



**JOURNALISTS AND
WRITERS FOUNDATION**



CSW67

**The Sixty-Seven Session of the
UNITED NATIONS
COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN
6 - 17 March 2023 | New York**

JWF/CSW67 PROCEEDINGS



**6-17 March 2023 INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE
EDUCATION IN THE DIGITAL AGE**
CSW67 Progress toward gender equality
COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN



JOURNALISTS AND WRITERS FOUNDATION

The Journalists and Writers Foundation (JWF) is an international civil society organization dedicated to the culture of peace, human rights, and sustainable development. The JWF promotes diversity and inclusion by creating forums for intellectual and social engagement; generates and shares knowledge with stakeholders, builds partnerships worldwide and develops policy recommendations for positive social change.

* JWF is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization registered in New York State, USA.

* JWF is associated with the United Nations Department of Global Communications.

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INTRODUCTION

THE JOURNALISTS AND WRITERS FOUNDATION

CO-ORGANIZED 12 PARALLEL EVENTS

HOSTED 32 SPEAKERS FROM 12 COUNTRIES

ON THE 67TH SESSION OF THE UN COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

The 67th Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW67) convened in New York from 6 to 17 March 2023, in a hybrid mode after two years of COVID restrictions. In addition to the United Nations member states, thousands of non-governmental organizations from different parts of the world came to New York to attend the in-person sessions and have discussed many pressing issues including the social and economic development of women and girls, prevention of all kinds of violence against women, women in effective decision-making positions, education of girls, women's participation in the science and technology sector, women journalists and contributions of women to maintain sustainable peace and development.

The UN Commission on the Status of Women is one of the most important times at the United Nations when women leaders and delegations from different countries and societies come together in solidarity to promote women's rights and activists come together in New York. The Journalists and Writers Foundation (JWF), which has participated in the UN Commission on the Status of Women meetings since 2013, continues to raise awareness on women empowerment and give a voice to the voiceless in diverse United Nations platforms. This year, JWF organized 12 parallel panels in partnership with 13 non-governmental organizations from 12 different countries.



On the occasion of the 67th Session of the CSW, JWF events shed light on pressing issues such as protecting women human rights defenders, integration policies for women refugees, arbitrary arrests and torture of women in detention, supporting global women's movements in Turkey, Afghanistan, Iran and Myanmar. Empowerment of women journalists and human rights defenders who risk their lives for accurate and reliable information was among the top priorities. Another important agenda addressed at the UN by the JWF was to encourage young women professionals and girls to pursue academic and professional careers in STEM Education (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) and to open space for young women and girls. Recent research studies reveal that gender equality is gradually increasing in the field of innovation and technology as women's active role in science, computers, technology, engineering, and all other sectors is one of the cornerstones of sustainable development.

JWF BROUGHT TOGETHER WOMEN'S RIGHTS EXPERTS AND UN DIPLOMATS AT A HIGH-LEVEL RECEPTION IN NEW YORK

RECEPTION HIGHLIGHTS

The JWF CSW67 High-Level Reception was held at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York on the opening day of the UN Commission on the Status of Women on 6 March 2023, Monday. Turkish, Kurdish, Iranian, Afghan, Hazara, Kosovan, Armenian, American, Romanian, British women's rights defenders, journalists, academics, and human rights experts, as well as young participants from North Carolina TMSA Charter High School and New Jersey Pioneer Academy were among the guests at the reception.



High-level representatives from the Permanent Missions of France, New Zealand, Chile, Guatemala, Sri Lanka and Myanmar to the United Nations participated in the reception. It was an opportunity for the UN diplomats and non-governmental organizations from all over the world to meet, network and exchange ideas during the CSW67.

After the open buffet, twelve representatives talked about their panel discussion organized in partnership with the JWF and NGOs from the United States, Brazil, Greece, Germany, India, Kyrgyzstan, Romania, and the United Kingdom. Expert speakers attending the reception also addressed the participants about the priority agenda of the CSW67.



In addition to the addresses of representatives from prestigious media organizations such as Committee to Protect Journalist and Empower Women Media, Azra Jafari, the first female governor of Afghanistan, and Kurdish artist Hozan Cane, who made her voice known to the whole world with her art and the crimes against humanity she lived in prison, also attended the reception. Kurdish singer Hozan Cane sang the song “Ez Jinim Jîyanîm - **I am a living woman**” written for the International Women's Day



12 VIRTUAL AND IN-PERSON PANELS AT UN COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

On the occasion of the 67th Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, the Journalists and Writers Foundation (JWF) organized 12 parallel events, both in-person and online, in partnership with 13 non-governmental and educational institutions, including Brazil, Greece, Germany, India, Kyrgyzstan, Romania, the United Kingdom and the United States. Expert speakers shared their perspective and real-life experiences on women's rights and gender equality during the sessions



As the 67th Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW67) returns to hybrid mode this year, the JWF and its global partners, organized parallel events to share the current status of women's rights and successful civil society practices for the empowerment of women and girls for policy recommendations on the prevention of violence against women. There was an active international participation in the panel discussions at the Church Center for the UN where the role of women's human rights in peacebuilding and regional projects aiming at the empowerment of women refugees were highlighted.

Prestigious speakers, academics, experts, journalists, and activists continued to discuss critical local and global issues of women's development and present innovative policy proposals for the gender-sensitive implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals at the UN Headquarters until 17 March 2023.

COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN 67th SESSION
6 – 17 March 2023 | New York

CSW67 PANELS OF THE JOURNALISTS AND WRITERS FOUNDATION

7 March 2023 (Church Center for UN) | IN PERSON | [Event Recording](#)

Protecting Women Human Rights Defenders for Sustainable Peace

Cemre Ulker, Representative of JWF to the UN DGC (USA)

Azra Jafari, First Female Mayor of Afghanistan, Province of Nili (USA)

Erica Saghar Kasraie, Creative Director, Empower Women Media (USA)

Naw Hser Hser, Political Initiative and Advocacy Team Member, Women League of Burma (MYANMAR)

9 March 2023 (YouTube) | VIRTUAL | [Event Recording](#)

Violence Against Women Journalists around the World, in partnership with Instituto pelo Diálogo Intercultural (Brazil)

Stephanie Fillion, UN Correspondent, Neuffer Bronze Medal Recipient of 2022 UNCA Awards (USA)

Dr. Gulnoza Said, Head of Europe and Central Asia Program, Committee to Protect Journalists (USA)

Iryna Matviyishyn, Journalist, Kyiv Independent (UKRAINE)

Mayra K. Yazdari, TV Producer, Journalist, CBN News (USA)

Marina Dias, Journalist, The Washington Post in Brasília (BRAZIL)

11 March 2023 (Compass College Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan) | HYBRID | [Event Recording](#)

InnovaSHEon: Women's Empowerment Through Innovation and Technology, in partnership UN Women Kyrgyzstan, UNDP Kyrgyzstan, WomenTechmakers, Compass College Bishkek

Priyanka Chahal, Program Associate, Youth Representative of JWF to the UN DGC, Journalists and Writers Foundation (KYRGYZSTAN)

Victoria Mozgacheva, Vice Mayor of Capital Bishkek, Government of Kyrgyzstan (KYRGYZSTAN)

Ulziisuren Jamsran, UN Women Representative to Kyrgyzstan (KYRGYZSTAN)

Farzana Abdilashimova, Spotlight Project Officer, UN Women (KYRGYZSTAN)

Jenny Jenish Kyzy, Head of Experimentation, UNDP Accelerator Lab (KYRGYZSTAN)

Talant Sultanov, Chair and Co-Founder of the Internet Society-Kyrgyz Chapter (KYRGYZSTAN)

8 March 2023 (Church Center for UN) | IN PERSON | [Event Recording](#)

Intersectional Violence Against Women in Turkey, organized by Set Them Free (USA) in partnership with the JWF and AST

Hafza Girdap, Executive Director, Advocates of Silenced Turkey (USA)

Alin Ozinian, Regional Analyst & Editor-in-Chief, GerçekNews (GERMANY)

Sarah Teich, Human Rights Lawyer, Senior Fellow at Macdonald-Laurier Institute (CANADA)

Hozan Cane, Kurdish Songwriter, Women's Rights Advocate (GERMANY)

9 March 2023 (Church Center for UN) | IN PERSON | [Event Recording](#)

Integration Policies for Successful Resettlement of Refugee Women in Greece, organized by PIGI KOINSEP (Greece), in partnership with the JWF

Cemre Ulker, Representative of JWF to the UN DGC (USA)

Alexis Anagnostakis, Human Rights Officer, European Criminal Bar Association (GREECE)

Vonya Womack, Executive Director, Refugees Unknown Stories Untold (USA)

Ramona Mihaila, Head of Secretary of State's Office, National Agency for Equal Opportunities between Women & Men (ROMANIA)

Ahsen Karagulmez, Youth Advocate resettled in USA from Greece (USA)

13 March 2023 (YouTube) | VIRTUAL | [Event Recording](#)

Global Solidarity to Combat State-led Violence against Women, organized by Set Them Free (USA), in partnership with the JWF

Cemre Ulker, Representative of JWF to the UN DGC (USA)

Azadeh Nikzadeh, Iranian Director, Women's Right Activist (USA)

Dr. Shilan Fuad Hussain, Marie Curie Postdoctoral Fellow of Gender Studies and Cultural Analysis, Senior Consultant of Gender (UK)

Fatema Daryab Ahmadi, Adjunct Professor at American University (USA)

Chra Abdullah, Project Manager, Dialogue and Culture Organization (IRAQ)

13 March 2023 (YouTube) | VIRTUAL

The Role of STEM Education in Achieving Gender Equality: Perspectives of Youth, organized by Triangle Math and Science Academy (USA), in partnership with the JWF

Meryem Golbasi, Sophomore at TMSA, President of the Model UN Club (USA)

Arvinth Krishna, Sophomore at TMSA, Member of the Model UN Club (USA)

Yashitha Vanamala, Junior at TMSA, Student Athlete (USA)

Liam Westberg, Senior at TMSA, Vice President of the Model UN Club (USA)

Ishaan Kamra, Sophomore at TMSA, Treasurer of the Model UN Club (USA)



PROTECTING WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS FOR SUSTAINABLE PEACE**Azra Jafari, First Female Mayor of Afghanistan, Province of Nili | USA***Panelist 1: Gender-specific challenges the WHRDs encounter in patriarchal societies: Afghanistan Case*

Azra Jafari is Afghanistan's first female mayor and began her work as a women's rights and social activist, established a non-profit school for Afghan refugees living in Iran. Throughout her career, Ms. Jafari held many impactful positions in various councils and made history by becoming Afghanistan's first female mayor in Nili the capital of Daikundi province. She also joined the Research Committee of Secretariats for the Afghanistan Constitution Commission and her team assisted commissioners draft a new constitution for Afghanistan in 2004. As a result of her commitment to peace and women's rights, Azra Jafari received the Meeto Memorial Award for Young South Asians in 2011.



As the first female mayor of Afghanistan, I raise my voice for the women of Afghanistan who are suffering under the Taliban regime. As a woman who was once a refugee and then returned to her country hoping to rebuild it, I never imagined that I would again be forced to flee my homeland with my daughter and hundreds of thousands of others. The situation in Afghanistan under the Taliban regime is dire.

As per the UNDP report in November 2022, 97%, or around 40 million people in Afghanistan, are below the poverty line and need emergency assistance for food and first aid. But despite all these challenges, the Taliban has focused on restricting women's rights. Since August 2021, the Taliban has issued 54 decrees verbally or officially, almost 40 of them being restrictive for women. These decrees include banning schools for girls in the 6th grade and up, banning all universities, private schools, and institutes for girls, and restricting women's work in all profit and nonprofit organizations.

The Taliban has also banned women from exercising their rights to governance, education, travel, and public places such as parks, streets, and shopping malls. Women who disobey these restrictions face punishment according to Sharia law and a decree announced by Mullah Haibatulla Akhundzada (Nov 14/22), the supreme leader of the Taliban, which allows for public executions. According to reports by the media, 454 people, including 79 women were publicly flogged in 21 provinces for not adhering to the proper hijab, running away from home, committing adultery, and selling drugs, among other reasons. In addition, women in Afghanistan have paid a high price for their resistance against the Taliban regime. Over 162 women were killed in 23 provinces due to direct fire by Taliban forces or unknown armed individuals.

Yet, none of these cases have been investigated. Furthermore, 1126 women and girls have been imprisoned in Taliban detention centers across 24 provinces. There are more, but the numbers only include reported accounts only. Over 95% of these women participated in protests or wrote against Taliban decisions on social media. Aleiya Azizi is a policewoman whom the Taliban kidnaped in October 2021. To this day, her whereabouts are unknown. Furthermore, several of these imprisoned women were killed, including Frozan Safi, an avid protester. Afghanistan has become a graveyard for women, girls, and youth. Forced marriage, child marriage, and suicide increase day by day and we lose our young generation the way of emigration.



I am here today to ask for your support. We need the support of the United Nations and its member countries to stand with us in solidarity and take action to protect the women of Afghanistan. We need your help to provide emergency assistance to those in need, including food, medicine, and shelter. We need your help to ensure that women's rights are protected and that they are not forced to live under such oppressive conditions. I urge the United Nations to take decisive action against the Taliban regime and to impose sanctions against those responsible for human rights abuses

We need your support to ensure that women and girls are allowed and encouraged to participate in all aspects of life, including education, work, and governance. Afghan women have suffered enough. It is time for the international community to act and support them in their struggle for freedom and equality. We cannot afford to turn a blind eye to the atrocities against Afghanistan's women. We need your help to ensure their voices are heard and their rights are protected.

I implore everyone to acknowledge the tireless efforts and hardships endured by women in the Middle East, particularly those in Iran and Afghanistan, and declare 2023 the year of Women's Freedom, Education, and Rights. I appeal to governments worldwide to cease supporting the Taliban terrorist group and take stringent measures against any country recognizing them.

I call on the United Nations to withdraw its endorsement of the Doha Agreement, which facilitated the resurgence of the Taliban regime and oppresses women, who constitute 50% of Afghanistan society. The United Nations must continue to support Afghanistan and Afghan women. The Taliban must be recognized as a terrorist organization, and all forms of funding and financial aid must be classified as terrorist financing.

Erica Saghar Kasraie, Creative Director, Empower Women Media | USA

Panelist 2: Exclusion of activists by state-led harassments and arbitrary measures towards women human rights defenders: MENA Region

Saghar Erica Kasraie is the Creative Director and Persian Media Fellowship Coordinator for Empower Women Media. She is an Iran-born American and Middle East expert, human rights activist, and voice for vulnerable religious minorities, especially women and children. In recent years, Ms. Kasraie has been a Middle East advisor, policy building, and media consultant to prominent organizations and a senior member of the U.S. House of Representatives Armed Services Committee. Erica Kasraie has developed over a decade of expert knowledge of Iranian political, economic, and social conditions.



Amir Ali Mousa Kazemi, a two-year-old boy, is the latest victim in the wave of murders since the unjust death of Mahsa Amini. The Islamic Republic fears even minor schoolgirls that they have resorted to chemical gas poisonings targeting Iranian children. I urge you to not make a mistake. This regime is one of the coldest, most heartless, and anti-human regimes in world history. It is desperate to impose a hateful, fantastical, and permanent repression on everyone but especially women.

The regime of the Islamic Republic in Iran from its inception till today has always deprived its citizens of basic human rights in order to control the population. They began their suppression by targeting women, the first of many restrictions were preventing women from entering their workplace without mandatory hijab and the serial execution of writers and journalists. The terror regime simply is not the way Iran ever was before the Islamic Revolution. Iranian society was an advanced, cosmopolitan, gender-progressive society and among Muslim nations, Iran remained a progressive center of learning and human rights.

The Mullah high jacking of my country in 1979 changed all that. The Mullahs got power and then took for themselves the money and power, but they also abused everyone else in new and evil ways. They restricted religious freedom and education. And they moved women back to the dark ages.

I experienced this with tens of millions of others. I was born in Iran and attended kindergarten with normal expectations soon after the Mullahs took control. However, soon after that, girls had to dress and act differently at school. All the children had to learn chants of “Death to Israel!” and “Death to America!”. My family fled abroad, living for months as refugees and guests of a kind, loving people devoted to human rights in Europe until we later arrived in the United States. Therefore, I have experienced in succession previous Iran, today’s terrorist Iran, and an affirming world that, in contrast to the regime, recognizes human rights, so reaps the rewards of humane policies.

In my new home, I was delighted I was free to attend school with no compulsory head covering or hateful chants, and I was even free to choose my own faith, which I did. I eventually asked what happened to Iran my family left behind, and what went wrong. I followed the democracy movement in its struggles against the dictatorship and against corrupt traitors who support that dictatorship, who enable the regime's continued killing of human liberty and opportunity. As usual, this terror regime represses and hurts everyone but often vulnerable and powerless women, children, and minorities the most. You cannot support human rights and also support the Iranian regime that violates people's rights at home and exports terror, weapons, and murder abroad. Removing Iran from The UN Commission on the Status of Women was a great first step, but more must be done to hold the regime accountable for its gross violations.

Ever since the popular revolutions in the Muslim world in 2009, the people of Iran have publicly expressed their wish to be rid of this evil regime. In 2009, then again in uprisings in 2018, and regularly to today, when the regime assaults and abuses people with cruelty, it was the brave women of Iran who rose to lead the first women-led revolution, to show the world they will no longer tolerate abuse even at the cost of their own lives. The chants of "Woman Life Freedom" were a rallying cry for women and men which echoed from a small cemetery where Mahsa was laid to rest.

The events this time since Mahsa's murder simply are the most forceful and obvious. We have countless examples of these violations of human rights that are widely accessible to anyone who is interested to know the truth. The regime arrested Niloofar Hamed, a journalist who broke the story of Mahsa Amini's murder along with several prominent civil rights activists and human rights activists. The regime arrested anyone who had any history of political activism such as Arash Sadeghi and Golrokh Iraee.

According to human rights groups, 61 journalists have been arrested since the murder of Mahsa Amini, although the numbers are likely higher, these are only the ones that have been able to be identified. We need to keep in mind that there is no such thing as freedom of the press in Iran. Journalists cannot operate legally without getting government accreditation and are forced to operate under strict limitations. Despite the severe censorship, the regime imprisons, harasses, and surveils journalists and their families.

Journalists in jail are subjected to torture and other human rights violations, including extended solitary confinement, denial of family visits, and access to health care and legal counsel. Journalists and others charged with crimes against national security may only select an attorney from a government-approved list. Most journalists imprisoned are housed in Evin Prison, which is notorious for subjecting inmates to torture, beatings, harsh interrogations, and mock executions.

Charges brought against journalists include:

- “waging war against God”
- “struggling against the precepts of Islam”
- “assembly and collusion against national security”
- “gathering classified information with the intent to harm national security”

A recent law was introduced that anyone who reports a story without the blessing of the regime will face a 10-year prison sentence, one such journalist who reported about the chemical gas poisoning of schoolgirls was arrested. Not only is there no freedom of the press in Iran, but there is no freedom of expression, conscience, or belief. And no one has the right to defend those who wish to have such freedoms, Human rights defenders and lawyers are systematically persecuted, imprisoned, and tortured. Even foreign humanitarian aid workers are not immune to the evil of the regime, as Belgian aid worker Olivier Vandecasteele was arrested on a visit to Iran in February 2022 and sentenced in January to 40 years in prison and 74 lashes on charges including spying. Dissidents and journalists based abroad face threats, and their families in Iran are interrogated and/or arbitrarily detained in reprisal for their activism.

Detained protesters face unspeakable sexual and physical assault in prisons. Over the course of 21 days, 23-year-old medical student, Kayvan Samadi tells an exclusive CNN report this his only human contact was the two interrogators who treated him to an increasingly harsh regimen of torture. They assailed him with insults, then they beat him so violently that he vomited blood. He was flogged 42 times and he was molested. On the 16th day of his detention, having failed to extract a confession out of him, Samadi’s interrogators raped him with a baton.



I could go on and on about the grotesque details of what goes on in clandestine jails and government facilities to crush an uprising, all in the name of God. No one really knows how many people have been arrested since the beginning of this revolution, thousands indeed. According to human rights activists, at least 520 people have been killed in 26 provinces during five months of protests including 60 women and 70 children.

Amidst the great protests for democratic change, the Iranian people are prime for freedom of conscience and belief messaging and training. Based on our research, it is paramount to offer human rights education through digital strategies (top-down and bottom-up approach). The good news is that Iranians are online all day long looking for answers and support from the outside world. It was 1 tweet after all that brought the eyes of the world to Iran's women-led revolution. At Empower Women Media, we are providing them with digital content to advance human rights and freedom of belief inside the country.

Some examples of these are that:

- We develop IRF advocacy videos;
- We are broadcasting an IRF series on satellite TV to millions in Iran;
- We lead an IRF training fellowship for women leaders;
- We are hosting an IRF film festival for Iranians;
- We translate our IRF education tools into Farsi;
- Finally, we are planning to host an IRF Training Conference in Morocco this June.

This is just a short list of actions we can accomplish. In the coming year:

- We will increase IRF education and training across Iran through satellite TV, social media, and online courses, with a special focus on including women;
- We will urge the government, civil society, faith, and business leaders to support religious freedom education in IRAN;
- We will encourage exchanges and roundtables between IRF delegates to learn from each other and share practical approaches for IRAN;
- We will conduct more analysis on the power of women and digital media strategies to develop IRF programming for IRAN.

Social science has shown, when you hold women down, you hold down a whole society and its children vulnerable. When you raise women up, you maximize freedom but also stability, growth, and security. Revolutionary movements with huge women's participation are more successful in changing governments, but also protecting people's rights over time.

Sarina Esmailzadeh, a bright and joyful 16-year-old vlogger who was murdered by the evil terror regime for joining the revolution once asked in her videos, what are the needs of a 16-year-old teenager? Giving love, receiving love, being in love. We are all in need of joy and recreation, good spirit, good vibes, and good energy, in order to have these, we need freedom.

Naw Hser Hser, Political Initiative and Advocacy Team Member, Women League of Burma | MYANMAR

Panelist 3: Forms of violations that WHRD combat in Global South: Myanmar

Naw Hser Hser is the former General Secretary of the Women's League of Burma. Currently, she is the Political Initiative and Advocacy Team Leader of the Women's League. She is one of the representatives of the Women's League of Burma in the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC). She is also currently serving as a member of the Standing Committee and International Advocacy Officer of her mother organization, Karen Women's Organization (KWO). For her commitment and dedication, Naw Hser Hser received the Pdoh Mahn Shar Lah Phan Karen Young Leader Award from the phan foundation in 2018.



Women's League of Burma (WLB) is a member-based organization and currently has 12 member organizations of different ethnic communities. Since its establishment in 1999, we have worked to increase the participation of women in the struggle for federal democracy and human rights in Burma. Since the military junta's failed coup in February 2021, they have imposed travel restrictions on humanitarian workers, blocked road access for aid convoys,

destroyed non-military supplies, and attacked aid workers. The coup has internally displaced over 1.5 million people who are in need of urgent humanitarian aid.

Almost all international humanitarian aid to Burma is being delivered in-country by international humanitarian aid agencies that have signed memorandums of understanding with the military junta in order to stay in the country. In contrast, our organization has been one of the forefront groups to respond to the humanitarian crisis on the ground, a crisis that continues to worsen by the week. WLB devised robust cross-border humanitarian assistance to systematically provide aid to displaced people in hardest-to-reach areas in Burma. So far, we have effectively assisted over 400,000 vulnerable people displaced across the country, including in Kachin, Karen, Karenni, and Shan states.

In May 2022, the ASEAN Coordinating Center for Humanitarian Assistance (AHA Center), an organization set up to deal with natural disaster relief, agreed to deliver aid to Burma under the supervision of the military regime. Unsurprisingly, this aid has not yet reached the people and the military continues to weaponize aid. International donors need a new approach. Working with the military has proven to be ineffective, and further undermines the work of local human rights defenders and humanitarian response efforts. The humanitarian crisis demands the international community use alternative pathways to deliver aid. For decades, the work of cross-border humanitarian and civil society organizations and community-based organizations, including women's rights organizations such as my mother organization, the Kachin Women's Organization, has been successful and effective.

Our assistance has reached communities most in need, while most of the relief items through INGOs, including the AHA Centre, OCHA, and WPF, have only been delivered to city and town areas unaffected by devastating conflict or in areas that are now illegally controlled by the military junta. This is not our speculation; this is evidenced by their own reporting. The reason behind our network's ability to deliver is not merely dependent on resources, which are scarce. It is due to our strong networks across regions, our commitment, our knowledge of local needs, our decades of proven capacities to manage risks and challenges on the ground, and our experience and expertise in aid delivery. Most importantly, we have the absolute trust of local communities in our work. International "experts" or international humanitarian workers cannot replace these norms.

I would like to present a few brief recommendations for the UN Member States and the international community:

- Do not cooperate with the military junta or its proxies to distribute humanitarian aid;
- Work and collaborate only with local actors, including the NUG, EROs, and local CSOs, to find innovative and alternative ways, to use existing reliable networks, distribute aid outside of military channels, and streamline administrative procedures to be flexible and user-friendly;
- Support local humanitarian groups and responders who have bravely worked to address the dire needs on the ground rather than supporting international organizations;
- Encourage donors to allow a degree of flexibility in their reporting requirements, as well as funding requirements such as the rigid designation of relief items, house rental, and original receipts with seller's details. Privacy, safety, and security of aid recipients, item sellers, deliverers, and, most importantly, effective aid distribution must be placed above donors' logistical rules and regulations;
- Ensure humanitarian funds and aid address priority issues for women, such as sexual and reproductive healthcare.



Obstacles

Our work is by no means without obstacles, some of which are similar to what's been faced by international organizations. Transportation of items to communities is a challenge due to military checkpoints and increasing prices of daily goods, while there is a risk of junta soldiers and paramilitary raiding and destroying relief supplies. But the fundamental difference between us and international agencies is that our local responders are rooted in communities, have the absolute trust of the people, and have the capacity and access to local markets and transport means so that once needs on the ground arise, they are ready to respond swiftly if they have the resources.

Security

Surely, there is an issue of security. With this military junta, no one in Burma is safe. This includes our networks. However, again the main difference or advantage we have as opposed to international humanitarian actors in such situations is that our networks are locally based, trusted by local communities, and have knowledge and capacity. This includes knowledge of where the checkpoints are being placed. Unlike the international and UN agencies whose staff can only travel with the Junta's permission, and approval accompanied by the people associated with the junta or ex-military personnel taking care of transportation.

Despite the danger, our network remains committed to assisting vulnerable communities in any way we can, and we know ways and means to minimize or reduce the risk. The strength of our networks on the ground, local connections, and our creative problem-solving skills coupled with local knowledge allow us to swiftly find new and innovative ways to overcome these challenges and assist those most in need.

Women's rights organizations

Ethnic women's organizations have provided assistance to conflict-affected populations in ethnic regions for decades and have established systems in place to deliver aid to those most in need. Ethnic CSOs have invaluable experience and expertise, but they require funding support from the international community to carry out cross-border humanitarian efforts. Ethnic CSOs are challenged by insufficient funding and demanding donor requirements that are unsuitable in times of emergency. Donor requirements are burdensome resulting in many CSOs forced to refuse much-needed funding.

I would like to remind distinguished colleagues that we are addressing an ongoing civil war and daily atrocity crimes perpetrated by the same Myanmar military that has committed genocide against the Rohingya and atrocity crimes against ethnic communities for decades and targeted civilians and used airstrikes. Efforts to address this humanitarian catastrophe must go beyond typical modes of the provision of humanitarian assistance.

All measures at your disposal must be rallied to actively end the root cause of the humanitarian crisis: atrocities by the junta. I request your support in pressuring the UN Security Council to impose a global arms embargo on Burma. Sanctions must further be placed on military-owned companies and affiliates, in particular against the Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise, which finances the junta's heinous crimes. The UNSC must refer the situation in Burma to the International Criminal Court or establish an ad-hoc tribunal.



VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN JOURNALISTS AROUND THE WORLD

**Journalists and Writers Foundation (USA) in partnership with
Instituto pelo Diálogo Intercultural (Brazil)**

**Stephanie Fillion, UN Correspondent, Neuffer Bronze Medal Recipient of 2022
UNCA Awards | USA**

Moderator: Opening Remarks

Stéphanie Fillion is a New York-based reporter specializing in foreign affairs and human rights and a United Nations correspondent. Her work was published in outlets like Forbes, Foreign Policy, Radio-Canada, and the Japanese newspaper Asahi Shimbun. She has a master's degree in journalism, politics, and global affairs from Columbia University and a BA in political science from McGill University. In recent years, her United Nations coverage received two UN Correspondent Association awards as well as a Gracie award from the Alliance for Women in Media. She writes in French, English, and Italian.



When I started my career as a TV reporter in Vancouver, Canada back in 2015 I remember that there was a trend to yell gender-related obscenities at women reporters when they were live on TV. On a reporting trip to Whistler in Western Canada, this incident happened to me more than once. For TV reporters, it is hard enough to think about all the details of a live stream on tv, whether it is thinking about the information that you have to convey or when you have a producer talking to you in your ears or potential technical issues. Therefore, dealing with strangers yelling obscenities about the female body does not help with your line of work. A few weeks after, I also remember that the same thing happened to me, but a colleague of mine was even kissed live on TV in Canada in 2015.

It was before the time that journalists were considered fake news. It was in a country where journalists are free, and their work is relatively independent and defended. Additionally, it was also before social media became a breeding ground for online violence. This is only one example of a gender-based type of harassment that women journalists have to deal with. It is nothing compared to war zones and countries where people, especially women, have to fight for their basic rights. As a UN correspondent, I cover these rights from New York City on a daily basis, and I depend on the important work of these courageous reporters who are there on the ground taking all kinds of risks to bring us first-hand information.

Dr. Gulnoza Said, Head of Europe and Central Asia Program, Committee to Protect Journalists | USA

Panelist 1: Shrinking Space of Women Journalists: Forms of Violations

Gulnoza Said is a journalist and press freedom advocate with over 20 years of experience in New York, Prague, Bratislava, and Tashkent. At CPJ, she has conducted several missions to countries in Europe and Central Asia and advocated for greater press freedom and the release of jailed journalists at forums including the U. S. Congress, the United Nations, and the OSCE. Before joining CPJ in 2016, Ms. Said was a journalist and covered issues including elections, politics, media, religion, and human rights with a focus on Central Asia, Russia, and Turkey. Gulnoza Said also worked in communications for the United Nations Secretariat and the UNDP.



The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) has been documenting press freedom violations, including violations against women journalists. I would like to address several forms of violations that are aimed at silencing women journalists. The ultimate form of censorship is murder. CPJ continues working on achieving justice in the cases of many women who have been killed in retaliation for their reporting.

Since 1992, when CPJ started keeping a database of journalists and media workers killed on assignment. More than 2,000 journalists have been killed and 106 of them are women journalists. In 2022, out of 7 women journalists killed, 4 were journalists covering the war in Ukraine. Shireen Abu Akleh was among those killed last year in Palestine in retaliation for her work. In most of these cases, when journalists were murdered in direct retaliation for their reporting, full justice has not been achieved. At CPJ, we continue working on these cases, including that of investigative journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia who was murdered in Malta in 2017. The road to justice has been very difficult. With the pressure from the international community, and the European Union institutions, the Maltese authorities have reluctantly been doing the work they had to do to bring those responsible for the journalist's killing to justice. Thus, full justice has yet to be achieved.

In some cases, justice does not seem to be achievable. At present, in Russia, journalists Anna Politkovskaya and Natalia Estemirova worked on reporting for the Novaya Gazeta newspaper on human rights violations in the Caucasus. They both were murdered brutally. Those responsible for executing or masterminding the killings will likely walk free as long as Putin is in power in Russia. The other tool authorities use to silence journalists is imprisonment. Globally, at least 363 journalists are in jail for their work. 67 of them are women, which makes up one-fifth of those in jails. The top jailer of journalists is Iran; at least 62 journalists were behind bars on December 1st last year, when we conducted our most recent prison census and 24 of them are women.

Since September my colleagues working on Iran at CPJ have documented the detentions of about 100 journalists, half of them are women. These numbers are unprecedented. When Iran jailed a record-high number of journalists following the 2009 presidential election, out of 47 journalists in jail in 2012 that we documented, only 4 were women.

Another country is Turkey, where at least 40 journalists are in jail. Among them is the world's longest-imprisoned woman journalist, Hatice Duman. She is serving a life sentence since 2003. Hatice Duman was in her late 20s when she was imprisoned for her political views on fabricated charges. She is now 50 years old. We arranged a visit to the prison to see her a few months ago. There is a re-trial going on now, but Hatice said she does not have hope to be released. Nobody seems to have any interest in her case, not the judge, not the society. It is a very tragic case.

I will also refer to Belarus, which is the world's fifth-largest jailer of journalists, with 26 behind bars. Women journalists played a prominent role in reporting on mass protests that erupted following the contested presidential elections in August 2020. Dozens of women journalists and activists have been in jail. One of them is Ksenia Lutskina who is suffering from a brain tumor but is not getting the medical treatment she needs. Her family does not know how to proceed to seek justice for her case as the authorities do not take any action. Another women journalist imprisoned in Belarus is Katsiaryna Andrejeva, who almost completed serving a two-year sentence for reporting on protests, but then the authorities brought new charges against her, accusing her of treason and sentencing her to another 8 years without a shred of evidence.

There are other forms of harassment women journalists have become victims of. Online smear campaigns, threats of death, and physical violence. Interestingly, when a woman is threatened over her reporting, she is threatened not for being a journalist only, but for being a woman. I refer to threats of sexual assault, and if she is a mother, she also receives threats about her children, which is not necessarily the case with male journalists, who are also parents, and fathers.

For example, we issued a statement about Slovakia, where radio host Marta Jančárová received death threats through graphic messages sent by email and phone threatening her and her family with physical and sexual assault and death. Police provided protection and are investigating the threats. The worst part of all these incidents is that the main violators of journalists' rights are their governments. Surely, there are cases when criminal groups or private individuals target journalists or when women journalists are killed while reporting from war zones, as in Ukraine. In these cases, it is a foreign government and foreign army that is responsible.

However, in many other cases, including murders and, especially, imprisonments, or legal cases and investigations launched against journalists and media outlets, closure of media, blocking of websites, DDOS (distributed denial-of-service) attacks, the main risk for journalists often come from the authorities in the countries where these journalists live and work.

So, what can or do journalists do? Many brave women journalists continue their journalism risking their lives, freedom, and well-being. Some decide to relocate temporarily to wait out the threats or online harassment. Many flee their home country fearing prosecution. For example, Ukrainian journalists had to flee the war when the full-scale invasion started last February, but many have returned since then. Dozens of Russian journalists fled fearing prosecution from their own government which has banned independent reporting on the war.

What do we at CPJ do to help these journalists? We provide financial and non-financial assistance with covering expenses of relocation or cover legal aid if they are facing legal investigations or provide them prison support or medical assistance in the cases of injuries and being wounded while reporting. We also have extensive resources for journalists to stay safe physically and digitally. Furthermore, we also help journalists get mental health support if they had a traumatic experience while working as journalists.

Iryna Matviyishyn, Journalist, Kyiv Independent | UKRAINE

Panelist 2: The Role and Experiences of Women Journalists Covering War Crimes in Ukraine

Iryna Matviyishyn is a Ukrainian journalist and producer with a human rights background, currently working as a video reporter at the Kyiv Independent. She worked for 3 years as a project coordinator, producer, analyst, and journalist for the UkraineWorld media project, focusing predominantly on Russian aggression against Ukraine and its consequences. Shortly before Russia's all-out war, she started working as a local producer and contributor for the National Public Radio (NPR), covering the war in different regions. Currently, her work is about the analysis of Russian propaganda and genocidal narratives and its implications.



I have been in Ukraine throughout the whole war. I have been covering Russian aggression even before the full-scale invasion. In my mind, I was already in this coverage of war for nine years. However, the full-scale invasion was something very unexpected for society. I personally did not believe that it would take place on such a scale. When the war started, I was in Kyiv, and I was working with the NPR team as a local producer. I decided to take a lead, but I did not really believe that war will happen on such a scale. Thus, when it happened, it had a tremendous impact on any Ukrainian and even journalists.

We were not prepared for this psychologically. I remember the first day while I was working, I met the war in my window because I saw the explosion from my hotel room. Then I woke up my colleagues, and I was in a panic, I vividly remember the first few two hours. I just could not calm myself down. My male colleagues from NPR were trying to help me out. Surely, I think that it is not about being a woman, but about being in your own country, realizing that a big war started, and it will bring horrible incidents to all Ukrainians and your own family as well.

That is one aspect of being a journalist covering the war in your own country; that is something that I would not compare to working as a war reporter in a foreign country. It has a tremendous psychological burden on you. We felt it throughout this year and up until now. Even though it has been one year of the full-scale invasion, but, covering all these horrible war crimes, being in this information hub constantly is very draining regardless of whether you are working or just spending your free time, you are constantly exposed to the war information pool. So, all this negative news about war is very pressing.

To share my reflections on being a female journalist during the war in Ukraine, I would indicate that I did not personally feel any prejudice or any kind of bias against other journalists while covering the war. I can also compare this with the pre-invasion period, during which there may be some issues pushed on the background; but right now, everyone feels in the same boat. We are all working on the same goal, and we know that everyone is doing their part to cover this war, to raise awareness in the world about this war, and to see what is happening. In such circumstances, the status quo of gender equality became relatively better as there is an urgent need for coverage investigating war crimes and bringing the news to the world.

I do not have statistics, but I think most of the journalists are female in Ukraine. That is why they constitute a huge part of the journalistic society in Ukraine. Their voices are seen and heard everywhere, whether it is on a foreign media platform or local media coverage. Women are very present at the front line. They are doing some of the best reporting from the trenches. They are present in extremely dangerous zones on the actual battlefield. We also have many women fighters at the frontline.

Therefore, I would say that we are united, male, and female journalists, in terms of what we can do and what we should do together. I admit that gender issues are still present in Ukraine, and we can observe it most vividly in virtual platforms. When female journalists present any topic in a controversial way or present various facts that people may find incorrect, they can face more online harassment than a male journalist.

Mayra K. Yazdari, TV Producer, Journalist, CBN News | USA

Panelist 3: Best Practices of Iranian Women Journalists to Create Global Solidarity for Women in Iran

Mayra Yazdari is a storyteller and Iranian American journalist and television producer for Christian Broadcasting Network. She is pursuing a master's degree in communication and the arts with a concentration in television production from Regent University. Ms. Yazdari has experience creating television programs for Farsi-speaking audiences as well as reporting Iran's most recent events. Through her social media platforms, she connects directly with those whose voices have been silenced for so long. Ms. Yazdari also tells stories, and the goal is to amplify the voice of the voiceless through her platforms.



I would like to tell the story of my people, focusing on women, who have been one of the first targets of the Islamic Regime in Iran since its formation, as well as Christians, Bahais, Jews, and others. As we all know, freedom of expression drives all other human rights. Where there's no freedom of expression, there are no human rights! Under the Islamic Republic's rule, Iran is the third-biggest prison for journalists.

According to Reporters Without Border's 2022 World Press Freedom Index, Iran remains one of the world's worst press freedom rankings, at 178th out of 180 countries. At least 1,000 journalists and citizen journalists have been arrested, imprisoned, disappeared, murdered, or executed by the regime since 1979. According to Reporters Without Borders, eight journalists have been detained since the beginning of 2023.

The Tehran Journalists Association reported that since the spark of the nationwide revolutionary movement in September, the regime arrested nearly 70 journalists, some of whom have been released on bail awaiting sentencing. At the same time, at least 30 others are still in detention. Among them are Nilufar Hamedi and Elahe Mohammadi, two reporters in jail for reporting the truth; about the death of Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old girl killed in police custody. It is because of them that we know what happened to Mahsa! As always, the regime incriminates the dissidents with false accusations like threatening national security, inciting public opinion, and conspiring with the enemies. The exact number of prisoners linked to media activities is much higher.

The lack of press freedom has prompted citizens to take on this crucial role. As smartphones, social networks, and the digital world have revolutionized the way of journalism and news delivery, especially in countries that violate press freedom, citizen journalists have informed us about the cruelty and brutality of this regime. Many of them, however, were arrested, imprisoned, tortured, and blinded.

Among countless victims, Ghazaleh Chalabi, a 33-year-old woman, was shot dead by the forces on September 30 while recording protests on Amol's streets. The video was shared on social media shortly after her death. Only moments before forces shot her, Ghazaleh shouted: "Don't be afraid, don't be afraid, we are all together." Also, bloggers and social media activists have been the regime's target, like Arsam Mahmoudi, who was arrested during the recent revolutionary uprising and is still imprisoned.

Therefore, I would like to draw the attention of organizations and bodies that work for freedom of the press and freedom of expression to anonymous citizen journalists. Those who have reported the most authentic news by risking their lives to make their cry for freedom heard. In the massacre of November 2018, when the government shut down the internet for three days and murdered more than 1500 innocents, these citizen journalists put their lives in their hands, made up for the lack of independent media, and warned the world about the massive murder and repression.

"Information is a public good" was the slogan of the United Nations on Press Freedom Day in 2021. The wealth that the Islamic Republic has looted from Iranians for over 40 years. From the first day of the formation of the Islamic regime in Iran, information has been taken, hostage! Media has been used as a government propaganda tool, from encouraging nine-year-old girls to get married to broadcasting forced confessions to frighten society. Shockingly, the Biden administration waived sanctions on Iran's state-run news arm last month, even while the regime uses the outlet to distort and underreport its murder of dissidents and fuel sham trials against protesters. As one of the most prominent government-controlled media, along with Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB), I can name Fars news agency affiliated with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

The falsification of reality is not only limited to the country's borders. Through infiltrating its agents into Western media in the face of journalists, the Islamic Republic, for years, has invested in influencing the public opinion of Western countries and politicians, spreading its propaganda, expanding its radical ideology, and manipulating the information to remain in power. Unfortunately, women have been an essential part of this propaganda.

For instance, during the widespread protests in November 2018, some of the regime's mouthpieces in free Western media condemned the U.S. sanctions as the cause of economic chaos and, consequently, the protests. While Iranians inside the country were chanting: "Our enemy is right here; they lie that it is America". The same journalists blamed the United States President when the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' (IRGC) missiles shut down the Ukrainian flight known as Flight #752. Once again, echoing the voice of the Islamic Republic's leader.

Iranian women have suffered not only from the government but also from the whitewashers who write for a bloodthirsty regime in Western newspapers to make the regime's face look decent on the global stage. I repeat that, unfortunately, an essential part of these journalists who justify the regime's crimes are women.

It does not end here. While schoolkids were under chemical attacks, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr. Volker Turk, met the regime's representative, Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, shaking his hand in Geneva. Moreover, the Belgian foreign minister, who previously cut her hair to show solidarity with Iranian women, met with the oppressors' same representative, Amir-Abdollahian, the regime's Foreign Minister, during the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, leaving the Iranian women behind! Iranians say the double standard of many Western politicians, and, in some cases, human rights organizations are standing in our way to freedom! The courageous people who have taken to the streets, unarmed, hopeful, shoulder to shoulder, men and women, and they have kept coming.

While we might think the regime has already used all possible ways of oppression, they always come up with something even crueler. As we celebrate International Women's Day, schools and metro stations are targets of a mysterious chemical attack. The attacks were initiated by girls' schools and spread to some boys' schools and metro stations.

Let's stand alongside the freedom-lover Iranians, go beyond slogans and supportive words, and show our solidarity with action.

I would like to share a few steps about how to amplify their voice:

- Educate local and national policymakers about the ongoing events and issues and how they can support them by listening closely to their demands through reliable channels and individuals;
- Use your platforms, share news from Iran, and raise awareness;
- Support citizen journalists by sharing their content and spreading the word;
- Stay involved by attending rallies around the world;
- Call your representatives and ask them to take a firmer stand against the regime;
- Ask your representatives to support the Mahsa Amini Act. This bipartisan sanction bill aims to impose sanctions on high-level regime officials in response to the killing of Mahsa Amini and the crackdown on protesters;
- Be sensitive to whom you give voice to, the regime agents or the people;
- Say the names of those in prison. Let us remember Fatemeh Sepehri, an outspoken critic of the Supreme Leader. She has been sentenced to 18 years imprisonment after calling on him to resign.

How policymakers and politicians can support Iranian men and women:

- Sanction on Iran's state-run news arm, IRIB;
- Block all the channels of transactions done by IRGC and related affiliates;
- List IRGC as a terrorist organization;
- Declare an end to Iran Nuclear Deal, Known as JCPOA;
- Sanction Ali Khamenei, who is responsible for hundreds of thousands of deaths, arrests, executions, rapes, tortures;
- Encourage and facilitate creation of a labor strike fund to support the movement.

Democracy cannot function without a free and independent flow of information. Under the rule of the Islamic Republic, neither the free flow of information is possible nor is democracy an achievable dream.

Therefore, to help this problem and eliminate the repression, the international community must stop the notion that Iran's repressive regime could be reformed or change its behavior. Instead, listen to the wish of the Iranian people fighting the fight on their own. Support their cause to take control of their destiny and future and stop dealing, appeasing, and negotiating with the representatives of the bloodthirsty regime. The free world should talk to the freedom-loving people of Iran and the opposition abroad. People who have, shared values with you. They want democracy, equality, liberty, and basic civil rights. A world without the Islamic Republic and a free Iran will be safer for everyone, including women.

Ultimately, I would like to quote a part of Prince Reza Pahlavi's message on International Women's Day: "During the dark 44-year period of this regime's occupation of Iran, Iranian women have fought bravely for their rights, and today they are at the forefront of a historic, revolutionary movement. They will prevail with unwavering support from their fathers, sons & brothers. Iranians will reclaim Iran from this regime and author a future in which women live freely, with equality, alongside men."

Marina Dias, Journalist, The Washington Post in Brasília | BRAZIL

Panelist 4: Forms of Increasing Violence Against Women Journalists: Cases from Brazil



Marina Dias is a journalist working for the Washington Post in Brasília, Brazil. She was a Former U.S. correspondent for Folha de S. Paulo from 2019 to 2022. Formerly, Marina Dias was a national reporter at Folha (2013-2019), covering two Brazilian presidential campaigns and the 2016 presidential impeachment. In 2020, Ms. Dias was nominated for the Premio Gabo de Periodismo for "The Americans", a series of stories examining politics and social issues in the U.S.

I have been a journalist for 16 years. I was the US correspondent for one of the largest newspapers in Brazil. During most of my career, I was covering politics and other issues in Brazil. The fact is that I have never been so attacked as I have been in the last 4 years. There were online attacks, and in-person attacks but my most recent experience was the peak, which happened on January 8th in Brasilia, the capital of my country.

I was covering the riots by former President Jair Bolsonaro's supporters. As you know, Bolsonaro is a right-wing populist, who has always encouraged attacks against the press. Unexpectedly, I was surrounded by more than 10 people, who knocked me to the ground, kicked me, beat me, pulled my hair, broke my glasses, and tried to take my cell phone. At some point, a woman yelled “We need to kill her”. They did that when they discovered that I was a reporter asking questions to a lady, who had agreed to answer all of them. So, I was attacked just because I am a reporter.

Professional journalism has always annoyed public authorities, in Brazil and all over, because we challenge them, and we investigate what they are doing. However, since the end of the military dictatorship, in Brazil, in 1985, we had never seen the kind of institutionalized violence against the press that we saw during the 4 years of the Bolsonaro government. Attacks on professional journalism are a method and a public policy for leaders like Donald Trump and Jair Bolsonaro, who always said he was inspired by his American colleagues. It is the way they act to undermine democracy and accountability. We know that, but we cannot normalize that.

There was no formal censorship under the Bolsonaro government, as there was during the dictatorship, but attacks on the press were systemic. Furthermore, Bolsonaro has encouraged policies to cut money from outlets, with speeches urging people to stop subscribing to newspapers and magazines, asking advertisers to stop advertising in the professional media, and unsubscribing from newspapers in public buildings in Brasilia. So the government in Brazil used the institutions to persecute media outlets and reduce their ability to report, to do critical reporting.

Bolsonaro and his allies also attacked women journalists directly, calling us names and demeaning us simply for asking basic questions about his government. With that, Bolsonaro legitimized violence against women journalists and, as the country's highest authority, he fed his supporters with fake news and hate.

It was what motivated the 10 or more people who beat me on January 8th. I have no doubt. But what amazed me the most that day was the behavior of several women, who scratched me, called me with degrading sexist labels and threw bottles of water at my head.

This appeal to gender, most often the misogyny, is not by coincidence: in societies with a massive presence of conservative values, as in Brazil, this type of attack serves to undermine the work of women, who, in their views, should not be questioning the president. It happened to me, and also to brilliant journalists like Daniela Lima, host of CNN Brasil, and Patrícia Campos Mello, a reporter at Folha de S.Paulo.

As we all know, it's not personal. It is not about me, about Daniela, or about Patricia. It is a method. A report by Abraji (the Brazilian Association of Investigative Journalism), with UNESCO, showed that female journalists suffer 1 attack every 3 days in Brazil in 2021, with Bolsonaro as one of the main aggressors.

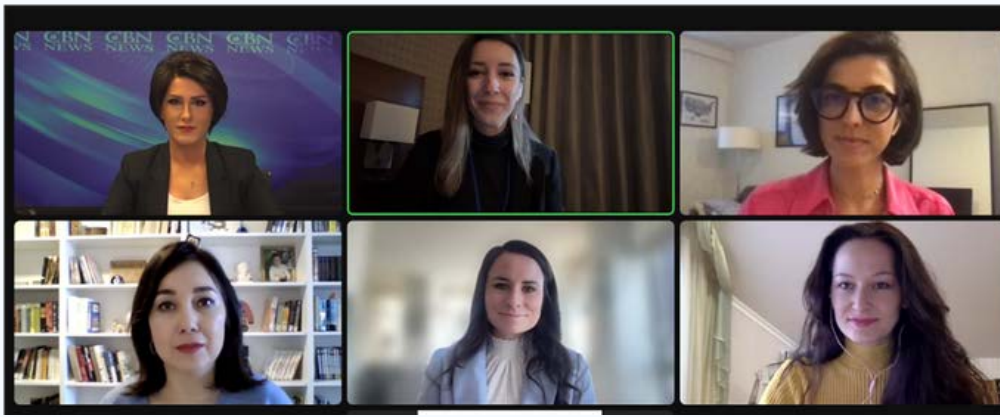
During his government that year –2021– there was a 79% increase in the number of attacks against women journalists or with gender bias.

- In all, there were 119 cases reported.
- More than half of the identified aggressors (52%) were public officials.
- 95% were men, 68% of the attacks started online and 60% of the cases involved journalists in the political coverage.

These numbers and findings reflect in Brazil what we see in many other places in the globe, as this panel has discussed. Again: It's not a coincidence. It is a method, set up and well paid on social networks, in Brazil even with evidence of the use of public money when Bolsonaro was president.

According to this great American author Barbara Walter, to overcome this system of destruction of democracy from the inside as Bolsonaro does, it is necessary to establish free elections, which we have in Brazil despite the false allegations of fraud spread by Bolsonaro and his supporters as well as efficient and effective public services. I believe that democratic and popular governments make the free press stronger. Our job as journalists is to put a spotlight on what we are seeing as important and relevant.

We need to keep up the good work, with good info and analysis but we also expect that the state or the society will take an action about it; however, there are also some incidents where nobody reacts, and in such cases, we may get frustrated, and tired. It is important to keep in mind that these attacks are not just attacks on the press, but attacks on journalists. They are attempts to undermine journalism and stop critical reporting. They are part of these leaders' efforts to escape accountability and to limit public response to their anti-democratic acts. Criticism of our work is good for a free society, and we can deal with that. However, the attacks that Bolsonaro in Brazil and similar leaders around the globe have done are attacks on democracy itself. We cannot naturalize that. Keeping our work as journalists is the way to fight against this method.



InnovaSHEon: WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT THROUGH INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY

**Journalists and Writers Foundation in partnership with UN Women
Kyrgyzstan, UNDP Kyrgyzstan, WomenTechmakers, Compass College Bishkek**

**Priyanka Chahal, Program Associate, Youth Representative of JWF to the UN
DGC | KYRGYZSTAN**

Priyanka Chahal is a Global health enthusiast and Researcher with diplomatic skills. She has a keen interest in youth and women empowerment, health system governance, SDGs, policies, advocacy, and leadership. She has been awarded and recognized as the Young Scientist of CIS and Best Student of CIS. Currently, she is serving as JWF Youth Representative to the United Nations DGC, and Executive Director of IYC which is in collaboration with UN DGC, and UN-Habitat based in New York, USA. She is also the Founder and President of the Student Network Organization -Kyrgyzstan (SNO)-Kg.



The youth engagements at the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women 67th Session are a powerful demonstration of the energy and commitment of young people to advancing gender equality and women's empowerment. The world we live in today is more interconnected and complex than ever before, and we need the full participation of all members of society, including young people, to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

The UN has already recognized the importance of youth in advancing gender equality through the creation of the Youth Gender Equality Task Force. This task force is composed of young people from around the world who are working to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in their communities. Technology and innovation have transformed our world in unprecedented ways. The digital age has brought us closer together, and it has given us access to knowledge and information that were once unimaginable. However, it has also exposed and exacerbated the gender inequalities that exist in our society.

Innovation and technological change have the potential to transform the lives of women and girls around the world. Access to technology can provide opportunities for education, economic empowerment, and social inclusion. However, we must also recognize that the digital divide continues to exist, with women and girls often being left behind.

We must acknowledge that innovation and technological change are not neutral. They reflect the biases and inequalities that exist in our society, and they can perpetuate them if we are not careful. This is why it is essential to ensure that innovation and technology are designed and implemented in a way that promotes gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.

One of the keyways to achieve this is through education. Education is the foundation of any society, and it plays a crucial role in shaping the attitudes and beliefs of individuals. In the digital age, education must be adapted to meet the changing needs of our society. Education is also a critical component of empowerment, especially in the digital age. As the world becomes increasingly connected, it is essential that women and girls have access to quality education that prepares them for the future. This means ensuring that education is accessible, affordable, and relevant to the needs of the 21st century. We know that when women are empowered, societies thrive. However, despite progress in recent years, women and girls continue to face numerous challenges when it comes to participating in public life. We must ensure that all women and girls have access to quality education and that they are equipped with the skills and knowledge needed to thrive in the digital age.



In addition, we must promote innovation and entrepreneurship among women and girls. Women have traditionally been underrepresented in STEM fields, and they have faced significant barriers to entrepreneurship. As youth leaders, we have a unique role to play in advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. We are digital natives, and we are often at the

forefront of technological innovation. We must use our knowledge and skills to promote gender equality and challenge the gender biases that exist in technology and innovation. Education is not just about acquiring knowledge and skills but also about building confidence and self-esteem. When women and girls are empowered through education, they are better equipped to overcome barriers and take on leadership roles in their communities. Innovation and education are the two essential components of achieving gender equality.

The youth engagements at the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women 67th Session are a powerful demonstration of the energy and commitment of young people to advancing gender equality and women's empowerment. The world we live in today is more interconnected and complex than ever before, and we need the full participation of all members of society, including young people, to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals. By promoting innovative solutions and providing quality education to all, we can break down the barriers that have held women and girls back for far too long. As youth leaders, we can advocate for policies and programs that prioritize the empowerment of women and girls in the digital age. We must also lead by example, promoting gender equality in our own lives and communities. I also call on all of you to recognize the vital role that young people play in advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

In conclusion, let us work together to ensure that innovation and technological change are harnessed to promote gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. Let us create an enabling environment that encourages women and girls to thrive in the digital age by harnessing the power of innovation to drive change and create a more equitable and just world for all.

Victoria Mozgacheva, Vice Mayor of Capital Bishkek, Government of Kyrgyzstan | KYRGYZSTAN

Victoria Mozgacheva is a Vice Mayor of the Capital Bishkek in Kyrgyzstan. Ms. Mozgacheva implements social assistance programs, developing social security and charity, and improving the structure of managing the social sphere of the capital Bishkek. She also serves her duties by inviting and giving instructions to the heads of territorial, structural, subordinate divisions, and business entities (municipal enterprises) of the Bishkek City Hall and exercising other powers by the legislation of the Kyrgyz Republic.



As a female leader, it is a pleasure to address women's empowerment through technology and innovation, a relevant topic at all times in the context of globalization and the digitalization of the world community. The Kyrgyz Republic joined the Beijing Platform for Action, ratified several international conventions, including the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women, and signed the Millennium Declaration.

We have adopted such fundamental laws of the Kyrgyz Republic as "On State Guarantees for Ensuring Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Men and Women" and "Social and Legal Protection from Domestic Violence".

According to the official statistics, at the beginning of 2022, in Bishkek, the resident population was approximately one million people. The economically inactive population amounted to 255 thousand people and active 503 thousand people, of which 482 thousand people are employed and 21 thousand unemployed.

In 2021, almost half (47.3%) of women accounted as employed people. Traditionally, due to large families, female employment is significantly lower than male, which is 74.3%. Unlike other regions of Kyrgyzstan, in Bishkek about 82% of citizens, including women, are employed. The maximum concentration of women among workers is observed in education (79%), healthcare (78%), and other services (51%) which includes the hotel and restaurant sector, manufacturing industry, information and communication, trade, financial activities, and public administration. Based on official statistics, we can see that



there is no accounting for the involvement of women in the field of information technology because this area is at the initial stage of development in our country, and it is gratifying for me to note the women leaders who develop innovations and technologies at the state and commercial levels. It is important to note that the neglect of gender aspects not only in the sphere

of labor activity but in everyday life leads to the deepening of social and economic problems. As a result, each new generation faces a decreasing situation in the field of education and health, which in turn leads to limited opportunities to earn a decent income and realize their potential. This is due to the lack of not only specialized professional skills but also the general skills that ensure economic success, career growth, and a culture of health. Under such conditions, the role of non-formal functional education increases sharply since a significant amount of information and necessary life skills today obviously cannot be obtained at school.

According to official data, about 1.3 million girls from 0 to 17 years old are registered in our country in 2022 and about a third of them live in Bishkek. Today, we are systematically working to develop IT education at school and even at preschool levels. For example, only recently, the basis of kindergarten № 22 was opened first in the country's STEM resource center. This is an important step forward because we live in the age of computer literacy, technology, engineering, robotics, and creativity, which should create the most comfortable conditions for children's development. With the support of the "Girls in Science" UNICEF project, out of 81 schools in the republic, 51 Bishkek schools are involved in the work of this project, within the framework of which 168 girls of 11 grades were selected.

At the end of the 2021-2022 academic year, out of 168 students, 105 entered higher educational institutions in STEM areas. I believe that such initiative projects contribute to the development and disclosure of the potential of our younger generation, which can make a significant contribution to the development of our republic. During the years of independence, the women's movement has become a significant part of the overall process of democratization of Kyrgyzstan. However, at present we are still experiencing a number of problems where the role of women is insignificant, these are:

1. Economic opportunities for women, especially in business.
2. Access to education during the whole life.
3. Expansion of women's rights in all spheres of the country's activities.

I hope, in partnership with experts coming from different sectors, we will be able to develop constructive proposals for improving the role of women in our society, particularly in the field of IT technologies.

Ulziisuren Jamsran, UN Women Representative to Kyrgyzstan | KYRGYZSTAN

Ulziisuren Jamsran joined the UN Women Kyrgyzstan Country Office as a Representative in June 2019. Ms. Jamsran's experience includes over 20 years of experience in international development, and strategic and managerial leadership in gender and women's issues in Moldova, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan for UNDP, UNIFEM, and UN Women. Earlier, she was the UN Women's Gender Adviser for Moldova and Ukraine, Regional Governance Specialist in Almaty, Senior Rural Development Specialist and Social Development Advisor in Kyrgyzstan and Ukraine, and Poverty Alleviation Specialist in Mongolia. Ms. Jamsran has a Specialized Master's in Leading Change from the University of Oxford and HEC Paris, and an M.A. in Economics from the Mongolian State University.



As I deliver my remarks on the occasion of the 67th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), I would like to indicate that this year's theme is particularly important: "Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls". This theme will influence the subsequent intergovernmental efforts to develop the global digital compact as part of the UN Secretary

General's agenda, which is called Our Common Agenda. In preparation for the 67th CSW session, the UN Secretary-General also issued a report analyzing how technological changes impact today with gender equality. The report also highlights how innovation processes can be harnessed to develop new services and products that would fulfill the needs and human rights of women and girls in every part of the world.

I think it is important to also say that the report of course also underlines very concrete challenges and barriers that are preventing women and girls from realizing their fullest potential and reflecting the ways how to distribute the benefits of digitization equally to achieve fast-forward results.

I am very proud to mention that the Kyrgyzstan government decided to host a Central Asia CSW67 consultation, which happened on the 28th of February bringing the representatives of the government, civil society, and private sector, many of them were also youth, and those who were practitioners in advancing women, girls' access to it and technology from our region. This consultation discussed very concrete issues around challenges, but also very concrete solutions and ideas that the sub-region wants to share with the global community.

I would like to highlight the number of key findings, and key conclusions from the subregional CSW67 event, which I believe you have also found relevant to the main theme. The first one is the central states basically indicating that digital literacy teaching is really very good and that it is ongoing, but it should go beyond teaching basic computer skills. We must take into account the complexity that is rising in terms of intergenerational division because there is a huge gap between the international and intergenerational divisions. Digital communities and digital platforms can help to reduce such a gap.

The other important issue which was addressed is that we also realize the conventional ways of addressing women's rights are no longer producing those results, which are very much needed until 2030, the deadline for the Sustainable Development Goals. Better innovative thinking, actions, and concepts are needed to ensure that we have not just the attainment of results, but actions too. Moreover, transformative results because incremental changes are already not enough in this rapidly changing context. This specific context requires us to also act and think differently.

The important part, which I want to also address to the Journalist and Writers Foundation directly, is that one of the issues that participants of the sub-regional CSW67 consultation have identified was the danger that the digital development committee moves rapidly, I may call it nutrition of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into daily life. Many schools are discussing how you are going to use AI in teaching and learning. It is not something of the future, it's happening today.

On the other hand, when you investigate what is available on women's rights, and gender equality on the internet as data, and information, there is a huge, absolute gap. The danger is that if we want to start to actively apply AI and actively advance threats to women's rights, we might only reinforce the existing stereotypes and only increase the bad existing barriers even more.

So, it is dangerous and that is why we are calling upon the Journalists and Writers Foundation, and all other partners to actively engage in ensuring that the rights of women, and the actual situation of women and girls everywhere are also replicated.



Another important highlight that I want to address is that Central Asia states underlined that investment is very much needed to support girls and women within disadvantaged groups, those who are in remote communities and rural areas, who need some special assistance, for instance, women living with HIV or with disabilities. If we just provide the same access to everyone by

saying that everyone has equal access to the internet, in any case, it is not true. It is important that we are looking at specific needs that they have.

We would like to invite all partners to work closely together with our colleagues in the broader sense and explore how we can work together in a manner that we can change and challenge these stereotypes, which are still, unfortunately, the number one issue and the barrier for the advancement of rights, women, and girls in all the spheres of life. In this respect, we urgently need to foster our collaborations.

Farzana Abdilashimova, Spotlight Project Officer, UN Women | KYRGYZSTAN

Farzana Abdilashimova is the Project Officer at the Spotlight Initiative program, UN Women Kyrgyzstan country office. She graduated from the American University of Central Asia in 2019 with a degree in Sociology. Ms. Abdilashimova provides the analytics of the project and all related activities and coordinates implementing and responsible partnerships. She closely collaborates with the program and operations team, UN Women Headquarters staff, Government officials, multi and bilateral donors, and civil society ensuring the successful implementation of the Spotlight Initiative program in Kyrgyzstan.



I would like to start by finding an answer to this question: what is innovation? Innovation is something that we do differently. It is not always about technology, yet it might result in advancing new technologies too. However, innovation can be intangible and applied in our everyday life. Innovation is a state of mind. GALS methodology is a community lab empowerment that aims to promote harmonious life and relationships free from violence.

When I refer to relationships, I do not only mean a relationship between men and women, or between any partners. GALS is a community-led empowerment methodology developed by Dr. Linda Mayoux, the author of the GAME change family of empowerment methodologies. Its main purpose is to promote more harmonious and violence-free relationships in families and communities. GALS is aimed to connect and build synergies between various groups of people in pursuit of the common vision of promoting a harmonious life free of gender-based violence for women and girls within their families and the wider communities.

I would like to highlight and share what I believe has been very innovative and working not only within the project and the community but can be applied to various sectors that we are working in. This is about the harmonious and being free from violent relationships among family members. When we are talking about the families, we are talking about the entire community. Whenever we talk about gender equality and discuss why it is important to promote a life free from violence, we cannot just impose certain ideas and concepts into people's minds, which are usually unknown and unfamiliar to a certain group of people or the specific community that we are working with.

What is unique about this methodology is that the main tool here is joy. Do you remember the last time when you were just sitting and drawing something? It may be recent for those who are artists or for those who drawing is part of their profession. However, for the rest of us that it was a long time ago. As far as I remember, I believe I was 17 or 18 at school the last



time that I drew, and this is such a shame because there is so much research in the world that states drawing is super important for our health. It really helps to clarify the concepts and the ideas are complex things that are complicated in our minds; but once we just start drawing, it gets easier to comprehend challenging concepts. We can process an entire oversized idea very simply using a pencil and just drawing.

We all know that development agencies, international organizations, activists, NGOs, and grassroots organizations work at the community level. When you go there to real families who have no idea of what all these smart concepts are, what you can use is the tool of drawing. This methodology itself has five tools and it is not in the form of a one-day training. You simply take a pencil and start drawing what you are dreaming about or what is your vision.

The second instrument is joining the vision. We all have plans and dreams. As the next step, what is the way that we can show and analyze to reach our dream?

Followingly comes taking an action or action, analyzing all the steps, and building a journey. Not everyone goes there through a simple one-element drawing. The community members move from the first to the second and then they have a family tree, which helps you analyze all the gender relationships within the family. For example, when we talk about gender inequality methodology in Central Asia, we may be familiar with the concept of household choice. We know that there is an equal distribution of household responsibilities. So "Happy Family Tree" helps all family members to analyze and see who is doing what. The entire process is about self-reflection through drawing and analysis. The utilization of diagrams like concept maps, charts, and information graphics is attractive to a wide range of users, from international and development agencies to academic institutions. "Thinking with diagrams" is a key element in facilitating creative and non-standard thinking, which is essential for innovations.

WHY DRAWING?

- Helps to explain concepts and ideas;
- Helps to clearly communicate ideas, concepts, and connections in a visual form;
- Gives an opportunity to place a lot of information in a small space for analysis and to see connections between various elements;
- Helps to create an environment of inclusion, involving people with a lower level of education. Such people frequently learn to draw through symbols faster than their well-educated peers.

The most amazing part about GALS is that it is driven by the community. Real people, residing in those communities, who received GALS and would like to share with their peers (neighbors, relatives, friends, colleagues, etc.) to become GALS champions and promote change at the community level. The process is led by the community and the upscaling system relies on a peer-sharing system.

Thus, the goal of a GALS process is not only to draw diagrams and share the methodology but also to promote a sustainable, self-spreading, and dynamic gender justice movement for collective action and policy advocacy. Therefore, we are engaging men and women, we are engaging fathers, grandfathers, brothers, and everyone from different structures living in that community. When they question unequal task distributions like "why my daughter is doing all the household, chores, and I am just coming from work laying on the sofa?" for instance, no one is telling this man that this is not alright by the law and self-reflection. So drawing is also stimulating thinking and self-reflection. The person starts seeing in his drawing that social attributions are not growing equal. There is a matter of concern; this mental shift that a person starts thinking about increasing income. It is very important to talk about who is the breadwinner in the family. We have a traditional notion and demand that the woman's place is at home, and she has to take care of children.



Where after this methodology, the community members went through these processes of realization tools by themselves, and a self-reflection happens. They re-analyze their situation and it positively influences the gender dynamic and the responsibilities shared in the same family. The methodology proves to be working. Another important point to question is who is the trainer in the methodology? There is no word such as trainer because when we say trainer, it lets you imagine you are the audience, and I am the trainer. There is only a facilitator. The person who is helping and assisting all the members of the group, the participant's right to engage, understands the methodology better through the drawing. Eventually, people become agents of change by themselves. I would also like to underline that the other good part of this methodology is the principle of sustainability and inclusion and inclusion of local people.

The GALS process promotes the main provisions of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW):

- The right to a life free from violence.
- The right to private property.
- The right to equal participation in decision-making.
- The right to equal access to work and rest.
- The right to freedom of expression and association.

My final note is that gender and learning about gender should be fun.

Jenny Jenish Kyzy, Head of Experimentation, UNDP Accelerator Lab KYRGYZSTAN

Jenny Jenish Kyzy is the Head of Experimentation at the Accelerator Lab of the United Nations Development Programme in Kyrgyzstan. She has 10 years of work experience in the field of Education, Social Entrepreneurship, and Community Development. She is the nominated "Community Champion" for the Central Asian region by the Global Shapers Community of the World Economic Forum. Jenny is the nominated "Gender Champion" of UNDP in 2022. Jenny holds one Master of Science degree from Columbia University and a Master of Public Administration from the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy of the National University of Singapore.



When we talk about STEM, it is only limited to a certain set of subjects. We must elaborate on STEM as an approach to learning and development that incorporates science, technology, engineering, and math. Nowadays we in fact have more interdisciplinary skills that are demanded STEM integration. We know that during the COVID-19 Pandemic, hundreds of millions of jobs were lost.

However, there is one sector that remains and is unexpectedly growing further: the field of STEM as the future of work because this industry is at the forefront of technology innovations and digitalization, which are centric on the job markets.

I would like to provide several statistics. Soon, more than 90 percent of jobs will require digital skills. The World Economic Forum conducted research about the future of jobs and by 2025, there will be 85 million jobs lost because of automation and digitalization. The good news is that there will be 97 new types of jobs that will be arising.

Why is it important for the United Nations and for all our society to achieve Sustainable Development Goals by 2030? Imagine 180 million jobs employing women workers will be automated. It means 118 million women will lose their job. Let me give you some career and complex examples: imagine the graduates are graduating from the STEM profession, of which 31 percent are women. It is very worrisome because it means in Kyrgyzstan, we are those young women. We will be losing this potential to succeed in the future market. So, we need to continuously re-skill and upscale ourselves. Compared to men, women use less technology and innovation to improve themselves, upskilling, and reskilling. That is why the United Nations Development Program together with UN Women, and UNICEF



are investing in technology and innovation. We are investing in STEM for gender equality, which is very much relevant to today's global topics. Why are women less likely than men to use technology and innovation? This is a very complex kind of question as there is a lack of infrastructure for digital learning. Compared to men, women have less economic

opportunity to buy those digital devices, to buy computers, laptops, or necessary items for digital learning. Women feel less safe online. Therefore, online space is now riskier as they are exposed to online violence, and cyber violence more than men. STEM is a high-growth, growing kind of industry. We can help and move together to close this gender inequality gap. We also would like to call for more women to use digital technology because we need more data.

I just want to quickly address what UNDP has been doing and investing in women. Foremost, we are investing consistently to build a community called "STEM for All". We encourage all, both men and women please join our STEM community.

We have organizations starting from the government sector, civil society, private sector, and religious communities that are also involved in this community. Secondly, we recently conducted the "MIS (Management Information System) Assessment Research" and this will be published in April. It is the first-ever MIS assessment of STEM women in Kyrgyzstan after COVID-19. We are doing several storytelling campaigns to deal with the stereotypes. We need those role models until women's trust in their own empowerment journey is boosted.

At UNDP, we are soon going to launch our mentorship program, a one-to-one individual mentorship. We also have a corporate mentorship. We would like to bring this kind of gender-sensitive industry to mentor girls, to connect the supply and the demand side. To foster women's empowerment, I think we need three key components. First, we need to increase women's skills and self-confidence. Following this, we need to provide success resources for women and lastly, we need an enabling, empowering environment for women with potential collaborations. The future of STEM is about to change, and women have absolutely all possibilities as long as they trust their capabilities.

Talant Sultanov, Chair and Co-Founder of the Internet Society-Kyrgyz Chapter **KYRGYZSTAN**

Talant Sultanov is the Chair and Co-Founder of the Internet Society-Kyrgyz Chapter. He is a member of the UN Secretary General's Multistakeholder Advisory Group for Internet Governance. He has served in the Kyrgyz Government as the Adviser to the Prime Minister in charge of the Taza Koom Digital Transformation Strategy and as the Director of the Government Think Tank NISI. Previously he has worked in academia as the CFO of the American University in Bishkek and as the Scholarship Coordinator at the World Affairs Council in San Francisco. Additionally, Mr. Sultanov served on boards of the Kyrgyz National TV and Radio Corporation, the Business Council of the Kyrgyz Parliament, the Bank of Asia, and Humo Microcredit Foundation in Tajikistan.



I would like to start by sharing the story of a girl named Aliyah from the village of Enilchek. In the East of Kyrgyzstan, in the Issyk-Kul, there is a village called Enilchek, a beautiful village with rich history and beautiful landscape. So, in 2021, we visited this village that has no internet connectivity, during the time of COVID-19. We wanted to see how kids are living their lives under these conditions. We found that in villages, like Enilchek, where there is no internet at all,

the schools had to go online. Kids were left without education and Aliyah, a 12-year-old girl, had to be sent to a different village to stay with her relatives. Her family stays in the village of Enilchek. We spoke to her, and Aliyah said we have no internet, and we have to leave our families as access to the internet is expensive.

"My family gives me some pocket money per week for internet connectivity; but if I want to access all these online video courses, my internet runs out very quickly. I have friends who want to become programmers, but they don't have laptops. So instead of being programmers, they want to become drivers. They want to become labor migrants." said Aliah. These are issues that are present in rural communities of Kyrgyzstan and other countries. We, at the internet society Kyrgyz chapter, are trying to resolve these challenges.

There are a few villages in Kyrgyzstan yet to be connected to the internet. So, we brought devices to these places and connected kids with teachers for an innovative project "Ilimbox" – Internet in a Box for schools in Kyrgyzstan. We delivered IlimBoxes, digital libraries that operate without Internet access and contain educational materials in Kyrgyz such as e-books, video courses, Wikipedia, and Khan Academy. The Thomson Reuters Foundation named the Ilimbox project as one of seven global initiatives in the area of digital education. The Internet Society-Kyrgyz Chapter (ISOC) installed fifty Ilimbox devices in understaffed and under-equipped rural classrooms in the Kyrgyz Republic's northern provinces. Ilimboxes were demonstrated in school halls for instructors and students in grades 6 through 10. The public greeted this move positively and enthusiastically in some areas. Teachers found the materials very useful for preparing class materials and tasks.



Students requested additional textbooks and materials that were not originally installed. Based on user input, the team paused Ilimbox distribution during spring break in schools and worked with various stakeholders to obtain permission to share their textbooks and educational materials. The software component had been entirely redesigned, as had the user interfaces, and overall product recognition had improved. The installation of fifty devices and the completion of the initiative benefited

approximately 25 thousand students and teachers. There is also a major issue that most people speak only the Kyrgyz language. However, on the internet, the majority of information is either in English or in Russian. So very little information is available in Kyrgyz. That is why as a next step, we are providing educational content in the Kyrgyz language in a very interactive format with the support of the US Embassy and European Commission. Moreover, children of Kyrgyz migrants living abroad are also using this portal because they want to be able to speak the Kyrgyz language.

In addition to that, we have created a YouTube channel where science experiments, technology, biology, and chemistry in the Kyrgyz language are now available on YouTube.

One can freely use these materials online. So, what's next? Digital skills are very challenging in rural areas of our country and together with the European Union, we implemented a project called "Digital Citizen". We are bringing digital skills to youth, for girls in rural communities of Kyrgyzstan. We are doing training at the moment, and they say the room is full, 90% are girls and women who want to learn digital skills. Our approach is that we are looking at digital skills as a pyramid, on top of which are a programmer and YouTubers. However, to get these youth to the top, you need to have solid foundations and be able to use all these internet platforms. We are teaching such kind of a basic level of digital literacy so that we have more and more girls programmers on the internet through this project. We also have members present here in this hall who participated in this project so that girls and young people can watch and get inspired by these experiences. Therefore, we bring in many young people from rural communities and provide them with internet access.



INTERSECTIONAL VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN TURKEY

Organized by Set Them Free in partnership with JWF and AST

Hafza Girdap, Executive Director, Advocates of Silenced Turkey | USA

Panelist 1: Women`s Rights in Turkey

Hafza Girdap is the Executive Director and the Spokesperson for Advocates of Silenced Turkey and the founding member of the Set Them Free platform who works for the women's rights violated particularly in Turkey. Ms. Girdap is also a Ph.D. candidate in Women's and Gender Studies at Stony Brook University, New York. Her research areas are human rights and women's status in Muslim contexts, specifically the integration and adaptation of Muslim immigrant women while redefining their cultural identities. Hafza Girdap has participated in many programs and delivered speeches about the status of women in Muslim societies. Girdap has been organizing and speaking at UNGA and UN CSW panels with a focus on women's matters and experiences.



Within the context of Turkey, women have consistently experienced subjugation, discrimination, and oppression by social, institutional, and structural actors. Gender and sexuality issues have long been topics of debate in Turkey's fragile political context. Since the foundation of the Turkish Republic, gendered and sexualized narratives were used by defenders of both secular state ideology and political Islam to position themselves with specific political events.

Within the gendered discourses and practices of the current Islamically rooted conservative ruling party, the AKP, the government fell short of substantially addressing gender-based inequality and discrimination based on sexual orientation, and Turkey eventually withdrew from the Istanbul Convention in 2021.

As the AKP government grew increasingly authoritarian, people of different ideological, political, ethnic, and religious backgrounds have been subjected to different forms of systematic and social violence, and gender and sexuality issues have been one of the areas in which the oppressive turn manifested itself, attracting the attention of many scholars.

In the aftermath of the 2016 coup, increasing numbers of women were marginalized based on their social status, gender, and ethnic identities. While the regime that controls the government in Turkey has always been based on a male-dominated, patriarchal, and militaristic mindset, particularly after the coup attempt this mindset has merged with political Islamist thought and discourse which justifies drastic legal means and expanded forms of violence.

Emergency decrees and increasing autocratic tendencies have negatively affected women's rights and limited independent women's organizations. A key example is the withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention, which immediately impacted the struggle for women's rights and violence against women, including a dramatic increase in femicide.

Following the 2016 coup attempt, women and LGBTQ people have been targeted as threats to society and the survival of the state. As such, they have disproportionately been subjected to state-led and state-sanctioned social segregation, public oppression, and various forms of violence including physical, sexual, economic, and psychological. People considered dissidents or critics of the state are stigmatized as terrorists and subject to mass arbitrary incarceration. Many NGOs and civil society organizations have been forced to close, making it difficult to fight these state tactics.

What is more, under the influence of the regime's discriminatory acts and oppression, society has developed more heteronormative and patriarchal discourses against stigmatized individuals and groups including Kurdish women, women affiliated with the Gulen movement, and LGBTQ individuals.



In other words, more identity variables have been targeted in state-led and state-sanctioned gender-based violence in ways that make it impossible for increasing numbers of people to remain in Turkey and survive. My closing remark would be that violence against women is political. Defending women's rights is not just opposing the crushing relationship between men and women.

It is also to oppose structural, and institutional discrimination, violence, and injustice. First and foremost, we have to speak up. And then, solidarity and support are among the key words that I have learned so far both as a woman and as an activist and scholar working in this field. It is not a fight to win alone, but by increasingly coming together. At this point diversity is beautiful. In the context of Turkey, As Kurdish, as secular or pious, as Alawis, as Armenian, as left-wing, or right-wing, altogether we have to speak up, stand up! We can extend the idea of solidarity and unity beyond Turkey case.

Alin Ozinian is a Regional Analyst and Editor-in-Chief of GercekNews. She holds a BA in International Relations and Diplomacy and an MA in Turkish Studies. Ms. Ozinian is currently a Ph.D. researcher at YSU's Faculty of Political Science. She has worked at the Permanent Mission of Armenia to the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) and was the Regional Coordinator of International Alert's Caucasus Development Network, based in London. Alin Ozinian was formerly a regional analyst for the Armenian Assembly of America. In 2018, she received the Jampruk Research Award on migration issues, announced by the United Nations Association. Since 2021, Ozinian has been the executive director of Arti Media.



Being a journalist in Turkey is difficult, being a woman journalist is harder, and being an Armenian woman journalist in Turkey who does not want to be confined by the borders drawn by the Erdogan administration is infinitely more difficult. Amidst all this difficulty, it is perhaps the most difficult to be an Armenian woman journalist among the “Turkish-Sunni” male-dominant clan that claims to rule over the country.

The state of minorities in the country was not impressive by any means, even before Erdogan’s method of governance which has turned increasingly authoritarian under the guise of conservatism and has now taken on the form of a one-man regime. The 1915 Armenian Genocide and its subsequent denial that has persisted for over a century created fertile ground for the oppression of minorities and many other ethnic and religious groups, such as Assyrians and Kurds who today are unable to even obtain minority status, by the Republic of Turkey which succeeded the Ottoman Empire and was established on the basis of Turk-Sunni predominance.

These minorities, who are not considered equal citizens, have always been regarded as potential subversives because of their perception as an internal threat. As such, they live and work each day strictly within the lines drawn for them by the state and burdened by the onus of constantly proving that they are “Turkish” and “would not engage in actions hurting Turkishness.” This policy is at times overt, and at other times discrete.

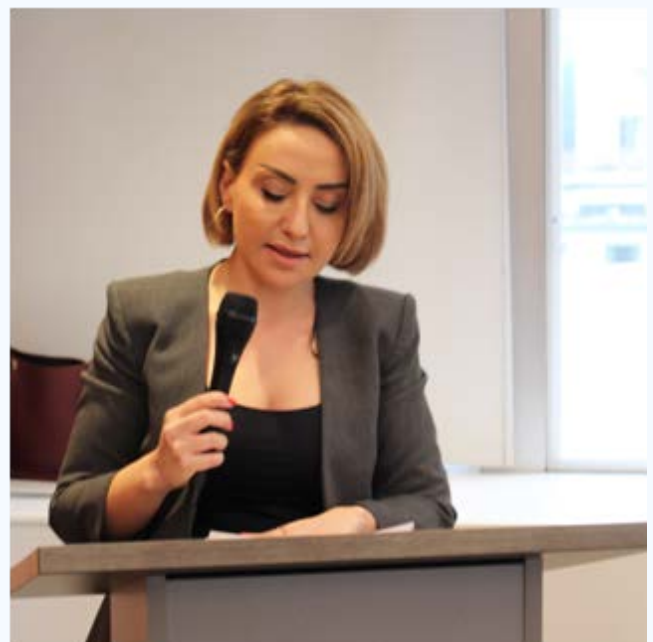
The refusal to reckon with the September 6-7 Pogrom, considered to be Turkey’s very own Kristallnacht, during which minorities were plundered, raped, and murdered, and the massacres and rights violations that have persisted since then are the building blocks of the politics of pressure and fear that continue to this day. Today, the groups that are subjected to persecution and discrimination, or are even declared to be enemies far outnumber those in the past.

In contemporary Turkey, even fellow Turks and Muslims can fall within the domain of traitorous people. Unfortunately, even their turn has come. Their turn has come, because when the rights of the Armenians, the Greeks (Rum), the Jews, or the Kurds positioned as the first targets were violated, “they” did not defend the rights of these groups.

They did not defend their rights because they considered themselves to be the fundamental element of the state and could never have predicted that they would be next in line, despite the fact that the state mechanism was predicated on manufacturing new enemies and then destroying them, and as each enemy was destroyed it was necessary to create another.

German theologian and later a dissident in Hitler’s regime, Martin Niemöller’s words are worth recalling:

First, they came for the Communists
And I did not speak out
Because I was not a Communist
Then they came for the Socialists
And I did not speak out
Because I was not a Socialist
Then they came for the trade unionists
And I did not speak out
Because I was not a trade unionist
Then they came for the Jews
And I did not speak out
Because I was not a Jew
Then they came for me
And there was no one left
To speak out for me



What people are experiencing in Turkey now in terms of oppression and injustice is a difficult lesson, a dramatic end, or a delayed consequence of history. With their various political orientations and apoliticisms, their world views, and habits, Turkey’s Armenians continue to be a rather multiplex minority.

According to the most optimistic figures, the roughly 50 thousand Armenians in Turkey characterize themselves as being different; many claims they are not part of the Diaspora because they still live on their own ancestral lands. Unlike the Diaspora, which dispersed to all corners of the world after the Armenian Genocide in 1915, sometimes called the first genocide of the twentieth century, where approximately 1.5 million Armenian Christians in the Ottoman Empire were killed, a majority of Turkey’s Armenians have left the past in the past and are not in pursuit of justice or any other demand.

Neither do many of Turkey's Armenians make demands for the equal citizenship rights promised in the Constitution. They believe that voicing a desire for these rights or struggling to achieve them would be misguided, in vain, and ineffectual, and could even be a course of action that would only add difficulty to their daily lives.

Due to this passivity, an Armenian from Turkey who searches for truth, who demands it, and who struggles for its sake is atypical and outside the customary "model of an Armenian." This is an Armenian who is dangerous. When all this is considered, opposing the government through writing, proclaiming, and publishing the truth in the public space is an arduous task that compels punishment in a variety of ways by the "powerholder."

Of course, it is not only the state that punishes minorities and citizens who are "outside the mainstream." The public sphere, the school, places of employment, the streets, and even social media, in the past few years, take on the role of a brightly lit theatre for the punishment of the other. To better illustrate this, I shall present examples from my own childhood.

I first understood how "unique" a state it was to be an Armenian in Turkey, how dangerous my existence was for this country, and how disturbing it could be in the early years of the 1980s when I was quite young myself. My home, in which the Armenian language was the mother tongue, was located then and remains today in a neighborhood densely populated by Armenians. Naturally, after I began to talk, I began to call my mother "mama" both at home and outside.

One day, anger evident in her voice, my mother berated me: "Do not call me 'mama' on the street ever again!" Hers was a reflex akin to "survive without falling prey," one that animals teach their young in the wild; it was the first of many "laws of the jungle" required to live safely in Turkey as an Armenian.

Unfortunately, in those early years of life when I had not even deciphered the alphabet, I did not yet know that Armenians were perceived from the get-go as second-class citizens or as something less than citizens, as "the foreign within," and that this status of being "foreign" correlated to "working with the enemy."

Though I spent some time believing that my mother, who had frightened me when she said, "Do not call me 'mama!'" no longer wanted to be my mother, it did not take me long to put together that the unwanted thing was not me, but "Armenianness." One thing was clear, being Armenian was not a matter to be discussed out in the open, it was a thing to be kept to ourselves. In my early adolescence, I had already become accustomed to the "bewildered" look that colored people faces when I first told them my first and last name. To move beyond that seemingly endless confusion, I would always blurt out, "I'm Armenian" — I still do.

I became accustomed to hearing the responses:

“Have you come from Armenia?”

“You speak Turkish so well, how did you learn the language?”

“But you don’t look like an Armenian.”

To this day, I have a fondness for the way my well-intentioned Turkish friends introduce me to other Turks: “Alin, she’s Armenian but a great person” or “Aline, she’s Armenian but she loves Turkey just as well as us.”

In my beloved country, many Turks did not know that I, that is, Armenians lived there as well. For them, Armenians were not more than the prototype of bad, negative, unfavorable people.

To live in Turkey is not difficult for only Armenians. When I was 16, a young Turkish man who I had met coincidentally expressed his interest in me and was devastated upon learning that I was Armenian. His anguish clear as day, he had said, “But you cannot be an Armenian.” Turkey was making life miserable not only for us but also for its very own children. I do not know whether it is more difficult to be an Armenian after 2015, when the country’s form of government shifted to the new presidential system, deemed “a Sultanate” by the West and characterized as an “an oppression regime with no end in sight,” or in the past, when Kemalism and Turkish nationalism, in a general sense, reigned supreme and terrible minority policies were widely adopted.



For my peers and me, there is a turning point that marks our beginning to talk and write about being Armenian out loud: Hrant Dink. Following the many years of deep silence, Dink had taught us in the 1990s that an Armenian could also speak, could express his troubles, and could even question the state's account of history.

Then, shot in the back in front of his newspaper Agos one afternoon on January 19, 2007, Hrant Dink's death was the result of an assassination organized by various wings of the Turkish government and the fact that the real perpetrators have yet to be punished taught us that there is a price to pay for talking and writing in Turkey.

We persist in being journalists in the Turkish media without ever forgetting these lessons.



Undoubtedly, to be Armenian, to be a visible Armenian, or to be a journalist has never been easy at any time in Turkey. But the particular terror of these days lies in the fact that many now are being given “the Armenian treatment,” are being regarded as undeserving of equal citizenship, and are being declared traitors to the nation...

The Kemalists, who were the “keepers” of Old Turkey, the nationalists, and even those religious people outside the folds of Erdogan's AK Party are today enemies of the system. The responses I receive to practically all of my critical essays or news pieces, in large part, concern my identity. “This woman is an Armenian, she harbors treachery, she wants to present Turkey in a negative light!”

When I share an article of mine that criticizes the regime or some of the basic faults of the government on social media, the number of those who comment with pictures of Enver and Talat Pasha, the founding fathers of the Armenian Genocide, saying, “Don't you remember what became of your ancestors” is still too great to ignore.

That Armenians are the indigenous peoples of this land called Turkey today, that my family's roots here date predate the Ottoman Empire, and that we have all been born and raised in Turkey is still not enough to qualify as being “from Turkey.” There is still one criticism that you hear as an Armenian journalist concerned with Turkey's politics: “You go deal with Armenia, what's Turkey to you!” Neither is this reproach honest because when you write about Turkey-Armenia relations or make analyses, this time you are accused of “pushing pro-Armenia or Armenian propaganda.”

The insults, harassment, and attacks suffered by all female journalists in Turkey are more intense and more intimidating when the women in question are neither Turks nor Muslims. New causes for unease are added daily to the centuries-old “unique disquietude” faced by all female journalists and researchers of minority backgrounds who specialize in Turkey.

Yet female journalists who remain assured that they have chosen the right career and are determined to understand and present the truth are neither frightened nor deterred by their treatment as targets, including their perception as clear threats by the state and some segments of society.

There is an important point that unites Turkish, Kurdish, Armenian, Assyrian, Muslim, Christian, Jewish, or nonbelieving female journalists: their faith in truth, democracy, and in justice. No matter how heavy the burden, those who share these values continue the struggle in Erdogan’s country, and they shall continue to do so.

Sarah Teich, Human Rights Lawyer, Senior Fellow at Macdonald-Laurier Institute | CANADA

Panelist 3: Increasing State-led Violence Against Women: Case Studies from Turkey

Sarah Teich is an international human rights lawyer in Canada. She focuses on helping them utilize domestic, foreign, and international mechanisms to seek justice and accountability for atrocity crimes and human rights abuses committed by state and non-state actors around the world. Sarah Teich holds a Juris Doctor degree from the University of Toronto Faculty of Law, and licenses to practice law in Ontario and New York. She is a senior fellow at the Macdonald Laurier Institute and received multiple recognitions and awards, including a commendation in 2016 from the Office of the Prosecutor at the International Criminal Court in The Hague, and the 2022 Hon. David Kilgour Global Humanitarian Leader of the Year Award.



I would like to speak about a marginalized group of women in Turkey, and those are, women allegedly associated with the Gulen movement. I am not Turkish, nor am I associated with the Gulen movement. However, I can speak to the human rights violations suffered by these women from the perspective of a human rights lawyer, because I have represented, and I currently represent, some of these women. I would like to focus on three specific cases that I am working on,

but before I delve into that, I would like to provide just a bit of background about the Gulen movement in Turkey. The Gulen movement follows the teachings of an Islamic cleric, Fethullah Gulen. It is a peaceful reading of Islam and promotes tolerance, coexistence, and service. It is not actually called the “Gulen movement” by its proponents, but rather, the “Hizmet movement”, Hizmet being the Turkish word for service.

Those belonging to the Gulen movement in Turkey have faced discrimination for many years. However, this discrimination intensified after July 2016, when Erdogan accused Gulen's supporters of attempting a violent coup in the country. Many critics and dissidents question the veracity of this and believe that there was no coup attempt and that it was fabricated by the Erdogan regime to justify the Turkish government cracking down on Gulenists.

In any case, after the events of July 2016, the Gulen movement was criminalized as an armed terrorist organization, and repression intensified under the guise of counterterrorism. This repression was state led by the Turkish government, and anyone even tangentially associated with the Gulen movement has been targeted. This overbreadth is why, even if there had been a coup attempt, the crack-down by the Turkish government could not be justified.

Since 2016, the Turkish government has, by some estimates, detained over 300,000 people, including thousands of prosecutors and judges, and shut down over 2,000 institutions and 131 media outlets. Turkey detained so many journalists that, for a time, they were the worst jailer of journalists in the world. There is evidence that detainees are tortured and raped.

The Turkish government has been found to have violated multiple international human rights, in dozens of these cases, by multiple international instances. The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention has found, in many cases, that the detentions of individuals allegedly associated with the Gulen movement are arbitrary and unlawful. The UN Human Rights Committee has found multiple violations of human rights in the context of Erdogan's crackdown on the Gulen movement. So too has the European Court of Human Rights. Violations have also been documented by civil society, including by international not-for-profit organizations, such as Amnesty and Human Rights Watch. In Erdogan's crackdown on this community, women often feel the greatest impact. I would like to discuss three examples. The first example is the case of Gulden Sayin, the mother of Yusuf. Gulden Sayin was first arrested in February 2017, and charged with being a member of an armed terrorist organization. She denied it and still denies the charges. The evidence against her was tenuous, as it typically is in these cases related to the Gulen movement.

The evidence presented against Gulden was that she had an encrypted messaging application called "Bylock" installed on her cell phone; that she made deposits into a bank account at Bank Asya; that she worked as a teacher in dormitories that were later closed due to reported affiliations with the Gulen movement; and that she was a member of a couple of aid associations that were also reportedly affiliated with the Gulen movement. All of these activities were legal before July 2016.

The Turkish judiciary has relied on the download and use of the "Bylock" application to the ground numerous convictions of individuals for terrorism. This has been rejected, numerous times, by international bodies and independent experts.

Among other things, experts have noted that this application was globally available on the Apple Store, the Google Play Store, and other online markets, and it was downloaded over 100,000 times from the Google Play Store alone.

As the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention and other international instances have consistently held, download and use of the “Bylock” application are protected under a person’s right to freedom of opinion and expression. Similarly, various international instances have rejected the idea that deposits into an account at Bank Asya can reasonably ground a terrorism conviction. Bank Asya was, for years, the largest participation bank in Turkey as it operated legally. Despite this typically tenuous evidence, Gulden was convicted of membership in an armed terrorist organization in March 2018. She appealed multiple times, continuing to deny the charges. Her final appeal was rejected on October 13, 2022. On October 24, 2022, Gulden’s 6-year-old son, Yusuf Kerim, was diagnosed with advanced-stage cancer. As a result of this diagnosis, Gulden requested the postponement of her prison sentence, so that she



could be there to support her child as he goes through strenuous treatment. Her request to delay her sentence was rejected. Gulden was detained in December 2022 and remains imprisoned. Yusuf can be seen, in heartbreaking videos on social media, crying out that he wants his mother. I and David Matas are representing Yusuf and Suleyman Sayin in a complaint at

the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. We are submitting that, as a state party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Turkey is obligated to protect children’s rights, including their right to life and to health. By continuing to arbitrarily detain Gulden during this critical time, Turkey is violating not only her rights but also the rights of her child, Yusuf. We also asked for Gulden’s release to be prioritized as an interim, emergency measure, to prevent irreparable harm to Yusuf. The case is ongoing. One day after our last filing, Turkey permitted Gulden to spend a few days with her son at the hospital. This was encouraging but is not good enough.

I will discuss the second and third examples together because they are similar fact scenarios. They each relate to a family that was illegally abducted from abroad, and back to Turkey, after July 2016. One was abducted from Bahrain back to Turkey, and the other was abducted from Pakistan back to Turkey. The members of both families suffered numerous grave human rights violations: deportation; torture; arbitrary detention; persecution. There is not enough time in this context to go through the details of these cases, but I want to focus on the women in each family because the treatment that these women received was striking. For both women, sexual violence was threatened.

The family abducted from Pakistan felt this from the start. On the flight from Pakistan to Turkey, as two intelligence officials were physically assaulting the husband, one of the guards leaned in his ear and said, “Calm down, your wife and daughters are here. Be a man. Or we will rape your daughters and wife here. They are halal to us anyway.”

This threat was repeated upon the family’s arrival in Turkey. The physical assaults continued, and they said there, “We will rape your wife and daughters in front of your eyes”. It was repeated again in attempts to extract a forced confession. Meanwhile, the wife suffered under her conditions of detention. Although she is hypoglycemic, she was not provided with food until the next day. She lost consciousness as a result. While she was abducted from Pakistan, she was not permitted to wear clothes such as underwear, socks, and shoes, and these needs were not met upon her arrival in Turkey. She was forced to sleep on wooden benches for 11 days. Even the washbasin was monitored with a camera. She was not allowed to have any privacy. The husband and wife abducted from Bahrain received similar threats.

In both cases, this is made all the more egregious because, as in Gulden Sayin’s case, these detentions were arbitrary. There are many more examples like these ones, and many of them are substantially the same. The Turkish government, under the guise of counterterrorism, is engaged in widespread, systematic human rights violations against individuals allegedly associated with the Gulen movement. Many of the detentions are arbitrary and unlawful. And women bear the brunt of this. Because these violations are state led, we cannot expect the Turkish government to provide a remedy. We must turn to international instances to try to address these violations on a macro scale, and we can do so.

The UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, the Human Rights Committee, and the European Court of Human Rights have laid excellent foundations. Now, UN bodies can and should do more, and civil society has an important role to play in these efforts. The UN human rights council can and should pass a resolution condemning human rights violations. They can also resolve to establish an evidence collection mechanism to assist in prosecutions. The International Criminal Court can and should open a preliminary examination into crimes against humanity of deportation, as has been recently requested by a panel of European legal experts. And universal jurisdiction cases can and should be launched. Michael Polak and I are working on that last one already.

These are just several examples. So that is my note of hope, after having shared a handful of truly depressing stories. The violence may be state led, but that does not mean that there is no recourse. We can absolutely do something about this, and we should. The UN Commission on the Status of Women is an opportunity to push forward and fight for justice internationally for these women and girls.

Hozan Canê, living in Germany for 25 years, is committed to fighting for the politically and culturally persecuted people. The Kurdish-German singer was imprisoned in a Turkish prison between 2018 and 2020, arbitrarily accused of making terrorist propaganda. Hozan Canê was horrified by the persecution of ISIS against Yazidis in Northern Iraq and went to the region of Shingal, the heart of the Yazidis in northern Iraq, to document the genocide and shoot a film there. Her emotional work "74th Genocide Shengal" received many awards at the Cannes and Monaco International Film Festivals.



March 8, International Women`s Day, is a very important and meaningful occasion for women from across the world. As it was back in 113 years ago, in 1910, when 8 March International Women's Day was announced, there are still major conflicts, wars, ecological catastrophes, femicide, ethnocide-genocide, climate crisis, housing problem, food insecurity, unemployment, pandemic, migration as well as other serious issues such as politics shifting to the right.

The statement of the UN Secretary-General, Mr. Antonio Guterres, on 13 January, underlined that there is a risk of 'lawlessness becoming the rule' in this age, which expresses the dangers we face. We are in a phase where the law of the strong prevails. The danger is even greater for us women, who are seen as powerless, and for societies still in colonial status. Especially we, Kurdish women, are the victims of constant unlawfulness. We are faced with severe injustice, oppression, and persecution, such as the banning of our mother tongue, our names, our culture and music, and the names of our residential areas. Our songs and folk songs, literature, and legends are either banned or assimilated by sovereign states. The oppression applied against the Kurds is applied to Kurdish women many times more.

Both the Turkish and Iranian states are perpetrating all kinds of sexual, psychological, and violence against us, women in war, and prisons. I am one of the Kurdish women who have personally experienced the persecution. I still have difficulty describing what I went through in the Turkish prison where I stayed for 2.5 years. I was born in Erzurum Karayazı County. Serhat Region is officially the region that covers the provinces of Iğdır, Kars, Ardahan, Erzurum, and Ağrı in Turkey. This region is a place dominated by heavy feudal religious values. There are strict rules against women. I was married at the age of 12. I left my home when I was 14 as a second wife was brought. I had to leave my two children with their father, take my eldest daughter and run away. I escaped death for 7 years due to the honor case. Finally, I started my current profession, being a musician. I took the first step in my art life in 1989 with Arif Sağ, a legendary folk-dance musician. Since it was forbidden to speak and sing Kurdish at that time, I was arrested by the Turkish state and spent 9 months in prison in Van.

After I got out of prison, I was attacked again after a concert, and I was seriously injured. Given this situation, I had to flee to Europe, settled in Germany, and got German citizenship. I was invited by the HDP (Peoples' Democratic Party) to support them in the 2018 Presidential elections. While returning from the election rally in Edirne, at around 2:00 AM at night, my bus was stopped at the top of a mountain by the gendarmerie. I was taken into custody and was held by the mountain for four hours in a place like a hut. I was searched naked by the gendarmerie.

They took me to TEM (Bureau of Combating Against Terrorism) in the morning and I was subjected to heavy interrogation for two days. Later they took me back to another cell, where I stayed for four days. I again faced the most severe interrogation and torture.

A few days later a policeman brought me breakfast. I did not know that breakfast was poisonous. I was in a hospital when I opened my eyes. Two people from TEM came to the hospital and told me that a dissident police officer gave me the poison. I asked for a report proving that I was poisoned, but they did not give me any medical statements. My lawyer also applied, but they did not give a hospital report. Days later, they took me to a court and there I was arrested by the court and taken to Edirne Prison. The soldiers handed me over to the prison guards. I was taken to a small room where they asked me to undress, but I refused. I was wearing my stage performance dress, a nylon fabric for days. Some guards robbed me by force. A guard put on a glove and inserted his hand into my mother's womb. The other guards collapsed on me and left me motionless. Because of this, I had excessive bleeding. I went through menopause two years ago.

In the prison, there was no window, I could not breathe. I shouted and knocked on the door, when the guards came, I asked them to take me to a human ward. They said they will put me into a cell with the members of the Hizmet Movement, who have been criminalized as alleged members of a terrorist organization, and they made me sign a paper. Police told me that these people would kill me and made me sign a statement that if any harm would happen to me, the state is no longer responsible.

I signed the paper and said that I would go into this supposedly dangerous ward of my own free will. Edirne Prison was built by the Ottomans in 1814. Inside, you could not breathe from the smell of skin. A broken board had been placed over the toilet drain. Insects, mice, and rats swarmed in the ward. There was hot water for half an hour every 7 days.

In that ward, there was a 20-day old baby and prison guards did not provide any necessary products to provide care for him. The baby's legs and body exulcerated from the heat. There were 17 people staying in the 6-person ward, and that was severe torture. The blood flowing from me had dried on me and I was very afraid. The people in the ward embraced me with love and wiped my blood with a glass of water.

That little boy never leaves my mind, he comes to my dreams every night. I applied to the German Consulate and asked them to take me from Edirne to Istanbul Bakirköy Prison. The conditions were the same there. The only difference was that there were 60 people in 25 square meters. Every night, the soldiers were raiding and destroying the ward. I stayed 2.5 years in



Bakirköy Prison. In my last trial, my detention was continued, and they took me from my normal ward to a one-person cell. The first cell that I was taken to was a private place and it was nothing like a ward. Two guards said they would take me to the doctor and took me to another room. A delegation of 10-11 people was sitting at a table in the room.

They told me they would set me free. In response, they asked me to tell the German Consulate that the Kurdish people are terrorists. They also asked me to spy. Officials requested I locate as many Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) members and Hizmet Movement volunteers, as there are in Germany. They said, "If you fulfill these requests, we will send you to Germany tonight." I did not accept these offers. They cursed me, and I spat in their face. They took me to a dark cell. That section was where they tortured inmates. There was beating and rape until morning. The screams still go off like lead in my ears. Guardians did not provide water and food for a week. I was slowly going to die.

I wrote a letter saying I was going on a death fast and threw the food out under the door. I said I would commit suicide if they did not give my letter to the German consulate. Then Germany stepped in and they finally dropped me out of nowhere in a forest in the middle of the night. I was only 37 kilos at that time. I was also banned to leave the country for one year. I was able to return home at the end of July 2021. I am outside of Turkey now, but thousands of my sisters are still subjected to torture and oppression in the dungeons of Turkey and Iran. That is why I am here today to make my sisters' voices heard. My only alleged crime was being Kurdish, a woman singing in Kurdish. They called it terrorism.

For years, they did their best to break my human dignity. We, Kurdish women, have fought for the past two years for femicide to be recognized as a crime against humanity by the United Nations. We collected thousands of signatures for this. We are advocating to end the direct or indirect implications of women being killed in Turkey and standing up to end the brutality that ISIS perpetrated against Yazidi Kurdish women in 2014. Thousands of Yazidi women are still missing. This is an incurable wound, a trauma for us Kurdish women and especially Yazidi women. It is the shame of this age. Looking back today, I wonder if it were not for the heroic Kurdish women fighters and the Women's Protection Units (YPJ), and if ISIS had not been defeated in 2014, would a more misogynistic system come to power in the Middle East today than in Afghanistan?

Unfortunately, we saw in Afghanistan that states cooperate with the Taliban politically, diplomatically, and economically for the sake of their interests, as if the Taliban were a normal regime. As Kurdish women, we salute the women who are fighting against this regime in Afghanistan.

In our opinion, the regime in Turkey is no different from the Taliban. The head of the Turkish government does not only cause massacres in regions such as Afrin and Serekaniye, but at the same time, it targets our female pioneers both in Turkey and abroad and has them assassinated. On the other hand, Kurdish, Persian, Baloch, Azeri, Armenian, and Arab women are subjected to systematic state violence in the Iranian state. Kurdish women's slogan of "Jin, Jiyan, Azadi" (Women, Life, Freedom) has become a hope against despair for Baluch, Persian, Azeri, and Arab women in Iran.

In Kurdish, jin means woman, and jiyar means life. We are trying to bring Kurdish, Arab, and Assyrian women together with jiyar (life) through the women's revolution we made in Rojava and our struggle for freedom. We hope that the women's revolution in Iran will continue. I wish all my sisters all over the world to live freely and in dignity on the basis of "Jin, Jiyan, Azadi". We, Kurdish women, find it strange and shameful that the United Nations still does not accept femicide as a crime against humanity in the 21st century.

I hope that my sisters in Iran, all women across the world, and in all dungeons will attain their freedom soon and I salute their struggle.

Jin Jiyan Azadi



INTEGRATION POLICIES FOR SUCCESSFUL RESETTLEMENT OF REFUGEE WOMEN IN GREECE

Organized by PIGI KOINSEP (Greece), in partnership with JWF

Alexis Anagnostakis, Human Rights Officer, European Criminal Bar Association | GREECE

Panelist 1: Greece`s Policy Making for the Successful Integration of Refugees

Alexis Anagnostakis is a criminal lawyer in the jurisdiction of the Athens Bar Association. He is also a Barrister to the Hellenic Supreme Court and Council of State, a Member of the Hellenic Criminal Bar Association, and a Human Rights Officer, Chairman of the European Criminal Bar Association Human Rights Committee. Mr. Anagnostakis is an International Officer of the Defence Extradition Lawyers Forum in the UK and Co-Chair of the European Criminal Justice Observatory. He has published various articles in Greek and European legal journals about human rights.



There is no single statistic that can capture the effectiveness of integration policies for women refugees in Greece, it is clear however that there are still significant challenges to be addressed. As of December 2021, there were 34,225 refugee and migrant women in Greece, according to UNHCR. The majority of women refugees and migrants in Greece come from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq.

A survey conducted by the Greek Council for Refugees found that 42% of refugee women in Athens reported experiencing discrimination or xenophobia in their daily lives. Another study conducted by the International Rescue Committee found that only 28% of refugee women in Greece feel safe in their communities, compared to 68% of men. A report by the Greek Council for Refugees found that only 25% of refugee women in Athens had completed primary education, and only 9% had completed secondary education. The same report also found that women refugees in Greece are at a higher risk of gender-based violence, including sexual harassment and assault. The lack of safe spaces and the persistence of patriarchal attitudes in some communities can make it difficult for women refugees to access justice and support.

Limited access to information: Women refugees may have limited access to information about their rights and the services available to them. This can be due to language barriers, lack of information dissemination, and difficulty navigating complex administrative systems.

Limited access to education and employment opportunities: Women refugees may face challenges in accessing education and employment opportunities due to language barriers, lack of qualifications, and discriminatory attitudes from employers.

Limited social support networks: Women refugees may lack social support networks and may struggle to build relationships with the host community. This can lead to social isolation and mental health problems.

Administrative delays: The process of registering as a refugee and accessing services can be lengthy and bureaucratic, leading to frustration and uncertainty for women refugees.

However, there have also been some positive developments in the integration of refugees in Greece. For example, the Greek government has established the ESTIA housing program, which provides accommodation to vulnerable refugees, including women, and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) has implemented vocational training programs to support the economic integration of refugees.



In response to the challenges faced by refugee women and girls, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has established "safe spaces" in several refugee camps in Greece, where women and girls can access reproductive health services, counseling, and other support services. Overall, the legal basis for integration policies for the resettlement of women refugees in Greece is firmly rooted in international human rights law and the Greek constitution and is further supported by national policies and plans that prioritize the rights and protection of women refugees.

At the international level, Greece has ratified several human rights treaties and conventions that protect the rights of refugees and women, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. These instruments provide a framework for protecting the rights of women refugees, including the right to non-discrimination, access to education and healthcare, and protection against violence and exploitation. At the national level, Greece has developed several laws and policies to ensure the rights and protection of refugees, including women refugees. The Greek constitution guarantees equal rights and protection to all individuals, regardless of their gender or nationality. In addition, the Greek government has developed the National Action Plan for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals 2020-2024, which includes a section on gender equality and the protection of vulnerable groups, including women refugees.

The plan sets out specific targets and actions to ensure that women refugees have access to education, healthcare, employment, and legal protection. The main issue is implementation, where it is clear that there is a great challenge: how to make the law work, regardless of patriarchal attitudes, xenophobia and racism. This is the challenge for the future, how human nature will overcome their conditioning who think of others as inferior, particularly women.

Vonya Womack, Executive Director, Refugees Unknown Stories Untold | USA
Panelist 2: Best Practices of Refugee Women`s Integration to Greece

Vonya Womack is a respected author, university instructor, and international presenter who served in Director, Coordinator, and Management roles including her current role as Executive Director of Refugees Unknown-Stories. Ms. Womack is an active board member, published author, leader, and contributor to public service messaging with presentations conducted in North America, North Africa, Africa, Eastern Europe, and Europe. She is a thought leader who has utilized her international and business experience to create an organization that serves the vastly growing political refugee population.



In the media and international news, we often hear about refugee boats capsizing and the unnecessary loss of human life; we hear about pushbacks and watch the suffering of mothers and children stranded, crying, and begging for help stuck on islands between two countries. We are a world choosing to play with human life and death. We are nations choosing whether someone is persecuted enough to seek safety, and more often, we are a world that is lost

when preserving human dignity. I am sometimes asked what the value is for refugees in sharing their stories. I can answer that in a couple of ways. By sharing refugee stories, human rights organizations can raise awareness about the plight of refugees and highlight the human impact of displacement. This can help to counteract negative stereotypes and prejudices about refugees and promote empathy and understanding among the broader public. Telling refugee stories can also help to hold governments and other actors accountable for their actions or inaction. By documenting and publicizing human rights abuses against refugees, human rights organizations can pressure governments to improve their policies and practices and uphold their obligations under international law. Sharing refugee stories can also empower refugees by allowing them to have a voice and be heard. heard.

I have often visited Greece, Germany, Norway, Sweden, and the United States and have just returned from Denmark, collecting refugee stories. I had witnessed parents tell stories of their children drowning in the Aegean Sea when their boat flipped and heard how whole families drowned in the Evros River seeking freedom from Turkey. I have heard the stories of young women who experienced sexual assault fleeing other countries like Syria and Afghanistan to escape tyrannical regimes and war.

Now, I have even heard stories of those very refugees who thought they had a haven in the new country that provided them with asylum only to find an oppressor's arms have reached them there, and they must flee again and claim asylum somewhere new. They want to contribute to a country where their children can be free and get a good education. It seems that is too much to ask in our world as we know it.

It is essential to highlight refugee and migration stories during world polarization, war and conflict, climate change, and lack of food and clean water. Millions of refugees cannot tell their stories; they live in fear of relatives, friends, and co-workers being harassed or even kidnapped or killed. They are even in fear of telling their stories of resilience and how they now feel a part of a new community in a new country where they are successful shop owners and contributing to society. When we collect stories, we enrich history; when we tell them, we teach compassion; when we listen, we provide validation; and when we use stories to advocate, we create change. A much larger story emerges by assembling stories of human rights violations and the loss of human dignity. With stories, we can hold those accountable quicker and enforce change faster at the political levels.

We can quickly see the issues regarding systems put in place by world leaders that do not work, like the pushback stories we hear from refugees blaming Greece and Turkey. Best practices and potential gold standards also emerge and could be emulated or adapted in other areas experiencing a refugee crisis. Those success stories we don't often hear about, and I believe they are essential not only for the leaders who create and establish those programs but for those who keep them operating. They are also crucial to the story holders who found success in those programs because, for them, it changed their life. It gave them back some of the dignity they had lost on being displaced and forced to flee the only home they ever knew.

When I speak around the world, I talk about the crisis that is still to come of people being on the move. Although the international migrant numbers have remained around 3 percent globally over the past two decades, since 2000, those numbers have more than doubled. The number of people in the world forced to flee their homes has increased sharply due to persecution by tyrannical regimes, war and conflict, and poverty. According to the United Nations, it will increase even further due to climate change and environmental degradation. Experts predict that at least 1.2 billion people could be displaced by climate-related events by 2050. If we want to be ready for a crisis that we foresee coming, we must work together toward solutions.

Setting the context is essential as I will be talking about the successful integration of refugee women into Greece society. So, what can we expect to look forward to regarding refugees and their integration into societies? As the world is increasingly becoming more polarized, we know this will significantly impact refugees worldwide regarding their reception by host communities and their ability to access protection and assistance moving forward.

We will see more communities where refugees are seen with fear and suspicion, leading to stigmatization and discrimination. This can make it more difficult for refugees to access essential services, find employment, and integrate into society.

We will see increased xenophobia and hostility towards refugees, which results in hate crimes, violence, and other forms of persecution. We will see more political divisions, making reaching a consensus on international refugee policies and programs more challenging. This can be challenging in providing support to refugees and create uncertainty about their future. We see these things now. For example, according to El Paris, NGO information and data from other active sources in the Evros River border area, Greece has recently been accused of stealing over 2 million from migrants. This includes confiscating valuable items like cell phones and jewelry. Stealing phones, money, and other tangible goods at the border will halt future unlawful border crossings. What it does is eliminate their existence. It removes evidence that they were there. This only makes refugee lives more difficult.

According to the Minister of Protection of Greece, the Greek police have caught 154,102 illegal migrants from reaching the shores from the beginning of 2022 until September of last year. This kind of action does not draw international support but scrutiny and is bound to reduce support for refugee programs and services. We should be working to reduce hostility and counteract the narrative that refugees are a drain on resources or a threat to national security. Closing borders to refugees can have negative impacts on a country.



Regarding economic impact, refugees contribute to a country's economy by working, paying taxes, and starting businesses. By closing borders to refugees, you limit the labor force, reduce the demand for goods and services, and decrease investments, negatively impacting the country's economy.

Social tensions will increase, especially if there is a negative perception of refugees or ethnic tensions. This can lead to resentment, prejudice, and hostility towards refugees, which results in social unrest and violence. Legal obligations, humanitarian impact, and diplomatic relations will negatively impact other nations, especially those hosting large numbers of refugees. Leading to strained relations, reduced cooperation, and even economic sanctions.

These kinds of policies or acts by nations to curb refugees from coming will feed into the larger narrative and make it more difficult for refugees worldwide to access essential services, such as healthcare, education, and housing. Refugees continue to become more vulnerable to exploitation, abuse and be considered easy targets by criminal gangs.

Whenever governments are willing to take the political pressures supported by their party's public opinion, we will see limited access to programs for refugees and asylum access in that nation. Polarization will continue to have significant negative impacts on refugees worldwide. Governments, civil society, and the international community must work together to promote tolerance, respect, and solidarity toward refugees and other vulnerable groups. Countries should have fair and efficient procedures for processing asylum claims and ensure all refugees have access to a fair hearing and legal representation. This includes providing adequate resources and staff to process applications in a timely manner. Policies and programs should be in place to support refugees in integrating into society. This includes providing access to education, language training, and employment opportunities and ensuring refugees access health care and other essential services. Countries must ensure that refugees have access to fundamental human rights, including the right to work, education, and health care. They should also work to combat discrimination and promote social inclusion among host communities and the refugee population.

For the challenges that Greece faces, it is essential to note that in terms of concrete actions, the Greek government has established an independent committee to investigate allegations of pushback and other human rights violations. The committee comprises legal and human rights experts and has the power to investigate and report on incidents of abuse. Additionally, the Greek government has stated that it will improve the management of its borders and implement measures to ensure that all asylum seekers are properly registered and have access to legal assistance and support services. However, the effectiveness and implementation of these measures remain to be seen, and the situation remains a matter of ongoing concern for human rights organizations and advocates.

If countries work in partnership with international organizations, non-governmental organizations, and other stakeholders to share resources and expertise and to ensure that refugees are provided with the support they need, we will have more successful solutions instead of shutting any solutions down. So how can we be more forward-thinking? How can we start to change the narrative away from polarization and using tactics that give so little to the value of human life? Overall, a forward-thinking model of refugee policy would prioritize the protection and well-being of refugees while also recognizing the importance of social inclusion, partnership, and empowerment. It should be based on human rights, dignity, and respect for all people, regardless of their background or circumstances. Why don't we spend more time looking at what countries are doing to provide safety and how they have succeeded in refugee integration and adaptation? If we want to be progressive, we must work together to come up with better solutions, which means attempts at policies and programs that refugees find successful based on their own lived experiences.

Greece has been at the forefront of the refugee crisis for several years and has received many refugees, many of whom are unaccompanied minors. Unaccompanied minors are children under 18 who arrive in a foreign country without a parent or legal guardian.

They are particularly vulnerable and face many challenges, including separation from their families, exposure to violence and exploitation, and difficulties accessing education and healthcare. Greece has developed several programs to provide them with protection, support, and access to essential services. One of the most critical programs for unaccompanied minors is the Reception and Identification Center (RIC) system. RICs are facilities established by the Greek government to receive and identify refugees and asylum seekers who arrive in the country. Unaccompanied minors are housed separately from adults in special facilities designed to meet their unique needs. Minors receive food, clothing, shelter, medical care, and psychosocial support. They also receive assistance with legal procedures and access to education and vocational training. Another program is the Guardianship Network. This network of trained professionals provides legal and social support to unaccompanied minors who do not have legal guardians in Greece. Guardians help minors navigate the complex legal procedures of obtaining asylum, reunifying with family members, and accessing essential services. It also provides psychosocial support and helps minors integrate into Greek society. This is particularly important for minors who have experienced trauma and need special care and attention.

In addition to these programs, Greece has also established a foster care system for unaccompanied minors. Foster families are carefully selected and trained to provide a safe and nurturing environment for minors who cannot be reunited with their families or do not have family members in Greece. They receive financial support from the government to cover food, clothing, and education. This program provides a safe and stable environment for minors and helps them integrate into the Greek society and learn the language and culture.

Greece has also established a program to support unaccompanied minors who wish to return to their home countries. This program assists with travel arrangements, legal procedures, and reintegration into their communities. Greece has developed comprehensive programs to provide protection, support, and access to essential services for unaccompanied minors. These programs recognize unaccompanied minors' unique needs and vulnerabilities and aim to provide them with the care and attention they need to thrive. It is important to note that every country's approach to refugees is different and depends on various factors, including their resources, political climate, and cultural norms.



With a world issue that will continue to add more refugees and displaced people, we may start learning about each other's programs and learn from the refugees themselves about best practices. We might even save money and resources doing it. There are also various refugee integration programs that have been successful in different countries. Canada's Private Sponsorship of Refugees Program; Germany's "Welcome Culture", Australia's Community Support Program, Uganda's Refugee Policy: which allows refugees to work, move freely, and access education and healthcare.

The government also provides land to refugees to farm and build homes, which helps them become self-sufficient and integrate into the local community. Sweden's "Right to Work" policy allows refugees to work as soon as they arrive, which helps them integrate into society more quickly and provides them with a sense of purpose and dignity. The United States has The Resettlement Support Center Program, a global network of centers that help refugees prepare for resettlement in the United States. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) initially developed the program and was adopted by the US government in the 1980s, the Family Reunification Program. These are just a few examples of successful refugee programs implemented by countries worldwide. Human history shows us that when cultures share, when cultures trade, and when cultures take responsibility for humanity, we ultimately have less fighting for resources, less war and conflict, improved educational opportunities and advancement in economies, and when successful programs are shared, nations develop more advanced problem-solving strategies.

While there are certainly challenges and criticisms of the refugee policies in Greece, there are some initiatives that refugees and humanitarian organizations have praised. Like when emergency reception facilities are staffed by trained professionals who can provide support and information or by women for women. When they have access to legal assistance to help them navigate the asylum application process and access their rights. Education and language training for refugee children and adults. These programs have been successful in helping refugees integrate into the Greek society and improve their job prospects. One of the most mentioned is the family reunification efforts to reunite refugee families separated during their journey to Europe. They especially find this helpful when facilitation is provided, and there are services for families once they arrive.

I was fortunate to meet with the Greek ministry this past summer and hear about the successful unaccompanied minor program ensuring the welfare of children through family and fostering, as well as other minor programs that have been successful. This has become a best practice. I also heard from women forced to flee Turkey, for example, who feel accepted into their communities and participate in the new country they call home. One woman I met said she was so excited because she now felt like she belonged in Athens. She was excited to tell me she had paid her first taxes. Their new shop in the city was a family affair, and even their teenage son was proud of his new home.

The government has a role in how the immigrant population is welcomed by supporting community programs like PIGI, a Nonprofit organization that carries out educational, psychological, health, and artistic counseling activities related to integrating refugees. This organization now contributes to the well-being of refugees in the Athens area. It is a gold standard, started by refugees and run by refugees. Now a pillar of the community of Athens providing services, ultimately strengthening the community, and contributing to the pillar of economic growth.

Another successful initiative is community-led women-friendly spaces and centers for women only, where they are offered life-changing services. These centers are operated by women and local grassroots organizations that provide empowering activities which create a sense of belonging. We must protect refugees, including ensuring their safety and security and protecting them from violence and exploitation. If we empower refugees to become self-sufficient and independent and give them the tools and resources, they need to rebuild their lives, they will ultimately contribute to their new communities. As for the refugees I have encountered in Greece, although disappointed in recent practices to halt migration and the devastation pushbacks have caused to families and the refugee population, they want to thank Greece. Now that they have had time to integrate into Greek society, they send the message to the Greece administration that they are thankful for the country that has provided them a haven, provided programs, and access to communities that have helped them to integrate into the Greek society and thankful for a country that they feel they have a future to help support and contribute to.

We are now at a crossroads where the international community must hold international human rights policies to the highest degree. We must think about the dignity of human life and how we will preserve it. If we share best practices and listen to the stories of refugees and their recommendations on best practices, we can come together with them to seek solutions to the challenges. In doing so, we can preserve human dignity for those forced to flee, which could be any of us someday.

Ramona Mihaila, Head of Secretary of State's Office, National Agency for Equal Opportunities between Women & Men | ROMANIA

Panelist 3: A Global Perspective on the Importance of Refugee Women`s Successful Integration into Societies

Ramona Mihaila is a full professor of Ph.D. at the Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures at Dimitrie Cantemir Christian University, Romania. She has been Head of the Office of Secretary of State at the National Agency for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men, within the Ministry of Family, Youth, and Equal Opportunities. Ms. Mihaila is the author and (co)-editor of 25 books on gender studies. She has been visiting professor at Arizona State University and coordinator of European projects. She serves as the executive publishing editor of the Journal of Research in Gender Studies, Addleton Academic Publishers, New York.



Romania acceded to the 1951 Geneva Convention and its Protocol of 1967 without reservations according to Law 1 46/1991. The law concerning the status of refugees in Romania entered into force on 5 May 1996 and is in line with the 1951 Convention and its Protocol. Asylum seekers coming from war-torn areas can be granted refugee status for humanitarian reasons even if the conditions of the 1951 Geneva Convention are not fulfilled.

According to Article 15 of the Law on the Status of Refugees, a Convention refugee has the right to stay on Romanian territory and receive adequate documents, to work in Romania, to undertake all forms of education, and to receive refundable support within the limits of the state's financial possibilities. In practice, it is very difficult for a refugee to find employment without sufficient knowledge of the Romanian language, and no language courses are organized. UNHCR assistance constitutes the main financial support and hundreds of needy asylum seekers and refugees rely on it. The slim chances of integration have forced a number of recognized refugees to leave Romania.

The new Law on Refugees contains some doubtful provisions: refugee status may be granted for only three years (Article 22 of the Romanian Refugee Law) and is subject to a further two-year extension. Another worrying provision of the law denies access to asylum to those who arrive at the border without valid documents unless they arrive directly from the country where they have been persecuted. Romania currently hosts over 86,000 refugees from Ukraine, most of them women and children. The UN Refugee Agency, UNHCR, is supporting refugees throughout the country by providing counseling, legal advice, and psychosocial support, as well as cash for recently incoming families. On the other hand, thousands of Afghans, Iranian, Senegalese, and Syrian refugees have been traveling to the western border of Turkey once learning that Turkey's border with Europe was opened. Being banned to cross the border into Greece, the refugees began gathering at an empty field in Edirne, Turkey, and many of the women arrived in Romania.

Social and Financial Support for (Women) Refugees

The international armed conflict in Ukraine, which broke out on 24 February 2022, has triggered one of the fastest-growing displacement and humanitarian crises on record and has forced millions of people to flee their homes and seek shelter both within borders and abroad in search of safety. As of February 24, more than 2.46 million border crossings from Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova to Romania were registered. As of December 27, 2022, a total of 106,542 refugees from Ukraine are present in the country, and 101,641 refugees registered for temporary protection in Romania, according to Romanian Government data. Women and children make up 80% of the refugee population (according to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)). The key outcomes of the refugee protection response are as follows: 64,587 refugees received information, legal assistance, and counseling in person or via hotline; 700 local authority officials, partners, and volunteers were trained on the basic concept of refugee protection, including child protection, prevention and response to gender-based violence, protection from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse, etc.; 44 organizations coordinate their efforts through the Protection Against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Network (PSEA); 14,781 refugees were contacted through dedicated social media channels, including Telegram and Facebook; 8 Blue Dot hubs are operational in Romania, organized together with UNICEF.

UNHCR's support includes IT infrastructure support. The term asylum seeker is often confused with the term refugee. An asylum seeker is a person who claims to be a refugee and is seeking international protection from persecution or danger in their own country. Every refugee is initially an asylum seeker, but not every asylum seeker will eventually be recognized as a refugee. While waiting for their application to be accepted or rejected, these people are called asylum seekers. The Romanian National Council for Refugees Foundation (CNRR) is a non-governmental organization established in 1998 with public utility status since 2003. The mission of CNRR is to promote and defend by all legal means human rights in general and the rights of migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. CNRR offers social assistance and legal consultancy services within its specialized departments.

The Association for Dialogue and Universal Values (ADVU) developed cultural and social projects related to refugees. The Women's Organization, run by Dr. Aynur Gursoy, also present at the 67th Commission on the Status of Women, promoted projects for Ukrainian refugees, e.g., after the war, in March-April 2022, a clothing campaign was organized for children in the range of 0-13, and volunteers distributed the clothes they collected to Ukrainian mothers who fled the war and took refuge in Romania for their children. At the same time, approximately 70 tons of canned food and hygiene aid were provided to the victims of Ukrainian refugee women in partnership with Tuna Foundation. The following week, women were visited in Ukraine, and hand-made food was presented to them. There were about 50 volunteer women participated in this project. The International Women's Association of Bucharest is an independent, voluntary, charitable, non-profit, and apolitical organization. The purpose of IWA is to promote friendship amongst women of all nationalities living in Romania and to introduce its foreign members to the life and culture of our host country. In addition, Mrs. Ximena Reyes, a member of the board, present at the 67th Commission on the Status of Women, mentioned that IWA raises funds to support such charitable projects and organizations for refugees as IWA determines to be sound and worthy recipients of funding. IWA was founded in 1978 by members of the diplomatic community and local women and became a legal association in



JRS (Jesuit Refugee Service, Romania) is an international Catholic organization with a mission to accompany, serve and advocate for the rights of refugees and others who are forcibly displaced. JRS advocates for the protection of fundamental human rights, particularly those of refugees - in the broadest sense, including asylum seekers, migrants, and stateless persons.

JRS believes that their journeying with refugees is the most important way to express our solidarity with them and their concern for their wellbeing. Nowadays, when refugees more imperatively need welcome, protection, and justice, and yet are increasingly rejected, demonized, and their fundamental human rights are denied, JRS constantly joins the refugees as a sign of hope and a way towards healing. Even in the most desperate of situations, we remain with refugees to assure them that the world has not forgotten them and that they are not alone. As part of its mission, JRS assists forgotten people or those in remote areas with no access to assistance. Whenever conditions and crises change, JRS quickly adapts its protective mechanisms to meet the needs of the community.

Tackling Education: Governmental Measures to Support the Teaching and Learning Environment

According to statistics issued by Free Europe), Russia's war in Ukraine has created a humanitarian crisis in Ukraine, forcing thousands of people to flee the country. More than 7 million Ukrainian refugees are currently in Europe, including at least 49,000 students. The UN Refugee Agency estimates that around 7.5% of refugees in Ukraine fall into the 17-24 age bracket, which "is based on 4,800 intention surveys of Ukrainian refugees across Europe between August- September 2022", according to Euronews.

In Romania, where there are over 500 Ukrainian students, according to the European Parliament, initiatives have also appeared to support Ukrainian students. Romanian universities offer students from Ukraine the opportunity to continue their studies in Romania, and in case students they do not have the necessary academic evidence, the faculties can arrange the organization of evaluation exams. Despite the open attitude of the Ministry of National Education to welcome Ukrainian students to study in Romanian universities, the process is complicated and rather favors students from non-EU countries who attended the courses of higher education institutions in the country under Russian siege.

One category is that of foreign students, who studied medicine or exact sciences at universities in Ukraine, especially in Kyiv. They have received the right to enroll at the universities in Romania, on the same study programs they attended, paying a fee in foreign currency, which varies between 2,000-2,500 and 7,000 euros, depending on the specialization, the highest being in medicine.

There are a lot of problems concerning the differences in curriculum comparing the Ukrainian and Romanian systems of education, the fees, the translation of the documents the students can provide (in case they managed to bring their personal documents), the lack of these documents and the procedures the students can be enrolled, the way of teaching the students who speak only Ukrainian language, just to mention few of the difficult situations the educational environment in Romania has to face in order to help the refugees.

“Having regard to the Asylum Law, Article 20, which provides that refugees will be granted the most favorable form of access to the education system for those who benefit from the asylum, having regard to the Geneva Convention which, in Article 20, says that for primary education refugees must be granted the same rights as Romanian citizens, and for the other forms of education, it is about high school and university level, the most favorable possible form, considering these things, by way of derogation for Ukrainian citizens and for refugees from Ukraine, the minister's order provides that they can register at any time. The general rule is that they must register before the beginning of the second semester,” explained the Minister of Education, quoted by AGERPRES.

The Romanian language learning program, an academic program that lasts one year, will be oriented towards the training and development of communication skills in Romanian according to the CECRL regulations (written reception, oral reception, written expression, oral expression), in a format adapted to the structure of the Romanian language preparatory program for foreign citizens. While the public universities agreed to welcome students from Ukraine because they get funds from the national budgetary system, the private universities established as non-profit organizations cannot afford to admit students for free, so they imposed for the students to pay at least the fees the Romanian students should pay.

Thus, the Ministry of Education announced that through a Government Decision, all Ukrainian students can enroll in courses immediately, thus continuing their studies, without paying any tuition fee. The Romanian universities are able to issue them study diplomas, once the students provide evidence (not necessarily at registration) that they studied in Ukraine. In addition, students from third countries (non-Ukrainian students who were studying in Ukraine) can continue their studies in Romania, paying a study fee equal to the non-EU foreign student fee charged in Romania.

As for the secondary school and high school programs, “it is very important to be able to provide them access to education when they want it. In this sense, in Romania, the Ukrainian language is taught in 45 schools and 10 high schools in eight counties: Maramureș, Satu Mare, Suceava, Botoșani, Tulcea, Arad, Caraș-Severin and Timiș. In these schools, there is a significant number of teachers who can teach in the Ukrainian language. They are educators, teachers, or professors. There are teachers who teach the Ukrainian language or other subjects in the Ukrainian language, but their number is insufficient. There are also three universities in Romania where there are programs taught in the Ukrainian language: the University of Bucharest, the “Babeș Bolyai” University in Cluj Napoca, and the University of Suceava. These universities train their students to be able to do pedagogical practice in the interest of these children, who, unlike the students, cannot communicate in any other language than Ukrainian.

Governmental Policies for Refugee Women

Many war situations have targeted systematic actions against women, situations in which their vulnerability and need for protection are speculated and turned into an advantage on the battlefield leading to a critical analysis of the distinction of civilian combatants, the losses incurred in the absence of peace and security. Feminist research has shown that there is no direct connection between the number of female soldiers on battlefields and the number of female victims. It is estimated that in contemporary conflicts women and children represent 90% of civilian casualties.

The work of the National Agency for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men (NAEO), within the Ministry of Family, Youth, and Gender Equality, on promoting a gender perspective in the area of peace and security policies would like to point out that the agency is part of the National Implementation Group that monitors the implementation of the provisions for a national action plan (NAP) attached to National Strategy Regarding the Implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) Women, Peace And Security 2020-2023. The Agency's main role is to promote and raise awareness of gender issues with an emphasis on elements related to harassment but also to create networks and partnerships to facilitate the implementation of the measures taken through the strategy. By running the Project "VENUS - Together



for a safe quality life!" the Agency created and developed an integrated innovative national network of 42 sheltered homes for victims of domestic violence (one sheltered home in each county), in order to ensure the transfer to an independent life and the socio-professional reintegration of victims of domestic violence. At the same time, 82 complementary services were created and developed for victims of domestic violence, namely, 42 Support Groups that provide specific psychological assistance and personal development programs and 42 vocational counseling offices that provide vocational counseling services, guidance professionals, and accompaniment to identify

a new job to overcome crisis situations related to domestic violence and professional reintegration. A Sheltered Home/ Protected House represents a new type of social service that can be created and operated according to the provisions of Law no. 292/2011 on social assistance, Law no. 217/2003 for the prevention and combating of family violence, with amendments and additions (Law 174/2018), as well as other secondary normative acts applicable to the field of social assistance. By December 2022, there were over 7,000 victims who benefited from the services (sheltered houses, Support groups, vocational counseling) provided through the "VENUS" Project.

These shelters were open to refugee women, too. Thus, NAEO signed agreements with non-governmental bodies and academic entities in order to work closely with volunteers (e.g., due to the partnership with Dimitrie Cantemir Christian University, students who speak Ukrainian or Russian language helped a lot of the persons who work for the helpline provided by the agency 0800 500 333 a nonstop service for the victims of violence).

Social and Political Relationships between Romania and Greece

The Greco–Romanian relations started hundreds of years ago when the two peoples formed a bastion of the Greco-Roman alliance in the Balkans. In the inter-war period, Romanian politicians found Thessaloniki as a potential way for Romanian exports that later increased the possibility of a Greco–Romanian collaboration. Negotiations with Greece proceeded in March 1928, during the League of Nations conference in Geneva. After the fall of Communism in Romania, many Romanians immigrated to Greece for economic reasons. Both countries are full members of the European Union and the Council of Europe, NATO, and the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation. According to the General Secretariat for Greeks Abroad, the Greek community in Romania numbered 14,000. There are over 30 Romanian cultural and social organizations in Greece, and around 15 Greek associations in Romania, dealing with volunteering activities, religious purposes, charity actions, etc. The most active ones are The Greek Union of Romania and The Association of Friends of the Hellenic Church of Bucharest.

The first one “is not just a simple organization. This is a living spirit made up of all its members who voluntarily contribute to the perpetuation of Greek culture on the territory of Romania. The second one “was established to support the day-to-day functioning as well as the long-term preservation of the Greek Orthodox Church of the Annunciation, a beautiful, exquisite and unique Greek Orthodox Church in Bucharest, Romania, that combines harmoniously two traditions: externally, the Ionian temple; internally, the byzantine basilica.” Social and Political Relationships between Romania and Greece

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In 2020, Romania offered help to Greece in managing the crisis of immigrants and refugees. Thus, goods worth over one million lei will be sent through the European Civil Protection Mechanism, according to Mediafax. The Ministry of Internal Affairs affirmed that Romania supported the refugee resettlement program within the European Union, by taking in the first refugees from Greece, thus giving an important signal regarding the functioning of this mechanism. The Women’s Organization of the Association for Dialogue and Universal Values (ADVU) developed projects related to refugees. One of them was an aid and support campaign launched for refugee women in Greece. During the pandemic in Greece, there were four types of courses (polymer course, cake, cake decorating course, Amigurumi, and punch handicraft) were given to 150 women for about 3 months in March, April, May, and June 2021. These courses were held online via the Zoom platform in an interactive environment. Female volunteers in Romania provided their materials by ordering (handicraft course materials and some cake materials) online.

The materials were delivered to Greece to the refugee women there. These courses were organized for their psychological support to get to know themselves, to show them to buy and sell things on the internet with their home skills, to get to know themselves, and for psychological support. The organizers of this course were volunteer women with skills and training in the field of art. There were approximately 10-15 women who worked as active volunteers in this project.

The 67th Commission on the Status of Women reaffirmed its main goals in promoting human rights policies on preventing and combating violence against women, with a special focus on women refugees. The panel I delivered my speech was an opportunity for the participants, speakers, and attendees to discuss measures to protect and secure women’s public and private lives against any kind of violence. A very special acknowledgment goes to the Journalists and Writers Foundation, associated with the United Nations Department of Global Communications, for organizing these challenging panels devoted to women’s rights.

Ahsen Karagulmez, Youth Advocate resettled in USA from Greece | USA

Panelist 4: Experiences of Youth Refugees in Greece

Ahsen Karagulmez is an 18-year-old youth advocate. She lived in Turkey until the age of 15 and following the failed coup attempt of July 2016 in Turkey, she had to leave her homeland to Greece. Ahsen is now reunited with her family in Texas, and she is in her junior year in high school.



I am an 18-year-old student, living with my family in Texas, Houston. When I was 12 years old, there was a coup on the night of July 15, 2016, in Turkey, and all things started for my parents. We lived in Turkey for three years after that coup, while running away from the police as my mom and dad were going to be arrested just because of being teachers. Then in 2019, my family made a decision,

and we went to Greece as refugees, and we had been asylum seekers. That night I made a promise to myself. I said that I will narrate all of these injustices we have experienced to the world. A new era has begun in my life. I felt my life changed on a cellular level. I felt terrible while we were passing through Greece because we faced serious obstacles but then Greece seemed like a paradise because we were relieved of the pressures in Turkey and the fear of my parents being arrested. we tasted freedom!

Moving to a new country, leaving everything in the past, and most importantly not losing my confidence to start all over again, these the things I had to handle at that time. Moving to a new country was not easy, new culture, a new environment, and a new language. It was difficult to get used to a new place, but I had to start somewhere for this world to change, I had to start from somewhere and I had to do something, so I started learning English and Greek to improve myself.



Being a refugee means escaping from persecution and persecution comes from ignorance. The exact thing that can destroy ignorance is education. My dad taught me to be confident and to guide myself through the world. We started school a week after we went to Greece. I cried a lot when I first started school because I could not communicate at all, I did not know their language. However, even though I don't know the language, the people in my class were trying to be friends with me. I remember that I experienced a shift in consciousness that gave me the ability to maintain my life. They were trying to speak English next to me so that I could understand what they were talking about and not feel alone. At that moment, I felt that life met me with such good friends and that the Greek people were truly sincere.

Two months later my father came to America, and we stayed in Greece with my mother and siblings. We started to wait for the family reunification process. It was hard to leave my father, but nothing was easy in my life anyway. What does family mean? Parents and children are together and experiencing emotional togetherness. Being a refugee has separated us but could not separate our emotional togetherness. Being a refugee woman taught us to be strong, patient, and never lose hope, and that we always have a second chance in life. I did not expect our family reunification to be this long. We were going to meet eventually, and it really hurt us to wait so long for something we knew the end of. We lived apart from my father for three years. We missed a lot of moments with my dad, and I was not a little girl anymore, I was 18 years old.

I learned to be grateful while living in Greece because we were in good health, no matter what, and our mental health was good even though we had a lot of trouble. Greece really made me feel very good both with its people and with its nature. Maybe that is how we protected our mental health. While I stayed in Greece, I improved my English and started teaching English to young children. This has developed my sense of direction. Together with my friends, we established an education platform and started to provide education to refugee children. In a very short time, this platform started to teach more than a thousand students, and more of our volunteer friends started to help us.

I started to feel valuable again after I experienced it being useful to someone. I really needed to empower and redefine my personality. I was doing that by teaching English to children. Greece prepared and developed me for my new life here in America and gave me good opportunities to improve myself. Thus, most importantly, it has allowed me to make friends that will never leave me alone for the rest of my life. When I look back, I realize how meaningful my life has been. Yes, there are evil ones in the world, and people are persecuted unjustly. They sometimes lose their homes, homelands, and the land they were born in. They may even have to leave. However, they should not give up the struggle, because the chance of ignorance against education is as critical as the chance of darkness coming over against light. So never lose hope. Good people can change the world, I believe.

GLOBAL SOLIDARITY TO COMBAT STATE-LED VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

organized by Set Them Free (USA), in partnership with the JWF

Azadeh Nikzadeh, Iranian Director, Women's Right Activist | USA

Panelist 1: Crimes Against Humanity Faced by Iranian Women and Their Pivotal Role in Leading a Global Momentum for Women's Rights

Azadeh Nikzadeh is an Iranian writer, director, producer, and women's rights activist. She advocates projects on systematic and state-led violence against women, emphasizing on the power of storytelling to create the real-life stories of underrepresented female heroes to build global solidarity. She has won multiple fellowships and awards including Women Empowerment Fellowship, Asian Film Academy Fellowship from the Busan International Film Festival, Athena Film Festival Writing Lab, and Honorable Mention at the Charlotte Film Festival Social Justice Films. Azadeh Nikzadeh is also the founder of Burnt Generation Studios, which creates and promotes authentic narratives to build grounds for mutual understanding and shifts in the collective perspective of the audiences.



The Islamic regime in Iran has long been perpetrating crimes against humanity and particularly targeting women. The plight of women in Iran is a source of deep sorrow and anguish. I was born in Iran, a country with intense social and political oppression. Living under oppression means dealing daily with a vast tyrannical machine enveloped by the strict interpretation of Sharia law, which nullifies

the rights and freedom of women. This intricate web of governmental control is crafted to hide its true ambition, eliminating women's dignity and fundamental freedoms. There is even an intentional lack of education and enforcement of the limited rights women have under Sharia law as women continue to be humiliated, deprived of their dignity, and treated unfairly and unjustly. To clarify let me present you with a personal example. Back in Iran, I was a well-educated, ambitious woman exposed to an advanced world of technology and innovation thanks to the internet, and yet my reality could not have been farther from the ideal. Because of being a woman, I was valued less than a man: half to be exact. I would inherit half, my intelligence was perceived to be half of a man, and my blood money was valued at the half. My body was also the battleground for gender-based discrimination against women. I was forced to wear a hijab and cover my hair fully with a headscarf.

Walking in the streets could be traumatizing. My appearance was scrutinized and judged harshly by security forces and the so-called morality police. I could face severe penalties such as imprisonment, fines, or even lashings if they were not pleased with my outfit. If I ended up in their jail, I was endangered of getting raped and tortured.

The enforcement of the hijab has limited my freedom and ability to be myself and express who I truly was. It was scary to show I was a modern woman. The compulsory hijab forced me into positions of submission and servitude. In the Islamic regime, the hijab has become a symbol of patriarchal control and discrimination against women and has undoubtedly had detrimental impacts on the civil rights of Iranian women. This is how the Islamic regime has maintained its power, by subjugating its female population viciously as it slyly widened its hold on every single Iranian for the past 44 years.

The good news is oppression does not last forever. 44 years of systematic violence against Iranian women brought us to September 16, 2022, when Mahsa Amini was brutally got murdered by the Islamic regime for the crime of wearing her headscarf improperly. It was the moment when Iranian women refused to accept the status quo. Their courage in taking to the streets and demonstrating their anger at the brutal regime was embodied by the most potent symbols, cutting their hair and the burning of headscarves.

Iranian women demand freedom, and more importantly, the dismantling of the oppressive system. It is not an attack on Islam. Iranian women fight to create a better future for their beloved homeland. The Islamic regime, rather than listening to its own people's demands, chose instead to shut down the internet, kill hundreds of children, men, and women, massive arrest, torture, and rape the protestors. Recently, they are taking revenge on schoolgirls and students by poisoning them with chemical gas. To this date, more than 5000 students across multiple cities are poisoned. And still, despite attempts to silence the outcry, the incredible plea for freedom continues to echo loudly in this darkest of times in Iran. People of Iran, men, and women are still protesting. We should not forget that we all have a responsibility to support those whose cause persists in spite of such relentless atrocities. It is imperative that we all stand in solidarity with those fighting for their voice.

As a filmmaker, I want to emphasize the power of media and storytelling. Because organizations and NGOs, storytellers, and mass audiences are the most important pillars to defeating dictators around the world: Let me tell you why. Storytelling is an important tool for creating solidarity between women advocates in their fight against violence or discrimination. Through narratives and characters, it is possible to bring attention to the struggles of these brave individuals and build a community of support behind them.

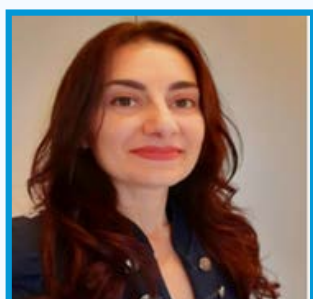
We can give them a platform to share their experiences while connecting audiences to their struggle. Moreover, these stories can create a stronger sense of solidarity, by inspiring others to take up the cause and join in the fight against injustice. Ultimately, storytelling is essential for giving these women a voice and helping them rewrite their stories from being victims of violence or discrimination to becoming heroes who inspire and unify others. That is why I chose to be a filmmaker.

We must amplify the stories of these brave women and create heroes that can rally people to their cause. Through storytelling, we can extend our support beyond simply acknowledging the struggles faced by women advocates and work together to ensure that they are remembered, honored, and never forgotten. Organizations, NGOs, and corporations should allocate budgets for creating stories of courage, hope, and resilience that showcase the strength of women facing injustice. Such an effort can help create a positive change in society by empowering more women to fight for their rights and making it easier to access resources and support. These empowering stories of women can help spark a movement that works towards creating an equitable world. So let us all be storytellers. Let us use our voices to amplify women's struggles and ensure that they are never forgotten.

Dr. Shilan Fuad Hussain, Marie Curie Postdoctoral Fellow of Gender Studies and Cultural Analysis, Senior Consultant of Gender | UK

Panelist 2: The Role of Kurdish Women Advocates in Creating Global Solidarity to Increase Human Rights

Dr. Shilan Fuad Hussain is a Marie Curie Postdoctoral Fellow and interdisciplinary researcher specializing in gender studies. Her current work sits at the intersection of sociology and cultural analysis, and its symbiotic relevance to modern society. She has worked for over ten years with international NGOs, liaising with a diverse range of local, national, and international governmental and non-governmental officials, policymakers, bureaucrats, and civil society members.



One cannot fully discuss increasing women's equality in the world today, without also mentioning the role being played by Kurdish women. As a Kurdish woman and a Ph.D. cultural analyst who frequently writes on the role of women in the Kurdistan liberation movement, there is a lot that can be written about this topic, in fact enough for an entire book. But for the sake of brevity, I will give a

brief overview for those who may not be familiar with multi-faceted role that Kurdish women have played in the political space and culture of Kurds in particular. At the outset, I believe it is helpful to begin with the basics of who the Kurdish people are. Kurds are an ethnic group of around 40 million people spread out primarily over four different countries: Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria. These four areas (called Bakur, Bashur, Rojhilat, and Rojava in Kurdish – i.e., North, South, East, and West) overlap and form an area most Kurds consider to be Kurdistan, a country that exists in the popular imagination of many Kurds, but unfortunately is not recognized by the current international state-based system.

And this is where we find our first issue, which is that since the Kurds lack a state of their own, in many ways they are subject to the dictates of the four states overlapping, or some might contend occupying, Kurdistan. Historically, this has created a range of challenges as Kurds have traditionally had their language banned by the dominant ethnic groups of these states, and their culture has not been recognized. This has led to a range of laws meant to subjugate the Kurds and included everything from banning the Kurdish New Year (Newroz), outlawing Kurdish music, and making it illegal for Kurds to give their children Kurdish names.

You also have comical examples like when a city in Turkey changed their traffic streetlights from red-yellow-and-green which are the traditional Kurdish colors, to red-yellow-blue, and caused many car accidents as drivers did not know when to start and stop. Predictably, that plan was obviously short-lived. Because of the cultural suppression of Kurdish identity and in some cases outright attempts at genocide against the Kurdish people – made most infamous when Saddam Hussein used poison gas against the city of Halabja – Kurds have struggled to ensure they receive their full human rights. On the front lines of that struggle, have been Kurdish women. This is for a myriad of reasons which are complex, but the shorter explanation for it would be that women serve a unique role in Kurdish culture, where despite being in the Middle East and coming from socially conservative families, many of them grow up in households where mothers are the dominant and central figures of daily life.

This strength that young Kurdish girls witness in the sphere of the home (and personifies itself in their mother's rebellion against patriarchal dictates of the father), often times then extends out when they reach adulthood, to believing that their voice inherently matters and belongs in the public sphere. In the same way that many young girls watch their mothers' rebel against the male patriarchy, by telling them the importance of studying and marrying later in life, they then also rebel against the states that want to deny Kurds their full rights.

As a result, for decades women have been on the front lines of the movement for Kurdistan's freedom, which has seen many of them take heroic stands on their political principles, and sadly, many of them be killed or jailed for defending human rights. The list of women political figures from the last few decades is rather long, but a non-specific summary would be that you have had women defy dictators as members of parliament, go to prison for making protest art or Kurdish music, be on the front line as armed resistance fighters and guerrilla leaders, lead social revolutions and push for gender equality, become well-known poets who celebrate sensuality in a culture that usually hides it, and become novelists who challenge the gender norms and male patriarchy that tries to stick them back into the boxes from where they have burst out of. Just in the last few years alone you have had brave Kurdish women like: Nûdem Durak be jailed for singing in Kurdish, Zehra Dogan be jailed for her paintings against authoritarianism, and Zara Mohammadi be jailed for trying to teach little girls to speak in Kurdish.

Often times the news about Kurdish women can be a paradoxical mix of inspirational heroism and depressing outrage, as you see so many women taking principled stances against dictators and regimes which do not respect their basic human rights, and yet their stories largely go unheralded in the West, when they are in fact everything that most Western nations say a heroine should be. In an age where young girls in the West are taught to forgo traditional ‘Disney’ princesses who are idle in favor of strong women who embrace their voice and seek their own path, Kurdish women provide daily examples of inspirational defiant women worthy of attention.

Women have truly been at the forefront of the fight for gender equality and women’s rights in the Kurdish regions of the Middle East and in the diaspora, particularly in the context of the ongoing Kurdish struggle for autonomy and self-determination. Some other ways that they are leading the fight for equality include women’s armed resistance. In the fight against ISIS in Syria (what Kurds would call Rojava), women played a significant role in combat, forming all-female military units known as the Women’s Protection Units (abbreviated as the YPJ). These YPJ women famously fought the misogynistic men in ISIS who had passed laws mandating women must be in full burqas without even their eyes showing and never leave the house without a male chaperone. The sight then of these unveiled Kurdish YPJ women with AK-47s meeting these ISIS militants on the battlefield was about as close as you will find to the cliché battle of ‘Good versus Evil’ in modern life. The success of the YPJ has also challenged traditional gender roles and helped to break down societal stereotypes about women’s capabilities throughout the Middle East and spread to areas beyond Kurdistan and into neighboring Arab, Turkmen, Assyrian, and Persian communities.

But even these YPJ women, took inspiration from other Kurdish parties and women in different parts of Kurdistan, whether they be Komalah or PDKI women in Rojhilat, PUK and KDP women in Bashur, or HDP and guerrilla women in Bakur. And all of them often work in union with human rights activists, and international NGOs who are constantly advocating on behalf of women’s rights in Kurdistan. Kurdish women in Syria (or Rojava) also established a “Co-Chair” system that mandates that in every position of government, there must be one man and one woman sharing equal power. As a result, all local councils and political parties have women in leadership roles, and equal gender parity, at a time when most Western liberal nations still do not have equal numbers of women in political office.

Women have also established a new science called “Jineology” translated as Women’s Science, which seeks to center women’s voices and concerns into a new academic discipline and study all the ways women have historically contributed to society and why their roles in public life are so vital to the success of any society. Jineology posits that it is not just that women deserve equal representation, but that they are necessary in order for any community to thrive, as they bring unique attributes that are inherent to them as women.

You also have the current protests in Iran (or Rojhilat) that have been going on for many months and which began with the death of a Kurdish woman – Jina Amini in morality police custody, and then sparked a nationwide movement of not only Kurds, but Baloch, Awazi Arabs, Azeris, and Persians for more women's rights in Iran and an end to the mandatory hijab laws there.

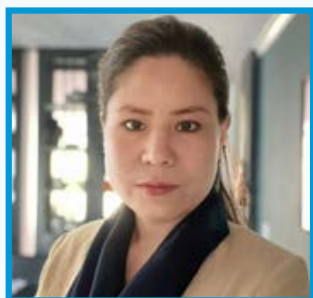
The leading slogan of that movement in Iran right now is a Kurdish phrase “Jin, Jiyan, Azadi” which translates to (Women, Life, Freedom) and has now been chanted in global parliaments all around the world. But ironically, many Western states welcome that message when targeted at Iran – a geopolitical foe – but become a little uncomfortable when the light is then shined back on themselves and they realize that all of the world's women are engaged in a similar fight for equality, and that oppression can take many forms. It does not just occur in ‘dusty’ Middle Eastern nations, but also in ‘shiny’ European and American cities where women are still denied the right to live freely.

In the recent earthquake which hit the Kurdish areas of Turkey and Syria, women have been at the forefront of organizing aid and critiquing the government response and why it has been unequal when it comes to distributing aid to Kurdish versus non-Kurdish areas. So, overall, Kurdish women have been instrumental in challenging patriarchal norms and fighting for gender equality in the Kurdish regions of the Middle East and the diaspora. But their contributions have been widely recognized and have also inspired women's rights movements all around the world. This is why I can confidently assert that the contributions of Kurdish women are instrumental to our collective quest for greater equality of all women.

Fatema Daryab Ahmadi, Adjunct Professor at American University | USA

Panelist 3: Plight of Women's Rights and Girls Empowerment under the Taliban Rule

Fatema Ahmadi is a Fellow and Adjunct Professor at American University, School of Public Affairs in Washington, DC. Ms. Ahmadi worked as a Senior Peace Process at the United State Institute of Peace. She managed the first kind of "Synergizing Nonviolent Action and Peacebuilding (SNAP) program in Afghanistan that trained young people in non-violent responses to the protracted conflict in 8 provinces. Previously, she led USAID's Combating Human Trafficking through Hagar International in Afghanistan and also worked with refugee children through the Child Labor Association and the UNHCR Afghan Refugee Health Insurance project in Iran.



Since the Taliban seized the power, women and girls in Afghanistan experienced different forms of limitation every day. The Taliban fight on the battlefield has finished; however, they commenced a new war against women and girls in Afghanistan. Therefore, the struggle to gain not even equal right but basic human rights continue for women and girls in Afghanistan.

The first month of the Taliban in power started with 6 declarations, announcements, and orders against women including ordering imams of mosques to collect names of unmarried girls and women between 12-45 to marry their fighters. In September 2021, the Taliban de facto authorities realized the most tyrannical ban on girls on this planet and it was the ban on secondary education. The Ministry of Women's Affairs was dismissed and replaced with The Ministry of Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Voice to better control society and to the best of their ability to shrink all small public spaces to women. While states are responsible to provide security for their citizen, the Taliban ordered women and girls to stay home as their soldiers are not trained to see women in public. Before completely closing the expelling of women from universities, the Taliban prevented women from choosing agriculture, mining, civil engineering, veterinary, and journalism as their study majors. Taliban said these subjects are too difficult for women. Then, this terrorist group banned female students from public and private universities and from attending private courses. In continuation of their fight against women, the Taliban banned female staff from working for international NGOs which affected so many women and their families in the very poor economic situation of the country.

Public flogging of women and men continued to dishonor a nation's human dignity. The message is that the Taliban regime is against the people of Afghanistan. Despite the fear of a fully armed group, women of Afghanistan have been the only group to continue protesting the Taliban. The first protest took place on 17 August 2021 against the discriminatory and misogynistic treatment of women by the de facto authorities.

Women's demands were clear and strong: decentralization, multiculturalism, and social justice through their slogan "work, education, and freedom." However, the violence and crackdown increased in Kabul and other cities against the women protesting for their rights. Many of them are imprisoned, kidnapped, tortured, and raped to silence others who dare to speak up. Hazara women were among the groups who started protesting first and due to the ethnic discrimination by the Taliban and their supporters, they experienced torture and violence more than others but never became silent in their activism.

Chra Abdullah, Project Manager, Dialogue and Culture Organization | IRAQ

Panelist 4: Best Practices of Civil Society from Iraq Creating Cohesive Societies to Foster Women's Rights and Girls Education

Fatema Ahmadi is a Fellow and Adjunct Professor at American University, School of Public Affairs in Washington, DC. Ms. Ahmadi worked as a Senior Peace Process at the United State Institute of Peace. She managed the first kind of "Synergizing Nonviolent Action and Peacebuilding (SNAP) program in Afghanistan that trained young people in non-violent responses to the protracted conflict in 8 provinces. Previously, she led USAID's Combating Human Trafficking through Hagar International in Afghanistan and also worked with refugee children through the Child Labor Association and the UNHCR Afghan Refugee Health Insurance project in Iran.



Since 2003, Iraq has faced complicated obstacles to stabilization and peacebuilding, the most recent of which is attributed to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), which seized huge portions of the country in 2014 and left a massive amount of damage and displaced people in Iraq. Since 2003, civil society has been essential to the stabilization of post-conflict environments.

In order to address humanitarian needs, promote increased civic involvement and citizen awareness, and supplement government services, civil society actors, from volunteer networks to youth groups and community-based organizations, have mobilized. Additionally, as civil society organizations (CSOs) play a more significant role in Iraq, they have the chance to influence political processes in favor of better governance, respect for human rights, and the rule of law. In Iraqi communities, history, demography, and culture all have an impact on how civil society is structured and operates. In all areas of Iraq, including the KRG, there are nearly 6,350 non-governmental organizations registered with the NGOs Directorate nationally.

The role of CSOs in women's rights and girls' education takes a huge part in their activities including:

- Department of Social Welfare for Women in 2008;
- Improvement of women's development;
- 30% of women seat in the Kurdistan Region of the Republic of Iraq (KRI Parliament), 25% in Iraq;
- Establishing Law on Combating Domestic Violence Act no.2/2011;
- Female genital mutilation;
- Campaigns and Awareness sessions.

Moreover, this year's United Nations Press Release for International Women's Day stated their commitment to supporting women's and girls' rights. Despite these actions toward change still, there are many challenges that civil societies face in Iraq such as:

- Lack of trusted data;
- Interference by the political side;
- Tribal and religious interference;
- Inadequate implementation of laws;
- Cultural norms in rural areas;
- The law against domestic violence has not yet been enacted. (Iraq);
- Not being helpful in implementing the Strategic Plan for the Elimination of Violence against Women, despite its Adoption by the government in 2011.

The above challenges and careless monitoring prevented the intended results from being reached. Still, "1.32 million people are estimated to be at risk of different forms of gender-based violence. 75% of them are women and adolescent girls".

(UN, Iraq) 77% of incidents are linked to domestic violence which means still violence exists due to the below points which CSOs should take into consideration:

1. Their activities have not affected women's reality;
2. Almost two-thirds of women had not even heard of these efforts;
3. Society's trust is lost;
4. Changing their aims and working for their benefit;
5. Low prevalence of anti-violence programs by international NGOs in the rest of the governorates of Iraq;
6. All rural areas are less active than urban areas, especially international NGOs;
7. Inadequate CSO and employee modernization strategy;
8. Lack of adequate solutions for root causes;
9. Working randomly regardless of geography.

Women in Iraq should be given equal opportunity to participate in the nation's overall economic, political, and social growth, therefore their empowerment should be a primary objective rather than a secondary one. Evidence, however, demonstrates that Iraqi women are disproportionately impacted by prolonged conflicts, which also cause the State's authority to decline, political instability-related insecurity, the collapse of economic activity, and the disintegration of social institutions. The transition's present most serious side effect, which calls for urgent action from all social actors, is an increase in violence against women. Women have returned to their communities, sects, or tribes in search of security, undoing the positive effects of nearly a century of modernization initiatives conducted by the State.

The ability of people to develop fully has been hindered by a lack of security, which has also harmed mechanisms for true empowerment. The situation for women can yet be improved, though. **The State has certain obligations, including:**

- * Amendments should be made to the Constitution and statutes to get rid of clauses, omissions, and contradictions that support discrimination;
- * Support freedom of speech to promote discussion and debate; deep changes in media portrayals of women are required, as well as public awareness-raising activities;
- * Build a new work environment that does away with the current labor market's division of labor based on women's restricted roles and employment in low-productivity industries;
- * Eliminate violence against women in all its manifestations and put an end to its continuation as a tenet of acceptable culture by confronting the culture of dominance and marginalization and spreading a culture of peace and tolerance;
- * Provide new opportunities by changing the way public banks handle loans, removing the demand for real estate as security, and promoting women-friendly banking practices;
- * Change educational systems and curricula to alter how society views violence against women and to create a feeling of shared accountability for putting an end to it;
- * Increasing the number of rural women, elderly people, widows who are supporting families, and women with no formal education or training who can work from home.



THE ROLE OF STEM EDUCATION IN ACHIEVING GENDER EQUALITY: PERSPECTIVES OF YOUTH

Organized by Triangle Math and Science Academy (USA),
in partnership with the JWF

Meryem Golbasi, Sophomore at TMSA, President of the Model UN Club | USA

Meryem Golbasi is a sophomore at TMSA and is the President of the Model UN Club. She also plays for her school's varsity basketball team and has founded her own non-profit organization called Paint to Protect through which she helps refugees and families in need in Turkey.



Addressing the issue of women in STEM is crucial for achieving equality in societal, economic, technological, and educational development. Unfortunately, for many decades, women in STEM have been the subject of discrimination, their opinions and ideas belittled, and their opportunities limited due to deeply ingrained biases against them. It is essential to recognize that these biases are

deeply rooted and have manifested in women's contributions being ignored, and they are potentially unrealized. It is vital to change this narrative and foster a culture of inclusivity and diversity in STEM fields. Anna Pollina has stated, "Women make up about 48% of the total workforce, but in STEM jobs they only represent about 24% of all workers." The underrepresentation is not only a missed opportunity for gender equality but actual development in stem fields. With minimal inputs flowing out of women, the world will be predominantly built on how men view it, and it will continuously and exponentially build the barrier that women cannot cross.

Realizing that internalized misogyny can start from a young age, for example, in TV characters.

There is no doubt that internalized misogyny starts from a young age. Encouraging girls in STEM is an essential element in overcoming social barriers. With that, having representation and building confidence in women will start the long-lasting impact of destroying the social barriers for women in STEM. First, even starting from a young age, the only young scientist characters you would see in TV shows, or movies, were usually men. I, myself, cannot recall any female scientist on TV while I was younger. However, I do recall male scientists being overly represented in the cartoon industry. For example, Phineas and Ferb, Johnny Test, and Sid the Science Kid. These are all characters from mainstream cartoons that young women have watched.

From a young age, these stereotypes are indirectly built within the minds of women. When young girls see male scientists overrepresented in the media, it can contribute to the perception that science and technology are "male" fields and that women are not well-suited for them. This can lead to internalized misogyny within women about gender roles and abilities, which can impact their choices and aspirations later in life. Confidence is a direct factor in their choices and aspirations and the media continues to add a largely negative and stereotypical portrayal of women creating a sense of invisibility and devaluation. By increasing the representation of women in STEM fields, we can create a virtuous cycle that fosters an environment for more women to confidently and assuring enter these fields and help break down the social and cultural barriers that have historically kept women out of STEM.

Stem education promotes self-confidence and self-efficacy. However, for women, it is hard to attain this confidence, as the world is primarily built upon what men favor, and these biases can include assumptions that women are less capable or less committed to their work than men, or that they are less interested in technical or quantitative subjects. They can also take the form of microaggressions, such as dismissive or condescending comments, or exclusion from social networks and professional opportunities. In the face of these challenges, self-confidence can be a powerful tool for women in STEM. By believing in themselves and their abilities, women can push back against these biases and assert their presence and value in their fields. Importance of women who commit to STEM jobs and how that affects young women looking for jobs. Fortunately, women have realized this, and have started to initiate organizations such as KodewithKlossy or GirlsWhoCode. These STEM organizations foster a welcoming environment for women who are afraid of the intimidating idea of joining the stem field by themselves. These organizations not only provide a supportive community for women in STEM but also offer mentorship, education, and training opportunities. They create a platform for women to share their experiences, challenges, and successes in STEM and provide them with resources and networks to help them succeed.

By building a community of women in STEM, these organizations help to combat the feelings of isolation and imposter syndrome that women in STEM fields may experience. In an article from Elevate, it states “In a classroom, a girl may not be engaging in the conversation in the same way. But that doesn’t mean she isn’t present.”. Some may argue “How does this support gender equality if it is a girl-only stem club?” In order to get to gender equality we need to assure there is equity first since this whole system is built upon men. Equitable opportunities will help reach an equal outcome eventually. However, it is important to note that self-confidence alone is not enough to combat indirect misogyny in STEM fields. Women also need support from allies and advocates who are committed to creating more inclusive and equitable workplaces. This can include mentorship and sponsorship programs, diversity and inclusion training, and policies and practices that promote gender equity and work-life balance. Self-perception within the family and socio-cultural barriers. Sometimes family and sociocultural factors are looked upon and some people are oblivious to the fact that it is there.

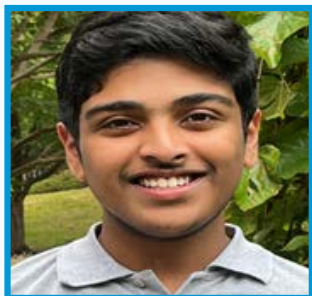
Personally, as I grew up, I could kind of relate to the sociocultural barriers my household held. Even if it was not intentional you could tell that my parents grew up with these cultural ideologies that women were the “cleaners” of the house and that women were incapable of jobs within STEM. However, even though my mom works as a software developer she is the only one in her colleague group that is a woman. She often feels she does not have a word, or she gets interrupted, and her ideas are deemed irrelevant, although she has done so much to help with projects. Even though my mom is in STEM, she can see the developed internalized misogyny that is built within her because of the self-doubt she has. Her self-perception has degraded through cultural talk, not only within the family but within communities.

It is important to recognize that these beliefs and biases are deeply ingrained in our society and can be difficult to overcome, even for individuals who have succeeded in breaking through traditional gender roles. Moreover, my family faced minimal cultural shock when it came to addressing gender roles in STEM. Other cultures have gone through so much more, where families expect aspiring females to drop out of school and help them around the house and do chores because that is “expected” of them because of society. This pressure can come from family expectations, social norms, and even religious beliefs.

Women may feel torn between their desire to pursue their dreams and their obligations to their families and communities. This burden can take a toll on women's mental health and well-being, as they struggle to balance their own aspirations with the expectations of those around them. Women must receive more positive affirmations to help build their confidence within themselves starting from internal factors such as family members. These cultural barriers must be removed, and to do this we must directly promote this and find leaders that are involved in cultural diversity and open communication within these channels.

Arvindh Krishna, Sophomore at TMSA, Member of the Model UN Club | USA

Arvindh Krishna who is a sophomore as well and loves to participate in Model UN. He is a STEM student and involved in many STEM activities such as Robotics and Brain Games. Arvindh also enjoys participating in musical ensembles.



Imagine you are at a job interview. The 20 people I am about to hire have similar resumes and the same number of women and men have applied for the job. You would think that I would employ 10 men and 10 women. Instead, unconscious bias in today's world will lead recruiters to hire just about 4 women and 16 men. Similar credentials, information, and experience should constitute an equal outcome in

an ideal situation, but unfortunately, this is not the case. Specifically in STEM, whether that be hiring, grants, salaries, and even holidays, discrimination is extremely visible. Addressing unconscious bias in STEM is critical to promoting gender diversity and inclusion in STEM fields. Unconscious bias is an implicit form of bias that can significantly impact decision-making, behaviors, and interactions with others. In STEM fields, this bias can manifest in various ways, including hiring decisions, promotion, and allocation of resources.

Research shows that this bias can impact hiring decisions, making female candidates less likely to be hired for STEM positions than their male counterparts. A National Bureau of Economic Research study found that female applicants were less likely to be hired for STEM jobs than male applicants with the same qualifications. The study found that gender bias in hiring was prevalent in both male and female hiring managers, indicating that unconscious bias is a widespread issue that needs perspicuity. Moreover, unconscious bias can also impact the allocation of resources in STEM fields. A study by the National Science Foundation found that female scientists and engineers are less likely to receive research funding than their male counterparts.

The study found that unconscious bias is one of the factors contributing to this dissimilarity, with male scientists perceived as more capable and deserving of monetary allocations than female scientists with the same credentials. One example of unconscious bias in the workplace against women in STEM is the "like me" bias, where people tend to favor those who are like themselves. This bias can manifest in the hiring process, where male hiring managers may be more likely to select male candidates over equally qualified female candidates.

This bias was confirmed by a study conducted by the National Bureau of Economic Research found that male candidates were more likely to be selected for STEM jobs than female candidates with the same qualifications. Another example of unconscious bias in the workplace against women in STEM is the "maternal wall" bias, where women with children are perceived as less committed to their careers than their male counterparts. This bias can lead to women being passed over for promotion or being given less challenging work assignments. A study by the Pew Research Center found that 41% of working mothers said they have experienced discrimination in the workplace, with many citing biases related to being a mother.

Moreover, research has shown that unconscious bias can impact the allocation of resources in STEM fields. For example, a study by the National Science Foundation found that female scientists and engineers are less likely to receive research funding than their male counterparts. This bias is partly due to the perception that male scientists are more competent and deserving of funding than female scientists with the same credentials. This also ties into the idea of sexism as men have been allocated time and money much more easily than women have in the past and present. Fortunately, addressing unconscious bias in STEM is possible. Companies can provide training and educational programs to raise awareness of these biases and their effects. This can include workshops, seminars, and online courses that teach people to recognize unconscious biases and their negative impact on workplace culture and productivity. Also, companies can take a more holistic approach and work with employees in a relaxed manner to foster a sense of comfort so this issue can be addressed more comfortably.

Moreover, companies can implement strategies to reduce the effects of unconscious bias in the workplace, such as structured interview processes, objective performance metrics, and diverse hiring panels. For example, a study by Harvard Business Review found that using structured interviews that ask the same questions to all candidates "reduces the effects of unconscious bias in hiring decisions". One example of unconscious bias affecting a real-life woman is the story of Katherine Johnson, an African American mathematician who worked for NASA in the 1960s. Despite her exceptional skills and talent, Katherine faced unconscious bias in the workplace due to her race and gender.

At the time, many people believed that women and African Americans were not as capable as white men in technical and scientific fields. Katherine had to overcome significant barriers to pursuing her passion for mathematics, including being denied access to certain academic resources and being excluded from important discussions and meetings. Despite these challenges, Katherine persisted and worked hard to prove herself. She was eventually assigned to NASA's Flight Research Division, where she made significant contributions to the space program. She played a critical role in calculating the trajectories for the first human spaceflight and the Apollo 11 mission to the moon.

Katherine's perseverance and dedication to her work helped her overcome unconscious bias and make a significant impact on the field of mathematics and space exploration. Her story has inspired many young women and minorities to pursue careers in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) and to challenge societal norms and expectations. Overall, Katherine's story is an excellent example of how unconscious bias can have a significant impact on women in the workplace, but with determination, hard work, and a strong support system, it is possible to overcome these barriers and achieve success.

Another example of unconscious bias affecting a real-life woman is the story of Rosalind Franklin, a British chemist and X-ray crystallographer who made critical contributions to the discovery of the structure of DNA. Despite her groundbreaking work, Rosalind faced significant discrimination and unconscious bias from her male colleagues. In the 1950s, Rosalind was working at King's College London, where she was using X-ray crystallography to study the structure of DNA. Her work was instrumental in developing key insights about the double-helix structure of DNA, which later led to the discovery of its structure by James Watson and Francis Crick.

However, her contributions were not recognized until much later, as her male colleagues failed to credit her work and often dismissed her ideas. Rosalind faced significant gender-based discrimination and bias in the male-dominated field of science. She was often excluded from important meetings and conversations, and her work was routinely dismissed or undervalued. Despite these challenges, Rosalind persisted in her work and continued to make important contributions to the field of DNA research. Tragically, Rosalind died of cancer at a young age, before she could see the full impact of her work. However, her contributions to the field of DNA research have since been recognized, and she is now widely regarded as one of the most important scientists of the 20th century. Rosalind's story is an excellent example of how unconscious bias can have a significant impact on women in the workplace, but also how women can persevere in the face of adversity and make important contributions to their fields. It is a reminder that we must continue to work to address and eliminate unconscious bias in all aspects of society.

The last example I would like to highlight is how unconscious bias affected my own mother when she was a student in the STEM field. After college, she became a computer science lecturer at a university. When getting her job, she quickly noticed how so many of her colleagues were men. Even when interviewing for her job, most of the people interviewing her were men. She was one of the only women in the computer science department and so she had to fight to get a faculty spot. During her time at the university, she worked with a lot of the very few female students there and inspired young girls to go into computer science. She always wanted to promote gender diversity in her working environment and she strived to make the department a more welcoming place for all people.

She ended up teaching there for a long time and many other women came to teach after her years at the college. Sexism and bias are always present in any scenario, and even though my mom bravely and strongly overcame these odds, many others, unfortunately, are not able to. Overall, addressing unconscious bias in the workplace is essential to promoting gender diversity and inclusion in STEM. One effective strategy is the use of structured interview processes that ask the same questions to all candidates. This strategy reduces the impact of unconscious bias in hiring decisions, leading to a more diverse and inclusive workforce.

In conclusion, addressing unconscious bias in STEM is essential to promoting gender diversity and inclusion in these fields. With the right strategies, including training and awareness programs and implementing objective performance metrics, we can create a more inclusive and equitable STEM workforce that benefits everyone. By acknowledging the impact of unconscious bias and working to reduce its effects, we can ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed in STEM fields.

Yashitha Vanamala, Junior at TMSA, Student Athlete | USA

Yashitha Vanamala who is a junior at TMSA and has a deep interest in international affairs. She is also a student-athlete, playing for the women's varsity basketball team and has participated in the Indian classical dance Bharatanatyam for over a decade.



If I gave you 3 seconds to name a role model for basketball players, who would it be? It is relatively easy to answer that, correct? Let's say I asked for a role model for women and girls in STEM. I guarantee you will struggle with this question much more than the previous one. How are we supposed to find role models as women in STEM when the current number of female leaders in this field is very limited? According to the U.S Equal Employment Opportunity Commission,

there is a large disparity between men and women when it comes to holding leadership positions in STEM, with men holding 74.1% of leadership positions and women holding only 25.6%, despite women making up 48% of the STEM workforce. There is an even larger disparity for women of color, with only 4% of leadership positions in STEM being held by women of color. So why does this disparity exist? Because of an existing bias toward mothers, women leave the workplace much sooner than men, and because many women do not receive credit for their accomplishments, they do not receive promotions in their workplace because of a lack of credentials, all leading to a lack of women STEM leadership jobs. An existing bias towards new mothers who work in STEM is a big reason why women leave their workplaces so early, which leads them to not receive leadership positions. A study that was conducted by the University of California, San Diego states found that 43% of women in STEM leave their job within 4-7 years of having their first child.

This is a big difference compared to the twenty-three percent of new fathers who will leave. Another study was done by Ariane Panzer of the University of California, San Francisco found that mothers with a Ph.D. are thirty-five percent less likely to earn a tenure track position and twenty-seven percent less likely to even become tenured compared to fathers who hold a Ph.D. Why is there a large difference between the two genders? It turns out that it has a lot to do with the assumptions made by employers. In a study conducted by the Department for Business, Innovation, and Skills (BIS) and the Equality and Human Rights Commission, thirty-three percent of private sector employers assume women are less interested in progressing their careers during and after their first pregnancy. Because employers just assume that their employees are less interested in climbing the leadership ladder in their respective fields, they will not feel the need to promote them, likely giving those promotions to their male counterparts instead who do not face the same mindset from their employers.

How are women expected to be leaders in STEM if this is happening to them? To anyone, not being promoted after working in their field for years, after working hard to get an education in STEM in the first place, must feel terrible. It is understandable why so many new mothers leave their STEM positions because, without getting promoted, they are stuck in a company that is most likely going to keep them at the same level for the rest of their tenure. This is what's called the Maternal Wall Bias and it is a term that is used to describe the negative assumptions that society makes toward working mothers. While it is hard to change the assumptions people make based on years of bias towards women, there are some small steps that businesses can take to better the lives of employees and make the task of being mothers and having full-time STEM jobs easier and one of them is implementing better-paid leave policies.

A study conducted by Mary Ann Mason of the University of California at Berkeley and Joan Williams of the Center for Worklife Law had them survey sixty-three institutions about their leave policies. The responses showed that fifty to sixty percent of the institutions surveyed do not provide paid maternity leave for postdoctoral fellows. Some of these institutions do not even provide job security for new parents, meaning an employee can come back from leave and have been demoted or not have a job at all.

Paid maternity leave and job security are extremely crucial for new mothers to have because, if they have access to it, they don't have to worry about going to work while their newborn is still too young to be in any childcare services. This is a big problem, especially for new mothers who will have the biggest problems concerning unpaid maternity leave. So how do we fix this? One step business can take to solve this problem is by offering paid maternity and other types of leave. This includes vacations and sick days that new mothers can use to provide additional days to their maternity leave.

There should also be guaranteed job security for new parents. Parents should not have to worry about losing their job while they are taking care of their newborn, and it is unfair to them to have to be in the unknown about what their job position will be like if they took leave to care for their child. This will not only solve the problem of mothers leaving their jobs after having their first child, but it will also make sure that businesses are providing the correct amount of care they should be giving to their employees who go through such a huge life-changing event. We can implement these changes through our local lawmakers, petitioning for bills to be drafted requiring certain leave policies in businesses. Also, by raising awareness about this problem, we can catch the attention of local politicians who will eventually run for office, and they could implement this into their campaigns. This is how new mothers will be able to go further in their careers and will overall help the number of women in STEM who want to be leaders.

Another reason why there is such a large disparity between men and women when it comes to holding leadership positions in STEM fields is something called the “Matilda Effect”. The term Matilda Effect refers to the consistent suppression of contributions female scientists have made, and suppression of achievements given to female scientists throughout history and in today’s world. A good example of this can be seen in the hematology and oncology field. The number of women in this field has been increasing year by year with them representing 35.6% of H&O specialists in 2019 according to the National Library of Medicine (NLM). However, a study conducted by the NLM found that only 20.4% of the women that make up the H&O field have received awards that relate to their study. This shows that women are heavily underrepresented among award winners in this field of medicine.

A good historical example of the Matilda Effect is Ester Lederberg who, according to National Geographic, was a pioneer in antibiotic resistance research. She, along with her husband Joshua, collaborated on many projects concerning antibiotic research. However, Lederberg never got any of the credit for the work she did on the research with Joshua and two others earning a Nobel Peace Prize in 1958 for their work. Lederberg was never mentioned for her part in the research. She also struggled to earn a position as a research associate professor at Stanford despite having the credentials to do so. This instance of gender bias towards Lederberg has led to her not receiving the credit she deserves and not receiving the job position she had the credentials to do. This was completely unfair to Lederberg, but unfortunately, this happens to many women who are in STEM. According to the Association of Women in Science, seventy-three percent of women and sixty-eight percent of women of color have had their ideas and accomplishments credited to someone else. How are women supposed to get promoted to higher levels if their accomplishments and ideas are stolen by men? The main way people get promotions is through helping their respective companies by coming up with new ideas and earning accomplishments.

This is how people get leadership positions, but women can't get that if their accomplishments are not given to them. There is no easy solution to this. This is something that has gone undetected throughout history, and it is very saddening knowing that there are many women out there who have never gotten credit for the amazing research that they have done to better humanity. However, not all hope is lost. The world has already recognized March as Women's history month, a month dedicated to honoring women for the enormous number of things they have done for us. To make sure that the voices of those historically important women who have done so much for the STEM world are heard, we can start implementing days that are aimed to acknowledge these women. Using social media and even going into workplaces and holding seminars to celebrate these women can empower the current women in STEM. Social media especially is a powerful thing in today's world and can be influential in this situation. By having these special days that will acknowledge the "lost" women in STEM, we can empower women in STEM to stand up for themselves when they are not getting the credit that they deserve, similar to the situations women in history have been through all their life.

Women in STEM have already been through so much to get to the positions that they are in, so it is completely unfair for them to continue to put them through a hard time after they enter the workforce by not letting them climb the leadership ladder. By contacting local lawmakers so they can propose bills mandating paid leave policies in business and using social media to empower women to stand up for themselves when they are being treated unfairly, we can help overcome the problem of a lack of female leaders in STEM.

Liam Westberg, Senior at TMSA, Vice President of the Model UN Club | USA

Liam Westberg who is a Senior at TMSA, this being his 7th year. He is currently the Vice-President of the Model UN club and plans to major in international politics.



I would like to introduce you to some of the women leaders in STEM, who have branched further into new territory for women: Rana el Khaliouby, pioneering work at MIT in AI specifically teaching computers to read facial expressions and gestures Alba Colon, lead Engineer, and NASCAR program manager for General Motors Susan Solomon, lead atmospheric chemist, and scientist at

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to investigate the ozone hole over Antarctica Aprille Ericsson-Jackson, the first African American woman to earn a Ph.D. in Mechanical Engineering from Howard University and the first African American woman Ph.D. from NASA Goddard Space Flight Center. According to UN Women, in order to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, empowering women in the economy, and closing gender gaps on a global scale are key objectives in achieving 6 particular Sustainable Development Goals which are: Goal 5: gender equality, Goal 8:

promoting full and productive employment and decent work for all, Goal 1: ending poverty, Goal 2: ensuring food security, Goal 3: ensuring health, and Goal 10: reducing inequalities. The ability to reach these goals is reliant upon women working. Because when women work, the economy grows, because it allows for more economic diversification, allows for more individuals to take on more sophisticated jobs reduces income inequality and boosts the global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 6 trillion USD. So, why is STEM important in this endeavor? “In total, STEM supports two-thirds of U.S. jobs, 69 percent of U.S. GDP, and \$2.3 trillion in annual federal tax revenue.” according to the World Economic Forum, STEM jobs made up a fifth of all jobs globally in 2020 and that number has risen dramatically since then. Being such an important facet of the economy, women need to be equally represented in it, yet they are not. According to the World Economic Forum, women make up only 18.5% (less than a fifth) of researchers in South and West Asia and are further underrepresented globally. That is why STEM education plays such a critical role in accelerating women's contribution to economic growth. It provides women with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in STEM-related industries, which make up a large portion of the world's innovations, jobs, and market share.

There is not only a demand for equality in STEM careers but there is also a global demand for STEM careers in general. STEM careers, in fact, are among the fastest-growing and highest-paying fields in today's job market. The demand for STEM jobs is consistently high and is projected to continue growing in the coming years. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, employment in STEM occupations is expected to grow by 8% from 2019 to 2029, and according to the world economic forum STEM jobs are set to rise to 28% of all jobs in the world by 2030. These statistics illustrate that STEM jobs grow much faster than the average growth rate for all occupations. Additionally, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that many STEM jobs have higher than average salaries, with a median annual wage of \$86,980 for STEM occupations, compared to \$38,160 for all occupations. That is a difference of almost \$50,000. So not only is there an outcry for equal representation in such an important part of the world's economy and innovation industry, but there is consistent demand for such occupations; a need that could be, and should be filled by skilled, and qualified women.

Here are some examples of how STEM education can pave the way for equality by contributing to an increase in women in STEM.

1. Providing access to education: One of the biggest barriers to women's participation in STEM fields is access to education. STEM education can help provide women with the necessary skills and knowledge to succeed in these fields. By pursuing a STEM education and eventually joining the STEM workforce, women bring unique perspectives and approaches to problem-solving, which can lead to new and innovative ideas in STEM fields. This, in turn, can lead to the development of new products, services, and industries that contribute to economic growth.

One of the benefits of a STEAM-oriented school, such as mine (STEAM is STEM + Art), is that no matter what, you are surrounded by STEAM-related classes, teachers, and skill development. Because of this, students adopt new ways of learning and critical thinking. On a personal example, my calculus class encouraged a creative solution-based way of thinking for me. It is very different from algebra and the types of questions don't always direct you to a straightforward solution but in calculus, it is up to your creativity to figure out a way to tackle and solve the problem.

2. Another way of increasing the number of women in STEM, is by actively encouraging women to pursue STEM careers. STEM education can also help to encourage more women to pursue careers in STEM fields. By exposing girls to STEM subjects at an early age and encouraging them to pursue STEM-related activities and hobbies, we can help to break down gender stereotypes and encourage more women to enter STEM careers.

By educating women in STEM and encouraging women to pursue STEM careers, we are filling talent gaps and satiating the need for STEM careers globally. There is a growing demand for workers with STEM skills, and women represent an untapped pool of talent. Encouraging more women to pursue STEM education and careers can help to fill this talent gap and ensure that businesses have the skilled workers they need to succeed, and thus contribute to a grander standard of living through a wealth of new innovative technologies developed by geniuses to enter the workforce.

3. Increasing diversity in STEM fields: By increasing the number of women in STEM fields, we can help to create a more diverse and inclusive workforce that is better equipped to address the challenges of the 21st century. This can lead to new perspectives, new ideas, and more innovation, which can ultimately lead to increased economic growth. Research has shown that diverse teams tend to be more productive and innovative. A study published in the Harvard Business Review found that companies with more diverse management teams generate higher levels of innovation and creativity. The study analyzed the gender and cultural diversity of top management teams in more than 1,700 companies across eight countries.

I see this, personally, every day in my classrooms. The value added from a female perspective in STEM generates discord, creativity, and collaboration, much more than that if it were a homogenous group. This would mean that by increasing the number of women in STEM fields, businesses can build more diverse teams that are better equipped to solve complex problems and drive innovation that would benefit the world in a myriad of ways.

4. Supporting gender equality: STEM careers bring about social benefits like encouraging financial independence, equalized pay, and challenging gender stereotypes. Women in STEM careers tend to earn higher salaries, which can lead to greater financial stability and independence. This, in turn, can lead to increased spending, investment, and economic growth.

Also, encouraging more women to pursue STEM education and careers can help to address gender disparities in the workplace and promote greater social equity. This, in turn, can lead to a more productive and prosperous economy for all.

5. Supporting women in STEM careers: STEM education can also help to support women who are already working in STEM fields. By providing training and development opportunities, mentoring, networking programs, and other forms of support, we can help to ensure that women are able to succeed and thrive in STEM careers. Finally, I would like to state that STEM education can play a critical role in accelerating women's contribution to economic growth. By increasing access to education, encouraging women to pursue STEM careers, increasing diversity in STEM fields, and supporting women in STEM careers, we can help to create a more inclusive and innovative workforce that is better equipped to address the newly established challenges of the 21st century.

Ishaan Kamra, Sophomore at TMSA, Treasurer of the Model UN Club | USA

Ishaan Kamra who is a sophomore. He serves as the treasurer of our Model UN club, is a member of the school's varsity soccer team, and has a strong passion for humanitarianism and actively participates in various STEM and Business clubs at school.

I would like to elaborate on the role of STEM education in achieving gender equality, specifically in Asia's global south countries. While we have made significant progress toward gender equity in STEM fields, we still have a long way to go, particularly in countries where cultural traditions and gender norms limit opportunities for girls and women. As a child of first-generation Indian immigrants and a Triangle Math and Science Academy student, I have witnessed firsthand the impact of gender inequality in STEM education in many parts of the world. These experiences have driven me to explore how STEM education can help break down barriers and promote gender equity in the region.

In many parts of Asia, gender norms continue to shape social and cultural expectations, particularly regarding education and career choices. Girls are often discouraged from pursuing STEM fields, conventionally seen as masculine areas of study. This means that women are significantly underrepresented in STEM careers in these countries, leading to a significant gender gap in the industry. Additionally, girls and women often lack the resources and support they need to pursue STEM education, such as access to quality education and mentorship.

Promoting STEM education for girls and women is crucial not only for achieving gender equity but also for driving innovation, economic growth, and social progress in the region. We can unlock hidden talent and expertise by empowering girls and women to pursue STEM careers. We must work together to break down the barriers that continue to limit opportunities for girls and women in STEM education and the workforce.

Introduction to Gender Inequality in Asia:

Despite the significant progress toward gender equality in education, healthcare, and politics, gender inequality remains pervasive in Asia. Women in these countries face significant cultural and societal barriers that limit their access to education, economic opportunities, and leadership positions. While many of these challenges are rooted in long-standing cultural and religious traditions, there are also structural barriers to women's advancement, such as discriminatory laws and policies. The gender gap in STEM fields is particularly significant in Asia's global south countries. According to UNESCO, only 35% of STEM students in low-income countries are women, compared to 55% in high-income countries. The disparity in STEM fields is even more significant in countries such as Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan. Boys are more likely than girls to pursue STEM subjects in school, and men significantly outnumber women in STEM jobs. This gender gap limits women's access to economic opportunities, financial independence, and decision-making power.

Personal Connection:

When my parents were growing up in India, gender norms at the time were deeply entrenched, with women's roles in society primarily focused on marriage and motherhood. For a considerable percentage of the population, pursuing higher education was considered unconventional and often discouraged or even forbidden. Women were expected to prioritize marriage and family over education and professional aspirations and were repeatedly told they could not succeed in male-dominated fields. By contrast, the women in my family, going back three generations, pursued higher education and were encouraged to follow their passions and interests. But even with their talents, they would face bias simply because of their gender. This is true with almost every woman who does pursue higher education or a career. They encounter discrimination in the workplace, on top of sociocultural expectations that involve balancing their professional and personal life, such as managing the household and taking care of the kids. Though my mother had to fight to be respected in her field and excelled through her prowess, she had opportunities that many women in the global south lack.

Approaches:

Addressing gender inequality in STEM education in Asia's global south countries requires a multi-faceted approach. We must work to change cultural and societal norms that limit women's access to education and professional opportunities. This includes increasing access to education for girls, promoting positive role models, and engaging families and communities in conversations about the importance of women's empowerment. Additionally, we must address the systemic hurdles that limit women's advancement, including discriminatory laws and policies. Governments, civil society organizations, and private sectors must work together to create an enabling environment for women to pursue STEM careers. We can also address the gender gap in education by creating mentorship and networking opportunities for girls and women in STEM fields.

These programs can give girls and women the support and guidance they need to succeed in their respective careers, including exposure to role models, career advice, and professional networks. By promoting gender equity in STEM education and the workforce, we can dive into a vast pool of untapped talent and expertise, driving breakthroughs in technology, medicine, and other fields. We must recognize that gender inequality is not just a women's issue but a human right issue that impacts us all. Promoting gender equity in STEM education and the workforce benefits not only women but also their families, communities, and societies as a whole. By breaking down the obstacles that stand in the way of women's access to education and professional opportunities, we can create a more equitable and prosperous world for all.

Education can play a crucial role in empowering girls and women in Asia by providing them with the skills and knowledge necessary to pursue their desired careers. Although promoting STEM education for girls and women in Asia is an intimidating challenge, we can start by providing access to quality education from an early age. This can involve investing in resources and programs for schools in underserved communities and providing scholarships and academic counseling for girls and women interested in STEM. Additionally, it is essential to create a supportive environment that encourages girls and women to pursue their interests and provides them with the resources they need to succeed. This can involve creating women-enabling STEM clubs, hosting women-led workshops and conferences, and providing access to female role models who inspire and motivate girls and women to pursue their passions. Promoting STEM education for girls and women in Asia can also drive economic growth and social progress in the region. STEM careers are in high demand and can give women opportunities to secure high-paying jobs and make meaningful contributions to their communities. Additionally, promoting gender equity can help to address broader issues of social and economic inequality in Asia. The empowerment of girls and women can close the gender pay gap, increase economic mobility, and promote social and political action. Achieving this goal requires a collective effort from governments, schools, communities, and individuals. Governments must invest in STEM education and work to eliminate policies and cultural practices that perpetuate gender inequality. Schools must create supportive environments that encourage all students, regardless of their background and identity. Communities must work on challenging cultural norms, and individuals must advocate for policies and programs that promote gender equity. We can only achieve true gender equity in STEM education and build a more just and equitable world if we work together.

Socioeconomic & Cultural Challenges:

In creating a more just world, we must confront the reality that patriarchal systems limit progress, especially in the global south. These cultural and socioeconomic challenges reflect broader systemic issues contributing to gender inequality in these countries. Only by dismantling these systems can we hope to build a world where everyone's voice is heard and valued.

One example of this is the prevalence of child marriage in many global south countries. According to UNICEF, one in three girls in developing countries are married before the age of 18, and one in nine are married before the age of 15. Child marriage is often seen as a way to protect girls from the risks of premarital sex or secure their economic future, but in reality, it perpetuates gender inequality and limits girls' opportunities for education and financial independence. Girls who are married young are often forced to succumb to traditional gender roles - to drop out of school and prioritize their "roles" as wives and mothers over pursuing their own aspirations and careers.

Furthermore, gender-based violence is a widespread issue in many Global South countries. Violence against women takes many forms, including sexual assault and domestic violence. It can have lifelong consequences for survivors. Women who experience gender-based violence are more likely to suffer from poor physical and mental health outcomes and face stigma and discrimination from their communities. These cultural injustices contribute to a cycle of gender inequality that affects every aspect of girls' and women's lives. Promoting STEM education in these contexts is crucial not only for achieving gender equity but also for empowering girls and women to challenge traditional gender norms and contribute to the social, economic, and political progress of their communities and countries.

As we have seen throughout this presentation, gender inequality in STEM education is prevalent in Asia, particularly in global south countries where cultural norms and societal expectations often limit opportunities for girls and women to pursue STEM careers. The consequences of this gender gap are not only personal but also societal and economic, as these countries lose out on potential contributions. So, what can we do to promote education for girls and women in Asia and break the cycle of gender discrimination in these countries? One solution is to increase educational resources: this can involve measures such as scholarship programs and mentor-based guidance, as well as developing the current STEM curriculum to be more inclusive and gender neutral. Additionally, drawing attention to increasing female representation in STEM fields can serve as role models for young girls and break down existing stereotypes about a woman's potential.

We need to work on breaking down the gender-discriminating cultural traditions that generations of families have followed. This can involve advocating for policy changes and raising awareness about the importance of gender equity, as well as working with communities to challenge ingrained gender norms that limit women's aspirations. Addressing gender inequality in STEM education requires a comprehensive approach involving education, policy, and social and cultural change. To achieve this, we must recognize that achieving gender equity in STEM education requires a sustained effort over time. It will take the collective action of governments, educators, industry leaders, and civil society to create a world where every girl and woman has the same opportunities to pursue a successful STEM career. We must work together to ensure that STEM education is accessible to all.

We must empower girls and women to believe in themselves and their abilities and to challenge the systemic barriers that have limited their opportunities for far too long. In conclusion, promoting STEM education for girls and women in Asia is not only essential for achieving gender equity but also for driving innovation, economic growth, and social progress in the region. By breaking down cultural traditions and increasing access to STEM education and careers for girls and women, we can unlock the full potential of our population and create a more equitable and prosperous future for all. It is time for us to take action and work together to create a world where gender does not limit opportunities but empowers all individuals to pursue their dreams and reach their full potential.



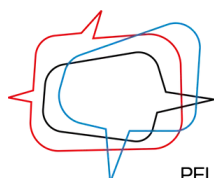


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