

# RENMUN VII

*Peace in Permanence*



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**Chair Report**

## Chair Introduction

Hi Everyone! My name is Shraddha Rajesh and I am currently a Year 12 student at Renaissance College Hong Kong. Women's rights and gender equality are issues that are extremely close to my heart and the reason I applied to chair this committee.

Hi delegates! My name is Charmaine Wu and I will be serving you as your Deputy Chair for CSW this year. I am currently a Form 4/Year 11 student studying at Diocesan Girls' School and I've been involved in MUN for three years now.

Although CSW is a beginners' council, we hope that novice delegates are willing to step out of their comfort zones in discussing with delegates and sparking debates during the conference. Delegates are expected to read through the chair reports, and conduct extensive research based on their country's stance to better prepare the two topics. We look forward to witnessing 2 full days of engaging debates and creative solutions, and wish you all the best of luck during your preparation! Should you have any enquiries about the topic or procedures, feel free to reach out to either of us!

Warm regards,  
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# Eliminating Discriminatory Barriers Faced by Women in the Workplace

When one imagines a perfect family, it is not uncommon to think of the man at work and the woman at home cooking and taking care of the children (whether she likes it or not). Women cannot get equal footing with men in the world without equal work opportunities. There are a number of barriers that women face in the workplace: maternity and domestic responsibilities, lack of access to financial resources, land, capital and technology, gender based violence and more. These barriers mean that a large number of women work in low paid jobs, are paid less than their male counterparts and are less able to access social protection. A number of other barriers like legal and religious barriers prevent women from being employed in the first place.

According to the 2015-2016 UN Women progress report and a 2016 study conducted by the World Bank, only 67 countries have laws against gender discrimination in hiring practices and in 18 countries, husbands are able to legally prevent their wives from working. For example, in Afghanistan, women have been barred from doing a number of jobs and according to a female activist from Kabul, the only job that women are able to do is clean female bathrooms. This information points to the great need for global improvement in the area.

Elimination of such barriers would mean that women are more economically empowered. By giving women the opportunity to take control over their decisions, bodies and lives, speak freely, make economic decisions and more, we are naturally able to get closer to gender equality and allow women to enjoy the rights they deserve.

Women joining the workforce would not only benefit women but the economy as a whole. Companies and industries will gain a wider talent pool, increased diversification, different perspectives, better reflection of the customers and higher productivity, all of which could contribute to increased revenue. According to UN Women, an increase in female employment rates in developed countries to be similar to that of successful countries like Sweden, could increase GDP by more than 6 trillion US dollars and companies with more than 3 women in senior leadership positions do better in organizational performance and growth.

Many think tanks and other organizations are conducting frequent research in the area in order to create reports on progress. An index that will be used through this report is the Women's workplace equality index from the Council on Foreign Relations.

## Key Terms

Term	Definition
Workplace Discrimination on the basis of gender	When an applicant or employee is treated differently or in an unfavorable manner due to their gender identity.
Gender Based Violence	Harmful acts directed at an individual based on their gender.
Sexual Harassment	Sexual Harassment is defined as non consensual sexual advances, request of sexual favours and verbal or physical advances of sexual nature.
Building Credit	This is an important area the Council on Foreign Relations looks at in their Women Workplace Equality Index. The building credit area refers to constraints women may face in relation to discrimination in access to credit due to gender, marital status etc. all of which affects women's abilities to seek employment, start or grow businesses and open bank accounts.
Accessing Institutions	Another area the council on foreign relations looks at in their Women Workplace Equality Index is accessing institutions. This area refers to the legal capacity of women to make their own decisions. For example, legally constraining women from choosing where and how they want to travel, when they want to go where, how they choose to lead their life etc. will all impact their ability to commute to work, seek employment and seek start businesses.

## Background Information

According to the International Labor Organization, the global labor force participation rate for women is only 49%, while the rate for men is around 75%. According to the universal declaration of human rights, It is a human right for everyone to have the right to work and have favorable employment conditions. There

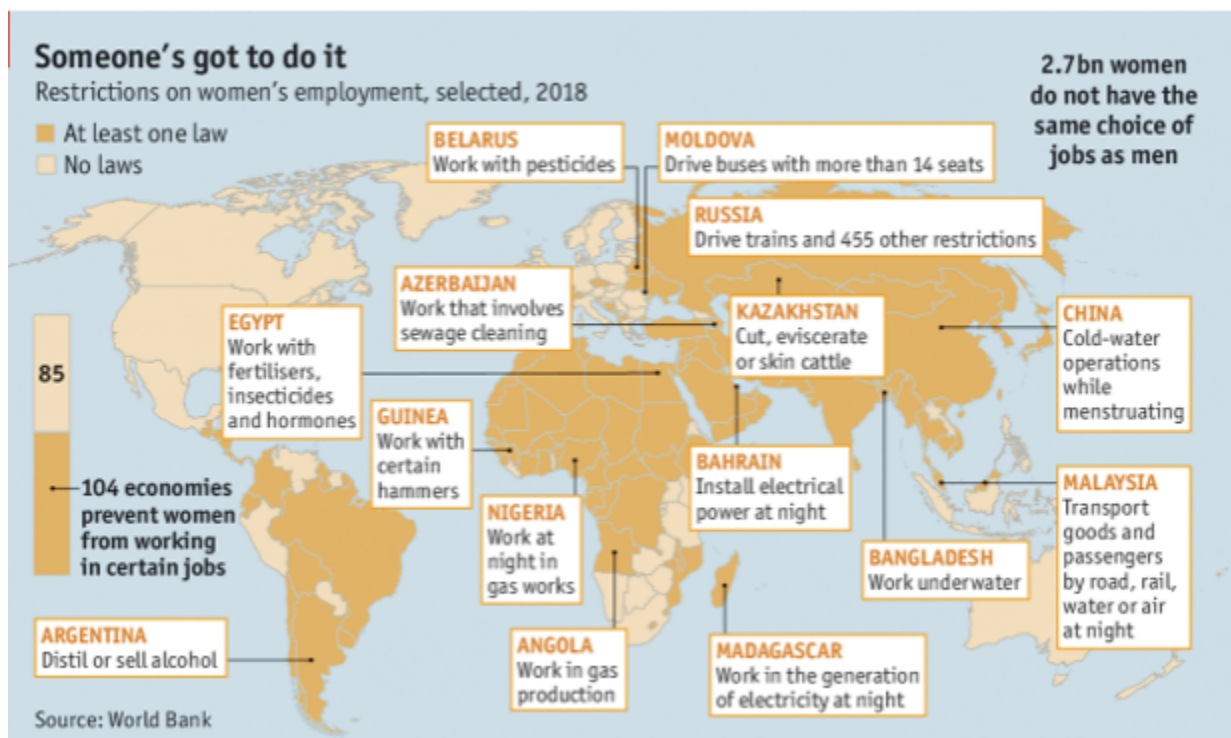
are, however, a number of barriers that prevent women from enjoying this right and lead to a smaller proportion of women in the workforce.

One such barrier that prevents women from employment is the gender roles that have been set by society. When a male partner is economically stable, it is not uncommon to see women step down from work due to the common male breadwinner model.

Childcare, cooking, cleaning etc. are all essential for the welfare of a household and the economy as a whole. As a result of gender roles set by society, these responsibilities are disproportionately held by women. There is also a lack of affordable child care in a number of countries making it harder for women to take up employment.

In many developing countries, lack of transportation can also be a major barrier for women. Lack of accessible and safe transportation makes it more difficult for women to commute to work. Sexual assault and harassment during their commute to work is also not an uncommon occurrence.

Legal systems globally have laws that are gender biased. For example, In Russia, women are not allowed to do work like drive trains, trucks, be a frontline firefighter and other labor that is deemed heavy or harmful. The image below shows a visual representation of different jobs women are prevented from undertaking around the world.



These laws prevent women from working, not having sufficient legal protection for cases of sexual harassment and violence both domestically and at the workplace and more. Religious prevalence in a number of regions also reflects both policy and the way the general public may perceive women, all of which can decrease incentive and opportunities to work.

Women are less likely to gain access to banks and other financial institutions, hindering their ability to save money, invest and start and grow businesses. Women are also far less likely to hold leadership positions in companies, with only 5% of Fortune 500 CEOs being women.

Lack of access to, quality of and safe education in many countries, particularly in developing countries, also limits the economic opportunities women will have. According to Unicef, worldwide there are 129 million girls out of school. In many developing countries, this can be attributed to the fact that poor families prefer to invest in the education of the male child as the male child is traditionally the one that will be able to financially support the family in the future. In many places, schools are not safe and are not hygienic and responsive to the sanitation needs for girls. This then results in women being less educated and skilled and lowers their employability.

## **Potential Clashes**

### **Conflicts on the basis of religion and culture**

A number of religious practices globally tend to perpetuate practices that are misogynistic, indirectly creating an image of women that then translates to how they are perceived in the workplace and beyond. For example, in countries like India, religious teachings are often passively taken in by women and very often these religious teachings are distorted by politics and age old gender stereotypes, degrading women and presenting them in poor light. Religious structures are also highly normalized, meaning that women in these communities internalize what it is that they have been taught and tend to become comfortable with having minimal space to exercise their rights.

That being said, religion is also a human right in itself and without religious freedom, many minorities and women will not have their say in global conversation. When making resolutions, all parties should take into account the importance of religious freedom and respect the importance it plays to many. It is important to discuss ways in which religious freedom and the empowerment of women can coexist.

In many cultures, what is feminine and appropriate for women to do with regards to employment may also impact women's economic empowerment and ability to

freely make economic decisions. For example, many countries prevent women from doing hard manual labor. With different countries having different views with regards to what gender equality should look like, this may also be a large point of disagreement.

### Conflicts between economically developed vs developing countries

Clashes could potentially arise between economically developed and economically developing countries due to a number of reasons. One such reason is the fact that the two parties may have different priorities. For example, a country torn by warfare would have different priorities to a country that is not, and where gender discrimination in the workplace would come on their agendas would undoubtedly differ.

## Key Stakeholders

Stakeholder	Involvement with the Issue
Qatar	A number of obstacles in Qatar that women face in relation to the workplace have given the country the third lowest score on the Council of Foreign Relations Women's Workplace Equality Index. Some notable barriers include the law not mandating equal pay for work of equal value, law does not prohibit the dismissal of pregnant workers, legally mandated maternity leave is less than fourteen weeks and women are not able to seek employment with the same ease that men are able to.
Afghanistan	With the current unrest in Afghanistan, women are becoming unable to exercise a number of their rights freely. For example, women are not permitted to leave the house without a male companion. Senior Taliban officials have also made it clear that women should not work alongside men as it goes against their view of Sharia law. Women in sectors like the media and banking have been under great scrutiny and are being made to step down from their jobs.
Sudan	Sudanese women are among some of the most oppressed in the world. With legal marriage as low as 10, and millions of girls victims of genital mutilation, lack of women's rights is a pressing issue in the country. Sudan is another country that scores highly on many indexes of countries where women

	<p>face the most barriers in the workplace. Such barriers include the fact that women are legally required to obey their husbands, law does not mandate nondiscrimination in the workplace on the basis of gender, women unable to work same night hours as men and women not permitted to work in the same industries as men</p>
Iran	<p>Discrimination in the workplace on the basis of gender is no new occurrence in Iran. Many barriers constrain women's abilities to not only find employment but to commute to their workplace, seek justice, use property, save money, balance family responsibility etc. Examples include the fact that there is no criminal penalty for sexual harassment in the workplace, marriage age is below 18, women unable to travel outside and abroad the same way as men and more.</p>
New Zealand	<p>New Zealand is a country that ranks quite highly on a number of indexes looking at countries with the least workplace inequality/discrimination on the basis of gender. New Zealand has no legal barriers for women when it comes to accessing institutions, going to court, building credit, using properties and providing incentives to work. This being said, there are still some notable barriers including the fact that there is no legally mandated maternity and paternity leave, equal pay for work of equal value is not mandated by the law, there are no criminal penalties for sexual harassment in the workplace etc.</p>
United Kingdom	<p>The UK ranks 7th on the CFR's women's workplace equality index. Like New Zealand, the country does not have any legal barriers for women with regards to access to institutions, building credit, providing incentives to work and using property. This being said, there are no laws that criminalize marital rape, no clear penalties for domestic violence, maternity leave is not fully paid for by the government etc.</p>
United States	<p>The US is another country that does relatively well in comparison to other nations when it comes to workplace equality on the basis of gender. Like the previous two countries, the US does not have legal barriers when it comes to accessing institutions, building credit, use of property etc. Again, like the previous two nations, the US too does not have legally mandated paid paternity and maternity leave, equal pay for work of equal value is not mandated, the law does not</p>



have an antidiscrimination commission etc.
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## Possible Solutions

While numerous actions have been taken globally in order to minimize barriers for women in the workplace, there is still a lot left to be done. A major barrier for working women is family responsibilities. Resolutions could possibly include family friendly policies that challenge the unequal distribution of domestic responsibilities between men and women. This could include legally increasing maternity leave in order for more women to be able to balance both home and work responsibilities. Another important policy would be paid paternity leave (which is currently non-existent in a number of countries), which would help balance family responsibility.

It is also important to have adequate and updated information in order to monitor progress and areas for improvement. With this in mind, resolutions could incorporate requirements for generation of frequent reports regarding the many barriers women face in the workplace.

## Past Actions

The Beijing Platform for Action is considered a key document for gender equality globally. Developed in 1995 and adopted by 189 countries, the document was split into 12 areas, one of which was titled “Women and the Economy.” This section had a number of proposed clauses talking about how nations can remove barriers faced by women in the workplace. While a number of doors have been opened for women since the platform for action, there is still a long way to go.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is considered the most important treaty for women’s rights. The convention adopted by the UN in 1979 has 189 signatories. The convention contains articles with actions nations should take in order to eliminate discrimination (including in the workplace). Frequent CEDAW review reports of signatories are used to monitor progress and ensure compliance.

Other valuable actions taken by the global community include a number of prominent mandates that have been made by the International Labor Organization in order to ensure equal employment opportunity for all.

## Guiding Questions

- What historical efforts to build a multilateral approach to eliminating discriminatory barriers faced by women in the workplace have been taken? Which of these has proven successful and what has not? How can these be adapted to suit a modern context?
- How can gender discriminatory workplace barriers be overcome while still not hurting religious sentiment? In countries where religion is the deciding factor, what actions can be taken to shift public perception on this issue?
- What are the economic and social impacts of these barriers for women in respective nations?
- How do barriers for women vary based on geography, economic status, education levels and media development? How can these differences be accounted for in a joint resolution?

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