BULLSMUN IV

Commission on the Status of Women

Letter from the Chair

Welcome to BullsMUN and to CSW – The Commission on the Status of Women of the United Nations Economic and Social Council. My name is Zoe Fernandez, and I am excited to serve as your chair for the BullsMUN IV conference. I am currently a senior at USF majoring in political science, and this will be my second time chairing a committee at BullsMUN. I have been involved in MUN for about three years, traveling with USF and St. Petersburg collegiate teams. I am also on the executive board of USF MUN and serve as a Historian, running our social media presence and making connections across campus. Through MUN, I have grown my skills in public speaking, negotiation, and leadership, and I hope each of you can take advantage of this conference to improve them. I am looking forward to seeing all delegates engage in lively debate, create lasting memories, and grow as future leaders. I wish all delegates the best of luck, and I look forward to hearing the unique solutions and ideas you will bring to the committee. Welcome to CSW, and welcome to BullsMUN 2026!

Letter from the Co-Chair

Hello everybody, and welcome to BullsMUN! We are excited to present to you the CSW- the Commission on the Status of Women of the United Nations Economic and Social Council. My name is Imelda Mucaj, and I am delighted to be serving as your Co-chair at this BullsMUN. I am a junior at the University of South Florida majoring in Economics with a minor in Spanish, but my passion has always been politics. I have been involved with

Model UN since I was a Senior in high school. I have participated in several National Model United Nations conferences with St. Petersburg College. At USF, this is my second year participating in collegiate MUN, and I have staffed several conferences for USF, UCF, and Pinellas County Model United Nations. I am also on the executive board of USF MUN, serving as historian alongside my wonderful friend Zoe Fernandez. Model UN has taught me a lot about how to handle stressful situations, think critically through problems, and public speaking, and at the same time given me friends and memories that will last a lifetime. I wish all the delegates good luck at this conference, and try your best, this is a learning experience for all of us! Welcome to CSW and BullsMUN 2026!

Committee Introduction

The Commission on the Status of Women was established in 1946 to promote the advancement of women worldwide. This commission stemmed from the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), with its original mandate to “prepare recommendations and reports to the Economic and Social Council on promoting women's rights in political, economic, civil, social, and educational fields.” The CSW is an integral tool in documenting the reality of women's rights across the globe, and it shapes the international standard of gender equality for women and girls. This commission has been one of the biggest inspirations for women worldwide, creating a positive impact on legal and policy development at the national level. It has pushed for constitutional provisions and reviewed national legislation, thereby introducing new practices to promote gender equality at the national level. The first meeting of the CSW was held at Lake Success, New

York, in February 1947, and the Commission continues to convene each March. This Commission allows gender equality conversations to take place internationally, ensuring women were included in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The CSW's biggest accomplishment was its foundational role in establishing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted by 189 countries as the most comprehensive blueprint for achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls globally.

The most recent meeting of the CSW took place from March 9–19, 2026, at the United Nations Headquarters; this was the seventieth session. The established theme of this session was to ensure and strengthen access to justice for all women and girls by promoting equitable legal systems and ending discriminatory laws. The CSW cannot officially mandate policy, so its primary output is an agreed conclusion: a well-written, clearly defined policy document for UN Member States to follow. The 70th session's agreed conclusions include policy language such as improving access to justice, making it more affordable, expanding interpretation services, and removing barriers faced by women from minority groups. The CSW focused on increasing women's participation in justice systems, promoting women to leadership positions within courts and legal systems, addressing bias in judicial institutions, and improving gender-sensitive training for legal professionals.

Committee Format

The Commission on the Status of Women will operate as a traditional General Assembly (GA) committee. Though delegates have been provided with two topics in this background

guide, they will start debate with one topic, then gradually move into debate of the other topic later during the BullsMUN weekend. At the beginning of the committee, delegates on the speakers' list will debate on which topic they wish to set the agenda, allowing them to advocate for their preferred topic to be discussed first. This committee will include the speakers' list, moderated caucus, unmoderated caucus, authors' panel, and resolution voting; the chairs will monitor the flow of the committee at their discretion.

Topic I: Overcoming Systemic Barriers and Increasing Women's Meaningful Participation in Political Leadership Roles

From the local to the international level, women remain significantly underrepresented in political leadership and decision-making roles. Meaningful participation in political leadership includes holding elected office, serving in national parliaments and public administration, gaining access to candidacy and political advancement, and holding executive leadership positions. Women remain underrepresented at all levels of government, from national to local institutions. This disparity is influenced by discriminatory laws, institutional barriers, and embedded biases against women holding positions of power. These barriers include party gatekeeping, caregiving responsibilities, violence, traditional social norms, and sexist laws. These barriers are strongly rooted in long-standing traditional gender roles that have historically undervalued women's work and leadership capabilities.

The United Nations General Assembly Resolution on women's political participation (A/RES/66/130) states, "Women in every part of the world continue to be largely marginalized from the political sphere, often as a result of discriminatory laws, practices, attitudes and gender stereotypes, low levels of education, lack of access to health care and the disproportionate effect of poverty on women" (United Nations General Assembly, 2012, p. 2). Although individual women have overcome these barriers and made significant contributions to political leadership and the advancement of women's rights, substantial disparities in political representation remain.

The United Nations has a long history of international commitments to improve women's representation in political leadership. These efforts include adopting resolutions and creating programs focused on women's rights to participate in public life and public service. One of the most significant commitments is the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted in 1995 at the Fourth World Conference on Women, which established a global framework for advancing gender equality and women's empowerment.

Despite these commitments, significant disparities remain. According to UN Women, as of January 1, 2026, 30 women served as Heads of State and/or Government across 28 countries. Only seven countries had achieved 50 percent or greater representation of women in their national parliaments: Rwanda (64 percent), Cuba (57 percent), Nicaragua (55 percent), Bolivia (51 percent), and Andorra, Mexico, and the United Arab Emirates (50 percent each) (UN Women, 2026). These figures demonstrate that although some countries have made substantial progress toward gender-balanced political

representation, parity remains far from the global norm. Achieving balanced political participation between women and men therefore remains an important international objective, as established by the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

Current Solutions

While global progress has been slow, several national initiatives demonstrate how targeted interventions can improve women's political participation. Recent research in Nigeria highlighted a success story of increasing women's presence in local political leadership. In a case study, researchers found that women's low participation in political leadership was not just due to structural barriers but also to a lack of resources and information, and it was deeply rooted in psychological barriers and social norms. (Dhabhai, 2025). In Nigeria, training sessions began in local communities; these sessions included information on governance and two separate training styles for men and women. The women's training was group-based and promoted collective efficiency to build leadership and advocacy skills (Dhabhai, 2025).

UN Women has also taken action to combat the negative social norm that men are better suited to political leadership roles than women. UN Women convened a two-day Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on 4-5 February 2025 to address these barriers; the meeting included feminist scholars, political activists, and policymakers (United Nations Regional Information Center [UNRIC], 2025). Again, despite previous international commitments, such as the Beijing Platform for Action and the Sustainable Development Goals, women remain underrepresented, which is why UN Women is shifting its focus to changing social

norms and prioritizing shifts in community attitudes. At this conference, experts examined how norms manifest across many spheres of life, including family, political and economic institutions, and media and digital spaces. Delegates emphasized how norms from these areas affect women's political engagement and that these gender biases not only limit motivation but also sustain hostile environments that deter their participation (UNRIC, 2025). Discussions highlighted the epidemic of social norms and explored effective ways to change them. The meetings adopted best practices such as fostering positive representations, increasing positive storytelling, and actively countering false narratives about women in political spaces (UNRIC, 2025). The conference not only highlighted language change but also supported feminist movements and civil society organizations, equipping them to advocate effectively against biases toward women in political spheres. Lastly, the conference emphasized strategies for combating negative norms in media representation, again emphasizing inclusive storytelling that showcases not only women in political leadership but also a diverse range of women (UNRIC, 2025). By fostering inclusive dialogue, strengthening advocacy channels, and improving research, the international community can break these systemic barriers and improve women's meaningful participation in politics. Though these are only three examples of women's participation in diplomacy, other areas of political inclusion require more targeted action and greater attention to deeply embedded systemic barriers.

Potential Solutions

As work continues through organizations such as UN Women and the United Nations Regional Information Center, potential solutions remain underdeveloped. Potential

solutions for the committee session include focusing on implementing and building pipelines to involve young women in civic leadership and creating better opportunities for first-time candidates. Another area of progress could be to eliminate violence and harassment for women in politics. Though it is one thing to be able to have women on the ballot, we must ensure that they can campaign and govern without threat of violence. Overall, potential solutions should focus on improving women's meaningful participation in political leadership roles, including holding elected office, serving in national parliaments and public administration, gaining access to candidacy and political advancement, and holding executive leadership positions. Some mechanisms delegates could focus on include funding, capacity-building, data collection, technical assistance, reporting mechanisms, education, and NGO partnerships. These will allow the topic to be addressed in multifaceted ways, ensuring that achievable solutions can be discussed.

Questions to Consider

1. Does your country have equal protections for women under laws or constitutional practices to guarantee political rights? If so, how effectively are they implemented?
2. How can education, leadership training, and civic engagement programs better prepare women and girls for political leadership?

3. How can governments ensure that women from marginalized communities, including Indigenous women, women with disabilities, rural women, migrant women, and minority groups, are represented in political decision-making?
4. How can the international community encourage changes in harmful social norms while respecting national sovereignty and cultural diversity?

Topic II: Empowering Women's Participation in Sustainable Development

The world faces unprecedented challenges, including economic crises, unequal access to health care, violence against women, and climate change. Achieving gender equality may be an integral tool in addressing these issues for future generations. In each of these areas, women are affected at higher rates, even though they possess the traits, ideas, and leadership needed to address them. Discrimination based on gender not only limits women from reaching their full potential, but it also restricts the development of our global community.

International Efforts and Existing Programs

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted in 2015, marked a turning point in international cooperation and advanced progress toward a more sustainable world. Sustainable Development Goal 5, Gender Equality, focuses on closing the Gender Gap and creating equal opportunities for all. By advancing Goal 5 and supporting women's empowerment, all SDGs will have a fair

chance to improve areas such as justice, sustainable environments, and productive economies that work for all individuals. Early international recognition of promoting women in sustainable development appears in the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development. This document was crafted during the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (the Earth Summit) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, held from June 3–14, 1992. The summit aimed to guide future sustainable development actions while balancing environmental protection with economic growth. As it focused on guiding development, it also included a principle that set a standard for including women in sustainable development.

Principle 20 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development states, “Women have a vital role in environmental management and development; their full participation is therefore essential to achieve sustainable development” (United Nations, 1992, Principle 20). This is essential because women are key drivers of conservation and resource management. In the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), heads of government came together to produce a more inclusive framework for eradicating poverty, safeguarding resources, and promoting economic growth. This document again highlighted the vital role women play in development; though it used strong language, action is still lacking. Sustainable development includes protecting future generations' resources, but it also entails meeting present needs and distributing resources equitably (Warth & Koparanova, 2012). Growing sustainable development practices requires strategic perspectives to ensure both men and women have enough for future generations. Despite previous international commitments, women still face

immense barriers to participating in sustainable development. Women worldwide lack equal access to land ownership, education, technology, and financial gain. These resource gaps often limit their ability to advance land conservation, climate adaptation, and economic development. As a result, achieving inclusive sustainable development requires not just recognition of importance but also lifting real systemic barriers.

Women's Economic Empowerment

The most significant economic barrier women face is the persistent gender pay gap. More than ever, women are participating in the workforce, yet they face differences in wages and the economic opportunities available to them. The gender pay gap includes unequal wages for equal work. It also includes women's concentration in lower-paid occupations and their limited opportunities for advancement. Across all regions, women are paid less than men, with the gender pay gap estimated at around 20 percent globally (United Nations, n.d.). These disparities often prevent women from investing, accessing credit, owning property, and pursuing education. This economic inequality goes far beyond a woman's individual paycheck; lower lifetime earnings restrict women's ability to save and invest their money and, overall, pour it into their local economies. These implications restrict women's ability to participate in the activities necessary for sustainable economic and community development.

In many communities, women play a major role in agriculture, resource management, and food production but have less control over the financial and land resources tied to these responsibilities. Increasing women's land ownership and rights is essential to achieving

the Sustainable Development Goals (UN Women & OHCHR, 2020). When women lack secure access to agricultural resources, credit, land, and technology, they cannot invest in sustainable farming practices, limiting their ability to adapt to climate-related challenges.

To address this issue, UN Women, with support from other organizations, launched the Equal Pay International Coalition (EPIC), a multi-stakeholder organization whose main purpose is to achieve equal pay for women and men everywhere. This organization operates at the local, national, regional, and global levels, and works with governments and the private sector to improve equal pay legislation. This is one of many organizations that focus on improving participation in sustainable development; examining these organizations and their practices is one potential solution to consider when addressing participation in sustainable development.

Women and Climate Resilience

Lastly, climate change is another prime example of why women's participation in sustainable development is necessary. Climate change is universally recognized as an environmental threat, but its effects aren't always experienced equally. Persistent inequalities often determine who has access to the resources to adapt and recover efficiently from environmental disasters. These inequalities include access to technology, financial resources, land, and infrastructure; these factors can exacerbate the effects of climate change because of existing gender disparities. This is most common in rural communities, where women and girls often secure food, water, and household needs. Climate change-driven environmental changes may disrupt these resources through

drought, intense rainfall, and desertification. For example, as water becomes scarcer, women may have to travel longer distances to obtain it, increasing their unpaid labor and reducing their time for paid work and education. Climate change can disrupt this, keeping women from participating in community development as they adapt to changing environments and scarce resources.

However, if we view women as victims of climate change and discrimination, we diminish their ability to be leaders in developing solutions to promote and participate in sustainable development. This is why the international community must address these barriers so women have an equal opportunity to contribute to sustainable development. To address these barriers, look beyond the effects of inequality and consider the conditions that lead to low participation, while also addressing conditions that promote more meaningful participation. This may include analyzing women's access to education, financial resources, land ownership, and decision-making. As the international community continues to work toward improving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, the conversation should focus not only on how women benefit from sustainable development, but also on how to provide them with the tools to shape it. It is critical to consider how women are disproportionately affected by development challenges and to shape policies that promote women as equal and active participants in sustainable development.

Potential Solutions

As the international community advances toward women's participation in sustainable development, potential solutions may address economic, environmental, and institutional barriers that limit meaningful participation. Recommended areas to focus on during this committee session include improving education, promoting financial resource programs, developing ways to improve women's land ownership, and expanding sustainable development programs. Potential mechanisms include capacity building, civil society partnerships, improved information sharing, and technical assistance. Again, potential solutions should not only address the disproportionate effects of development challenges on women but also improve access to the tools and opportunities women need to participate actively in sustainable development.

Questions to Consider

1. How can Member States improve access to education and technical training for women and girls in sustainable development fields?
2. What mechanisms can improve accountability for achieving Sustainable Development Goal 5?
3. How are women disproportionately affected by climate change and environmental degradation?
4. What policies can support women working in agriculture, natural resource management, and conservation?

5. What barriers prevent women from fully participating in sustainable development initiatives within your country?

References

Dhabhai, K. (2025, September 30). *Overcoming barriers to women's political participation: Evidence from Nigeria*. Center on Democracy, Development and the Rule of Law, Stanford University. https://cddrl.fsi.stanford.edu/news/overcoming-barriers-womens-political-participation-evidence-nigeria

United Nations. (n.d.). *Equal Pay Day*. https://www.un.org/en/observances/equal-pay-day

United Nations. (1992). *Rio Declaration on Environment and Development*. United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.

United Nations General Assembly. (2012). *Women and political participation* (A/RES/66/130). United Nations.

United Nations Regional Information Centre for Western Europe. (2025, April 17). *Transforming social norms to advance women's political participation.*

https://unric.org/en/transforming-social-norms-to-advance-womens-political-participation/

UN Women. (2026, March 11). *Facts and figures: Women's leadership and political participation*. https://www.unwomen.org/en/articles/facts-and-figures/facts-and-figures-womens-leadership-and-political-participation

UN Women & Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. (2020). *Realizing women's rights to land and other productive resources* (2nd ed.). United Nations.

Warth, L., & Koparanova, M. (2012). *Empowering women for sustainable development*. United Nations Economic Commission for Europe.