



YAS

YOUNG AMBASSADORS
SOCIETY

CSW70

Policy Paper

Youth delegates' post-CSW reflections

COMMISSION *on the*
STATUS OF WOMEN



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About The Young Ambassadors Society

The Young Ambassadors Society (YAS) is a non-profit association founded in 2011 with the goal of empowering young people, offering them opportunities to make an impact and join official global policy making processes.

Together with a global network of international associations, YAS is one of the founding members of the Y20 and Y7, the official youth engagement groups of the G20 and G7 Summits. Since their foundation, YAS has been responsible for these engagement groups for Italy, in collaboration with the Italian Presidency and the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation.

On the occasion of the G7 Italy, YAS served as the Chair of the Y7 Italy, involving thousands of young people in the process. It had previously chaired Y20 Italy in 2021, Y7 Italy in 2024 and Y7 Italy in 2017. YAS also recruits and trains Italian youth delegations for major international forums, including the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP), the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), the World Food Forum (WFF), and the NATO Summit, among others.

In 2024, the Young Ambassadors Society (YAS) launched the first edition of the Global Youth Leaders (GYL) Programme, a training program developed in collaboration with institutions, international organizations, and the private sector. The initiative brought together youth from across Italy to explore key topics such as sustainability, innovation, and artificial intelligence, and to learn how to draft policy proposals on these issues through dedicated policy labs. According to participant feedback, 98% would join a new edition, 96% would recommend the program, and 95% reported an improvement in their personal or professional skills.



Preamble

This policy paper presents a synthesis of key insights and policy recommendations emerging from participation in the **70th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW70)** in New York, drawing on direct engagement in plenary discussions and side events. It highlights critical trends, challenges, and opportunities identified during the conference, with a focus on **advancing gender equality through strengthened access to justice**.

The paper is structured into three sections. The first section, **Ending Gender Discrimination**, examines the persistent legal and structural inequalities that limit women's and girls' access to rights and opportunities. It highlights the importance of closing the gender gap not only as a matter of fairness, but also as a driver of economic growth and social resilience, while addressing emerging challenges such as bias in artificial intelligence and digital exclusion.

The second section, **Ending Gender-Based Violence**, addresses the continued prevalence and evolving nature of violence against women and girls. It highlights the structural roots of such violence, including unequal power relations and systemic barriers to justice, while drawing attention to emerging forms such as digital violence and legal retaliation. The section emphasises the urgency of comprehensive, victim-centered and prevention-oriented policy responses.

The third section, **Women's Participation in Public Life and Decision-Making**, explores the interconnected financial, institutional, and digital barriers that constrain women's meaningful participation in governance. It advocates for integrated approaches combining structured financing, institutional reform, and inclusive digital governance to ensure women's full and effective engagement in shaping public policy.

Together, these sections reflect a **holistic approach to gender equality**, grounded in the understanding that legal frameworks, social norms, economic systems, and technological developments are deeply interconnected and must be addressed collectively.

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The insights and analyses contained in this debrief reflect the exclusive work, judgment, and interpretation of the individual contributors, derived from their direct involvement in the CSW70 proceedings. This document reflects their perspectives and focus areas, and is not intended as an exhaustive overview of all developments. Findings are presented based on current understanding and may be subject to future revision as new information emerges.

Key Takeaways

1. Ending Gender Discrimination, Closing the Gender Gap

Gender discrimination is ever-present regarding women's and girls' access to justice. Globally, women hold only 64% of the legal rights afforded to men. This fuels systemic inequality in multiple domains, including education, employment, healthcare, and digital spaces. For women facing intersectional discrimination - related to their age, disabilities, or social class - these barriers compound. Changing the law is essential, but it has to be followed by concrete change and implementation at the local level, particularly for rural and remote communities. Addressing discrimination in access to justice is a cornerstone for fostering trust between governments, legal institutions, and the populations they serve.

2. Ending Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

Gender Based Violence (GBV) remains a global crisis affecting one in three women. CSW70 discussions revealed alarming trends: violence is intensifying and becoming more structural, particularly where “masculinity has become a mandate”, digital violence now affects 73% of women online, yet remains inadequately faced with legal retaliation from systems meant to protect them, and conflict-related sexual violence in Ukraine, Sudan, and Gaza continues with impunity due to Security Council paralysis. Urgent action requires addressing root causes, transforming justice systems, and centering marginalized voices, including indigenous women's healing knowledge.

3. Women's Participation in Public Life and Decision-Making

Women's participation in public life and decision-making remains essential for inclusive governance, democratic legitimacy, and equal access to justice. Discussions at CSW70 highlighted that financial constraints, institutional biases, and digital inequalities – identified by the Working Group – are deeply interconnected and should not be treated as separate challenges. Limited funding weakens institutional reforms, institutional biases restrict women's leadership opportunities, and digital inequalities reduce visibility and civic participation, reinforcing one another. Addressing these barriers, therefore, requires an integrated approach combining structured financing, reforms in legal and public institutions, and gender-responsive digital governance to ensure women's meaningful influence over public agendas and policy outcomes.



Ending Gender Discrimination, Closing the Gender Gap

Context and Key Insights

CSW70 convened amid a turbulent geopolitical climate, marked in particular by ongoing armed conflicts that violate international human rights treaties, five years of Taliban ruling in Afghanistan, and a growing gender backlash led by conservative political movements. On the opening day, the Commission, for the first time, failed to adopt conclusions by consensus, with 37 countries in favor, one against (the United States), and six abstentions. Against this backdrop, the theme of CSW70 should serve as a call to action: access to justice can free women and girls from discrimination. While the conference adopted some strong conclusions, such as promoting comprehensive legislative reviews to eliminate discriminatory laws, a gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda remains significantly off track.

Working Group Views

It's hard to deny the level of injustice intrinsic to gender discrimination itself, but the gender gap is not only unfair; it is also economically irrational, coming at a high price. Excluding half of the population from full participation in the economy is one of the largest self-inflicted constraints on world prosperity. In fact, global estimates show that reducing gender gaps in the labour force participation would raise GDP by around 15-20 percent in many economies, with the largest gains in regions where women's work is most constrained; furthermore, economies with stronger equality laws see women's participation 28 percentage points higher and gender gaps over 20 points smaller. It's of the utmost importance to highlight that gender equality is not zero-sum: male labour force participation rises as the gender gap decreases, showing that inclusion expands the economic base rather than redistributing it.

Despite all these positive potential outcomes associated with putting an end to gender discrimination, the path towards equality is still long and, in António Guterres's – the UN Secretary-General's – own words, “we have barriers to overcome and gaps to fill – opportunity gaps, implementation gaps and justice gaps”. Only 4% women around the world live in economies approaching full equality in regard to women's rights, and no economy has put in place the entire set of legal rights needed for women's full participation. In this context, another critical gap must be addressed: the age gap. Adolescent girls and children, who often bear the brunt of discrimination, are frequently overlooked in local, national, and international agendas. At CSW70, their voices remain strikingly underrepresented.

Amidst this, artificial intelligence offers a promising tool, holding significant potential to enhance the efficiency and decision-making processes of judicial systems, thereby reducing the waiting time for victims seeking legal outcomes. AI could also democratize access to legal information, enabling individuals without formal legal education to comprehend complex legal terminology and procedural requirements. However, the use of AI in the public sector must remain targeted and empathetic with vulnerable groups, prioritizing human rights over blind efficiency. AI algorithms are not immune to structural gender biases. If unaddressed, these biases - inherent in the training data - risk being perpetuated and even amplified within legal frameworks over time. Moreover, women are disproportionately targeted by harassment in digital spaces, a trend exacerbated by AI technologies. Their personal data, including facial and vocal recordings, can be exploited without consent to create sexual content.

The evidence is unambiguous: closing the gender gap is both a moral imperative and a sound policy choice. The following proposals identify concrete steps through which that opportunity can be seized.

- Mandate pay transparency, that is, requiring companies to publicly report average salaries by gender and role. The EU Pay Transparency Directive (2023) and Iceland's Equal Pay Standard are both initiatives that seek to make the gap visible, aiming at creating accountability and measurably narrowing it.
- Reform parental leave structures, for instance by introducing non-transferable paid leave for fathers, consequently reducing the career penalty that falls disproportionately on mothers. Norway's model offers a concrete and replicable framework, by splitting the parental leave into three equal parts: one for the mother, one for the father, and one freely allocated by the couple.
- Require gender-disaggregated lending data from financial institutions. Making the gap visible in financial data is the precondition for closing it.
- Advance blended finance solutions, i.e., deploying public funds to reduce investment risk and attract private capital into women-led businesses, making them more accessible and appealing to banks and investors.
- Introduce boardroom gender quotas by implementing mandatory targets for gender balance on company boards. The EU Gender Balance on Corporate Boards Directive exemplifies this policy proposal by setting a target for EU large listed companies of 40% of the underrepresented sex among their non-executive directors and 33% among all directors.
- Establish a global and standardized framework that ensures transparency in AI programs and data training to identify and mitigate biases, while safeguarding users' personal data from new digital threats.
- Promote gender diversity in tech and gender equality in digital education. Gender discrimination is more easily spotted by those experiencing it, so increasing the representation of women in AI development and software teams can lead to original and useful innovations that actually benefit more than half of the global population.
- Implement gender-transformative education across all levels, in alignment with guidelines from Plan International, Transform Education, UNGEI, and UNICEF.
- Institutionalize meaningful youth participation in gender equality policymaking and programming by establishing CEDAW Youth Committees, as well as ensuring direct funding for girl- and youth-led feminist movements, improving accessibility and distribution of opportunities for youth advisory bodies, councils, and consultation mechanisms under UN Women.
- Reform legal and justice systems to be child- and youth-sensitive, care-centered, intercultural, and intersectional, addressing harmful practices against adolescent and girls' child rights, including child marriage, female genital mutilation, prohibition to education, feminization of poverty, and gender-based violence.



Ending Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

Context and Key Insights

The 70th Commission on the Status of Women has adopted comprehensive agreed conclusions that aim to establish a global framework for ending gender-based violence through strengthened access to justice. The framework recognizes that violence against women and girls, rooted in structural inequalities and unequal power relations, constitutes a major impediment to gender equality and represents a violation of fundamental human rights.

Working Group Views

Violence against women and girls remains a persistent global challenge characterized by multiple interconnected factors. Systemic barriers prevent access to justice, including discriminatory laws, entrenched gender stereotypes, and negative social norms that perpetuate inequality. The prevalence of all forms of violence against women and girls, rooted in these historical and structural inequalities, violates and impairs the full enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms. It denies women and girls effective access to justice and accountability for violations and abuses of their rights, thereby perpetuating cycles of inequality and marginalization.

The Commission on the Status of Women recognizes that ensuring and strengthening access to justice for all women and girls across the life course is fundamental to achieving gender equality, empowerment, and the full and equal enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Most importantly, we must acknowledge the relevance and uniqueness of political gender based violence, which is systemically and increasingly being used to silence women and prevent their participation in political life. Sexual deepfakes, consistent threats related to rape or sexual abuse (not only addressed towards women, but also their families) make female participation in public life increasingly risky. In a changing world, where women are speaking up and fighting back against injustice and oppression, this specific type of gender based violence is purposefully designed to discourage and punish women from raising their voices.

Another issue that was touched upon during several meetings at the conference was that of human trafficking with the purpose of sexual exploitation. Sex trafficking is one of the worst, most hidden human rights violations, and we must recognize that it is inherently gendered, with women and girls making up most of the victim pool.

Structural Patterns of Legal Retaliation

Research conducted by Zimbabwe Women Lawyers Association (2020) documents systematic patterns wherein women reporting domestic violence face strategic counter-accusations, including child neglect, property theft, and allegations of mental instability designed to silence complaints and deter others from seeking legal recourse. This phenomenon extends beyond individual cases of malicious litigation to constitute a structural barrier embedded within justice systems themselves. Testimonies presented at CSW70 from Mongolia, South Asia, and Latin America revealed that abusers across diverse legal and cultural contexts weaponize procedural complexity and differential access to resources to exhaust women's financial and emotional capacity until original complaints are withdrawn.

This pattern of legal retaliation operates as both a direct form of violence against individual survivors and a systematic enforcement mechanism perpetuating structural gender inequality.

Intersections with Economic Inequality and Care Work

The connection between legal retaliation and broader structural inequalities became evident through analysis of economic dependency patterns. India's Time Use Survey (2019) demonstrates that women spend an average of 5 hours daily on unpaid care work compared to 1 hour for men, creating what scholars term "time poverty" that fundamentally constrains women's economic independence. This structural inequality in care work distribution renders women particularly vulnerable to both initial violence and subsequent legal retaliation.

As discussed during the IBSA Fund side event at CSW70, economic empowerment initiatives such as India's training of 150 women entrepreneurs and South Africa's child marriage prevention programs demonstrate that addressing structural economic inequalities reduces vulnerability to violence. However, without concurrent reforms addressing legal retaliation, economic empowerment programs cannot fully achieve their potential, as women gaining economic independence may face intensified legal retaliation from partners threatened by shifting power dynamics.

Policy Recommendations

To address these challenges, including legal retaliation, and build upon the CSW70 outcomes, we propose the following policy proposals.

- 1) Ensure women's full access to justice, including gender responsive transitional and international justice mechanisms. This will have to be complemented by prevention, investigation, and prosecution of sexual violence, the elimination of impunity, and ensure non-recurrence. In addition, strengthening of monitoring mechanisms and safeguarding of victims, including providing trauma-informed and victim-centered approaches, as shown during several presentations from case studies in Western Africa and Central Asia. This would include **establishing "Safe Harbor" Legal Provisions:** Implement protective frameworks shielding women from retaliatory litigation when reporting violence or discrimination in good faith. **Mandate Free Legal Aid for Retaliation Cases and Judicial Training on Retaliation Patterns**
- 2) Developing and discussing holistic solutions to sex trafficking of women and girls that consider and actively address the role of male consumers in maintaining these exploitation markets. This could be done by further promotion of policy models such as the Swedish "Nordic Model", where the consumer of commercial sexual services is penalized. Further, Individuals who create nonconsensual sexual images of women and girls, engage in online harassment, or perpetuate other forms of GBV online must face legal consequences and accountability.



Women's Participation in Public Life and Decision-Making

Context and Key Insights

CSW70 highlighted women's participation in public life and decision-making as essential to inclusive governance, democratic legitimacy, equal access to justice, and implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The discussions highlighted three key barriers. First, participation requires sustained investment, including gender-responsive budgeting and long-term public financing, particularly amid growing backlash against gender equality. Second, equal access to justice depends not only on formal rights but also on women's representation in judicial and public institutions, especially in leadership roles. Third, digital civic spaces are increasingly central to democratic participation and must be supported by inclusive design, accountability mechanisms, and women's participation in digital governance.

Working Group Views

Gender Equality as a Strategic Investment: The Role of Structured Financing

Structured and sustainable financing has become increasingly urgent with the rising backlash against gender equality. To counter this, gender equality policies must adopt a proactive strategy grounded in credible, long-term investments. This calls for structured financing mechanisms beyond political cycles and funding volatility, rendering gender equality both a normative objective and a strategic investment. For example, the International Year of the Woman Farmer highlights structural inequalities in agrifood systems, where women – often leading SMEs – remain underrepresented in investment and decision-making. Addressing these gaps requires targeted, inclusive financing that supports women across value chains and promotes food loss reduction and sustainable resource management. Thus, it is crucial to recognize that long-term security is also rooted in strong social systems, the rule of law, and inclusive economic structures. Investing in gender equality is therefore not a competing priority, but a necessary foundation for resilient and stable societies. To address the challenges described above, we derived the following policy recommendations:

- **Frame gender equality as a strategic public investment**, integrating it into national development and welfare policies—such as care systems and equal parental leave—that generate both social and economic returns.
- **Expand targeted and inclusive financing** for women's economic participation, particularly in underrepresented sectors (e.g. agrifood systems), ensuring women's access to investment opportunities and participation across entire value chains, including informal trade.
- **Adopt structured gender-responsive budgeting frameworks** to ensure long-term and predictable financing for gender equality, while diversifying flexible and accessible funding mechanisms for civil society and women-led organizations to support their sustainable participation in policy processes and crisis response.

Women's Representation in the Legal System as a Catalyst for Justice

Women's representation in the legal system is central to achieving gender equality. This is not merely a symbolic objective but a functional necessity: without women on the bench, in courtrooms, and within law enforcement, justice systems risk reproducing the very inequalities

they are meant to address. Today, while women constitute a growing share of the judiciary globally, their presence remains uneven and stratified. This disparity has profound implications. Discriminatory norms within legal education and biased professional rules further worsen women's underrepresentation – as shown, for instance, in the case of women lawyers in Iran, who face unique challenges from control over dress and appearance to their exclusion from professional power networks and senior-level positions. A recurring obstacle to gender equality is the gap between laws and their implementation, with weak institutions, lack of enforcement, and limited resources preventing formal equality from translating into real outcomes. To address these challenges, we recommend to:

- **Ensure equal access to legal education for women and integrate gender perspectives into law schools' curricula**, thereby shaping future generations of legal professionals.
- **Prioritize transparent and inclusive recruitment and promotion processes**, developing comprehensive and standardized ethical guidelines such as Model Rule 8.4(g) of the American Bar Association (ABA), which characterizes discrimination and harassment as misconduct. **These efforts should be complemented with more informal mentorship and sponsorship programs from non-profit organizations**, along the lines of the Interest Group of the American Society of International Law (ASIL).

Women's representation, visibility, and participation in the age of algorithms

Visibility, legitimacy, and public engagement are shaped in online spaces, which are a core dimension of democracy. Several panels highlighted how platform architecture, algorithmic amplification, data bias, and weak accountability mechanisms disproportionately affect women and girls, especially those already marginalized by race, class, caste, ethnicity, or limited digital access. The broader consequence is a shrinking of democratic participation: when online visibility carries reputational, emotional, or professional costs, women may self-censor, withdraw from social platforms, or avoid entering public-facing roles altogether. Expanding women's participation in these spaces calls for structural, intersectional, and intergenerational action to enable women to participate fully, safely, and meaningfully in public debate and decision-making, not as a secondary or separate sphere. To address these challenges, we recommend to:

- **Adopt gender-responsive, human-rights-based digital governance frameworks** that address platform accountability, algorithmic transparency, and online safety as democratic participation issues, not only as private or individual risks;
- **Embed safety measures and participation mechanisms in design processes** by requiring platforms to assess how features may discourage women's public engagement, and to integrate user feedback into platform design;
- **Ensure meaningful participation of women in digital governance and technology design**, including in regulatory processes, AI development, data governance, and platform oversight;
- **Promote data collection and gender analysis, digital literacy, civic confidence, and shared responsibility**, including the engagement of boys and men in building healthier online cultures.

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