



**JOURNALISTS AND
WRITERS FOUNDATION**



**CSW70
2026**



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JWF CSW70 PROCEEDINGS

THE SEVENTIETH SESSION OF THE **UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN**

9 – 20 March 2026
New York

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



Școala Națională de Studii Politice și Administrative
Facultatea de Comunicare și Relații Publice



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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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 	Introduction	4-6
2 	List of CSW70 JWF and Global Partners Panels	7-8
3 	Ensuring Women's Access to Justice and Addressing Structural Barriers	9-26
4 	Transforming Women, Peace, and Security from Resolution to Reality	27-31
5 	Bibliotherapy for Youth: Rewriting the Story of Gender Justice	31-34
6 	The Role of Women Peacemakers and Empowerment Strategies	34-38
7 	Media and Community Leadership for Justice and Gender Equality	38-43
8 	Jobs for Girls: Leveraging AI to Match Young People With Better Careers	43-46
9 	The Role of Education in Gender Equality and Preventing Violence	46-50
10 	Authoritarian Power, Gendered Body, and Politics of Autonomy	51-53
11 	Justice Without Borders: Upholding the Rights of Young Migrant Women	54-57
12 	The Economic and Legal Empowerment of Forcibly Displaced Women	58-63
13 	Status and Impact of Women of Color in Higher Education	63-69
14 	Global Partners	70



INTRODUCTION

JWF CSW70

Journalists and Writers Foundation hosted the JWF High-Level Reception and Ramadan Interfaith Dinner during the CSW70 Session

9 March 2026, Monday | 6:00 – 8:30 PM | Penthouse45 Rooftop | New York



The Journalists and Writers Foundation (JWF) hosted a significant reception event during the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW70) session, highlighting its ongoing commitment to women's empowerment and intercultural dialogue. On the evening of March 9, 2026, at the Penthouse45 Rooftop in New York, JWF organized the JWF High-Level Reception and Ramadan Interfaith Iftar Dinner, bringing together UN ambassadors, diplomats, journalists, writers, academics, human rights defenders, civil society leaders, and youth delegates.

This special gathering celebrated the 70th session of the UN CSW and aimed to foster peaceful, inclusive societies through interfaith dialogue and cultural exchange. The event emphasized the importance of fasting traditions across religions, highlighting values of generosity, hospitality, and charity. Prominent interfaith leaders delivered remarks on fostering lasting friendships and promoting peace to prevent conflicts and wars globally. The program also featured a video message from New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani, who praised civil society efforts in promoting dialogue and social harmony, emphasizing New York's tradition of religious and cultural pluralism.

The evening included Keynote Remarks from religious leaders actively involved in UN interfaith initiatives, such as Rev. James DiLuzio of the New York Catholic Church, Imam Dr. Shamsi Ali, Rev. Doyeon Park of the Won Buddhist community, and Mark E. Fowler of the Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding. They underscored the shared ethical principles of compassion, justice, and human dignity across faiths and stressed the importance of faith leaders addressing rising polarization and fostering constructive community engagement.

The JWF High-Level Reception and Ramadan Interfaith Dinner 2026 was a high-level interfaith and civil society gathering held in conjunction with the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women's 70th session convened representatives from UN member states, civil society organizations, and faith leaders from diverse religious backgrounds to promote gender equality, women's rights, and sustainable development goals. Participants engaged in meaningful dialogues on inter-religious cooperation, women's empowerment, and social justice, while also celebrating Ramadan through shared meals and reflections on fasting's spiritual significance. The event emphasized the importance of building inclusive societies, fostering interfaith understanding, and strengthening global partnerships to advance gender equality and peace, highlighted by inspiring speeches, panel discussions, and youth participation.

The evening also featured discussions about the twelve panels organized by 22 civil society organizations from nine countries as part of the UN Women's Summit activities. These panels addressed themes such as women's leadership, human rights, conflict prevention, education, and social resilience, underscoring the importance of international civil society collaboration in tackling global challenges.

Young students from Pioneer Academy participated by sharing their reflections on building a more peaceful and inclusive world. Their messages emphasized the vital role of dialogue, mutual understanding, and cooperation among cultures, highlighting the responsibility of the next generation to shape a harmonious future.

The JWF and its global partners highlighted the significance of civil society diplomacy, informal, non-governmental dialogue efforts, as vital complements to official diplomatic channels. These initiatives foster exchanges across cultural, religious, and political lines, especially in times of international tension and conflict.

The Journalists and Writers Foundation affirmed its commitment to continue organizing programs that promote dialogue, education, and mutual understanding at global institutions like the United Nations. Participants concluded that even amid global uncertainty, shared human values and respectful dialogue remain essential for fostering peace and building bridges across divides.



CSW70 PANELS OF THE JOURNALISTS AND WRITERS FOUNDATION

9 March 2026, Monday | Church Center for the UN | IN-PERSON

Ensuring Women's Access to Justice and Addressing Structural Barriers

Prof. Sophia Murashkovsky, Chair, United Nations Committee, NYC Bar Association (USA)

Hon. Judge Melissa Benavides Viquez, Head of the Access to Justice Unit of the Judiciary, Supreme Court of San Jose, Costa Rica (Costa Rica)

Prof. Margaret Kobia, Former Cabinet Minister for the Ministry of Public Service, Youth, Gender, Social Protection and Special Programs; Chancellor, St Paul's University (Kenya)

Andrea Barron, Advocacy and Outreach Program Manager, TASSC International (USA)

Yveline Dalmacy, Esq., Founder, International Caribbean Women Alliance for Empowerment (USA)

16 March 2026, Monday | Church Center for the UN | IN-PERSON

Transforming the WPS Agenda from Resolution to Reality

Celisa Lehw, US Director, Trustee, SecurityWomen; Head of Police for Chapel Hill, North Carolina (USA)

Pablo Castillo Diaz, WPS Policy Specialist, UN Women (USA)

Maureen McGough, JD, Co-Founder, 30x30 Initiative to Advance Women in Policing; Senior Advisor to the Excellence in Policing and Public Safety Program, University of South Carolina School of Law (USA)

Merrite Johnson, Program and Research Manager, NGO Working Group on WPS (USA)

Meg McGurk, Community Safety Planner, Town of Chapel Hill (USA)



CSW70 PARALLEL EVENTS ORGANIZED BY JWF AND GLOBAL PARTNERS

9 March 2026, Monday | Church Center for the UN | IN-PERSON

Bibliotherapy for Youth: Rewriting the Story of Gender Justice

Organizer: Set Them Free (USA) in partnership with Core Belief Psychology (UK)

10 March 2026, Tuesday | VIRTUAL

The Role of Women Peacemakers and Empowerment Strategies

Organizer: Gefyris (Greece) in partnership with Dunaj Instytut (Poland)

10 March 2026, Tuesday | Salvation Army Lower Level | IN-PERSON

Media and Community Leadership for Justice and Gender Equality

Organizer: ADVU (Romania) in partnership with JWF

12 March 2026, Wednesday | NYU Kimmel Center | IN-PERSON

Jobs for Girls: Leveraging AI to Match Young People with Better Careers

Organizer: BacharLorai (Canada) in partnership with New York University (USA)

16 March 2026, Monday | VIRTUAL

The Role of Education in Gender Equality and Preventing Violence

Organizer: ADVU (Romania) in partnership with JWF

16 March 2026, Monday | Church Center for the UN | IN-PERSON

Authoritarian Power, Gendered Body, and Politics of Autonomy

Organizer: Advocates of Silenced Turkey (USA) in partnership with Set Them Free (USA)

17 March 2026, Tuesday | VIRTUAL

Justice Without Borders: Upholding the Rights of Young Migrant Women

Organizer: ADVU (Romania) in partnership with JWF

19 March 2026, Thursday | VIRTUAL

The Economic and Legal Empowerment of Forcibly Displaced Women

Organizer: ADVU (Romania) in partnership with JWF

19 March 2026, Thursday | VIRTUAL

Status and Impact of Women of Color in Higher Education

Organizer: North American University – US Council of Organizations (USA) in partnership with JWF

20 March 2026, Friday | VIRTUAL

Women in Leadership: International Women Shaping Cultural, Educational, and Economic Growth

Organizer: International Women's Association (Romania) – ADVU (Romania) in partnership with JWF

COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN 70th SESSION

9 – 20 March 2026 | New York

ENSURING WOMEN'S ACCESS TO JUSTICE AND ADDRESSING STRUCTURAL BARRIERS

BY JOURNALISTS AND WRITERS FOUNDATION (USA)

9 March 2026 | 10:30 AM – 12:00 PM | Church Center for the UN

[Click to Watch the YouTube Recording](#)



JOURNALISTS AND
WRITERS FOUNDATION



United Nations Commission on the Status
of Women 70th Session | Side Event



#CSW70

Ensuring Women's Access to Justice and Addressing Structural Barriers

9 March 2026, Monday | 10:30 AM EST | In-Person
Church Center for the United Nations
777 United Nations Plaza, 2nd Floor, New York, NY 10017



Prof. Sophia Murashkovsky
Chair, United Nations
Committee
NYC Bar Association
(USA)



**Hon. Judge Melissa
Benavides Víquez**
Head of the Access to Justice
Unit of the Judiciary
Supreme Court of San Jose
(Costa Rica)



Prof. Margaret Kobia
Chancellor, St Paul's
University
(Kenya)



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Program Manager
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Yveline Dalmacy, Esq.
Founder, International
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Prof. Sophia Murashkovsky, Chair, United Nations Committee, NYC Bar Association | USA Moderator

Prof. Sophia Murashkovsky Romma, Ph.D., Esq. is an international human rights attorney, playwright, screenwriter, theatre and film director, and university professor. She serves as Chair of the United Nations Committee of the New York City Bar Association and is a member of the New York City Bar's Council for International Affairs. Her work spans international human rights law, racial justice, women's rights, refugee and displacement issues, minority rights, and justice in conflict settings. She is also the author of sixteen stage plays and the director of award-winning films and theatrical productions focused on human rights, social justice, and women's voices.



Excellencies, colleagues, sisters, allies—let us not pretend we came here to trade well-behaved sentences. We didn't travel to this 70th session of the Commission on the Status of Women to admire the architecture of our language while the foundations of our world crack. We are here because the ground is shifting. We are here because the room tilts when women stand. We are here because the house is on fire. For the first time in a generation, the map is darkening. Autocracy is multiplying. Democratic space is thinning out



like old, brittle paper. The rule of law does not usually disappear with a ceremony; it recedes in a hushed murmur, a shrug, a backlog, or a door left unopened just a few minutes too long. It is first withdrawn from the woman in the courtroom, who is told her wound is “not yet evidence.” It is taken from the journalist at the border whose lens is confiscated before her story can even be born. It’s withdrawn from the defender whose name is fed into a machine and returned as jeopardy. We are living inside an autocracy pandemic, and its most reliable symptom is the systematic erasure of women’s access to justice—on the street, on the screen, and within the very institutions built to protect us.

We have learned not to confuse ink with outcomes. We have read the retrospectives that list reforms like distant constellations, and we honor the struggle behind those lines. But we carry a stubborn arithmetic that refuses to be charmed by prose. A woman can live in a capital with an exceptional statute on the books and still have no way to reach a courthouse without pawning her week’s food. A beautifully phrased protection—without an independent judge, a trained clerk, or a real budget—is just a ceremonial veil. A law without an independent judiciary is a suggestion. A right without a remedy is a rumor. A protection without resources is a theater.

There is a new choreography of silencing, and it targets the public woman. It doesn’t start with a cell; it starts with a profile page. It weaponizes defamation and “insult” laws to bury women journalists in procedures they can’t afford. It floods a judge’s name with deepfakes so that truth looks counterfeit and lies look plausible.

It hounds a human rights defender from platform to platform until she is cornered in her own life. This is not debate—it is deterrence. It is not controversy—it is coercion. An autocracy cannot survive an independent woman with a gavel, so she is smeared. It cannot survive a woman who will not succumb to a lie, so she is sued. It cannot survive a woman who speaks to the world, so the world is turned against her with algorithms and bile.

Long before the smear, there is a quieter battlefield: the daily architecture that excludes without ever saying its name. Justice, for too many women, is a luxury good. Justice is the bus fare she doesn’t have to reach the city. It is the childcare missing from the eight-hour wait to file one fragile piece of paper. It is the language that becomes a weapon when the judge speaks, and she cannot follow. Justice is a door that looks open but was not designed for anyone who cannot pay, cannot read, or cannot risk the retaliation that follows the filing.

I stand here for the United Nations Committee of the New York City Bar Association, but I also stand here as a practitioner who has worked alongside women whose lives are balanced on the thin strand between promise and practice—women displaced by war, women holding their children’s hands in one hand and their case files in the other.

I have watched that thread hold. I have watched it fail. I've learned that our task is not to draft more eloquently; it is to deliver more faithfully.

So, let us state it plainly: this cannot be another year of "awareness." The world's women are already exquisitely aware. They are waiting for a remedy. They are waiting for enforcement. For budgets that arrive on time. For courts that open doors to those who have never felt welcome. For safety that does not evaporate the moment, a case number is assigned. Let this be the hour when promises become deadlines. Let applause be withheld until delivery is visible. Let's start measuring courage in outcomes.

Because the purpose of an opening is to *open*, I now invite us into a conversation—not a parade of positions, but a search for the hinges that turn. I will ask questions that don't permit abstraction. I will return for clarity when answers drift. I invite you to answer not just as experts, but as witnesses to what can change by tomorrow morning. What we build here will leave this room. Our summary will reach every Permanent Mission and every UN agency that claims custody of justice. Let them feel our attention. Let them comprehend that we have ceased asking for permission to be equal. Equality is not a favor to be granted; it is a fact to be honored.

The house is on fire. But we are not powerless; we have water. Let our work be that water. Let it reach the woman at the margin first. Let it not evaporate in the heat of rhetoric. Let it run, visible and cold, through every corridor where justice has been withheld. Let us commence the journey together.

Hon. Judge Melissa Benavides Víquez, Head of the Access to Justice Unit of the Judiciary, Supreme Court of San Jose, Costa Rica | Costa Rica

Eliminating Discriminatory Laws, Policies, and Practices

Hon. Judge Melissa Benavides Víquez is a Costa Rican lawyer with a Master's degree in Law and Economics and is a PhD candidate in Law at the University of Costa Rica. She has extensive training in Family Law, Domestic Violence, Disability Rights, Indigenous Peoples' Rights, Gender, Sexual Diversity, Restorative and Open Justice, and Access to Justice. A former Family Court Judge and former Executive Director of the National Council for Persons with Disabilities, she currently serves as Head of the Access to Justice Unit of the Judiciary. She is also a lecturer at Universidad Latina de Costa Rica and a trainer at the Judicial School, the Public Prosecutor's Office, and the Public Defense Office. As an OAS postgraduate fellow, international speaker, and independent researcher, her work focuses on access to justice for vulnerable populations and the development of inclusive legal systems.



The title of my presentation is: “The Architecture of Democracy: Legal Strategies for the Empowerment of Women.” I could begin right away with the proposals I bring to you today. Yet, before doing so, I feel compelled to pause and reflect on a pressing matter: the profound challenges democracy faces in our time, and how, little by little, it is ceasing to be seen as a viable option by many younger generations. For years, as a lawyer and university professor, I taught that democracy was the bedrock upon which

human rights, dissent, and the rule of law firmly rested. I believed my students understood this truth because they had been born and raised in democratic societies. But today, I see cracks in that foundation. Democracy is no longer perceived as a legitimate option—it is seen instead as a system that fails to deliver equality, justice, and true representation.

I wish to put forward two guiding questions: First, are we witnessing democratic discontent? Or, more dangerously, are we facing discontent with democracy itself? The first speaks to a loss of trust in institutions when political decisions fall short of their promises of equity. The second goes further—it questions democracy itself, blaming it for inequalities, violence, and exclusion.

Let me begin with democratic discontent, a global phenomenon marked by citizens’ growing mistrust of democratic institutions. People feel unrepresented, unheard, and unseen in political decisions that should embody justice, equality, and fairness. Faced with this reality, young people—and society at large—find little incentive to participate in electoral processes, leaving the future of nations in the hands of a few.

One clear manifestation of this discontent is electoral abstention. Allow me to illustrate with the case of Costa Rica:

- In 2022, abstention reached unprecedented levels in recent history, over 40% in the first round, and nearly 44% in the second. The highest abstention was among young people aged 18 to 25.
- By 2026, abstention had dropped to 30%, signaling a recovery in electoral participation. Interestingly, youth abstention decreased slightly, while older voters became the least likely group to cast ballots.

According to a study conducted by the University of Costa Rica and the Supreme Electoral Tribunal, some of the causes of abstention are clear: distrust in political parties, disillusionment with politics, lack of ideological identification, and sheer disinterest or apathy. When a significant group of citizens feels unrepresented, a crisis of trust emerges—one that erodes the Social Pact and undermines faith in democracy.

This opens dangerous doors to populist, anti-system, or extremist movements. But let us ask: What effects does democratic discontent have on women? When apathy toward democracy grows, so too does apathy toward the institutions of the State. Democratic discontent directly impacts women's access to justice. When checks and balances weaken, when the judiciary is discredited—as often happens under authoritarian governments—structural barriers harden gender bias in rulings, lack of female representation in courts, and multiple forms of violence. This undermines the effectiveness of law as a means of resolving conflict and the legitimacy of justice itself.

I revisited Virginia Woolf's transformative work *A Room of One's Own*. Her central idea remains powerful: women must have money and a room of their own to create. Autonomy requires both resources and space. Yet, neither will suffice if the broader environment fails to recognize and nurture that autonomy. Discontent with democracy, on the other hand, manifests as apathy toward elected officials—those who, from positions of power, perpetuate gender violence, misdistribution of wealth, autocratic movements, radicalization of opinions, wars, and restrictions on freedom of expression.

Let me be clear: I stand firmly in favor of democracy. But that does not prevent me from listening with concern to voices that call for greater concentration of power, that dismiss human rights as indulgence, that silence dissent, or that excuse corruption. These discourses are often heard from public office, even in nations that claim to be democratic. Listening carefully matters—because only then can we respond with conviction and demonstrate that democracy is not a luxury, but the indispensable condition for human rights to flourish.

Now, I turn to the task entrusted to me. I begin by affirming that legal advocacy, policy change, and the creation of empowering environments are indeed agents of situational change. Yet they are also shaped by politics, economics, culture, and societal attitudes. We cannot advocate if our voices are silenced. We cannot build empowerment if the environment remains hostile to us. Spanish philosopher Amelia Valcárcel speaks of a “feminist civilization”—one that is universalist, less violent, highly educated, and expressive. She proposes that democracy and feminism must forge new relationships yet to be fully realized. To change laws, we must first change the masculine archetype upon which they were built. As jurist Alda Facio reminds us, laws were designed by men, in their own image. This explains why their effects differ between women and men.

With this in mind, I present six proposals:

1. A democracy without women is no democracy at all. Women must be visible in decisions that affect citizenship. True representation must be intersectional.
- Review discriminatory laws and audit legal frameworks to identify norms that perpetuate gender bias. Costa Rica's Judicial Branch already has a Gender Technical Secretariat and an Access to Justice Unit to identify obstacles with an intersectional lens.

- Gender quotas in the judiciary ensure women's representation not only as professionals but as decision-makers. For example, parity in judicial appointments across offices.
- Gender-focused indicators provide a realistic panorama for informed decision-making. Costa Rica's Gender Violence Observatory and Statistics Department democratize data to guide institutional and societal decisions.
- Education on violence against women equips judicial actors with skills to apply justice through a gender lens. Costa Rica mandates a gender perspective in all training and tracks participation by men and women annually.

2. Gender perspective must be recognized as a general principle of law. This allows us to measure and understand the differentiated effects of norms. It requires rethinking legal education, jurisprudence, and sources of law. Costa Rica already trains judges to apply protective frameworks for women when necessary.

3. Constitutions must integrate a gender perspective. Just as democracy organizes society, so too must gender equality. Budgets, education, health, justice, labor, and other constitutional mandates must reflect the social composition they protect.

4. Digital justice with a gender perspective. Build secure, accessible systems that bridge the digital divide and connect generations. Online reporting must be simple and provide strong protection against digital violence. Examples include itinerant justice for rural women or those with disabilities, and AI tools designed with a gender perspective.

5. Strengthening international coalitions. Global networks that defend women's rights and access to justice are vital. Yet they face threats: attacks on defenders, defunding, digital violence, and reprisals. These organizations are part of the democratic fabric, preventing impunity and safeguarding fundamental rights. Costa Rica is developing a gender-sensitive protection protocol for human rights defenders.

6. Creating empowering environments. We must rebuild youth confidence in democracy. Intergenerational coalitions, open listening, and inclusive participation are key. A gender perspective in academic curricula ensures that new generations grow close to these issues. Technology can connect, validate, and adapt democratic formulas to future needs.

Democracy is not a gift we inherit—it is a flame we must keep alive. And that flame burns brightest when women's voices rise to sustain it. Let us carry forward that light, so that equality, justice, and freedom may never fade. And so, I close with the words of writer Almudena Grandes: “Democracy is also measured by the voices of the women who sustain it.”

Prof. Margaret Kobia, Chancellor, St Paul's University, Former Cabinet Minister for the Ministry of Public Service, Youth, Gender, Social Protection and Special Programs | Kenya

Tackling societal, economic, and institutional barriers that hinder women's access to justice and the role of education in dismantling structural obstacles

Prof. Margaret Kobia is a distinguished Kenyan academic, public servant, and champion of women's empowerment and gender equality. She is Professor of Management and Leadership and Chancellor of St. Paul's University, Kenya. She previously served as Cabinet Minister for Public Service, Youth, Gender, Social Protection and Special Programs, Chairperson of the Public Service Commission, and founding Director General of the Kenya School of Government. With a Ph.D. from the University of Illinois and decades of leadership in governance, public administration, and higher education, Prof. Kobia has contributed nationally and internationally, including as a member of the UN Committee of Experts on Public Administration. She has received several national and international honors for her outstanding public service, leadership, and contribution to institutional development.



1.0 INTRODUCTION

I start by congratulating every woman who stands up every year to fight for gender equality towards the realization of a better future for all. Questions have been raised about whether we need to have CSW every year, and my answer has always been, yes. The moment we skip a year, we will start losing momentum, and the goal of realizing SDG 5 becomes just a dream. Seventy years after the establishment of the Commission on the Status of Women, we have made some

gains in advancing gender equality through codification in Constitutions, statutes, and international frameworks. Yet, for millions of women and girls, justice remains conditional, delayed, or denied (UN Women, 2023). Access to justice is not simply the existence of progressive law but also the ability of women to experience fair processes and outcomes (UNDP, 2022). That is to: i) Assert rights without fear; ii) Access remedies without financial torture; iii) Secure enforcement without prolonged resistance; and iv) Obtain protection without retaliation. Today, women and girls continue to face deep-rooted practices of discrimination against, and stereotypes related to gender and sexuality. Women's access to justice matters because it promotes gender equality by enforcing legal rights, empowers women to dismantle structural and cultural discrimination, challenges inequality in access to and ownership of property, secures economic rights, and provides remedies for gender-based violence (OECD, 2019).

UN Women (2025) reports that, where justice fails, equality weakens, and a justice system that fails half the population cannot claim to uphold justice. Property rights remain insecure. Gender-based violence persists with impunity, economic empowerment stalls, and political participation narrows. The global challenge is no longer legal recognition; it is a structural implementation. The purpose of this conversation is to highlight societal, economic, and structural barriers to women's access to justice, share research findings, and explore strategies for transformation.

2.0 WHAT STRUCTURAL BARRIERS DO WE SEE?

The Architecture of Inequality

Women's access to justice is constrained by mutually reinforcing societal, economic, and institutional barriers. These barriers operate across contexts, whether in rural communities in East Africa, urban centers in Latin America, or fragile states recovering from conflict (OECD, 2019; UNDP, 2022).

2.1 Societal Barriers: Norms as Parallel Governance Systems

Research shows that society has constructed the male gender as superior and the female as subordinate through historically embedded patriarchal structures (Kabeer, 1999). Patriarchal norms often function as informal enforcement systems that override constitutional guarantees. In many jurisdictions, including those with progressive constitutional rights to property, such as Kenya, inheritance and land rights disputes reveal the tensions between statutory protections and customary practice (Whitehead & Tsikata, 2003). A 2025 study on women and land governance in Kajiado County, Kenya, illustrates this pattern.

In one documented succession dispute, a widow who obtained a favorable legal determination affirming her entitlement to matrimonial land faced sustained resistance from male in-laws and clan elders. Despite judicial recognition of her rights, implementation of the land subdivision was delayed for over 2 years due to community opposition. In another matter, adult daughters challenged exclusion from inheritance under constitutional equality provisions. While local court processes acknowledged their legal standing, family mediation pressures, the traditional justice system, and procedural adjournments prolonged the matter. This was compounded by the increasing financial strain and discouragement from continued litigation.

These cases are not anomalies. They demonstrate how social norms operate as parallel governance structures, weakening the transformative potential of progressive legal frameworks (Agarwal, 1994). The barrier is not the absence of law, but the endurance of justice systems that delegitimize women's entitlement.

2.2 What are the Economic Barriers to Women's Access to Justice: When Justice Has a Price

Justice systems frequently assume financial resilience. However, women globally disproportionately experience:

- i. Limited access to finances needed for legal fees, including the filing of court cases
- ii. Informal or undocumented land tenure
- iii. Inability to afford legal representation
- iv. Economic retaliation for pursuing claims

The study established that where litigation requires sustained financial capacity, economically vulnerable women are structurally disadvantaged (World Bank, 2020). In Kajiado, a woman who had occupied matrimonial land for over two decades sought to formalize her property interest following separation. Without title deed documentation in her name and lacking an independent source of income, she initiated formal processes but ultimately abandoned her claim due to transport costs, filing fees, and repeated court adjournments. This case is not unique to Kenya. Across contexts, cost remains one of the most significant barriers to accessing justice (OECD, 2019). When justice requires endurance beyond women's economic capacity, rights become conditional and therefore inaccessible for the vulnerable. Economic inequality is embedded within the justice architecture, in shaping how laws are applied and often determining who has access to fair legal representation and outcomes (UNDP, 2022).

2.3 What are Institutional Barriers to Women's Access to Justice: Enforcement Gaps

Institutional barriers to women's access to justice include discriminatory laws, lack of legal representation, lack of adequate resources, lack of gender responsive laws and policies, and inadequate handling of GBV cases (UN Women, 2023). These barriers are due to unconscious gender bias and stigma, physical and social inaccessibility, language barrier, poor governance, misunderstanding of what culture is, the law, and weak institutions (OECD, 2019). Even where courts issue progressive rulings, institutional weaknesses tend to undermine the impact.

Common challenges in the Kenyan case study include:

- i. Court backlogs and delays
- ii. Weak enforcement of judgments
- iii. Limited monitoring of post-judgment compliance
- iv. Inadequate coordination between customary and formal systems
- v. Underfunded legal aid services

In several succession matters reviewed in Kajiado, women who obtained favorable rulings encountered additional administrative hurdles in executing court orders. Delays in confirming grants and in land registry processing prolonged tenure insecurity. Judicial victory without effective administrative enforcement reduces trust in institutions and diminishes the credibility of justice systems. Justice delayed and unenforced reproduces structural inequality (World Bank, 2020).

3.0 WHAT IS THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN DISMANTLING STRUCTURAL OBSTACLES TO WOMEN'S ACCESS TO JUSTICE?

Addressing structural barriers requires more than legal reform. It requires an empowerment infrastructure embedded with education. Education operates as a foundational justice strategy by equipping women with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to claim and defend their rights (Kabeer, 1999).

In Kenya, however, only about 10 percent of women take matters to court due to unawareness of the justice system, lack of financial resources, inadequate knowledge of how to seek legal aid, stigma, inaccessibility to the court, especially for women abled differently, and limited legal representation (World Bank, 2020). Of those who seek redress in court, only those who have at least 8 years or more of education can fight for their rights. Therefore, education can equip women with skills and abilities to fight for access to justice through:

- i. Greater awareness of inheritance, property, and land and human rights (voice, power, and agency)
- ii. Increased confidence in engaging and navigating administrative systems
- iii. Improved documentation practices that support their case
- iv. Higher likelihood of pursuing remedies

Community paralegal initiatives have proven particularly impactful in rural contexts, bridging the gap between formal courts and community dispute-resolution mechanisms (OECD, 2019). Women's collectives/group initiatives to fight for their rights have gained recognition as a strategy to promote access to justice. Education strengthens not only individual agency but also normative transformation. It reshapes expectations around women's entitlement to property rights, leadership, and autonomy. An informed woman is more likely to assert her rights. An economically empowered woman is more likely to sustain her claim. Integrating civic education, gender equality principles, and legal literacy into national education systems and community programming is a strategic structural reform strategy.

4.0 EMERGING ISSUES SUCH AS GLOBAL SHOCKS AND FRAGILITY OF JUSTICE GAINS

As we take stock of gains made towards women's access to justice, we are reminded of global crises that have exposed the fragility of justice systems:

- i. The COVID-19 pandemic increased gender-based violence while limiting court access.
- ii. Economic downturns reduced funding for legal aid.
- iii. Climate-related displacement heightened land insecurity for women.
- iv. Digital technology divide

In drought-prone pastoralist regions such as Kajiado County, climate stress intensifies land fragmentation and dispute frequency, disproportionately affecting women's tenure security. Crises that magnify pre-existing structural inequalities. Where justice systems are not institutionally embedded and adequately funded, gains erode quickly. To build shock-resilience, justice systems require:

- i. Institutionalized legal aid resources (with funding, budgets, representation)
- ii. Transparent and digitized land administration systems
- iii. Gender-responsive budgeting
- iv. Monitoring of enforcement compliance
- v. Formal recognition of community-based justice actors

Ensuring women's equal access to justice requires coordinated, measurable action across institutions. Governments must harmonize customary and statutory frameworks in line with constitutional guarantees of equality and strengthen enforcement mechanisms. Judiciaries should adopt gender responsive approaches, reduce procedural delays, and establish systems to monitor compliance with court decisions. Civil society organizations must expand grassroots legal literacy and systematically document enforcement gaps. The media must play the critical role of highlighting implementation failures and challenging narratives that normalize women's dispossession. Ultimately, justice must be measurable, tracked, and publicly reported. An example is the Gender Sector Working Group in Kenya, which recognizes the interconnectedness of thematic areas in advancing gender equality and coordinates actors and interventions in alignment with the SDGs.

5.0 CONCLUSION

Despite significant legal and policy reforms globally aimed at achieving gender equality, women continue to face societal, economic, and institutional barriers that hinder their access to justice. Women's access to justice is foundational to gender equality, economic empowerment, and democratic governance, essential for achieving sustainable development. The experience of land governance disputes in Kajiado County, Kenya, reflects how the broader global realities, progressive legal reforms with patriarchal enforcement systems, judicial victories undermined by institutional fragility, economic barriers deter rights claims, and global crises can erode gains. The jurisprudence exists. The commitments exist. Yet, structural barriers remain.

At JWF, CSW 70, the global community has an opportunity to move beyond reaffirming equality in principle and towards strengthening systems that ensure equality in practice. Justice must move from paper to possession. From recognition to realization. As we prepare forward-looking strategies to dismantle barriers to women's access to justice, NGOs, governments, media, and stakeholders must recognize that meaningful gains are experienced and sustained at community and national levels across different contexts. Achieving this requires our coordinated action. Developing a clear plan, measuring outcomes, and reporting progress every year to ensure accountability and lasting change. Let us work together!

STRATEGIES FOR TACKLING societal, economic, and institutional barriers that hinder women's access to justice:

1. Partnerships and collaboration with all human rights and women's rights actors to assess with evidence and data what works and what reforms are necessary to promote women's access to justice in different contexts. (NGOs, government, development partners, media, key stakeholders) Each partner brings in their strategic value.
2. Capacity building through lifelong learning and education on paralegal, human rights, women's rights, on gender responsive laws (duty bearers, cultural leaders, religious leaders, administrators, civil societies)
3. Sustainable support in budgeting and funding programs that promote women's access to justice at global, regional, national, and community levels, including funding legal aid
4. Integrating access to justice programs with gender thematic programs such as economic empowerment, climate action, peace and security, SGBV, and women in leadership

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Andrea Barron is the Advocacy and Communications Program Manager at the Torture Abolition and Survivors Support Coalition (TASSC) International, based in Washington DC. She prepares torture survivors to testify at meetings in the United States Congress and the Department of State about human rights abuses in their countries of origin and US asylum policy. Andrea developed TASSC's first Africa projects in 2025, supporting torture survivors and other refugees from Sudan, Eritrea and Rwanda in Uganda. In 2024 and 2025, she was an international human rights observer at a trial in Istanbul where 41 people -- mostly minor girls, female college students, mothers and grandmothers -- were falsely accused of terrorism. Andrea graduated from New York University and holds a master's degree in history from Boston College. She was an adjunct professor of history at George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia from 1999-2015, where she taught courses on Middle East history and Global Women's Rights.



At the Torture Abolition and Survivors Support Coalition, TASSC International, a non-profit based in Washington DC, we work with asylum seekers, mostly from Africa, who have been tortured by repressive governments, mainly for political reasons, or because they are part of the LGBT community. TASSC was founded by Sister Dianna Ortiz, a Roman Catholic nun from New Mexico who was raped and brutally tortured by the Guatemalan military in 1989 when the United States was supporting right-wing military dictatorships in

Central America. Sister Dianna believed that survivors of torture should have a voice in the nation's capital. As Advocacy Program Manager, I help make this happen by training torture survivors to testify in the US Congress and before US State Department officials. I also train survivors outside of Washington, including here in New York City, and internationally.

We often hear about the use of rape as a weapon in war. In the 1990s, rape was finally recognized as a war crime and a crime against humanity. However, there needs to be more discussion on rape being used as a method of torture by government agents against individual women opposed to their own autocratic governments. These are the women I want to tell you about. They have no access to justice, just total impunity for the rapists. Of course, this is not a problem only in Africa, but all over the world, including here in the United States. We all know how long the Jeffrey Epstein survivors have waited for justice. Both male and female torture survivors at TASSC have been severely beaten, placed in solitary confinement, and psychologically intimidated. But for women, rape is often used as an additional method of torture. I want to share the story of a brave woman who lives just a few miles from the United Nations. She comes from Eritrea, a small country in the Horn of Africa with no judiciary, no free press, and no parliament.

It does not even bother holding elections. Thousands of Eritreans trying to escape their country have ended up drowning in the Mediterranean Sea on their way to Europe. This woman was not a dissident- she just happened to be on a plane talking to another Eritrean woman about a boat accident where 300 Eritreans had drowned. Shortly after arriving home, she was arrested and taken to a police station. A man called “Major” played a tape of her criticizing the government on the plane. Turns out her plane seatmate was a female spy who recorded everything she said.

The Major threw her on the table, held a gun to her head, and raped her. He told her not to make a sound if she wanted to stay alive. The assault was extremely painful because she also had been subjected to female genital mutilation, or FGM, very common in Eritrea. No access to justice for her in Eritrea. She did get a type of justice when she was granted asylum in the United States, right here in New York City. Ten years ago, I met an Ethiopian survivor who got pregnant in prison from a rape. She told the perpetrator, a high-level military officer, that the pregnancy had made her sick, and he released her. Nine months later, he showed up at her house and told her mother he wanted to see the baby. Her mother said her daughter had fled the country. The woman was able to secure a US visa and was granted asylum, a form of justice, outside her own country.

FGM, also known as female genital cutting, is a form of torture. I have been working with a courageous Ethiopian woman who became an anti-FGM activist in her country. FGM has been illegal in the Ethiopian Criminal Code since 2004. But prosecution against traditional cutters, who make a living off these girls’ families, is extremely rare. This woman wanted to stop more little girls from getting cut. She and some other anti-FGM activists demonstrated opposite the federal police station in Addis Ababa, shouting “No to FGM” and calling on the government to arrest and fine the traditional cutters. She was beaten, thrown to the ground, and arrested.

I also heard from one of TASSC’s local partners about anti-FGM activists from Kenya and the Democratic Republic of Congo, or DRC, who were sexually assaulted by government agents. The DRC perpetrators were extraordinarily brutal – they not only raped one woman repeatedly, but they burned her flesh with an iron. The imprint of the iron can still be seen on her body years later. She was paying the price for directly criticizing a DRC government official by name.

I now want to turn to a different part of the world, Turkey. The Turkish justice system is misusing counter-terrorism laws to falsely accuse teenage girls, female university students, mothers, and grandmothers of terrorism. I visited Istanbul four times over the past 18 months as an international human rights observer and sat in on court hearings where 41 defendants, almost all women, were charged with terrorism and trying to overthrow Turkey’s constitutional order.

On May 7, 2024, the Organized Crime and Counterterrorism branches of the Istanbul Police Department raided a district of Istanbul and arrested the defendants. This trial has become widely known as the “Girls Trial” because some of the people arrested were teenage girls still in high school. The Turkish government alleges that the defendants are connected to the Gülen Movement, named after the late Muslim cleric Fethullah Gülen. They are committed to a moderate interpretation of Islam which embraces modernity, education—especially science and math—interfaith dialogue, and community service. The Turkish government claims, without any evidence, that Gülen was behind an attempted coup in Turkey in 2016.

Now, let me tell you what I observed in the Istanbul court. The presiding judge did not ask the defendants if they had undergone military training, encouraged violence, planted a bomb, or even communicated with anyone about an act of violence. Instead, the judge asked why they were studying science and math together, reading the Quran, and attending Iftars during Ramadan. The judge wanted to know why they went bowling together, to the cinema, and grocery shopping. These normal activities, according to the judge, were “evidence” to “prove” the defendants were terrorists.

The women I met are all observant Muslims who place a tremendous value on education. One defendant, 52-year-old Aysu Oztas Bayram, told me that the regime is targeting these particular girls and women because it is afraid of educated women. “Educated women ask questions,” she said. One of the most memorable stories I heard in Istanbul was from a 25-year-old defendant we can call S.N. She was strip-searched down to her underwear when she was arrested, then forced to remove all her clothes after being transferred to prison. S.N. testified publicly in court about the total strip search, an incredibly brave thing for a conservative Muslim wearing hijab to do. Her lawyer told me that many other defendants were strip-searched, but that only S.N. was willing to tell the judge what happened to her.

I asked S.N. why she did this. “I wanted to make my voice heard so they don’t do the same thing to younger girls,” she said, “who would have a much harder time handling it.” No weapon of any kind was ever found on any of the defendants after they were strip-searched. The idea was simply to humiliate them. In September 2025, the Istanbul Court announced the trial verdict—19 defendants were acquitted of terrorism, and 19 were found guilty of being Members or Supporters of a Terrorist Group. Aysu Bayram, the 52-year-old woman I mentioned above, was sentenced to 6 years and 3 months in prison. She has four daughters and a son who now lives in Germany. She is also a liver transplant recipient—she received part of her son’s liver—and was diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease. Her daughter Ayse, a law student, was acquitted. Aysu’s 10-year-old daughter said she would not cry- she had to be brave like her mother.

On October 8, 2025, a group of UN Special Rapporteurs and UN Working Groups, including the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls, wrote a letter to the Turkish government about the trial verdict. They said the verdict demonstrated Turkey's "misuse of counter-terrorism laws against individuals suspected of affiliation with the Gülen Movement" for activities that had nothing to do with terrorism. This is an excellent example of how the charge of terrorism has been widely used and misinterpreted to target actual and perceived dissidents in Turkey, as well as in other non-democratic countries.

Let us hope that, to honor the women of Turkey on International Women's Day, Turkey finds a way to acquit Aysu Bayram and the 18 other defendants—almost all women—falsely convicted of terrorism. I want to close by calling on all UN Members to: Envision a world where girls and women have access to justice, where perpetrators of violence against women no longer have impunity, and where innocent, peaceful, girls and women are not falsely accused of being violent terrorists. Then, turn this vision into reality, step by step.

Yveline Dalmacy, Esq., Founder, International Caribbean Women Alliance for Empowerment | USA

Promoting Inclusive and Equitable Legal Systems

Yveline Dalmacy is an accomplished attorney, certified professional mediator, FINRA arbitrator, and community advocate whose work spans law, public service, and social justice. Born in Haiti and raised in New York, she holds an MBA in International Banking and Finance, an M.A. in Diplomacy and International Relations, and a Juris Doctor degree. Admitted to practice law in New York and Washington, D.C., she has dedicated her career to advancing justice for women, immigrants, and underserved communities.

She is the Founder and Chief Executive Director of the International Caribbean Women Alliance for Empowerment, where she leads grassroots initiatives focused on women's rights, legal education, survivor-centered support, leadership development, and civic engagement. Ms. Dalmacy is a recipient of the 2026 Epiq Award for Justice and Advocacy at the New York City Bar Association's Annual International Law Conference on the Status of Women.



I am going to focus on the role of justice of the world of justice systems in advancing inclusive and equitable societies. Across many countries, legal frameworks protecting women's rights are on the books; however, one of the major challenges that women face today is ensuring that those rights are not only written but also accessible, enforceable, and effective in practice. To understand the importance of inclusive legal systems, it is helpful to begin with the broader global justice landscape. Recent research shows that approximately 64% of the legal rights available to men are also accessible to women

worldwide. At the same time, nearly 2/3 of the world's population lacks meaningful access to justice. Globally, approximately one in three women experiences gender-based violence during their lifetime. These figures highlight a fundamental challenge. Legal protections may exist, yet institutions of justice often struggle to deliver real protection.

One important insight from recent research is the distinction between legal rights and institutional implementation. Legal frameworks alone are not enough. Effective justice systems require three interconnected elements. First, laws must be recognized and rights protected. Second, you need supportive institutional systems that include national policies, legal aid services, and support structures for survivors. Third, justice institutions must have the capacity to enforce those rights through courts, law enforcement, and accountability mechanisms. Only when these three elements work together can legal rights translate into real protection. For legal rights to equate to real protection, not only do we need an inclusive legal system, but it must also focus on access to justice.

In the Caribbean, when we speak about access to justice, we are often talking about a woman who must travel very far to file a complaint and must decide whether losing a workday is even worth the trip, because, oftentimes, they do not even get justice. Missing a workday for these women is lost income for their families. We are also talking about a woman who works in the informal sector without a contract. We are talking about a woman who cannot access the court system because of gang-related violence, forcing courts to close in certain countries.

When we speak about access to justice, we are talking about a woman who may be undocumented, a migrant, or a stateless person who must decide between seeking protection that may trigger deportation, rather than the remedy that she seeks and deserves. Importantly, undocumented women often do not report abuse, whether sexual or physical, because they fear removal more than they expect protection, making access to justice extremely challenging. For a legal system to be inclusive and accessible, individuals must be able to reach institutions of justice regardless of income, language, geographic location, or social status. This includes affordable legal representation, accessible court procedures, and institutions of justice that are responsive to survivors of violence. Ultimately, inclusion determines who can access justice in practice.

While inclusion focuses on access, equity focuses on the outcome. A legal system is equitable when it produces fair and consistent results. This includes timely case resolution, transparent procedures, and effective enforcement mechanisms. Equitable legal systems also ensure that vulnerable populations, including women and marginalized communities, receive meaningful protection under the law. Meaningful protection, however, depends on a strong and equitable legal system, and that may require, in part, a reform of a country's entire legal system. In considering reforms, we must look at comparative models. For example, when it comes to gender-based violence, some countries may have quick orders of protection that women can quickly access.

Often, these countries may include access to housing in certain circumstances. Other countries may have domestic violence statutes, but there may be no enforcement mechanism or delays in enforcing them. So, we know that protection delayed is protection denied. Caribbean nations need not replicate current systems; they can adopt innovations that prioritize speed and coordination to strengthen institutional capacity.

I will highlight three pillars of justice reforms that require strengthening three interconnected pillars. The first pillar is legal recognition, ensuring that rights are protected through legislation and policy frameworks. The second pillar, and I think one of the most important pillars, is institutional capacity, meaning that courts, police, and other legal institutions must have the training, resources, and coordination necessary to enforce those rights. Finally, the third pillar is accessible justice. Ensuring individuals can realistically access the legal system through affordable legal representation, language access, and community support mechanisms. When any of these three pillars is weak, the effectiveness of the justice system is diminished. When legal protection exists, structural barriers often prevent individuals from accessing justice.

Social stigma is often a huge barrier to justice. Oftentimes, women fear retaliation that will prevent them from reporting violence. So, addressing structural barriers is essential to ensuring that legal systems are inclusive and effective. Several policy strategies I think can help strengthen the inclusive justice system include expanding legal aid access to those in need and providing judicial and law enforcement training on gender-based violence to strengthen institutional responses. Digital access to courts can improve case management and can help reduce delays. Coordinated survivor support services can ensure that individuals receive both legal protection and social support. These actions can help translate legal commitments into real protection.

Justice reform is central to the Sustainable Development Goals. SDG #5 calls for the elimination of violence against women and the promotion of gender equality. SDG #16 emphasizes access to justice and the development of strong, accountable institutions. An inclusive legal system serves as the bridge between these two goals. By strengthening courts, expanding legal aid, and ensuring a gender-responsive justice system, we strengthen both gender equality and the rule of law.

To conclude, promoting an inclusive and equitable legal system requires four essential elements: strong legal frameworks, effective institutions, accessible justice mechanisms, and accountability to bridge the gap between SDGs 5 and 16. In closing, let us remind ourselves that the strength of a legal system is not measured by rights written in law, but by whether those rights translate into real protection. When we say real protection, we mean accessible and equitable for those in need. That is why we need real protection, not just on the books but in reality.

TRANSFORMING WOMEN, PEACE, AND SECURITY FROM RESOLUTION TO REALITY

Organized by JWF (USA) and SecurityWomen (UK)
16 March 2026 | 10:30 AM – 12:00 PM | Church Center for the UN

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**JOURNALISTS AND WRITERS FOUNDATION**

**securitywomen**
Calling for women's inclusion in security sector reform



United Nations Commission on the Status of Women – CSW 70th Session | Side Event

Transforming the WPS Agenda from Resolution to Reality

16 March 2026, Monday | 10:30 AM EST | In-Person
Church Center for the United Nations
777 United Nations Plaza, 8th Floor, New York, NY 10017



Celisa Lehew
US Director, SecurityWomen
Head of Police for Chapel Hill, North Carolina



Pablo Castillo Diaz
WPS Policy Specialist
UN Women



Maureen McGough, JD
Co-Founder, 30x30 Initiative to Advance Women in Policing



Merrite Johnson
Program and Research Manager
NGO Working Group on WPS



Meg McGurk
Community Safety Planner
Town of Chapel Hill North Carolina

 JWFoundation_  security_women  jwfglobal  SecurityWomen www.jwf.org www.securitywomen.org

The panel discussion "Transforming Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Agenda from Resolution to Reality" brought together distinguished experts, civil society leaders, law enforcement professionals, UN representatives, and advocates to critically examine the progress, challenges, and opportunities in advancing women's participation, protection, and leadership in peace and security. Held on the sidelines of the CSW70, the event underscored the importance of translating global commitments into tangible actions within institutions, policies, and communities worldwide.

The panel was moderated by Celisa Lehew, US Director of the SecurityWomen and Head of Police for Chapel Hill in North Carolina, who articulated the importance of systemic change over mere statements of endorsement, emphasizing that real progress requires embedding gender equality into the operational fabric of institutions—whether in policing, military, or diplomatic spheres. Chief Lehew highlighted the necessity of structural reforms that move beyond endorsement to actual implementation, stressing that 25 years after UNSCR 1325, the question is whether institutions are willing to undertake the necessary structural work. Pablo Castillo Diaz, WPS Policy Specialist of UN Women, delivered his extensive experience in combating sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in conflict zones and working within UN processes to promote gender equality.

Merrite Johnson, Program and Research Manager of NGO Working Group on WPS, elaborated on the gap in political will and the need to implement the WPS Agenda at the UN Security Council. Maureen McGough, JD, the Co-Founder of 30x30 Initiative to Advance Women in Policing, shared reflections from her background in evidence-based policing, law, and criminal justice reform, advocating for increased women's participation in law enforcement. Meg McGurk, Community Safety Planner at the Chapel Hill Police Department, presented on actively leading initiatives to recruit, support, and advance women in policing, with a focus on workforce strategies for women in the security sector.

1. The Gap Between Commitment and Implementation

A central focus of the discussion was the persistent gap between global commitments to women's participation in peace and security and their implementation at the national and institutional levels. Panelists highlighted ongoing crises, such as in Sudan and Afghanistan, where atrocities against women are not cohesively addressed or lack priority within international responses. They pointed out that, despite the globally agreed commitments, such as UN Security Council Resolution 1325, women are often excluded from meaningful participation in diplomatic processes aimed at conflict resolution. Furthermore, violent extremists continue to systematically enslave women, yet the UN sanctions committees have yet to impose sanctions specifically targeting sexual slavery and trafficking systems. The panelists emphasized that mere endorsement of resolutions is insufficient; concrete actions are required. They reminded the audience that the United Nations' capacity to enforce commitments relies heavily on the political will of Member States. Although the UN can initiate justice mechanisms or impose sanctions when countries agree, such unanimity is rare. Most multilateral efforts to promote accountability rely on political persuasion and on creating incentives that may yield only limited results without strong political will.

2. The Reality of Political Will and Systemic Challenges

3.

The discussion underscored the difficulty of translating commitments into action. Experts noted that only 46% of Security Council decisions in 2025 contained language related to women's rights, a notable decrease from previous years. Efforts to renew mandates or adapt sanctions regimes often result in language that omits critical references to gender-based violations. For example, changes in sanctions language regarding Haiti and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have limited the scope of violations considered, excluding categories such as forced labor, trafficking, or violations based on sexual orientation or gender identity. The panel highlighted that these policy setbacks are emblematic of broader systemic issues, including a lack of political will, competing national interests, and structural weaknesses in UN reform efforts. Discussions around restructuring the UN—such as merging UNFPA and UN Women or creating new special envoys—were deemed insufficient or potentially counterproductive, as they risk undermining efforts or diverting attention from critical enforcement actions.

Experts emphasized that reform must go beyond bureaucratic tinkering. Structural reforms that do not address political priorities or societal norms are unlikely to yield meaningful change. They expressed skepticism about the appointment of additional high-level envoys, suggesting that existing leadership within the UN agencies already actively advocates for WPS issues.

3. The Role of Civil Society and Law Enforcement in Advancing WPS

A recurring theme was the vital role of civil society organizations and law enforcement agencies in operationalizing the WPS agenda. Panelists discussed the importance of community-led initiatives to increase women's representation in security forces and peacebuilding efforts. Research findings were shared that highlight the facts indicating that when women constitute at least 30% of an organization, they can effect significant cultural change. These projections also emphasize the importance of systemic reforms such as transparent recruitment, reducing hiring timelines, and addressing biases during background checks.

Experts shared their professional experiences, stressing that community trust and partnership are fundamental. They underscored that police must reflect the community they serve, and that representation alone is not enough; institutional culture, policies, and leadership must prioritize gender equality and gender-sensitive practices. The panel also discussed the alarming prevalence of sexual harassment and abuse within law enforcement agencies, referencing data from the U.S. indicating that over 90% of women in such organizations experience harassment. Addressing these issues requires systemic reforms, leadership accountability, and a cultural shift that views diverse competencies—such as de-escalation and collaborative partnership skills—as integral to organizational effectiveness.

4. Operationalizing WPS in International and Peacekeeping Missions

The discussion examined how global commitments influence operational decisions. Panelists highlighted that mandates for peacekeeping operations, sanctions, and political missions are the primary tools for implementing WPS on the ground. However, language in mandates is often removed altogether, undermining the effectiveness of peace operations. For instance, removing gender advisers from mandates significantly weakens the mainstreaming of WPS principles. Without dedicated personnel, peacekeeping missions lack the capacity to address sexual violence, protect women and girls, or support gender-sensitive programming. Budget cuts and liquidity crises further threaten the sustainability of these functions.

Panelists emphasized that operational decisions, such as staffing, budget allocations, and mandate language, must be driven by political will and institutional commitment. They called for more consistent and courageous advocacy within the UN and member states to preserve and reinforce gender-sensitive mandates.

5. The Requirement for Institutional and Cultural Change

A core takeaway was that change must happen at the cultural and institutional levels. The panelists agreed that increasing women's participation in peace and security roles is essential but insufficient without systemic reforms. Experts highlighted that police organizations should embed core competencies related to gender equality into their policies, recruitment, training, and leadership development. She stressed that leadership must articulate a clear narrative that emphasizes organizational effectiveness and mission-driven values, rather than viewing gender diversity as soft skills or optional add-ons.

All speakers agreed that the institutional mindset must evolve so that women's competencies are recognized as essential to organizational success. This involves transparent hiring practices, addressing biases during background checks, and creating pathways for women to advance into leadership roles. The panel stressed that progress requires sustained political will, leadership commitment, and cultural shifts within institutions. This includes challenging societal norms, addressing structural barriers, and fostering environments where gender equality is integral to peace and security efforts.

6. Innovations and Future Directions: The Role of Technology and Civil Society

Innovative approaches, such as the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI), were discussed as potential tools for advancing WPS. Panelists emphasized that AI systems, if intentionally designed, could help mitigate biases and improve decision-making processes. However, they warned that current AI data is often biased against women and marginalized groups, which could reinforce disparities if not carefully managed.

The panel called for procurement guidance to ensure that AI-enabled systems incorporate gender-sensitive data and protections. They also highlighted the importance of civil society organizations in advocating for accountability and oversight.



Regarding civil society, participants acknowledged the shrinking space and funding cuts threatening women-led organizations, especially in conflict-affected regions. Experts emphasized the importance of creating safe, inclusive spaces for women in security sectors and fostering partnerships between civil society and law enforcement.

Finally, the panelists agreed on the importance of activating men as allies in the gender equality agenda, encouraging their participation and support. They called for more grassroots engagement, community-led initiatives, and leadership that reflects the diversity and needs of the communities served.

Call to Action

The panel concluded with a powerful message: the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda is fundamentally about courage—courage to reform institutions, courage to measure progress honestly, and courage to turn language into tangible leadership. Global commitments serve as a guiding framework, but real change depends on the discipline to align systems and practices with these commitments. The speakers emphasized that progress is achievable, but it requires sustained effort, accountability, and political will. The time to move from resolutions to reality is now, and it begins with systemic reforms, inclusive leadership, and the active participation of civil society, law enforcement, and communities at every level. The panel reaffirmed that women are not merely victims but active agents of peace and security. Their full participation, protection, and leadership are essential to building a more just, peaceful, and equitable world.

BIBLIOTHERAPY FOR YOUTH: REWRITING THE STORY OF GENDER JUSTICE

Organized by Set Them Free (USA) in partnership with
Core Belief Psychology (UK) and JWF
9 March 2026 | 10:30 AM – 12:00 PM | Church Center for the UN

[Click to Watch the YouTube Recording](#)

The poster features a central graphic of two silhouettes of heads facing each other, with a balance scale between them. The background is a light blue sky with clouds. At the top, logos for 'SET THEM FREE', 'CoreBelief', and the 'UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN 70TH SESSION' are displayed. The main title 'BIBLIOTHERAPY FOR YOUTH: REWRITING THE STORY OF GENDER JUSTICE' is in large, bold, black letters. Below the title, the location '11TH FLOOR, CHURCH CENTER OF THE UN, NEW YORK' and the date '9 March 2026' are listed, along with the time '12:30 pm - 2:00 pm'. At the bottom, there are seven portrait photos of the panelists, each with their name and a brief description of their role or affiliation.

Name	Role / Affiliation
Ebru Kaya	Criminal Justice and Human Rights Researcher, USA
Ishak Alan	Sophomore, Montgomery HS, USA
Gulru Erkisi	Sophomore, Wayne Hills HS, USA
Melike Guray	Clinical Psychologist, UK
Yusuf Kaval	Junior, Pioneer Academy, USA
Mehtap Guven	Sophomore, West Carleton MS, CA
Zunera Haider	Psychology, Hofstra University, USA

The NGO parallel event “*Bibliotherapy for Youth: Rewriting the Story of Gender Justice*” was held on March 9, 2026, during the 70th session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW70) at the Church Center for the United Nations (CCUN), New York. The event brought together youth participants, educators, clinicians, and gender experts to explore bibliotherapy—defined as the intentional use of literature and guided reflection—as an innovative, evidence-based approach to psychosocial healing, critical awareness, and gender justice advocacy.

Aligned with CSW70 priorities and the Sustainable Development Goals—particularly SDG 4 (quality education), SDG 5 (gender equality), and SDG 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions)—the event emphasized youth-led strategies for building equitable and resilient communities through storytelling and dialogue. The session was moderated by Ebru Kaya and featured youth presenters alongside clinical and academic experts.

The event centered on the concept that storytelling is both a therapeutic and political act, enabling young people to process lived experiences while critically engaging with systems of inequality. The panel combined short presentations, literary analysis, and interactive dialogue, creating a participatory space where youth voices were foregrounded as both knowledge and advocacy.

Key Themes of the Discussion

1. Bibliotherapy as Healing and Empowerment

Speakers highlighted bibliotherapy as a structured process that supports emotional healing, self-reflection, and empowerment. Through literature, individuals can recognize internalized beliefs, reduce shame, and reframe personal experiences within broader social contexts. As emphasized by Melike Güray, storytelling enables individuals to name previously unarticulated experiences, transforming isolation into shared understanding and resilience.

2. Literature as a Lens for Structural Inequality

The panel explored how literature reveals systemic patterns of injustice, particularly in relation to gender, race, and class. Through texts such as *Just Mercy* by Bryan Stevenson, *Born a Crime* by Trevor Noah, *Men Explain Things to Me* by Rebecca Solnit, and *Man’s Search for Meaning* by Viktor Frankl, participants analyzed: institutional barriers to justice, racial and gender discrimination, violence and systemic neglect, power dynamics in everyday life. These discussions demonstrated how storytelling makes abstract inequalities visible and emotionally tangible.

3. Youth Voice and Critical Awareness

A central theme of the event was the role of youth as active agents in shaping narratives and challenging injustice.

Participants reflected on how literature: fosters critical thinking and empathy, encourages questioning of normalized violence, enables youth to connect personal experiences to global issues. The event emphasized that young people are not passive learners but producers of knowledge and change-makers.

4. Gender, Voice, and Representation

Discussions highlighted how gender shapes voice, credibility, and participation in social and institutional spaces. Through literary analysis, participants explored: silencing and marginalization of women's voices, gendered assumptions of authority and expertise, the psychological effects of exclusion and invisibility. The panel underscored the importance of recognition, representation, and validation in advancing gender justice.

5. Storytelling, Solidarity, and Social Change

The event emphasized storytelling as a bridge between personal healing and collective action. Participants identified key processes:

- storytelling → empathy
- empathy → awareness
- awareness → solidarity
- solidarity → advocacy

This progression highlighted how narrative engagement can lead to broader social transformation.



Key Takeaways and Call to Action

The panel highlighted several key conclusions:

- Bibliotherapy is both a therapeutic and civic practice
- Literature can reveal and challenge normalized gender-based injustice
- Youth engagement is essential for sustainable social change
- Storytelling is a powerful tool for building empathy and solidarity
- Safe, inclusive spaces are critical for dialogue, healing, and empowerment

The event concluded with a call to amplify youth voices in global conversations, expand access to literature and dialogue-based learning, integrate storytelling into education and advocacy frameworks, strengthen connections between personal healing and structural change.

The CSW70 event “*Bibliotherapy for Youth: Rewriting the Story of Gender Justice*” demonstrated how literature can serve as a transformative tool for both personal and collective change. By bridging emotional reflection with critical inquiry, the event highlighted the potential of bibliotherapy to foster resilience, deepen understanding, and inspire action.

Through its focus on youth leadership, storytelling, and interdisciplinary dialogue, the panel contributed to advancing global conversations on gender equality, justice, and empowerment. It reaffirmed that when narratives change, new possibilities for equity and social transformation emerge.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN PEACEMAKERS AND EMPOWERMENT STRATEGIES

Organized by Gefyris Irinis (Greece) and Dunaj Instytut (Poland)

in partnership with JWF

10 March 2026 | 8:30 AM – 10:00 AM | YouTube

[Click to Watch the YouTube Recording](#)

The graphic features a dark purple background with the title 'THE ROLE OF WOMEN PEACEMAKERS & EMPOWERMENT STRATEGIES' in white. Below the title are five circular portraits of the panelists, each with their name and country below it: Kristel Vaino (Estonia), Miroslava Bobakova (Slovakia), Marta Lempart (Poland), Persa Koumoutsis (Greece), and Dimana Sotirova (Hungary). Below the portraits, it says 'ONLINE PANEL DISCUSSION' and '10 MARCH 2026 8:30 AM ET | 2:30 PM CET'. At the bottom are logos for Dunaj Instytut Dialogu, a globe logo, Teoypez Epiphany, a star logo, Dialogus Platform Egyesület, and SATU saame tuttavaks.

CSW70 Panel entitled “Women as Agents of Peace: Dialogue, Empowerment, and Social Cohesion in Fragmented Societies” was co-organized by Gefyres Irinis AMKE and Dunaj Dialogue Institute, in cooperation with Journalists and Writers Foundation, MTÜ Satu Dialoog, Spoločná cesta, Dialógus Platform Egyesület. Convened as part of CSW70, the event brought together civil society leaders, activists, and practitioners from across Europe to explore the evolving role of women in peacebuilding, dialogue facilitation, and community resilience.

Moderated by Kristel Vaino (Estonia), the panel featured Persa Koumoutsi (Greece), Miroslava Bobakova (Slovakia), Marta Lempart (Poland), and Dimana Sotirova (Hungary). The discussion focused on the intersection of grassroots activism, faith-based engagement, and gendered approaches to peacebuilding in increasingly polarized and fragmented societies.

Framing the Discussion: Beyond the Absence of Conflict

A central theme that emerged throughout the panel was the reconceptualization of peace. As emphasized by multiple speakers, peace cannot be reduced to the absence of war; rather, it must be understood as the presence of inclusive dialogue, social trust, and equitable participation. This perspective aligns with broader CSW priorities that emphasize sustainable peace as a process rooted in inclusion and justice.

The panel highlighted that women’s contributions to peacebuilding are often overlooked or undervalued, despite their active involvement in mediation, humanitarian work, and community-based initiatives. As moderator Kristel Vaino noted, women peacemakers frequently remain “invisible actors,” even though their impact is both substantial and transformative.

Grassroots Leadership and Local Impact

One of the most significant insights from the discussion was the importance of grassroots leadership. Across Central and Southern Europe, women are actively building bridges within divided communities through local initiatives. These efforts include intercultural dialogue programs, humanitarian aid networks, and community-based education projects.

Miroslava Bobakova emphasized the role of civil society organizations in creating safe spaces for dialogue and empowerment, particularly for marginalized groups. Such initiatives often operate outside formal political structures but have a tangible impact on social cohesion. Similarly, Dimana Sotirova highlighted the importance of holistic and community-centered approaches, including the use of intercultural and therapeutic practices to foster understanding and healing.

These examples demonstrate that peacebuilding is not confined to diplomatic arenas but is deeply embedded in everyday social interactions. Women, through their engagement at the local level, play a crucial role in transforming social relationships and reducing tensions.

Faith-Based and Creative Approaches to Peacebuilding

Another key dimension of the panel was the role of faith-based initiatives and creative methodologies in promoting peace. Speakers pointed to the unique capacity of faith-based actors to mobilize communities, promote ethical values, and facilitate dialogue across cultural and religious divides.

Kristel Vaino highlighted the diversity of approaches presented by the speakers, noting in particular the use of art and creativity as “out-of-the-box tools” for peacebuilding. These methods allow for alternative forms of expression and engagement, making dialogue more accessible and inclusive. Persa Koumoutsis further emphasized the importance of education and cultural exchange in fostering respect for diversity. In increasingly multicultural societies, she argued, promoting understanding of different cultures, languages, and religions is essential for building sustainable peace. Educational initiatives, especially at early stages, can play a transformative role in shaping attitudes toward equality, human rights, and solidarity.

Challenges: Exclusion, Vulnerability, and Recognition

Despite their contributions, women in peacebuilding continue to face significant challenges. A recurring theme in the discussion was the structural exclusion of women from formal decision-making processes, particularly in international peace negotiations. As Persa Koumoutsis noted, women are often limited to advisory roles, with little influence over actual policy decisions.

Moreover, women activists frequently encounter criticism, marginalization, and even threats, particularly in digital spaces. This highlights the need for stronger protection mechanisms and support systems for women engaged in peace-related work. The panel also addressed the gendered dimensions of conflict and humanitarian crises. In contexts such as Gaza and Ukraine, women are often at the forefront of humanitarian efforts, focusing on mediation, relief, and social cohesion. Their roles as caregivers and community organizers position them uniquely within peacebuilding processes, yet these contributions are rarely recognized at the institutional level.



Resilience and Empowerment Strategies

In response to these challenges, the panel emphasized the importance of moving beyond symbolic recognition toward concrete empowerment strategies. Women's leadership in peacebuilding must be supported through access to resources, capacity-building programs, and institutional inclusion.

Speakers highlighted the need for empowerment strategies that enable women to act, not just participate. This includes creating pathways for women to influence policy, lead initiatives, and shape public discourse. As noted during the discussion, empowerment is not only about representation but also about agency and decision-making power. Education was identified as a key component of empowerment. By integrating gender equality, human rights, and intercultural understanding into educational systems, societies can foster a new generation that values inclusivity and peace.

Outcomes

The panel produced several important outcomes:

- **Recognition of Women's Central Role:** The discussion reinforced the understanding that women are essential actors in peacebuilding, particularly at the grassroots level.
- **Validation of Diverse Approaches:** The panel highlighted the effectiveness of combining traditional and innovative methods, including faith-based engagement and creative tools.
- **Identification of Structural Barriers:** Persistent challenges such as exclusion from decision-making, lack of recognition, and security risks were clearly articulated.
- **Emphasis on Local-Level Action:** The importance of community-based initiatives in fostering social cohesion and preventing conflict was strongly underscored.

Recommendations

Based on the discussion, the following recommendations were proposed:

- **Strengthen Institutional Inclusion:** Ensure that women are meaningfully included in peace negotiations and decision-making processes at national and international levels.
- **Support Grassroots Initiatives:** Increase funding and institutional support for local women-led organizations working on dialogue and social cohesion.
- **Enhance Protection Mechanisms:** Develop policies and tools to protect women activists from harassment, particularly in digital environments.
- **Promote Education for Peace:** Integrate human rights, gender equality, and intercultural dialogue into formal and non-formal education systems.
- **Leverage Faith-Based and Creative Tools:** Encourage the use of culturally sensitive and innovative approaches, including art and faith-based initiatives, to engage diverse communities.
- **Move Beyond Symbolic Empowerment:** Focus on practical measures that enable women to exercise leadership and influence policy outcomes.

Conclusion

The panel demonstrated that women's contributions to peacebuilding are both indispensable and transformative. However, achieving sustainable and inclusive peace requires more than recognition; it demands structural change, institutional commitment, and continued investment in women's leadership.

As global challenges intensify, the insights shared during this discussion highlight the urgency of rethinking peacebuilding through a gender-inclusive lens. Women are not only participants in this process but key drivers of dialogue, resilience, and social cohesion.

MEDIA AND COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP FOR JUSTICE AND GENDER EQUALITY

Organized by Association for Dialogue and Universal Values
(Romania) in partnership with JWF

10 March 2026 | 12:30 PM – 2:00 PM | Salvation Army

[Click to Watch the YouTube Recording](#)

Media and Community Leadership for Justice and Gender Equality

CSW70 Parallel Event United Nations Commission on the Status of Women – 70th Session
10 March 2026, Tuesday 12:30 PM – 2:00 PM: Salvation Army, Lower Level

Andreea Marin	Maria Toșchină	Aynur Gürsoy	Ramona Mihăilă	Aura Preda	Cemre Ülker
TV Personality, Producer, Humanitarian Activist President Prețuiește Viața (Cherish Life) Foundation	Journalist and Media Leader, Former President and Director General, Radio România Associate Professor, SNSPA	PhD, Vice President – ADVU, Women's Empowerment Project Coord, NGO CSW Events & Panel Coord	Professor Dimitrie Cantemir Christian University Head Secretary of State's Office National Agency for Equal Opportunities	Associate Professor Spiru Haret University, Senior Researcher Romanian Academy, President Romanian Society of Victimology	Representative to the UN DGC, Journalists and Writers Foundation

Within the framework of the 70th session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW70), the parallel event titled “*The Power of Media and Community Leadership for Justice and Gender Equality*” brought together academics, journalists, civil society representatives, and policymakers to explore the multifaceted role of media and community leadership in advancing justice and gender equality.

Moderated by Cemre Ulker, the panel featured distinguished speakers including Aynur Gürsoy, Andreea Marin, Maria Toğhină, Ramona Mihăilă, and Aura Preda. The discussion addressed key intersections between education, media, legal access, victimization, and structural inequalities, offering both analytical insights and practical recommendations.

1. The Transformative Power of Media and Community Leadership

In her opening remarks, moderator Cemre Ulker emphasized that media is no longer merely a tool for information dissemination, but a powerful force that shapes public perception and social reality. When used responsibly, media has the capacity to challenge stereotypes, raise awareness, and make gender-based injustices visible. Ulker highlighted that community leadership plays a complementary role by translating awareness into action. Activists, educators, journalists, and local leaders act as catalysts for change, mobilizing communities and amplifying marginalized voices.

She also drew attention to the growing risks faced by women journalists, including online harassment and physical threats. This issue, she stressed, is not only a matter of individual safety but also a serious challenge to freedom of expression and democratic participation. Ensuring the protection of media professionals is therefore essential for sustaining open and inclusive societies.

2. Justice Literacy and the Role of Education

Aynur Gürsoy centered her presentation on the concept of *justice literacy*, examining its relationship with education, gender equality, and access to justice. She argued that the mere existence of legal rights does not guarantee their effective use. Structural barriers such as educational inequalities, lack of legal awareness, gender-based discrimination, and institutional distrust limit individuals’ ability to exercise their rights.

Justice literacy, as Gürsoy explained, consists of three core components: 1 - Legal awareness – knowledge of one’s rights. 2 - Critical legal understanding – the ability to recognize rights violations 3 - Institutional access – the capacity to engage with legal systems. Her research demonstrates a strong correlation between education levels and access to justice. Women, in particular, face compounded challenges due to economic dependency, social stigma, and limited access to legal information. Gürsoy also emphasized the growing importance of digital literacy, noting that access to information increasingly depends on digital tools. She concluded by recommending the integration of justice literacy into educational curricula, the strengthening of human rights education, and the expansion of inclusive and digital learning opportunities.

3. Media, Storytelling, and Human Experience

Andreea Marin highlighted the human dimension of media, emphasizing its role in conveying lived experiences and fostering empathy. Drawing from her personal and professional journey, Marin explained that storytelling is not only about communication but also about responsibility. Through her work, she has encountered numerous women whose lives have been shaped by violence, inequality, and systemic injustice.

She stressed that these issues are not confined to distant regions but exist within European societies as well, including Romania. Challenges such as domestic violence, child marriage, lack of access to education, and human trafficking continue to affect women and girls. One of Marin's most powerful insights was that justice often begins not within institutions, but with being heard. Listening, believing, and responding to women's voices are essential steps toward meaningful change. She also underscored the importance of role models and education in empowering future generations. Continuous dialogue, awareness-raising, and the use of media platforms are crucial in ensuring that no woman feels invisible or unheard.

4. Media as a Protective Infrastructure

Maria Toğhină approached the issue from a public service media perspective, focusing on gender-based violence and responsible journalism. She presented alarming statistics from Romania, demonstrating that domestic violence remains a widespread and systemic issue. These figures highlight the urgent need for both institutional responses and public awareness. According to Toğhină, media should not only report events but also function as a protective infrastructure. Responsible reporting requires adherence to key principles: Protecting victims' identities, Avoiding victim-blaming language, Preventing sensationalism, Ensuring factual accuracy.

She warned that irresponsible reporting, particularly in cases of human trafficking and violence, can lead to re-traumatization and further harm to victims. Toğhină also emphasized the importance of collaboration between media, civil society, academia, and public institutions. She called for specialized training for journalists to better understand the dynamics of violence and avoid contributing to secondary victimization.



5. Regional Perspectives and Structural Challenges

Ramona Mihăilă provided a comparative analysis of gender equality issues in Southeast Europe, situating Romania within a broader regional context. She noted that many countries in the region share similar historical backgrounds, particularly the legacy of post-communist transitions. As a result, they face common structural challenges including: Educational gaps, Patriarchal cultural norms, Limited access to reproductive rights, Early marriages and teenage motherhood.

Mihăilă emphasized that, in some cases, legal rights exist only in theory and are not effectively implemented in practice. For example, although abortion may be legally permitted, access can be restricted due to institutional or personal barriers. She also highlighted the role of religious and cultural resistance in shaping policy debates, particularly in areas such as sexual education and gender equality initiatives. Despite these challenges, Mihăilă pointed to positive developments, such as increased use of support services and growing awareness. She concluded that education remains the most critical factor in achieving long-term gender equality.

6. Victimization, Trust, and Systemic Barriers

Aura Preda addressed the issue from a victimology perspective, presenting findings from victimization surveys conducted in Romania. These surveys reveal that a significant number of crimes, particularly those involving women, go unreported. The reasons include: Lack of trust in the justice system, Fear of retaliation, Feelings of shame and guilt, Social stigma and cultural norms.

Preda introduced the concept of secondary victimization, which occurs when victims are retraumatized by the very institutions meant to support them. This highlights the need for more sensitive and informed institutional responses. She also emphasized the importance of language. While legal systems often use the term “victim,” alternative terms such as “survivor” can empower individuals and shift perceptions. Preda concluded by stressing that victimization is not only an individual experience but also a societal issue that requires coordinated efforts across legal, educational, and social systems.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The panel clearly demonstrated that media and community leadership are essential drivers of justice and gender equality. Several key conclusions emerge:

- **Education is fundamental:** Strengthening justice literacy and gender equality requires comprehensive educational reforms.
- **Media is a transformative force:** Ethical and responsible journalism can empower individuals and promote social change.

- **Institutional trust must be rebuilt:** Barriers to justice often stem from a lack of confidence in legal systems.
- **Collaboration is essential:** Effective solutions require partnerships between media, academia, civil society, and public institutions.
- **Language matters:** Inclusive and empowering discourse can reshape societal attitudes and support survivors.

In conclusion, gender equality is not only a policy objective but a multidimensional transformation process. Media and community leadership must act not only as tools for awareness but as active agents of change, capable of driving sustainable and inclusive progress.

Policy Recommendations

1. Strengthen Justice Literacy through Education

- Integrate justice literacy and human rights education into national curricula.
- Promote digital literacy to improve access to legal information.
- Train educators to recognize early signs of violence and guide safe reporting.

2. Promote Survivor-Centered Justice Systems

- Ensure legal procedures are accessible, inclusive, and trauma-informed.
- Strengthen victim support services, including legal aid and psychological assistance.
- Implement mechanisms to prevent secondary victimization in institutions.

3. Enhance Ethical Media Standards

- Develop and enforce guidelines for responsible reporting on gender-based violence.
- Protect victims' identities and avoid victim-blaming narratives.
- Provide specialized training for journalists on trauma-sensitive communication.

4. Strengthen Cross-Sector Collaboration

- Foster partnerships between governments, media, civil society, and academia.
- Support community leaders and women human rights defenders in awareness campaigns.
- Establish coordinated referral systems linking media content to support services.

5. Improve Institutional Accountability and Trust

- Increase transparency in justice processes.
- Monitor implementation of gender equality laws and international conventions.
- Expand accessible reporting mechanisms, including hotlines and digital platforms.

Expected Impact

- Increased reporting of gender-based violence cases
- Improved access to legal and support services
- Greater public awareness and reduced stigma
- Strengthened trust in justice institutions
- More inclusive and gender-responsive policies

Achieving gender equality and access to justice requires more than legal reforms. Media and community leadership must be recognized as essential components of justice systems. By promoting ethical communication, strengthening education, and ensuring survivor-centered approaches, policymakers can create sustainable and inclusive pathways toward justice for all women and girls.

JOBS FOR GIRLS: LEVERAGING AI TO MATCH YOUNG PEOPLE WITH BETTER CAREERS

Organized by BacharLorai (Canada) in partnership with JWF
12 March 2026 | 11:00 AM – 12:30 PM | NYU Kimmel Center



BacharLorai Global, in partnership with the United Nations Association in Canada (UNAC), Journalists and Writers Foundation (JWF), and Kamakhya Health Organization, hosted the panel discussion “*Jobs for Girls: Leveraging AI to Match Young People With Better Careers*” during the 70th session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW70) at New York University on March 12, 2026. The discussion brought together experts across policy, healthcare, technology, education, and workforce development to examine how artificial intelligence can expand economic opportunities for women and girls while addressing systemic inequalities that continue to limit access to education, employment, and leadership opportunities. Building on BacharLorai Global’s previous policy work on youth unemployment inequities, the discussion explored how AI-driven innovation can be leveraged responsibly.

The panel was moderated by Aditi Zahir, Director of Policy Research at BacharLorai Global. In his opening remarks, Aki Temiseva of the United Nations Association in Canada framed both the opportunities and challenges presented by emerging technologies.

He emphasized that innovation cannot happen in isolation and highlighted the importance of cross-sector collaboration between governments, civil society organizations, academic institutions, and private-sector actors. Temiseva noted that while AI-powered platforms may help connect young women with opportunities they may not otherwise access, technological innovation alone cannot resolve structural inequalities such as wage disparities, underrepresentation in leadership roles, and geographic barriers to employment. He stressed that women and girls must play an active role in shaping the future of digital economies rather than simply participating in them.

Cemre Ulker of the Journalists and Writers Foundation highlighted the growing threat of technology-facilitated gender-based violence and its impact on women's professional advancement. She noted that approximately 73 percent of women journalists report experiencing digital threats, often leading to self-censorship and professional limitations. Ulker emphasized that online violence frequently extends beyond digital spaces and creates broader barriers to women's economic participation. She also referenced recent international efforts to address these issues, including the United Nations Secretary-General's scientific panel on artificial intelligence and the introduction of a new Convention against Cybercrime. Nicholas Kimble of the United Nations Youth Office further expanded the discussion by emphasizing youth mental health and cyber well-being as critical issues connected to technological advancement.

The panel featured Dr. Kristen Austin, Vice President of Culture and Community Impact at Rewriting the Code; Sila Gecir, a licensed social worker and therapist at Marble Health with prior experience in university career coaching at Stony Brook University; Saloni Patel, Public and Outreach Officer at Kamakhya Health Organization and graduate researcher in machine learning and artificial intelligence; and Dr. Al-Amin Ahamed, BacharLorai Global Policy Resident and researcher focused on youth employment and digital equity.

Question 1: Where do you see the most promising opportunities for AI to expand pathways for women and girls, and where do you see risks of reinforcing existing barriers?

AI-powered career platforms were identified as having the potential to expand access to resume development, interview preparation, mentorship, digital learning, and remote employment opportunities, particularly for young women in rural communities who may lack access to traditional career networks. Drawing from Bachar Lora'i Global's "Jobs for the Future" research, Dr. Ahmed noted that many young people in rural Bangladesh simply do not know what employment pathways, internships, or training opportunities exist, and AI has the potential to address this information gap. At the same time, panelists warned that technological innovation often reinforces existing inequalities when systems are built using biased datasets or are designed primarily for already privileged populations.

Dr. Austin described AI as a tool that can both “extend opportunity and amputate it,” warning that low-income and underrepresented women are often excluded from new technological shifts. Patel similarly noted that AI systems replicate historical inequalities when they are trained on data that fails to adequately reflect women’s experiences and economic contributions.

Question 2: When AI tools are built without the communities they are meant to serve, what is at risk? What would genuine co-design require?

Panelists noted that employment systems frequently overlook caregiving responsibilities, informal labor, mobility restrictions, and nontraditional work histories that shape women’s economic realities across many communities. Dr. Ahamed pointed to women working in Bangladesh’s ready-made garment sector, where many balance paid work with caregiving responsibilities while facing significant mobility limitations. Systems designed solely around productivity metrics often fail to recognize these realities. He outlined three elements necessary for meaningful co-design: early engagement with communities before systems are developed, participatory design processes that recognize informal labor, and shared governance models that allow communities to monitor outcomes.

The discussion also challenged assumptions about data neutrality. Patel noted that when economic systems rely on historical credit and employment data, women and non-binary individuals are often treated as higher-risk populations because their labor has historically been undercounted. The conversation reinforced that inclusive innovation requires communities to help define both the problems and the solutions.

Question 3: What gets lost if we fail to center the human experience—such as belonging, confidence, and mental well-being—in AI career tools?

Panelists challenged purely transactional approaches to workforce development, arguing that employment outcomes cannot be reduced to placement metrics. Gecir reflected on how AI has made career coaching more accessible, but cautioned against reducing individuals to algorithmic outputs. She noted that optimizing resumes exclusively for applicant tracking systems often strips away authenticity and ignores broader career aspirations. Drawing from the Stanford Life Design model used in her previous work at Stony Brook University, she emphasized the importance of aligning career development with personal values, long-term goals, and fulfillment.

Dr. Austin also raised concerns about accessibility and belonging, noting that AI-generated career advice often defaults to narrow assumptions about professionalism. She shared how phrases such as “walk into the room with a commanding presence” may carry very different meanings for individuals with disabilities or those navigating excludatory workplace cultures.

Question 5: In one sentence, what measure of change in five years would signal that AI has meaningfully improved economic justice for young women?

Panelists concluded by identifying measurable indicators of progress:

- Sila Gecir emphasized retention over placement and called for stronger systems to measure career burnout and long-term satisfaction.
- Dr. Al-Amin Ahmed emphasized intersectionality and called for multidisciplinary collaboration to become standard practice.
- Saloni Patel highlighted the need for increased representation of women across major industries.
- Dr. Kristen Austin emphasized that technology should be treated as a right rather than a privilege and should be integrated into educational systems from the outset.

The discussion concluded by returning to a central question posed throughout the event: who benefits from technological progress, and who gets left behind? As artificial intelligence continues to reshape global labor markets, panelists emphasized that equitable innovation requires intentional collaboration, accountability, and sustained investment in women and girls. In her closing remarks, Aditi Zahir shared findings from the World Bank's Women, Business and the Law 2026 report underscoring the urgency of this issue: women represent only 49 percent of the global labor force, own just 34 percent of private firms, and hold only 19 percent of top management positions worldwide.



THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN GENDER EQUALITY AND PREVENTING VIOLENCE

Organized by Association for Dialogue and Universal Values (Romania) in partnership with JWF
16 March 2026 | 10:30 AM – 12:00 PM | YouTube

[Click to Watch the YouTube Recording](#)

The banner features the title "THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN GENDER EQUALITY AND PREVENTING VIOLENCE" in large, bold, orange letters. Below the title, it states "Monday, 16 March 2026 | 10:30 AM EST | Online Parallel Event". The banner lists six participants, each with a circular portrait and their details:

Moderator	Speaker	Speaker	Speaker	Speaker	Speaker
FIGAN ÇINAR Equal Opportunities Expert Teacher Spectrum School Romania	RAMONA MIHAILĂ Professor PhD Dimitrie Cantemir, Christian University, NAEO, GEFE Romania	MADLEN ȘERBAN Associated Professor University of Bucharest, Former Secretary-General, UNESCO Commission Romania Romania	CLAUDIA BERGHEZAN GYARMATH PhD, Equal Opportunities & Workplace Harassment Expert Trainer, President APETES Romania	STELIANA MORARU C-level Executive Fractional COO, PhD, Social Entrepreneur Romania	MARIA-IULIANA DASCĂLU Dean - Faculty of Engineering in Foreign Languages Politehnica Bucharest University Romania

Logos at the bottom include: LUMINA, Dimitrie Cantemir Christian University, FILS, GEFE, APETES, and carierista.

This report summarizes the key contributions and insights shared during the CSW70 parallel panel on “*The Role of Education in Gender Equality and Preventing Violence.*” The event brought together experts from academia, civil society, and the private sector to examine how education systems, economic structures, technological developments, and policy frameworks intersect in advancing gender equality and addressing violence against women and girls.

Moderated by Figan Cinar, an experienced educator from Romania, the panel featured distinguished speakers: Madlen Șerban, Prof. Maria-Iuliana Dascălu, Prof. Ramona Mihailă, Steliana Moraru, and Claudia Berghezan Gyarmath. Each speaker provided a unique perspective grounded in research, practice, and policy engagement. The discussion emphasized that while education is a central pillar in achieving gender equality, it must be understood within broader socio-economic, cultural, and political contexts. The panel underscored the need for systemic, multi-level interventions to ensure sustainable impact.

1. Education in Context: Structural Inequalities and Multiple Crises

Madlen Șerban highlighted that education does not occur in isolation but is deeply shaped by global crises, including armed conflict, poverty, and health challenges. She emphasized that fragile contexts disproportionately affect women and girls, particularly in terms of access to education and exposure to violence.

She noted that conflict-related sexual violence overwhelmingly affects women, and that girls in conflict-affected regions are significantly more likely to be excluded from education. Poverty further compounds these inequalities, with structural barriers pushing women into cycles of vulnerability. Additionally, rising mental health challenges; especially among youth, create further obstacles to educational attainment.

A key argument in Șerban's intervention was that education alone does not automatically lead to gender equality or the prevention of violence. While access to schooling is essential, the quality and content of education are equally critical. She stressed that traditional approaches focused solely on curriculum reform are insufficient. Instead, emphasis must be placed on teacher training, pedagogical practices, and the "lived curriculum", the actual experiences students encounter in classrooms.

Șerban also presented the role of civil society, particularly through Soroptimist International, in supporting marginalized groups such as teenage mothers, rural girls, and migrants. These grassroots interventions demonstrate that community-based approaches are vital complements to formal education systems.

2. Gender Equality in STEM and AI: Building Inclusive Innovation

Prof. Maria-Iuliana Dascălu focused on the role of universities and technology in shaping gender equality outcomes. She argued that as artificial intelligence and digital technologies increasingly define modern societies, the underrepresentation of women in these fields poses both ethical and practical risks. She highlighted that women constitute a minority in AI and IT professions, which can lead to biased technological outcomes. Algorithms developed without diverse perspectives risk reinforcing existing inequalities. Therefore, gender diversity is not only a matter of fairness but also a prerequisite for high-quality innovation. Dascălu emphasized the transformative role of universities in influencing: Access to STEM education, Skills development for future engineers, Values that guide technological innovation.

She noted that while Romania shows relatively high participation of women in STEM education, significant gaps remain in leadership and decision-making roles. Through examples such as national hackathons and early innovation programs, she demonstrated how targeted initiatives can build confidence among young women and encourage their participation in technology. She stressed that confidence, not ability, is often the primary barrier for girls entering STEM fields. Importantly, Dascălu advocated for integrating ethical and social dimensions into AI education, ensuring that future technologies are inclusive, fair, and socially responsible.

3. Regional Perspectives: Feminist Activism and Resistance in South-Eastern Europe

Prof. Ramona Mihăilă provided a comprehensive regional analysis of gender equality in South-Eastern Europe, highlighting the complex interplay of historical, cultural, and political factors. She explained that the region's legacy of socialism, conflict, and socio-economic transition has created unique challenges. Health systems are often underfunded, and women's bodily autonomy remains contested across legal, cultural, and institutional domains. Mihăilă emphasized the importance of feminist health activism, which operates across multiple arenas, legal systems, healthcare institutions, and public discourse.

However, she also pointed to the rise of antifeminist resistance, including legal challenges to gender equality policies, expansion of conscientious objection in healthcare, disinformation campaigns targeting gender-related reforms. These dynamics are particularly visible in debates around sexuality education and reproductive rights. Despite these challenges, Mihăilă highlighted the strength of civil society organizations across the region, which provide critical services such as legal aid, shelters, and advocacy. She also noted the importance of regional and European mechanisms, such as the harmonized helpline for victims of gender-based violence.

In the field of education, she stressed that universities play a key role in advancing gender studies and fostering critical awareness. However, persistent barriers—such as limited representation of women in research and leadership—must be addressed. Her central message was that gender equality requires coordinated action across education, health, legal, and policy systems, and cannot be achieved through isolated interventions.

4. The Economic Case for Gender Equality

Steliana Moraru presented a compelling economic argument for investing in women's education and empowerment. She described women as the “largest underutilized economic asset” globally. Moraru highlighted that women represent half of the global population but contribute significantly less to global GDP. Achieving gender parity in the labor market could generate trillions of dollars in economic growth. She emphasized that gender equality is not only a moral imperative but also a strategic economic investment.

She also discussed the “multiplier effect” of women's economic participation, noting that women reinvest a large proportion of their income into their families and communities. This leads to improved outcomes in health, education, and overall well-being. In the Romanian context, Moraru pointed to significant gender gaps in employment and earnings, illustrating the economic cost of inequality.

From a business perspective, she presented evidence that organizations with greater gender diversity outperform financially and demonstrate higher levels of innovation. She argued that diversity should be understood as an innovation driver rather than a cost. Moraru also emphasized the importance of public-private partnerships and presented the Carierista model, which provides holistic support for women's professional reintegration. This approach addresses financial, psychological, and skill-based barriers, demonstrating the value of integrated support systems.

5. From Protection to Power: Structural Barriers and Systemic Change

Claudia Berghezan Gyarmath addressed the systemic barriers that continue to limit women's participation in leadership and decision-making. She argued that the concept of the “glass ceiling” should be understood as a concrete and structural barrier rather than a metaphor. Despite progress in legal frameworks, women continue to face significant obstacles, including workplace harassment, digital violence, and exclusion

from power structures. Gyarmath introduced the concept of the “resilience tax,” describing how women leaders often expend significant mental and emotional energy navigating hostile environments. This not only affects individual well-being but also reduces organizational productivity and innovation.

She highlighted the economic costs of gender-based violence, including lost working hours and reduced workforce participation. At the same time, she emphasized that organizations with greater female representation in leadership demonstrate improved performance and innovation outcomes. A critical aspect of her intervention was the role of digital violence, particularly in political and public spheres. She noted that a high percentage of women in politics experience online harassment, which discourages participation and undermines democratic processes. Gyarmath called for systemic solutions, including: Stronger legal frameworks, Organizational accountability, Support mechanisms for survivors, Active engagement of male allies. Her key message was that **gender equality requires a shift from protective measures to structural transformation**, ensuring that inclusion becomes the norm rather than the exception.

Key Conclusions and Recommendations

1. **Education is necessary but not sufficient** - Achieving gender equality requires addressing broader structural inequalities, including economic, cultural, and political factors.
2. **Teacher training and pedagogical practices are critical** - The effectiveness of education depends on how it is delivered, not just on curriculum content.
3. **STEM and technology sectors must be prioritized** - Increasing women’s participation in these fields is essential for inclusive and ethical innovation.
4. **Regional and cultural contexts matter** - Policies and interventions must be adapted to local realities while maintaining universal principles of equality.
5. **Economic arguments strengthen advocacy** - Demonstrating the financial benefits of gender equality can accelerate policy and institutional change.
6. **Systemic barriers must be addressed** - Legal frameworks, organizational cultures, and social norms must evolve to support women’s full participation.
7. **Multi-sectoral collaboration is essential** - Governments, educational institutions, civil society, and the private sector must work together to achieve sustainable progress.

Final Reflection

The CSW70 panel reaffirmed that gender equality is a complex, multidimensional challenge requiring coordinated global action. Education remains a powerful tool, but its impact depends on how it is integrated with broader social, economic, and political systems. The insights shared by the panelists underscore the urgency of moving beyond fragmented approaches toward comprehensive strategies that empower women and girls at all levels of society.

AUTHORITARIAN POWER, GENDERED BODY, AND POLITICS OF AUTONOMY

Organized by AST (USA), Set Them Free (USA) in partnership with JWF
16 March 2026 | 12:30 PM – 2:00 PM | Church Center for the UN

[Click to Watch the YouTube Recording](#)

UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN 70TH SESSION

AUTHORITARIAN POWER, GENDERED BODY, AND POLITICS OF AUTONOMY

SILENCED TURKEY **SET THEM FREE**

16 MARCH 2026
12:30 PM - 2:00 PM

10th Floor, Church Center for the UN
777 United Nations Plaza, New York, NY 10017

Rachel Miner
CEO, Bellwether International

Dr. Shilan Fuad Hussain
Marie Curie Researcher

Cindy Morris
President & CEO, The Benson Agency

Prof. Manisha Desai
Executive Director, Center for Changing Systems of Power, Stony Brook University

Sevinc Ozarslan
Journalist

The NGO parallel event “*Authoritarian Power, Gendered Body, and Politics of Autonomy*” was held on March 16, 2026, during the 70th session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW70) at the Church Center for the United Nations (CCUN), New York. Co-organized by Advocates of Silenced Turkey (AST) and Set Them Free, the event brought together scholars, practitioners, and civil society actors to examine how gender injustice is produced and sustained through the regulation and politicization of women’s bodies across social, legal, and geopolitical contexts.

Aligned with CSW70 priority themes, the panel emphasized bodily autonomy as a fundamental dimension of gender equality and women’s human rights, grounded in international frameworks such as CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action, and Sustainable Development Goal 5. The discussion aimed to bridge research, policy, and advocacy, fostering dialogue on pathways toward justice, agency, and gender equity.

The event was moderated by Dr. Hafza Girdap (Hofstra University, AST), who framed the discussion around the central role of bodily autonomy within systems of authoritarian governance. Panelists included: Sevinç Özarslan (Exiled Turkish journalist), Rachel Miner (CEO, Bellwether International), Professor Manisha Desai (Stony Brook University), Dr. Shilan Fuad Hussain (Marie Curie Fellow), Cindy Morris (Co-founder, Women Who Change the World). Each speaker contributed perspectives grounded in research, advocacy, and lived experience, highlighting the structural and transnational nature of gender-based violence.

1. Authoritarian Governance and Bodily Control

Panelists examined how authoritarian regimes use control over women's bodies as a mechanism of political power. Practices such as restrictions on reproductive rights, child marriage, and surveillance-based governance were discussed as systemic tools that limit women's autonomy. The discussion highlighted how legal frameworks, neoliberal governance, and patriarchal norms intersect to normalize these forms of control.

2. Structural and Transnational Gender-Based Violence

The panel underscored that gender-based violence is not isolated but embedded within broader institutional, legal, and geopolitical systems. Panelists emphasized the transnational nature of these dynamics, particularly in contexts of migration and displacement, securitization policies, authoritarian repression. These processes disproportionately impact marginalized women, including refugees and minority communities.

3. Intersectionality and Marginalized Experiences

Speakers highlighted how gender, race, religion, and geopolitical positioning intersect to shape women's experiences of oppression. Examples included: systemic discrimination against minority women, gendered violence in detention and prison systems, the use of women's bodies as instruments of political pressure. The discussion emphasized the importance of intersectional frameworks in understanding and addressing inequality.

4. Storytelling, Trauma, and Survivor-Centered Approaches

A key focus of the panel was the role of storytelling as both documentation and resistance. Panelists stressed: the importance of survivor-led approaches, trauma-informed practices, the role of narrative in rebuilding agency and identity. These approaches were presented as essential for both advocacy and long-term healing processes.

5. Resistance, Solidarity, and Collective Action

The panel concluded with a strong emphasis on collective resistance and transnational solidarity. Speakers highlighted: grassroots organizing as a driver of change, the need for cross-border alliances, the importance of feminist and multiracial coalitions. The discussion emphasized that systemic change requires both policy reform and community-based action.

Selected Speaker Insights

Rachel Miner highlighted the predictable nature of gender-based violence in conflict and emphasized the need for trauma-informed, locally grounded interventions.

Dr. Shilan Fuad Hussain introduced the concept of the “*Patriarchal Trifecta*”—forced marriage, female genital mutilation, and honor killings—and called for holistic responses combining education, economic empowerment, and legal reform.

Cindy Morris emphasized the importance of collective efficacy, stating that reclaiming agency begins with a belief in the possibility of change.

Professor Manisha Desai addressed the global rise of ethnonationalist ideologies and called for cross-religious and multiracial resistance grounded in liberatory discourse.

Sevinç Özarslan shared firsthand testimony on repression in Turkey, highlighting systemic violence against women and calling for international accountability and action.

Key Takeaways and Call to Action

- Gender-based violence under authoritarian regimes is systemic and institutional
- Bodily autonomy is central to gender equality and human rights
- Intersectional and transnational approaches are essential for meaningful analysis and intervention
- Storytelling and lived experience are powerful tools for advocacy and resistance
- Silence enables injustice; visibility and action are necessary for change

The event concluded with a call to the international community to actively confront systemic violations against women and to support rights-based, collective strategies for achieving justice and gender equity. The CSW70 panel “*Authoritarian Power, Gendered Body, and Politics of Autonomy*” provided a critical platform for examining the structural and transnational dimensions of gendered oppression. By integrating research, lived experience, and advocacy, the event contributed to advancing global dialogue on women’s rights, bodily autonomy, and social justice. Through its emphasis on solidarity, resistance, and transformative change, the panel highlighted the urgent need for sustained engagement across policy, academic, and grassroots spaces to address the ongoing challenges facing women worldwide.



JUSTICE WITHOUT BORDERS: UPHOLDING THE RIGHTS OF YOUNG MIGRANT WOMEN

Organized by Association for Dialogue and Universal Values (Romania) in
partnership with JWF

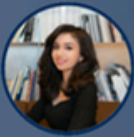
17 March 2026 | 10:30 AM – 12:00 PM | YouTube

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UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN 70TH SESSION - CSW70 PARALLEL EVENT

JUSTICE WITHOUT BORDERS: UPHOLDING THE RIGHTS OF YOUNG MIGRANT WOMEN

TUESDAY, 17 MARCH 2026 | 10.30 EST | ONLINE PARALLEL EVENT

MODERATOR	SPEAKER	SPEAKER	SPEAKER	SPEAKER	SPEAKER
					
ZEYNEP KORKUT CSW70 Parallel Event Moderator Medical Student Volunteer at ADVU	ELIS POKHVALITOVA Ukrainian Community leader Co-creator of Joy Day Project Team member of Eliberare	MILENA REYES VERGARA Gender Equality Advocate Social Entrepreneur	SEMIHA KILDIR Physics Student Volunteer at Geyres Irinis Association	REFIKA GÜÇLÜ Linguist and English teacher Counsellant at Phönix	ZAWDA IBRAHIM Medical Student Volunteer at ADVU

Logos: ADVU, NGO CSW, HOPE & UKRAINE, ГЕОПЕЦ ЕПІХІЗІ, PHÖNIX, COMMISSION on the STATUS OF WOMEN

The parallel event “Justice Without Borders: Upholding the Rights of Young Migrant Women”, held during the 70th session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW70), convened youth leaders, civil society actors, and experts to examine the lived realities, challenges, and opportunities shaping the experiences of young migrant women. The discussion emphasized that migration is not merely a geographic relocation but a transformative process affecting identity, access to rights, and participation. While migration may create new opportunities, it also exposes young women to layered and systemic inequalities.

1. Intersecting Structural Barriers

A central finding of the panel is that young migrant women face intersecting and mutually reinforcing barriers. As emphasized by Semiha Kobi, language barriers remain one of the most critical obstacles, limiting access to education, healthcare, housing, and legal systems. She highlighted that language is not only a communication tool but a determinant of trust, dignity, and belonging. Building on this, Soda Ibrahim noted that migrant women often experience exclusion within academic and social systems, leading to underrepresentation and limited participation. Her transnational experience demonstrated how identity becomes fluid and complex across migration contexts. These structural barriers are compounded by: limited awareness of legal rights, institutional gaps in support systems, social discrimination and marginalization. Together, they restrict not only access to services but also the ability of migrant women to exercise agency.

2. Community-Based Solutions and Safe Spaces

The panel strongly underscored the importance of community-based approaches. Drawing from her work with displaced Ukrainian communities, Elise Pokhvalitova highlighted that access to justice often begins with access to trusted information and safe environments. She emphasized the role of grassroots initiatives—such as workshops, crisis response mechanisms, and community events—in creating spaces where women can seek help, exchange knowledge, and build trust. As she noted, many migrant women are initially unaware of their rights or available support systems. Community spaces therefore serve as critical entry points to empowerment. Importantly, these initiatives do not merely provide assistance; they facilitate transformation, enabling women to become active contributors and community leaders.

3. Digital Risks and AI Inequalities

The panel identified digital environments as both enabling and risk-laden. Elise Pokhvalitova highlighted that digital platforms are increasingly used by migrant women for communication, employment, and integration. However, these platforms also expose users to risks such as: Online exploitation and trafficking, Fraudulent job offers and Manipulation and misinformation.

Expanding this discussion, Milena Vergara examined the implications of artificial intelligence (AI). She stressed that AI systems are not neutral but are shaped by existing power structures and data biases. As she articulated, the key issue is not simply access to AI, but participation in its design and governance. Migrant women remain underrepresented in data systems and innovation spaces, increasing the risk of exclusion from the emerging digital economy. She emphasized that without intentional inclusion, technological progress may reproduce, and even deepened, existing inequalities.

4. Education Systems and Language Integration

Education emerged as a critical domain requiring structural reform. Semiha Kobi emphasized that migrant students often lack adequate institutional support, with language assistance frequently dependent on voluntary initiatives rather than systemic frameworks. This results in talented students being unable to demonstrate their capabilities. She further highlighted the absence of integrated psychosocial support within educational systems, despite the emotional challenges associated with migration. The discussion made clear that language access and educational inclusion are foundational to long-term integration and empowerment.

6. Psychological Impact and Identity Transformation

The psychological dimension of migration was powerfully articulated by Rafika Güçlü. She described forced migration as a profound disruption affecting identity, dignity, and social standing. Her testimony illustrated the loss of professional roles, social networks, and personal continuity experienced by many migrant women.

However, Rafika reframed this narrative by emphasizing resilience. Referring to migrant women as “modern Amazons,” she highlighted their capacity to endure hardship while maintaining agency and ethical integrity. Her intervention underscored that migration is not only a structural issue but also a deeply human experience requiring empathy and recognition.

7. Participation, Volunteering, and Social Inclusion

Soda Ibrahim presented the Happy Children Project as a practical example of inclusive, community-driven engagement. The initiative supports disadvantaged children while creating opportunities for migrant women to participate actively in society. Through volunteering, women gain: Confidence, Social networks, A sense of belonging and purpose. As she emphasized, inclusion is not automatic; it must be intentionally created through participatory spaces that allow individuals to contribute and be recognized. This model demonstrates how grassroots initiatives can bridge gaps between migrant communities and host societies.

8. Redefining Access to Justice

A key outcome of the panel was the expansion of the concept of access to justice. Speakers collectively emphasized that justice must be understood as encompassing: Access to information, Social and civic participation, Digital safety, Economic opportunities, Representation in decision-making. This broader framework reflects the interconnected realities of migrant women’s lives and challenges traditional, narrowly legal definitions.

9. Policy Recommendations

Based on the panel discussions, the following policy priorities are identified:

Language and Education - Expand access to state-supported language programs, Integrate structured support systems for migrant students

Community-Based Support - Provide sustainable funding for grassroots initiatives, Strengthen women-led community networks

Digital Inclusion and Protection - Promote digital literacy and safety, Ensure inclusive participation in AI and technological systems

Psychosocial Support - Provide accessible, culturally responsive mental health services, Economic Empowerment, Facilitate access to employment and entrepreneurship opportunities

Legal Access and Protection - Establish multilingual legal assistance, Strengthen protections against exploitation

Participation and Representation - Ensure meaningful inclusion of migrant women in policymaking processes

10. Conclusion

The panel demonstrated that the challenges faced by young migrant women are complex, interconnected, and deeply rooted in structural inequalities. At the same time, it highlighted their resilience, leadership, and capacity to contribute to inclusive societies. The contributions of Zeynep Korkut, Elise Pokhvalitova, Milena Vergara, Semiha Kobi, Rafika Güçlü, and Soda Ibrahim collectively reinforce a central message:

Young migrant women must be recognized not only as beneficiaries of protection, but as active agents of change. Empowering migrant women is not only a matter of human rights but also a strategic investment in building inclusive, resilient, and sustainable societies. Young migrant women face multiple and intersecting barriers, including language limitations, lack of legal awareness, digital risks, discrimination, and psychological challenges. These barriers not only restrict their access to essential services but also limit their active participation in society. Existing policy frameworks are often fragmented and insufficient, frequently positioning migrant women as passive beneficiaries rather than active agents.

Migrant women are not merely a group in need of protection, but active agents in the transformation of societies. Policies must move beyond symbolic measures and ensure structural and inclusive transformation.



THE ECONOMIC AND LEGAL EMPOWERMENT OF FORCIBLY DISPLACED WOMEN

Organized by Association for Dialogue and Universal Values (Romania) in partnership with JWF

19 March 2026 | 10:30 AM – 12:00 PM | YouTube

[Click to Watch the YouTube Recording](#)



JOURNALISTS AND
WRITERS FOUNDATION

United Nations Commission on the Status
of Women 70th Session | Side Event

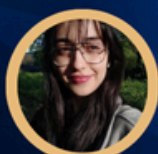


#CSW70

THE ECONOMIC AND LEGAL EMPOWERMENT OF FORCIBLY DISPLACED WOMEN

Thursday, 19 March 2026 | 10:30 AM EST | Online Parallel Event

Moderator



NESIBE NUR BOLAT
A Member of ADVU Association
Event Organizer
Project Manager
Romania

Speaker



OLENA LAZARIEVA
Project Coordinator
Founder of the CF "Hope for Ukraine"
Event Planner
Romania

Speaker



GUL CALIS
Civil Society Volunteer
Former Vice President of Sinesis
Pigi
Greece

Speaker



XIMENA REYES DE OLMEDO
Founder of Educultura & International Womens
Association Entrepreneur program
Romania

Speaker



IRYNA ARAPOVA
Business and Migration Law
Consultant
Romania

Speaker



MIHAELA TUDOR
Founder of #WeAreHalf Movement
Communication & Leadership Advocate
Romania



IWA



Asociatia
Solidaritate
si Egalitate



Arapova



**SYNEΣIΣ
ΠΗΓΗ**
AMKE

The parallel event titled “The Economic and Legal Empowerment of Forcibly Displaced Women” was organized within the framework of the 70th Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW70). The event brought together women leaders, legal experts, civil society representatives, migrant advocates, and community organizers from different countries to discuss the multidimensional challenges faced by forcibly displaced women and the pathways toward sustainable empowerment.

Moderated by Nesibe Nur Bolat from the *Association for Dialogue and Universal Values (ADVU)*, the panel highlighted the urgent need for integrated approaches combining legal protection, economic inclusion, psychosocial support, education, and community-based initiatives. The event emphasized that displaced women are not passive recipients of aid but individuals with professional expertise, resilience, leadership potential, and transformative social capacity.

Speakers from Ukraine, Türkiye, Greece, Romania, and international organizations shared both professional insights and deeply personal experiences, demonstrating the interconnected realities of migration, displacement, gender inequality, and systemic exclusion. The discussions aligned strongly with the objectives of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly those related to gender equality, decent work, reduced inequalities, access to justice, and inclusive societies.



The event opened with remarks by Nesibe Nur Bolat. She welcomed participants and emphasized that the issue of forcibly displaced women lies at the intersection of human rights, justice, and sustainable development. Bolat underlined that millions of women worldwide continue to face barriers in accessing legal protection, economic opportunities, social inclusion, and basic rights. She noted that displacement often intensifies pre-existing gender inequalities and leaves women exposed to vulnerability, exploitation, and institutional exclusion. The moderator highlighted the importance of strengthening legal frameworks while simultaneously creating economic opportunities that allow women to rebuild their lives with dignity and autonomy.

Women-Led Community Models and Ukrainian Refugees in Romania

Olena Lazariieva, a Ukrainian refugee, community organizer, and founder of the *Hope for Ukraine Foundation*, focused her presentation on women-led community models for economic and legal empowerment in Romania. Speaking from personal experience as a displaced woman, Lazariieva described how thousands of Ukrainian women arrived in Romania with children, often without financial resources, legal knowledge, or support networks. She stressed that displacement is not simply relocation but a complete restructuring of life.

One of the central themes of her speech was the inseparable connection between economic participation and legal literacy. According to Lazariieva: “Without income, women become vulnerable. Without legal knowledge, they remain equally vulnerable.” She argued that women-led initiatives are particularly effective because women understand each other’s trauma and experiences in ways institutional systems often cannot.

Lazariieva highlighted several integration programs she participated in with organizations such as *World Vision Romania* and *Olympics NGO*, including: livelihood projects, child protection programs, women’s forums, psychosocial support initiatives, and integration activities through sports and community engagement. She explained that successful empowerment programs must combine: legal guidance, psychological support, career counseling, leadership development, language education, and practical labor-market integration.

Through concrete examples, she demonstrated how legal awareness can determine the success or failure of refugee women entrepreneurs. One woman with financial resources but limited legal understanding failed in business, while another with modest means but strong legal knowledge successfully developed a thriving microenterprise. Lazariieva concluded by calling for: donor investment in integrated legal-economic programs, inclusion of women advisory councils in integration systems, and the incorporation of legal literacy into all economic empowerment initiatives.

Refugee Women, Resilience, and Social Participation

Gül Çalış, a former geography teacher from Türkiye and a refugee living in Greece since 2017, delivered a deeply personal and powerful testimony about rebuilding life after political persecution. Çalış explained that she and her family were forced to flee Türkiye due to political arrests, torture, social exclusion, and systemic injustices. Despite these traumatic experiences, she emphasized that displaced women should not be viewed as “people who come with nothing.”

According to Çalış, refugee women bring: professional expertise, educational backgrounds, life experience, and social contribution capacity. She noted that among displaced Turkish women in Greece are: teachers, psychologists, doctors, engineers, lawyers, and other professionals. One of the major barriers she identified was language access. High costs of language education create obstacles to integration, employment, and social participation. Çalış also discussed the emotional burden caused by: prolonged asylum procedures, documentation delays, citizenship processes, and adaptation challenges faced by children.

In response to these challenges, she co-founded the nonprofit organization **Sinesis Pigi AMKE** in 2020. Through volunteer initiatives, the organization promotes intercultural dialogue and social inclusion through: art exhibitions, environmental activities, educational support, language courses, women’s events, cultural workshops, and humanitarian aid. Importantly, Çalış emphasized that many refugee women continue creating, producing, and contributing despite systemic barriers. She shared examples of women who: teach online, produce handmade crafts, write books, run small businesses, and develop new professional skills. Her speech highlighted the importance of hope, adaptability, lifelong learning, and solidarity among women.

Community Networks, Social Capital, and Mentorship

Ximena Reyes de Olmedo, intercultural trainer and global consultant currently based in Romania, focused on the role of social capital, mentorship, and community-based structures in long-term integration. Reyes de Olmedo argued that migration discussions must move beyond simplistic divisions between “locals” and “migrants” and instead focus on interconnected social realities.

Drawing from a long-term research study conducted in Spain, she explained how children of migrants frequently face disadvantages related not only to economic status but also to social networks and access to information. One key issue highlighted was the lack of “social capital” among migrant families, including: professional networks, mentorship opportunities, institutional familiarity, and referral systems. She stressed that integration is not only about language acquisition or employment but also about visibility and belonging.

Reyes de Olmedo presented several successful community initiatives, including: *Humans Doing Business* in Romania, mentorship programs in Sweden, and the *International Women Entrepreneurs* initiative. These projects create spaces where individuals from different generations, nationalities, and professional backgrounds can connect and collaborate.

She emphasized that mentorship is particularly important in helping migrants navigate: job applications, CV expectations, workplace culture, and bureaucratic systems. A central theme of her presentation was the power of safe spaces and collective action. She explained that many migrants experience prolonged invisibility and social isolation in host countries. Community-based networks therefore become essential platforms for rebuilding confidence, professional identity, and opportunity. Reyes de Olmedo also highlighted the responsibility of media and education systems in shaping perceptions of migration and gender. She called for greater awareness training among journalists and institutions to prevent stereotyping and exclusionary narratives.

Legal Barriers and Human Rights Advocacy

Iryna Arapova, a Ukrainian-Romanian lawyer specializing in migration and business law, addressed the legal dimensions of displacement and the urgent need for systemic reform. Arapova shared her own experience of displacement from occupied territories in Ukraine and explained how war transformed both her personal life and professional mission. Her presentation identified three major structural challenges faced by displaced women:

- 1. Financial Exclusion** - Many Ukrainian refugees in Romania experienced blocked bank accounts and denial of financial services due to incomplete documentation and bureaucratic inconsistencies.
- 2. Legal Uncertainty** - Temporary protection status often does not count toward permanent residency or citizenship requirements, leaving women in prolonged legal insecurity despite years of work and tax contributions.
- 3. Vulnerability to Exploitation and Abuse** - Displaced women frequently face: labor exploitation, domestic violence, economic dependency, and fear of deportation.

Arapova described several legal interventions she led, including: campaigns to restore banking access for Ukrainian refugees, legal protection for survivors of domestic violence, and labor rights complaints on behalf of migrant women workers. She emphasized that legal empowerment requires: trusted legal professionals, accessible legal guidance, and equal protection under the law. Arapova concluded by advocating for the recognition of temporary protection as legal residency and expanded access to legal aid for displaced women.

Economic Inclusion as Structural Change

Mihaela Tudor, founder of the *We Are Half* movement in Romania, focused on women's economic independence as a strategic societal necessity rather than a symbolic equality issue. Tudor argued that women's exclusion from labor markets is not caused by lack of competence but by lack of access. Her organization developed partnerships with human resources institutions to create: vocational training programs, recruitment support systems, mentoring opportunities, and employment navigation services.

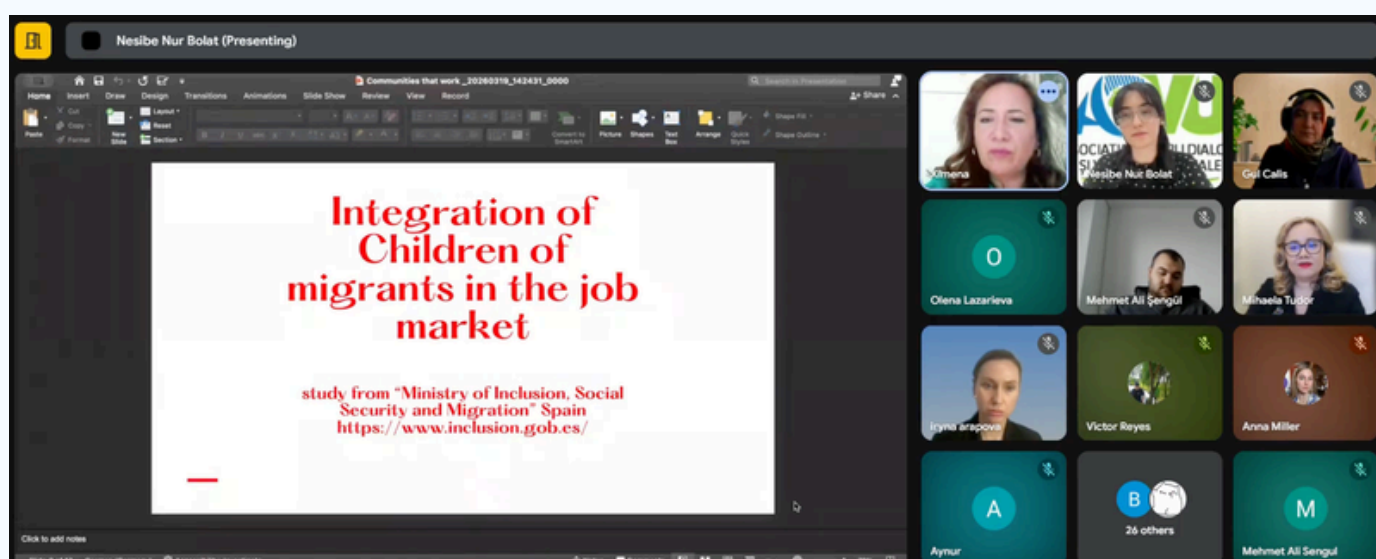
One of the movement's most impactful initiatives was the **We Are Half Hotline**, which provided direct support and guidance to vulnerable women across Romania. Tudor stressed that financial independence is fundamentally connected to: dignity, safety, autonomy, and freedom of choice. She also highlighted the importance of reaching women in geographically and socially isolated communities through mobile "caravan" programs that connected women directly with employers and recruiters. According to Tudor, inclusion should not be treated as charity but as "smart economics." Her remarks emphasized that sustainable societal growth depends on recognizing women as essential contributors to economic systems rather than peripheral participants.

Conclusion

The CSW70 parallel event on the economic and legal empowerment of forcibly displaced women demonstrated that displacement is not solely a humanitarian issue but also a structural gender equality challenge requiring coordinated global responses.

Throughout the discussions, several key themes consistently emerged:

- Legal literacy is essential for empowerment.
- Economic participation and legal protection are deeply interconnected.
- Community-based initiatives create belonging, resilience, and opportunity.
- Mentorship and social capital significantly influence integration outcomes.
- Women must be recognized as active contributors, not passive beneficiaries.
- Long-term inclusion requires institutional reform, not temporary assistance alone.



The speakers collectively emphasized that displaced women possess immense strength, knowledge, and transformative potential. With equitable access to justice, education, employment, and social participation, they can become not only survivors of displacement but also leaders of social progress and community transformation. The event concluded with a strong call for governments, civil society organizations, international institutions, and local communities to work collaboratively toward building inclusive systems where displaced women can thrive with dignity, security, and equal opportunity.

STATUS AND IMPACT OF WOMEN OF COLOR IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Organized by North American University (USA) and US Council of Organizations (USA) in partnership with JWF
19 March 2026 | 11:30 AM – 1:00 PM | ZOOM

Journalists and Writers Foundation

COMMISSION on the STATUS OF WOMEN

NGO CSW FORUM 70 WOMEN

Status and Impact of Women of Color in Higher Education

Thursday, March 19, 2026 / 10:30 AM - 12:00 PM ET
Virtual Zoom Session: <https://tinyurl.com/3ckcp74p>

Dr. Teta V. Banks
USA

Dr. Dawn Barnes
Liberia

Dr. Farhat Nasreen
India

Dr. Nadia Menjivar
El Salvador

London J. Bell, J.D., LL.M.
USA

US Council of Organizations

wfuna
World Federation of United Nations Associations

NORTH AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

The International Forum, Mexico

DELA GORDIA
P.O. BOX 10000
SAN JOSE, COSTA RICA

AIX FIRM LLC

“Status and Impact of Women of Color in Higher Education” is the third NGO parallel event organized by the North American University and the U.S. Council of Organizations in collaboration with the Journalists and Writers Foundation NGO Network for parallel events of the UN Commission on the Status of Women. To mark the 70th anniversary of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, the North American University, U.S. Council of Organizations convened an international panel of women of color in higher education, with the purpose to identify existing barriers to women of color in higher education, achievements made throughout the years, and future perspectives with needed actions to decrease inequalities in higher education.

Program participants included the following: Dr. Teta Banks, moderator; Dr. Faruk Taban, President of North American University, remarks; Dr. Dawn Barnes, President, Aurora Foundation/ Vice President African Methodist Episcopal University in Liberia, West Africa.

Professor Farhat Nasreen, Administrator, Jamia Millia Islamia University, New Delhi, India; Dr. Nadia Menjivar General Director of Strategic Management, Universidad Evangelica de El Salvador; London J. Bell, J.D., LL.M., Founder and President, Bell Global Justice Institute, USA; and Gloria L. Blackwell President and CEO, American Association of University Women , USA.

The event was an online Zoom interactive session on held on March 19, 2026. The call for the event and the registration form was sent out via the Whova app, social networks and emails from the hosting organizations. There were recorded 120 people in attendance, representing 19 countries.

Introduction:

This year, 2026, is a momentous year for many reasons. It is the 70th anniversary of the UN Commission on the Status of Women and continues the 80th year celebration of the United Nations. It is also the 80th year of the World Federation of United Nations Associations, thirty-one years after the Beijing Women's Conference, and four years before the Agenda 2030 date of achieving the UN Sustainable Goals.

All 17 SDGs impact everyone in every country. However, for the discussion of this panel, the key SDGs were SDG #4 (Quality Education) and SDG #5 (Gender Equality). The discussion also included interdependency with SDG #10 (Reduced Inequalities), SDG #16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions), and SDG #17 (Partnerships for the Goals). Noted: The issue of women in higher education is an intersection of several SDGs.

There are several scenarios or situations that apply to this crisis. According to UNESCO reports, women currently hold approximately 30-33% of higher education, presidential or CEO positions globally. In the top 200 institutions, as of 2025-26. Women remain significantly underrepresented in senior leadership. They often face the “glass cliff” scenarios, where they are appointed during institutional crises. Or they face the “pipeline myth,” which is the persistent idea that there are too few women qualified for leadership positions. However, the data indicate that there are more than enough qualified women to fill available leadership positions (American Council on Education). They also often face the “glass ceiling”, which we're all very familiar with, which is a long-standing metaphor for the intangible systemic barriers that prevent women from obtaining senior-level positions. The barriers are exacerbated for women of color, which was the justification and focus of this panel.

Panelists:

Dr. Dawn Cooper Barnes, Director of Aurora Foundation and former Vice President of African Methodist Episcopal University in Liberia, West Africa.

Dr. Farah Nasreen, Islamia University in New Delhi, India.

Ms. Gloria L. Blackwell, President of the American Association of American University Women, USA

Dr. Nadia Minyar Moran, General Director of Strategic Management at Universidad Evangelica in El Salvador.

Attorney London Bell, founding president of Bell Global Justice Institute, and a fellow for the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, USA.

Segment One: Barriers Identified

The panelists discussed barriers which they encountered personally as well as those encountered by women in general and women of color specifically. Some key barriers include the following: Poverty, early marriage and or pregnancy, domestic responsibilities of women and girls, deeply rooted patriarchal norms, financial constraints and limited access to financial support, sexual harassment in educational settings, puberty and lack of feminine supplies and sanitation, feminine menstruation cultural taboos, resultant high absenteeism and dropout rates, underrepresentation of women in STEM, sciences, technology, engineering, and mathematics fields, limited rural infrastructure/ physical , institutional weaknesses/shortage of female role models, stereotype of women's domestic role, dropout rate in higher education due to marriage, socioeconomic reasons, lack of financial assistance, especially for the liberal arts education due to lower salaries, patriarchal attitude that limit women in high positions, gender-sensitive physical infrastructure gender-sensitive psychological/ self-esteem, civic/political unrest, social, political, and humanitarian crises violence limited access to basic needs, physical/mental impact of discrimination and racism.

In addition to the listed barriers, additional barriers that women of color still struggle with are finding mentors, finding sponsors, finding an institution willing to invest in their leadership, and attitudinal sexism. One barrier that does not get named enough is that women, especially Black women, are often expected to prove competency over and over again in ways that others are not. There are deeply ingrained gender stereotypes. That's another barrier that really shapes assumptions about competence and ambition for women of color. There's an assumption that women's authority is conditional, that their expertise needs extra validation, that their leadership is somehow an exception, rather than something they have fully earned. And that assumption, sadly, does not go away the higher they rise. It follows them into the room, and it stays on their shoulders. And so also, in higher education, we hear so much about how women of color also brought in to clean up a mess or disaster that a non-person of color made, and they were not held accountable for.

Other attitudinal barriers include perceptions. If a woman of color is direct, she can be labeled difficult. If she is collaborative, she can be underestimated. If she names inequity very clearly, she can be treated as if she is the problem instead of the person identifying the problem. So, that double bind is not incidental. It's one of the most effective ways that higher education institutions manage to keep that status quo intact, while they appear open to change.

As a Black woman, race and gender do not operate separately. Bias compounds, and who gets hired, who gets promoted, whose credibility gets questioned, and whose ideas get credited. That double standard is itself a barrier, and naming it really does matter. We know that the leadership pipeline tells the story very clearly. The gap is not an accident. It really is the result of hiring practices, informal networks and institutional cultures that have historically centered a very narrow image of leadership and what leadership looks like.

Finally, some of the most persistent barriers that hinder women are structural. They are really not interpersonal. When pay is opaque, when probation pathways and promotion pathways are undefined, when mentorship is informal and gate-kept, the people who benefit most are those who were already advantaged. The needed work is about making those systems visible so they can be changed, because there is no shortage of qualified women ready to lead, as we all know. That leadership gap is not about a lack of talent. It's about systemic racial, structural, and cultural barriers that prevent women from advancing at the same rate as men. And so, by intentionally addressing bias, strengthening equitable practices, and investing in women's education, financial and leadership skills, we can make progress to close the leadership gaps for women of color. (Gloria Blackwell, AAUW)

Segment Two: Impact of Effective Leadership -Personal Perspectives

This segment focused on the sharing of personal achievements of the panelists in their leadership positions. Dr. Barnes shared that in spite of the challenges faced, Liberian women have been trendsetters on the continent of Africa. including having the first woman president democratically elected on the continent of Africa. Liberia has had several women presidents of the major universities including the preeminent University of Liberia and Cuttington University.

Organizations such as the Association of University Women Lecturers of Liberia founded to empower women lecturers address gender imbalances in academia, and to provide a sense of belonging. For women in higher education, there is also Hawah, the Forum for African Women in Education, which operates a national chapter in Liberia focused on promoting girls and women's education and fostering an inclusive society.

Other organizations are the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Incorporated, Aurora Foundation of Liberia, that provides scholarships and leadership training, as well as mentorship to low-income Liberian young women helping them to pursue higher education goals.

Dr. Nasreen, in India, as the head of the department, instituted a system of having an open mic where all the students could come and say whatever they wanted to say, anything that they felt like saying. She also instituted “brave talk” sessions, where her leadership team sensitized the students to understand when someone else is going through depression, so that they can. They also instituted a very robust gender-based grievance program and system to address complaints of any kind of a gender bias or harassment.

President Gloria Blackwell discussed the programs AAUW has implemented under her leadership that impacted programs and people. One achievement was an increase of first-generation graduate students who returned to their communities and countries as resources and professionals. An example of the impact of the leadership development program is the fact that the current executive director of the World Trade Organization is an AAUW alumna, and so is Oprah's favorite guest Dr. Tara Rye-Trant. She leads AAUW's fellowships and grants programs and other programs that focus on advancing equity for women and girls.

During her direct leadership of those programs, AAUW awarded over \$70 million to women, not just in the USA, but to countries across the world. Women of color, first-generation students, parenting students are at the center of AAUW's agenda, and not on the margins of the agenda. Overall, AAUW has awarded and invested more than \$150 million in fellowships and grants to more than 15,000 awardees from over 150 countries. For professional women, we have provided exceptional training programs on salary negotiation and have trained over 200,000 women. Leadership is not just what you do. It's what you make possible for others. Higher education is a key driver to achieving women's economic security.

Dr. Minyar Moran shared the impact of her work by discussing that after nearly 24 years working in the university, she has made a major difference with a model that gives equal conditions. Under her leadership, the university has impacted the staff, enrollment numbers, and graduation rates. Women are actively present at every level of leadership-faculty, boards, researchers, teaching faculty. The university has also increased scholarships for women, all resulting in breaking global trends and barriers. Attorney London Bell focused on the impact of developing mentoring programs. She presented a personal experience in law school and how she sought mentors in the legal community. After entering the profession, she founded Bell Global Justice Institute.

Some programs of the institute are focused on mentoring young people from around the country and different parts of the world. The program provides a pathway for young people, particularly young women of color, to have access to the United Nations as delegates.

II. Segment Three: Future of Women of Color in Higher Education

The final segment of the panel discussion focused on future perspectives, projections, and needed actions.

The panelists discussed following anticipated projections. All recognized the current geopolitical situations and their impact on gender equality. Currently, political situations in many countries are trying to impede more women of color, especially, from getting into certain professions. However, they believe the tides will change and are changing. Women of color are going to continue to create pathways to enter the most important rooms in the world.

Although there may always be barriers, the strength of women working together will help to ensure that women, especially women of color, are in these rooms. The success of women lies in unity among women.

Needed actions include the following:

- promote government and private sector prioritizing the critical issue of girls' education
- establish mentoring programs
- form unions, organizations, and participate in collaborative programs
- develop sustained and intentional educational investment
- implement strategic financial support
- develop policies designed to protect and strengthen equity, not dismantle it.
- use artificial intelligence to the advantage of women who are unable to physically access educational institutions
- increased digital literacy for girls
- provide funding to women to reduce economic disparities
- provide funding for electronics
- develop new education policies to increase higher education opportunities for women.
- develop an awareness of gender inequalities in the community at large.
- develop role model programs
- develop policies that that dismantle persistent barriers to educational equity
- increase financial aid access
- strengthen civil rights protections
- develop policies that ensure inclusive education
- Increase partnerships with organizations for women empowerment

Conclusion:

The panel discussion ended with an overview of the next steps after CSW70. Panelists agreed that women of color don't just succeed. They transform the institutions or organizations that they lead. The pipeline of women of color moving into leadership positions in higher education truly is growing. The pipeline truly is strong. It's diversifying in ways that really matter. The question is not whether women of color are ready for the future of higher education because they are already here. The question really is whether those institutions will create the conditions for them to lead it. Women need systems that work for them. Change comes from leaders like us and institutions where we work. Women of color not only persist, but they transform the academic and professional landscape.





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