



**No Borders MUN**

# **Background Guide**

**SOCHUM**

1 | Advancing and Securing the Rights of Women

No Borders MUN 2022

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## Committee Introduction

Delegates, welcome to the Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural Committee (SOCHUM)!

SOCHUM is the third committee out of six committees of the United Nations General Assembly and was established in 1945 under the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. SOCHUM is tasked with a variety of topics related to social, humanitarian, and cultural issues that affect the world. As one of the six GA committees, SOCHUM cannot enforce anything on individual nations, though it can suggest guidelines, encourage nations to act, and support coordinating efforts. An important aspect of SOCHUM is protecting human rights and has taken actions to help women's advancement, protection of children, elimination of racial discrimination, improve the treatment of refugees, and much more. SOCHUM also takes action on societal issues such as international drug control, crime prevention, and global literacy. To initiate successful operations, SOCHUM works hand in hand with other nongovernmental organizations as well as government agencies such as the World Health Organization, United Nations Children's Fund, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

In this committee, delegates will be creating resolutions, amendments, points of information, and speeches about issues surrounding the advancement of women's rights, the suppression of Uyghurs, and supporting Ukrainian refugees. We hope delegates will immerse themselves in the world of MUN and come up with feasible solutions to address these issues.

## Agenda Introduction

In 1792, English writer Mary Wollstonecraft wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, one of history's first writing with feminist philosophy. In it, she wrote that women are crucial to society and that as human beings, women deserve equal rights as men and equal access to education. Yet these ideas were radical to many at the time and did not have the necessary power to bring about change.

Fast forward half a century, the Seneca Falls Convention, the first women's rights convention in the United States, took place. Led by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott, the convention facilitated the signing of the Declaration of Sentiments, outlining women's grievances, and proclaiming that "all men and women were created equal," leading to decades of feminist activism.

In the world we live today, most governments have acknowledged and accepted the fact that "all men and women were created equal." However, the vast majority of societies fail to reflect gender equality and continue to disadvantage women. For instance, two-thirds of the global illiterate population are women. Women globally earn 37% less than their male counterparts in the same or similar jobs. Women make up only 26% of seats globally in national parliaments. These statistics illustrate the fact that there is still much room for improvement to guarantee equal rights for both genders and improve the conditions of how women are treated in the world today.

Furthermore, in recent years in the United States, the 1973 ruling by the Supreme Court of the United States in *Roe v. Wade* has been under controversy as politicians pushed to ban abortion in their state or on the national level to gain votes. On June 24, 2022, the Supreme Court overturned its decision in *Roe v. Wade*, rendering abortion rights not protected by federal law.

Delegates, when addressing the topic of women's advancement, please keep in mind of your country's stance in specific instances, and craft resolutions that best reflect what your country would advocate for.

## Letter from the Chairs

Dear Delegates,

My name is Kai Hyodo, and I will be serving as your Head Chair alongside Stella and Sunwoo. I am currently a senior at the American School In Japan, and I am seventeen years old. I joined the MUN community in freshman year, being persuaded by a friend that it was a great experience. Over the years, I've come to love the heated discourse, intense POIs, and collaboration with other delegates to create a compelling and creative resolution! I attended NBMUN last year as a deputy chair, and I have also participated in BSTMUN, CISSMUN, ASIJMUN, and IASASMUN! I am so excited to be a part of this conference as a chair, and I hope to contribute to fostering compelling and fruitful debates so that it can be as engaging and memorable regardless of the online circumstances! See you all at the conference!

Your SOCHUM Head Chair,

Kai Hyodo

## Key Terms

### **Feminism**

The aim that women should have the same rights and opportunities as men.

### **Wage Gap**

The difference between the amount that two different groups of people are paid. Often used in discussions about women's empowerment because women are on average paid less than their male counterparts in the same job fields.

### **Abortion**

The deliberate ending of a pregnancy at an early stage. It has been at the center stage of women's rights discussions, primarily in the United States. It is estimated that there are 73 million induced abortions take worldwide each year, yet, 45% of all induced abortions are unsafe. This is due to abortions being performed underground by untrained persons using dangerous and invasive methods.

### **Misogyny**

Hate or prejudice against women. There are many ways misogyny affects society and it takes on many forms. For instance, due to the spread of white supremacist views mixing with misogynistic views to reinforce societal roles, the term "misogynoir" became used to describe misogyny directed towards black women. Additionally, there is internalized misogyny, where women experience misogyny towards other women, expressing it through minimizing the value of women, distrusting women, and reinforcing the gender bias in favor of men.

### **Misandry**

Hate or prejudice against men. Many times, opponents of feminism argue that feminist viewpoints are misandrastic. Yet, many claim that misandry is not comparable to misogyny in terms of how systemic and transhistorical it is, given the reality in the modern world that women continue to be oppressed and there are societies that aid in the enforcement of male privilege.

### **Sexism**

The unfair treatment of people, especially women, because of their sex. Sexism takes on many forms, from sexist jokes to the objectification of women through pornography, to domestic violence and rape.

### **Patriarchy**

A society, system, or country that is ruled or controlled by men. Most evidence found in prehistoric societies finds that they were mainly egalitarian—where both male and female genders were equal. Yet, as time progressed, the spread of the idea of female inferiority became apparent, even dating back to the works of Aristotle. At the same time, gender roles began to become more cemented such as the belief that women should work

in the household and take care of children while men should go out of the house and work to finance for their families.

**Intersectionality**

The theory that various forms of discrimination centered on race, gender, class, disability, sexuality, and other forms of identity, do not work independently but interact to produce particularized forms of social oppression. Third-world feminists have criticized the way this concept had been illustrated by western interpretations and reshaped it to be transnational intersectionality, to spread the understanding that women across the world do not experience the same type of gender and racial oppression.

## Historical Background

In 1848, the Seneca Falls Convention took place in the United States of America, and women's rights activists such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott advocated for women's empowerment. During this convention, The Declaration of Sentiments was signed, arguing that "all men and women were created equal."

One aspect of women's empowerment that became an important goal, in the beginning, was women's suffrage. Following the Seneca Falls Convention, there was a push for women's suffrage in various parts of the world, and in 1893, New Zealand became the first self-governing country to grant the right to vote to all adult women. However, in most parts of the world, the path to women's suffrage was not as smooth. Therefore, prominent activists took action to create international organizations to bring forth action. In 1902, the International Alliance of Women (formerly known as the International Woman Suffrage Alliance) was created by lead activists such as Susan B. Anthony. Through the establishment of an international non-governmental organization, women across the world were able to plan together to campaign for women's suffrage. On the other hand, the International Council of Women was created before the International Alliance of Women, yet, did not actively promote women's suffrage so as to not upset the more conservative members.

In 1945, the United Nations was created, adopting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948. Women's involvement in the drafting of the declaration was highly important, as they helped push for specific human rights seen in various parts of the Declaration and spoke out for women's rights. Eleanor Roosevelt was one of the most prominent women on the drafting committee and played an important role in steering the drafting process towards its completion in a time of East-West tensions. In the UDHR's preamble, it is explicitly stated that the "United Nations have in the Charter reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women," and the entirety of the Declaration is written with this as the basis, to eliminate inequalities between men and women.

Nearly 30 years after the adoption of the UDHR, the first First World Conference on Women took place in Mexico. During this conference, there was the creation of the World Plan of Action for the Implementation of the Objectives of the International Women's Year, set new guidelines for the advancement of women through 1985. Yet, it was 20 years later that there was a significant stride for women's empowerment marking a turning point in history, at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. Adopted unanimously by 189 countries, the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) outlined objectives and actions for women's empowerment and the attainment of gender equality in 12 areas of concern. More than 17,000 participants attended this conference, including 4000 accredited NGO representatives and 4000 media representatives.

However, the UN still faced issues such as inadequate funding and having no single driver of UN action on women's empowerment. Therefore, in 2010, UN Women was established and has been a prominent organization globally for the improvement of the condition of women since.

## Current State of Affairs

One of the recent global developments for women's empowerment was the #MeToo movement, a social movement against sexual violence. Initially starting in 2006 with Tarana Burke, the MeToo campaign gained greater attention beginning in 2017 when it was revealed that Harvey Weinstein, an American former film producer, had sexually harassed and assaulted women for years, and victims of sexual harassment shared their experiences on social media with the hashtag #MeToo. This had profound effects on the world, starting from adding momentum to public debates around this issue to helping expose the endemic abuses that women face in the workplace and new national legislation to prevent workplace harassment and protect whistleblowers and victims from retaliation.

Additionally, feminism has been combined with LGBTQ+ in many discussions recently, due to the two movements' same goals of gender equality and protection of rights. Furthermore, both groups often experience unfair conditions with conservative ideas of patriarchy and heterosexuality being prevalent. Also, it has come to the attention of many that by supporting politicians who are prejudiced against LGBTQ+ people, one is also supporting politicians who favor the conservative social hierarchy where cisgender heterosexual males are at the top. Therefore, much of the UN's actions have veered toward the equality of all genders, rather than solely women's empowerment.

In terms of the current state of the world, there is still much more that must be done. A recent event that shocked the majority of the world was the Supreme Court of the United States' reversal of the 1972 Roe v. Wade decision, thereby not protecting abortion rights for women on the federal level. So far, 8 states have banned abortion, which has already made abortion clinics in such states close down, making it difficult for women to receive legal abortions. In response to this, the European Union condemned the end of constitutional protections for abortion in the United States and reaffirmed the need for the securement of legal abortion in the EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights. One of the main reasons why abortion rights are such a pertinent part of women's empowerment is because the right to receive safe abortions is a literal example of a woman's right to make decisions about her own body. It is estimated by the World Health Organization that 7 million women per year are treated in hospital facilities for complications of unsafe abortion, and restricting access to abortions does not reduce the number of abortions but rather affects whether the abortions are safe. On the other hand, antiabortion activists push forth a moral claim that the aborted fetuses were sympathetic victims. The United Nations has taken a clear stance on abortion and UN human rights chief Michelle Bachelet has described the reversal of Roe v. Wade as "a huge blow to women's human rights and gender equality."

Adding to the issue is the intensification of physical or sexual violence against women since the outbreak of COVID-19. One reason for this is the continuing stressors on the economy, with food insecurity being amplified in many parts of the world, leading to domestic violence. For women who are exposed to violence, the emotional impacts from

the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the experiences of violence are compounded, leading to worse conditions.

## Stances of Parties

### Afghanistan

Currently, Afghanistan has the least gender equality in the world. Following the US-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, the rights of women greatly expanded. However, with the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in 2021, the new rulers have quickly eliminated such rights. For example, it is now compulsory to completely cover one's body including the face for women when they are in public. Moreover, in the Taliban's address, they had claimed that if women have no important work outside it was "better they stay at home." Female protestors, female civil servants, and policewomen had gone missing. The Taliban banned secondary education for girls and banned women from almost all jobs. The reality in Afghanistan is that the Taliban has greatly amplified gender discrimination and is the most serious women's rights crisis in the world today. What makes this situation more challenging is that the Taliban leader lashed out at criticism and demands of the international community on the Taliban's human rights restrictions, and justified it as the "Islamic system."

### Cambodia

The Constitution of Cambodia guarantees that "all forms of discrimination against women shall be abolished," and adheres to the UDHR in providing equal rights under the law. The average number of years of education and the labor force participation rates of men and women have small disparities which are successes to be commended. However, there is still much work to be done in terms of political participation and gender equity legislation, as women represent only 20.3% of parliamentarians. Furthermore, the underlying condition of the cultural norms that exist in Cambodia as well as low enforcement of laws on domestic violence continues to hamper progress in women's advancement. In rural areas, most Cambodian citizens hold a deep-rooted mindset that men are better than women and that women are obliged to take care of the household from early childhood. Moreover, the teachings of "Chbab Srey," which is the traditional code of conduct of women, is still deeply ingrained in the Cambodian culture and informs girls to be patient with their future husband even if they face violence. Therefore, there is a slow battle inside Cambodia to empower women from the deeply ingrained cultural standpoint as well as reform legislation which is more visible progress.

### People's Republic of China

Since 1954, it was stated in the Constitution of the People's Republic of China that men and women are equal, and more than 100 laws have been passed to promote women's advancement and protect women's rights. Nearly half of graduates from higher education are females and the school enrollment rates of boys and girls are both nearly 100%. To prevent gender-based violence, the China Anti-Domestic Violence Law was enacted in 2016 to prohibit violence against family members, and there have been positive impacts. One development is that more women have stood up for their rights, and the number of calls to police about experiencing domestic violence has increased. Furthermore, there has been enhanced awareness of gender-based violence, however, there still requires more

protection measures for victims of domestic violence. Additionally, China now experiences a skewed gender ratio in its population due to the long-term impacts of the One Child Policy, which has led to an increase in the trafficking of women to China and discrimination and violence against women. Overall, it seems that China is moving in the right direction as a country, though there are still areas of improvement that can advance the status and rights of women.

### **France**

Gender equality was first introduced to the Constitution of France in 1946, and France has taken greater measures as part of the European Union and as a country itself to achieve full integration of gender equality. France has passed more than 13 laws to fight the gender pay gap and created a Gender Equality Index to measure their progress, though they still have a 15.2% gender wage gap. In terms of the percentage of women on company boards, France is at the lead of the world with the number at 43%, though there are still few large companies that have a female CEO. Though France is among the top countries for gender equality, progress has remained stagnant in recent years. At the start of French President Emmanuel Macron's first term, he promised to improve the condition of women and increase gender equality. However, there were few concrete successes of the administration, as 80% of ministerial cabinets were occupied by men, and the budget allocated to combat domestic violence proved insufficient in resolving the issue.

### **India**

The fundamental rights are guaranteed across all genders under the law in India, though the country has suffered from long-term gender inequality for many years. It is consistently ranked at the bottom of gender equality rankings, yet through efforts by the government and UN agencies, there have been strides in the right direction. For example, in 2016, nearly 30,000 girls were taught life skills and health information to empower them and end child marriage. Moreover, the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao was implemented to counter harmful practices such as gender-biased sex selection and child marriage, however, the entire scheme had minimal success due to insufficient government follow through. While there has been substantial progress in female-to-male enrolment in education, female labor force participation has remained low and even declined. Systemic sexism is pervasive in the nation's culture and politics, with the ritual of honor killings of females still leading to 900 deaths per year and 14% of female representatives in government. India, like many countries, also faces the struggle of cultural barriers, with a patriarchal society and a son preference, though such attitudes are starting to shift in the modern age.

## Possible Solutions

### Wage Equality

Globally, women receive 24% less than men, and closing this gap is crucial in terms of the attainment of gender equality, but also in terms of a purely economic standpoint. It is found that closing the wage gap would lead to better business performance as it justly awards those who have talent regardless of gender and would strengthen the global economy. To close the wage gap, there are various measures that can be taken, one being creating training programs and further educational opportunities to combat limiting norms for women's employment. Also, creating mandates within large companies to meet certain targets for gender balance among employees is another potential measure.

### Political Representation

The proportion of women in national-level parliament seats has greatly increased over the years, though the number still remains around 24.5% globally. The increase in female representatives in government is a crucial goal as research suggests that women's political participation results in positive results for democracy and improved responsiveness to citizens' needs. Furthermore, women have been at the forefront of gender equality, advocating for reforms around approaches towards gender-based violence, childcare, and electoral reform. Some policies that governments have already implemented revolve around reserving seats for women or mandating quotas to increase women's political participation. Additionally, to combat the challenge of women being underrepresented as voters in some countries, training to help build civic engagement and encouraging voting are also measures to help increase political representation.

### Fight Against Violence

With the current COVID-19 pandemic exacerbating the situation of domestic violence and continued violence across the world, a crucial element to gender equality is to create better legislation that can be accountably carried out to combat violence. One way to do this is to increase protective measures for victims and whistleblowers of violence and create structures for police to thoroughly investigate and not overlook them. Others could be to prevent violence in general, though this may be harder as there are many factors that contribute to a person engaging in gender-based violence. However, in terms of human trafficking, there are concrete legislative actions that can be put in place to prevent human trafficking.

### Abortion Rights

Following the United States' Supreme Court's recent decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, there has been greater attention given to reproductive rights for women worldwide. As abortion rights are an important aspect of women's advancement in society, one effort could be to increase safe abortion practices. While it would be hard to change the national policies of individual nations as it would infringe on national sovereignty, one effort could be to increase safe abortion practices in third-world countries where they are

hard to access. This would help eliminate underground abortion practices where oftentimes, unsafe abortion practices are used.

## Questions to Consider

1. Which issues that women face has your country taken action on?
2. Were there any successful outcomes?
3. What systems exist in your country to prevent violence against women and help those who experienced violence?
4. How severe is the gender wage gap in your country?
5. How many women vote?
6. How many women hold office?
7. Are there any gender quotas in your government?

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