸ Cogent, “Addressing Gender Bias in Facial Recognition Technology: An Urgent Need for Fairness and Inclusion,” Cogent Infotech, <https://www.cogentinfo.com/resources/addressing-gender-bias-in-facial-recognition-technology-an-urgent-need-for-fairness-and-inclusion>.

everyday digital systems that affect millions. Amazon’s Rekognition software, for instance, misclassified dark-skinned women as men in nearly a third of test cases – a reminder that algorithmic bias has tangible and often detrimental consequences for those it misreads.²⁹

The error gap between male and female identifications has intensified concerns about the unchecked deployment of AI in public and commercial contexts. The stakes are particularly high for women of color, disabled women, and trans women, who face the greatest risk of being misidentified, excluded, or made invisible by algorithmic systems.³⁰

More critically, these patterns of exclusion exist within a broader digital ecosystem where technology shapes not only access to opportunity, but also the formation of identity and ideology. In this sense, the risks extend beyond exclusion into active harm. The rise of misogynistic online subcultures, known collectively as the “manosphere,” has been linked to a growing number of acts of mass violence.³¹ The manosphere encompasses a loose network of online communities that promote hostility toward women, including incels (involuntary celibates), men’s rights activists, and “alpha male” influencers.³² These ideologies increasingly shape gender attitudes among youth and have been linked to real-world violence.

In 2014, Elliot Rodger released a manifesto and online videos voicing resentment towards women and hostility toward sexually active men; he went on to kill six people and injure fourteen.³³ A few years later, Alek Minassian drove a rented van into pedestrians, killing eleven and injuring fifteen.³⁴ Before the attack, Minassian praised Rodger and explicitly identified with incel ideology. These incidents expose the direct connection between toxic masculinity, digital extremism, and gender-based violence. While these communities have existed for over a decade,

²⁹ CBS News, “Amazon’s Face Detection Technology Shows Gender, Racial Bias, Researchers Say,” February 7, 2019, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/amazon-face-detection-technology-shows-gender-racial-bias-researchers-say>.

³⁰ Cogent, “Addressing Gender Bias in Facial Recognition Technology: An Urgent Need for Fairness and Inclusion.”

³¹ United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism, “Confronting Incel: Exploring Possible Policy Responses to Misogynistic Violent Extremism,” October 2023, <https://connect.unoct-connectandlearn.org/system/files/2023-10/Confronting%20Incel%20%20exploring%20possible%20policy%20responses%20to%20misogynistic%20violent%20extremism.pdf>.

³² UN Women, “Explainer: What Is the ‘Manosphere’ and Why Should We Care?,” UN Women, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/articles/explainer/what-is-the-manosphere-and-why-should-we-care>.

³³ BBC News, “Isla Vista Shootings: Killer’s Parents ‘Raced to Stop Him,’” May 26, 2014, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-43892189>.

³⁴ BBC News, “Isla Vista Shootings: Killer’s Parents ‘Raced to Stop Him.’”

their global influence has expanded through algorithm-driven platforms like TikTok, YouTube, and Reddit.³⁵

A 2020 study on Youtube’s recommendation algorithm revealed that users could be directed toward misogynistic and incel-related content after just five clicks, highlighting how platform design can serve as a catalyst for radicalization.³⁶ In response, some tech companies have issued bans or deplatformed major influencers, but policy action remains fragmented.³⁷ No international legal or institutional framework currently addresses online misogyny as a structural or security concern.

However, some governments have begun to acknowledge the implications of this extremism. In the United Kingdom, new national guidance issued in July 2025 directs secondary school educators to recognize and address manosphere rhetoric in students, signaling concern about the internationalization of gendered extremism.³⁸ However, policymakers remain divided over how to respond. Some classify incel ideology as a form of violent extremism that warrants counterterrorism and security measures, while others argue it should be addressed as a public health crisis – emphasizing mental health interventions, education, and support in deradicalization.³⁹ This lack of consensus has limited the development of cohesive international strategies, even as the threat continues to spread across borders.

In February 2025, UN Women explicitly warned that AI can “amplify gender inequalities” across domains ranging from healthcare to employment,⁴⁰ but without decisive action, this carries little weight. The Commission on the Status of Women has a responsibility to advance feminist digital ethics across the UN system, and by promoting multisectoral prevention strategies, CSW can intervene at the very root of this issue. This is not only a matter of

³⁵ Sirin Kale, “‘Global Incel Culture’ Linked to Dozens of Terror Attacks, Report Says,” *The Guardian*, October 30, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/oct/30/global-incel-culture-terrorism-misogyny-violent-action-forums>.

³⁶ Morgan Klaus Scheuerman, Amanda Cullen, and Jed R. Brubaker, *How Computers See Gender: An Evaluation of Gender Classification in Commercial Facial Analysis Services*, arXiv, January 23, 2020, <https://arxiv.org/pdf/2001.08293>.

³⁷ Amnesty International UK, *Toxic Tech: New Polling Exposes Widespread Online Misogyny Driving Gen Z Away from Social Media*, April 12, 2023, <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/toxic-tech-new-polling-exposes-widespread-online-misogyny-driving-gen-z-away-social>.

³⁸ Sally Weale, “Secondary Schools in England to Tackle Incel Culture in Sex and Relationships Education,” *The Guardian*, July 15, 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2025/jul/15/secondary-schools-tackle-incel-culture-relationships-sex-education>.

³⁹ United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism, “*Confronting Incel: Exploring Possible Policy Responses to Misogynistic Violent Extremism*.”

⁴⁰ UN Women, “How AI Reinforces Gender Bias – and What We Can Do about It,” UN Women, February 27, 2025, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/interview/2025/02/how-ai-reinforces-gender-bias-and-what-we-can-do-about-it>.

preventing violence; it is essential to defend the progress of gender equality in the face of intensifying global backlash.

Conclusion:

Digital spaces have become central to political participation, economic life, and cultural identity, but rapidly, they are becoming battlegrounds for gender equality. While these technologies facilitate connection, self-expression, and access to opportunity, they also perpetuate inequality, discrimination, and violence – particularly against women and marginalized communities.

The Commission on the Status of Women is uniquely positioned to respond. As a norm-setting body with influence across ECOSOC and the broader UN system, CSW can lead the development of a rights-based framework for feminist technology governance. Delegates should focus on three priorities: defining digital gender-based violence under international law; advancing platform accountability through enforceable standards and codes of conduct; and challenging algorithmic bias through intersectional, feminist analysis. This could include calling for mandatory gender audits of AI systems, advancing policies on the psychological impacts of digital harm, and global coordination on tech governance that centers human rights.

The task is not only to regulate emerging technologies, but to reclaim them, ensuring that digital spaces serve as tools for equity, dignity, and collective transformation rather than engines of harm.

Questions to Consider:

1. How can CSW advance a universally accepted definition of technology-facilitated gender-based violence that aligns with existing human rights frameworks?
2. To what extent should states compel private tech companies to remove or prevent digital harms, and where should the line be drawn to protect freedom of expression?
3. In what ways should digital radicalization and misogynistic online subcultures be addressed: as security threats, public health concerns, or both? Who should lead this effort?
4. How can CSW ensure that emerging technologies promote gender equality rather than deepen inequality?

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<https://www.2020centennial.org/un-declares-2025-the-year-to-combat-digital-violence-against-women-global-measures-and-national-responses>.
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II. Labor, Inequality, and Economic Power

As a functional commission of ECOSOC, the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) plays a central role in shaping global norms around women’s economic empowerment,

labor rights, and structural equality.⁴¹ Since 1946, CSW has monitored and addressed the economic marginalization of women, calling for equal pay, expanded protections in informal labor markets, access to credit and land, and the recognition of women's unpaid contributions to the global economy.⁴² The 1995 Beijing Platform for Action elevated economic justice as a core pillar of gender equality,⁴³ and ECOSOC Resolution 1996/6 reaffirmed CSW's mandate to mainstream gender into all UN development and recovery frameworks.⁴⁴

Today, that mandate faces renewed urgency. The COVID-19 pandemic reversed decades of progress, pushing millions of women into poverty, amplifying unpaid care burdens, and triggering new forms of economic disempowerment and gender-based violence.⁴⁵ As governments shift from crisis response to long-term recovery, CSW must confront three underlying trends: the post-pandemic feminization of poverty, the undervaluation of care work, and the destabilizing effects of economic instability on gender relations. In doing so, the Commission on the Status of Women has the opportunity to promote a global recovery that is not only inclusive, but fundamentally gender-responsive.

Statement of the Issue:

Global economic systems have long been structured around the systematic undervaluing of women's labor – both paid and unpaid. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated these inequalities, pushing an estimated 47 million women into extreme poverty and reversing years of progress on gender equality.⁴⁶

Women disproportionately occupy informal and precarious labor sectors, where wages are low, protections are minimal, and job recovery has lagged far behind that of men.⁴⁷ The

⁴¹ UN Women, "How We Work: Commission on the Status of Women."

⁴² UN Women, *Report of the Multi-Stakeholder Forum at CSW61 (2017)*, <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/CSW/61/multi-stakeholder-forum/Report%20of%20MSF%202017.pdf>.

⁴³ United Nations, *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women, 1995)*, <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/BDPfA%20E.pdf>.

⁴⁴ UN Women, "How We Work: Commission on the Status of Women."

⁴⁵ UN Women, *Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on Women*, <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2020/Policy-brief-The-impact-of-COVID-19-on-women-en.pdf>.

⁴⁶ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), "COVID-19 Will Widen Poverty Gap between Women and Men, New UN Women and UNDP Data Shows," *UNDP*, <https://www.undp.org/press-releases/covid-19-will-widen-poverty-gap-between-women-and-men-new-un-women-and-undp-data-shows>.

⁴⁷ Oxfam, *Time to Care: Unpaid and Underpaid Care Work and the Global Inequality Crisis*, <https://www.oxfam.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Time-to-Care-Report-January-20-2020-EN-Final.pdf>.

result is a widening gender wealth gap that leaves women more vulnerable to exploitation, economic insecurity, and violence.⁴⁸ Despite widespread rhetorical recognition of this crisis, meaningful structural reforms – such as gender-targeted stimulus programs, social protection schemes, or investment in women-led entrepreneurship – remain rare.

Compounding this economic disparity is the global failure to address unpaid care work as a foundational pillar of economic life. Women perform roughly three-quarters of all unpaid care and domestic labor, sustaining families and communities without compensation or legal protection.⁴⁹ Although institutions like CSW have started integrating care work into development discourse, few states have translated this into enforceable policy – such as national accounting systems that include care labor in GDP, or international frameworks that recognize care work under labor rights conventions.⁵⁰

The evolving landscape of gendered economic strain also fuels shifting, and often volatile, expressions of masculinity. In many crisis-affected or displaced contexts, the erosion of traditional male provider roles has sparked identity crises that frequently result in violence.⁵¹ However, most gender programming fails to account for these dynamics, offering limited support for men navigating disempowerment and overlooking the risks such neglect poses for women's rights and safety.

At the intersection of feminized poverty, undervalued labor, and masculinities in crisis lies a defining challenge for the Commission on the Status of Women. The post-pandemic era is not only a moment of recovery: it is a pivotal opportunity to confront and restructure the systems that have long marginalized women economically. Without targeted action, there is a real risk that economic rebuilding will replicate and deepen existing inequalities. CSW is uniquely positioned to lead the global response by advancing gender-responsive policy frameworks, championing the economic recognition of care work, and addressing the gendered dimensions of economic instability.

⁴⁸ UN Women, *Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Gender Snapshot 2021*, <https://knowledge.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2021/Progress-on-the-Sustainable-Development-Goals-The-gender-snapshot-2021-en.pdf>.

⁴⁹ Oxfam, *Time to Care: Unpaid and Underpaid Care Work and the Global Inequality Crisis*.

⁵⁰ International Labour Organization (ILO), *Care Work and Care Jobs for the Future of Decent Work*, https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/%40dgreports/%40dcomm/%40publ/documents/publication/wcms_633135.pdf.

⁵¹ Gary Barker, Michael Flood, and Brian Heilman, *Masculine Norms and Violence: Making the Connection* (Washington, DC: Promundo-US, 2018), <https://www.equimundo.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Masculine-Norms-and-Violence-Making-the-Connection-2018.pdf>.

History:

Efforts to advance women's economic inclusion have been central to the mandate of the Commission on the Status of Women since its founding in 1947. Early work emphasized legal equality and access to employment, but broader structural questions – such as unpaid labor, care responsibilities, and the gendered organization of the global economy – remained largely unaddressed. The 1975 International Women's Year and subsequent UN Decade for Women (1976-1985) introduced a development-based focus, drawing attention to informal work and the unequal burden of care.⁵² However, these early frameworks lacked tools for enforcement or measurement, reflecting a broader reluctance among Member States to question dominant policy structures centered on growth and market efficiency.

The 1995 Beijing Platform for Action marked a critical turning point. It named economic empowerment, labor equality, and poverty eradication as foundational to global gender justice.⁵³ Recognizing that gender disparities in economic power and structural barriers exacerbate women's poverty, the Platform called for the reformulation of macroeconomic policies – long focused almost exclusively on the formal sector – to address their differential impacts on women and men.⁵⁴ It emphasized applying gender analysis to all economic and social policies, ensuring women's full and equal participation in policymaking, and restructuring economic systems to guarantee access to resources, opportunities, and public services.

However, implementation remained inconsistent. Throughout the late 1990s and early 2000s, CSW continued to push for policy tools that could help translate rhetoric into action. These included gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) and the formal recognition of unpaid labor: innovations that offered Member States a rights-based framework to value women's economic contributions.⁵⁵

⁵² UN Women, "A Brief History of the Commission on the Status of Women", *UN Women*, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/csw/brief-history>.

⁵³ *Report of the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace*, including the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 1995, (United Nations), <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/BDPfA%20E.pdf>.

⁵⁴ *Report of the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women*.

⁵⁵ Debbie Budlender and Guy Hewitt, *Engendering Budgets: A Practitioners' Guide to Understanding and Implementing Gender-Responsive Budgets* (London: Commonwealth Secretariat, 2003), <https://gender-financing.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/media/Engendering%20Budgets%20A%20Practitioners%20Guide%20to%20Understanding%20and%20Implementing%20Gender-Responsive%20Budgets.pdf>.

By 2016, CSW60 had elevated care work as a structural issue, recommending its redistribution through public infrastructure, employer mandates, and legal reform.⁵⁶ But even as these recommendations gained traction in theory, few countries embedded them into fiscal or labor policy.

CSW68 in 2024 marked yet another shift in CSW's approach. For the first time, CSW explicitly linked unpaid care work to global financing systems, urging Member States to “recognize, reduce, and redistribute” unpaid care, measure its economic value, and treat care systems as essential public infrastructure.⁵⁷ This framing advanced care labor from a domestic issue to a question of macroeconomic policy, effectively challenging the invisibility of care in national budgets and global financing dialogues. The Agreed Conclusions emphasized that gender equality could not be achieved without transforming the economic models that rely on women's unpaid and underpaid labor.⁵⁸

At CSW69 in 2025, the Commission on the Status of Women reflected on the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action and the persistent structural failures that remained.⁵⁹ Despite decades of gender equality initiatives, care systems remained underfunded, labor markets remained stratified, and economic inequalities deepened in the pandemic's wake. Civil society leaders and feminist economists pushed for deeper reform, arguing that economic justice must move beyond “inclusion” and confront the architecture of inequality itself.⁶⁰ They advocated for a redefinition of value, a restructuring of global financing, and the recognition that unpaid care is not merely a social issue, but a global economic engine critical to any sustainable recovery.

Analysis:

The economic fallout of COVID-19 did not affect all populations equally. It deepened pre-existing gender inequalities, particularly among women and girls in the Global South.

⁵⁶ *Commission on the Status of Women, Sixty-Eighth Session: Agreed Conclusions (Advance Unedited Version)*, March 22 2024 (United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women), <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-03/csw-68-agreed-conclusions-advance-unedited-version-2024-03-22-en.pdf>.

⁵⁷ UN Women, *Commission on the Status of Women, Sixty-Eighth Session*.

⁵⁸ UN Women, *Commission on the Status of Women, Sixty-Eighth Session*.

⁵⁹ Graduate Women International, *Commission on the Status of Women 69 Session (CSW69) Delegate Reports Summary*, March 2025, <https://graduatewomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/CSW-69-summary-report-2.pdf>.

⁶⁰ Mahinour ElBadrawi (Center for Economic and Social Rights), “Charting the Path Beyond Beijing+30: Reflections on CSW69 and the Need for Transformative Change,” CESR Blog, March 27, 2025, <https://www.cesr.org/charting-the-path-beyond-beijing30-reflections-on-csw69-and-the-need-for-transformative-change>.

According to UN Women and UNDP, the pandemic pushed an estimated 47 million additional women and girls into extreme poverty, reversing decades of fragile progress on poverty reduction.⁶¹ By 2021, 435 million women and girls were living on less than \$1.90 per day, the majority in regions already characterized by structural deprivation and weak social safety nets.⁶²

In India, the economic fallout was severe: 83% of informal women workers lost income, and nearly half depended on emergency relief to meet basic needs.⁶³ In Kenya, 51% of women reported job loss during the pandemic, many of whom were unable to return to work due to increased caregiving burdens at home.⁶⁴ These cases reflect how unpaid care responsibilities act as a structural barrier to re-entry into the labor force, especially when public support is minimal.

Broader regional trends mirror this pattern. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the number of women living in extreme poverty is projected to rise from 249 million in 2021 to 283 million by 2030,⁶⁵ marking a significant reversal of previous development gains. In Central and South Asia, the female poverty rate in 2021 reached 13%, up from pre-pandemic expectations of 10%⁶⁶ – a reminder that even incremental regressions can signal deeper systemic erosion.

Perhaps most concerning is the widening gap in economic security between young men and women. For every 100 men aged 25-34 living in extreme poverty, there were 118 women – a figure expected to reach 121 per 100 by 2030.⁶⁷ This trend reflects that a woman's risk of falling into poverty is highest when she is likely to have young children to care for. It also peaks in late adulthood, when economic independence is most crucial.

Despite addressing these patterns, CSW64 and CSW65 stopped short of recommending binding recovery mechanisms. CSW's Agreed Conclusions did not call for gender-based fiscal stimulus, social protection floors, or any kind of operational strategy, leaving Member States

⁶¹ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *"COVID-19 Will Widen Poverty Gap."*

⁶² UN Women, *Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Gender Snapshot 2020*.

⁶³ Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, *"Evidence Review: COVID-19 and Women's Informal Employment: A Call to Support the Most Vulnerable First in the Economic Recovery,"* https://docs.gatesfoundation.org/documents/evidence_review_covid-19_and_women%27s_informal_employment_a_call_to_support_the_most_vulnerable_first_in_the_economic_recovery.pdf.

⁶⁴ International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), *"Impact of COVID-19 on Women Workers in the Urban Informal Economy in Uganda and Kenya: Secondary Data Review,"* ICRW, June 2022, <https://www.icrw.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Impact-of-COVID-19-on-Women-Workers-in-the-Urban-Informal-Economy-in-Uganda-and-Kenya-Secondary-Data-Review.pdf>.

⁶⁵ *Gender Equality in the Wake of COVID-19: Technical Note* (UN Women / UNDP, 2020), <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2020/Gender-equality-in-the-wake-of-COVID-19-Technical-note-en.pdf>.

⁶⁶ UN Women, *"The COVID-19 Boom-erang Effect: New Forecasts Predict Sharp Increases in Female Poverty,"* *UN Women Data Hub*, <https://data.unwomen.org/features/covid-19-boomerang-poverty>.

⁶⁷ UN Women, *"The COVID-19 Boom-erang Effect."*

with broad principles but no clear roadmap for economic justice in pandemic recovery efforts.⁶⁸ The result has been a persistent gap between feminist economic analysis and institutional response.

Without concrete recovery tools, economic policy continues to overlook the critical role of unpaid care work in sustaining national economies. Women perform an estimated 76% of all unpaid care labor, amounting to 16.4 billion hours per day – a contribution valued at up to 9% of global GDP, yet largely unaccounted for in national economic planning.⁶⁹ As long as care work remains undervalued and underprotected, economic equality will remain out of reach for women, particularly those in marginalized and migrant communities.

However, care work is only one dimension of gendered economic insecurity. Gendered outcomes are also deeply entangled with shifting masculinities and patterns of violence. Conflict, displacement, and unemployment often destabilize traditional masculine roles, increasing the risk of identity crises, radicalization, and aggression.⁷⁰

During the COVID-19 pandemic, these dynamics intensified: a meta-analysis of global data revealed a 66% increase in intimate partner violence (IPV) during lockdowns – driven by job loss, stress, and confinement.⁷¹ In South Africa, men who experienced income loss were 83% more likely to commit IPV.⁷² In refugee contexts, male trauma linked to forced migration has been associated with both interpersonal violence and vulnerability to extremist ideologies.⁷³ These trends are not isolated. Across post-pandemic and post-conflict settings, the erosion of economic agency among men correlates with rising risks of gender-based violence and political instability.

⁶⁸ ARC International, #CSW65: *What Was Won, What Is Pending*, March 26, 2021, <https://arc-international.net/csw65-what-was-won-what-is-pending>.

⁶⁹ International Labour Organization, *Care Work and Care Jobs for the Future of Decent Work*, Executive Summary, <https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/%40dgreports/%40dcomm/%40publ/documents/publication/wcms633166.pdf>.

⁷⁰ MenEngage, “Contexts and Challenges for Gender Transformative Work with Men and Boys,” MenEngage, December 2020, <https://cdn.menengage.org/media/documents/resources/contexts-and-challenges-work-with-men-and-boys/Contexts-and-Challenges-for-Gender-Transformative-Work-with-Men-and-Boys-EN.pdf.pdf>

⁷¹ A.R. Piquero et al., *Domestic Violence in the Time of COVID-19: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis (Crime & Delinquency)*, <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9582712>.

⁷² Campion Zharima et al., “Economic Hardship and Perpetration of Intimate Partner Violence by Young Men in South Africa during the COVID-19 Pandemic (2021-2022): A Cross-Sectional Study,” <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40621-024-00483-8>.

⁷³ Mehmet Can Çarpar and Filiz Göktuna Yaylaci, “Forced Migration as a Crisis in Masculinity: A Sociological Approach to Refugee Men’s Remasculinization Strategies in Turkey,” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 34, <https://academic.oup.com/jrs/article-abstract/34/4/3846/6125342>.

The Commission on the Status of Women has an opportunity to expand its policy lens. Rather than treating male trauma as a counterpoint to women's rights, CSW can support trauma-informed, gender-transformative programming that addresses masculinities in crisis. These initiatives can include economic resilience tools, psychosocial support, and educational campaigns that challenge harmful gender norms. Such efforts should be positioned as complementary to, not in competition with, women's empowerment, and understood as essential to preventing backlash, reducing GBV, and promoting shared wellbeing in contexts of economic transformation.

Conclusion:

The global recovery from COVID-19 stands at a crossroads. Without structural reforms, economic inequality will not only persist, but worsen. Care work will remain invisible, female labor will be undervalued, and gender-based violence will continue to rise in contexts of economic insecurity. For the Commission on the Status of Women to fulfill its mandate, it must ensure that recovery efforts do not replicate the very injustices they aim to repair.

CSW has taken important steps in recognizing the disproportionate impact of economic crises on women and the structural significance of unpaid care labor. However, it has not yet bridged the gap between recognition and implementation. To ensure decisive action is taken, CSW should encourage a more concrete and inclusive approach to economic equality. This could include advancing gender-responsive fiscal policy with measurable outcomes, embedding care labor within international and human rights frameworks, or acknowledging masculinities as a structural factor in both gender-based violence and economic marginalization. These reforms should be pursued in a way that complements, rather than displaces, women-centered justice to ensure that the full spectrum of gendered economic harm is addressed without reinforcing patriarchal norms.

Questions to Consider:

1. How can gender-responsive fiscal policy be realistically implemented without infringing on national economic sovereignty?
2. Should Member States integrate unpaid care labor into GDP calculations and macroeconomic planning?

3. How should CSW address the economic dimensions of shifting masculinities, particularly in post-conflict or post-crisis contexts, without diverting resources away from women-focused recovery programs?
4. What mechanisms could ensure that gender-based economic recovery measures are protected from future political or economic crises?

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https://docs.gatesfoundation.org/documents/evidence_review_covid-19_and_women%27s_informal_employment_a_call_to_support_the_most_vulnerable_first_in_the_economic_recovery.pdf.
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