



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-ninth session

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**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to  
the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly  
entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and  
peace for the twenty-first century”**

### **Statement submitted by International Relations Students’ Association of McGill University, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council\***

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

This statement is presented by the McGill Youth Advisory Delegation, a youth-led organization under the International Relation Students' Association of McGill University. We are committed to integrating young people's voices meaningfully into global policy decisions. Through structured community consultations and partnerships with youth-centered organizations, we work alongside policymakers to ensure that diverse youth perspectives are fully represented.

Despite the United Nations' pledge to leave no one behind in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, youth voices remain marginalized in international diplomacy and decision-making processes. However, sustainable development cannot be achieved without the active participation of young advocates and leaders—the very individuals who will inherit and drive the outcomes of today's global decisions. It is crucial that they are empowered and provided with the opportunities to shape those decisions.

As the 69th Commission on the Status of Women approaches, we want to emphasize the invaluable perspectives young people bring to this year's priority theme along with the outcomes of the 23rd Special Session of the General Assembly. Youth voices are critical in shaping global conversations on gender equality, offering fresh insights and innovative solutions to pressing issues. By challenging patriarchal norms and advocating for intersectional policies, youth drive activism and policy reform, pushing for sustainable and inclusive futures where all women and girls can achieve equal opportunities.

In response, we underscore three pivotal areas where progress for women and girls remains inadequate within the priority themes of the 69th Commission on the Status of Women and present targeted calls to action for advancing meaningful change in: the feminization of poverty, gender-based healthcare disparities, and institutional barriers to women's economic participation.

### **Addressing the Feminization of Poverty Through Equal Access to Education**

The feminization of poverty is a global crisis affecting women and girls across all demographics. Currently, over 10 percent of women live in extreme poverty, subsisting on less than \$2.15 per day, according to UN Women. Limited access to resources, compounded with entrenched stereotypes, restricts women's participation in decision-making and decent employment, imposing an undue burden of unpaid care and domestic work.

At the heart of this issue is the lack of equal access to educational opportunities. Education is not merely a tool for empowerment but the key to breaking cycles of gender discrimination and poverty. Without access to education, women are systematically excluded from leadership roles in government, business, and civil society, limiting their ability to make informed financial and career decisions.

Despite progress in girls' education, where enrollment rates surpass those of boys, millions of girls still encounter significant barriers. Globally, 119 million girls are out of school and, in 2023, young women aged 14 to 25 made up two-thirds of not in education, employment, and training youth, more than double that of young men. This disparity contributes to career interruptions, part-time employment, lower earnings, and increases in unpaid care responsibilities for women, further entrenching poverty.

While the Beijing Declaration pledges to promote women's economic independence and address structural causes of poverty, no country has achieved gender economic equality. Therefore, the persistent lack of educational access for

women undermines Goal 1 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: ending poverty in all of its forms everywhere. At this rate, 342 million women will remain in extreme poverty by 2030, exacerbating economic inequality rather than closing the gap.

To achieve the objectives set forth in the Beijing Declaration and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, we call upon partners of the Commission on the Status of Women to prioritize policies that:

- Implement community education programs to challenge cultural norms devaluing girls' education;
- Make early education programs affordable and accessible, specifically catering to the needs of girls in disadvantaged communities;
- Encourage collaboration between governments and local banks and financial institutions to implement financial literacy programs tailored for women;
- Implement stipends for women and girls to alleviate family financial pressures, reducing the need for girls to engage in unpaid care and domestic work.

### **Healthcare Disparities on Women and Young Girls**

Globally, many women continue to encounter significant barriers in accessing essential healthcare, particularly in maternal and reproductive care, STD treatment, and safe healthcare infrastructure. Inaccessibility remains especially challenging for those in marginalized communities, proving consequences to be alarming. According to the World Health Organization, over 800 women die daily from preventable pregnancy-related complications, while unsafe abortions and pregnancy complications remain the leading causes of death among girls aged 15 to 19.

At the core of these issues is structural gender inequality embedded in healthcare systems. Women, particularly those who are racialized and members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community, are frequently excluded from healthcare research, resulting in inadequate treatment options and a lack of culturally sensitive, inclusive care. Moreover, the lack of comprehensive reproductive health services leaves millions of women vulnerable to unintended pregnancies, unsafe abortions, sexually transmitted diseases, and maternal mortality. For young girls, restricted access to menstrual hygiene products threatens both their health and education.

In conflict zones, these challenges are significantly exacerbated by the destruction of healthcare infrastructure, forced displacement, and increased risks of gender-based sexual violence. Women and girls are frequently subjected to rape, sexual exploitation, and trafficking, resulting in increased exposure to sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy-related complications. Under these conditions, the physical and mental impacts of such violations often go untreated, further straining already fragile healthcare systems.

Although the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action calls for gender equity in healthcare, inadequate access to maternal and reproductive services hinders progress in achieving Goals 3 and 5 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: ensuring healthy lives, promoting well-being for all, and achieving gender equality. Without urgent action, these inequalities will continue to perpetuate systemic gender inequality in healthcare worldwide, endangering the status of women.

To achieve the objectives set forth in the Beijing Declaration and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, we call upon partners of the Commission on the Status of Women to prioritize policies that:

- Expand data collection efforts to include women from various racial, ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds to ensure healthcare services are tailored to their needs;
- Create targeted initiatives to fortify healthcare systems in conflict zones, ensuring access to essential services;
- Promote the integration of culturally sensitive and gender-inclusive healthcare practices into national health systems.

### **Tackling Institutional Barriers to Women's Economic Participation**

While women's participation in the economy, particularly the labor force, has increased, significant gender barriers persist preventing the full erasure of the gender gap. UN Women reports over 2.7 billion women globally face restrictions in job opportunities compared to men. This results in lower labor force participation of approximately 30 percent and overrepresentation in the informal economy, where most employed women endure poor working conditions, lacking legal protections and social security.

As previously noted, micro-level approaches are crucial to increase resources and opportunities available to women. However, structural reforms are essential to reduce institutional-level barriers; these reforms must be led by women and include their input. Involving young girls in this process will not only empower them but also inspire those around them.

Despite the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action emphasizing the importance of women's economic empowerment, there still remains a large underrepresentation of women within global workforces, causing discrepancies in reaching Goal 8 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: promoting inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all.

To effectively close the gender gap, we must address both internal and external barriers. Internally, equitable practices should be enforced within businesses, and policies or individuals perpetuating discrimination must be held accountable. Externally, improving care infrastructure is essential, as inadequate support limits women's ability to participate in the formal economy. Reforming these institutions will help women reallocate resources and engage more fully in the workforce. Addressing these intersecting barriers will ultimately reduce underrepresentation.

To achieve the objectives set forth in the Beijing Declaration and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, we call upon partners of the Commission on the Status of Women to prioritize policies that:

- Create job opportunities for women and young girls within the formal economy;
- Implement comprehensive Diversity, Equity, and Inclusivity programs within workplace practices;
- Mandate regular reviews of institutional practices to identify and address gendered disparities, such as assessing pay equity;
- Prioritize funding and development of social care infrastructure, such as affordable childcare, eldercare services, and support for caregivers.

This statement is endorsed by Ágora Ciudadanos Cambiando México, International Alliance of Women, Islamic Cooperation Youth Forum (ICYF), Population Matters, and Sikh Human Rights Group.