

**CSW68**

**11-22 March 2024**



Report of participation and overview of learning



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# Introduction

## What is CSW?

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is the UN intergovernmental body responsible for promoting the empowerment of women. Operating through annual conferences, its key role is to assist the United Nations and member states in setting policy direction on gender equality; the Agreed Conclusions negotiated by UN member states as the key outcome of CSW are presented to the General Assembly and designed to set wider UN policy on gender equality.

CSW also plays a key role in monitoring progress on the implementation of gender equality throughout the global Sustainable Development Goals, and to monitor progress on the Beijing Platform for Action set at the last World Conference on Women in 1995. Women's Platform, as an NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the UN, is eligible to participate in CSW and submit evidence in the form of written statements to CSW.

CSW also plays a key role in monitoring progress on the implementation of gender equality through the global Sustainable Development Goals and integration of gender throughout the Goals. Women's Platform, as an NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the UN, is eligible to participate in CSW.

CSW in its current form also includes an extensive side event programme, including a stream of official side events organized by UN member state governments and UN agencies, and a NGO Parallel Forum with over 700 events organized by civil society organisations.

## CSW68

Each CSW conference has a priority theme and a review theme, agreed in advance, and the Agreed Conclusions focus on these themes. This year's themes were **women's poverty and social protection**. However, the side event programmes cover the full range of issues and topics relevant to women's rights and gender equality.

CSW68 took place 11-22 March 2024, as a hybrid event with the majority of events held in person at the UN headquarters in New York.

The delegates from Northern Ireland participated in CSW68 during the first week, which is the high level element of the event and typically involves Ministers and high level government representatives attending and contributing to events. The focus of participation was to highlight the voices of women in Northern Ireland at the international level, and to gather evidence, examples of good practice and contacts relevant to the key issues for women in Northern Ireland, and the priority areas for the women's sector in Northern Ireland.

The delegation engaged with the Missions of both the UK and Ireland to the UN during CSW68, and highlighted voices and priorities of women in Northern Ireland.

## Delegation



### **Siobhán Harding, Research & Policy Officer, Women's Support Network**

Siobhán joined the **Women's Support Network (WSN)** in August 2018 as a Policy & Research Officer. She is responsible for drafting research papers and consultation responses on issues that impact on women on behalf of the Women's Regional Consortium in Northern Ireland. She does this through holding focus groups with local women discussing the issues that are important to them and reflecting their views in policy documents and research papers.

Siobhán has produced research papers on the Impact of Austerity and Welfare Reform on Women, Debt and Women, the Impact of Universal Credit on Women, an update paper on Women Living with Debt and most recently a research paper with Ulster University on the Impact of the Cost of Living Crisis on Women in Northern Ireland and a paper with Carers NI on Women, Unpaid Care & Employment.

Siobhán is a member of the Women's Policy Group which is a platform for women working in policy and advocacy roles in different organisations to share their work and speak with a collective voice on key issues. She is a member of the Northern Ireland Women's Budget Group and the working group on the Cliff Edge Coalition which is a campaign to extend and strengthen the mitigations package for Northern Ireland. Siobhán is also on the Committee for Women's Platform which works to achieve gender equality for women and girls through advocacy for the implementation of international human rights standards in Northern Ireland.

Prior to this, Siobhán worked for over 10 years with Citizens Advice as an Information & Policy Officer and has a wealth of experience working in the field of policy around issues such as poverty, welfare benefits, debt and employment.

WSN is a feminist organisation that provides support and services to the network of 14 Women's Centres/groups across Northern Ireland. WSN is part of the Women's Regional Consortium which consists of 7 established women's sector organisations. These organisations are committed to working in partnership with each other, government, statutory organisations and women's organisations, centres and groups in disadvantaged and rural areas, to ensure that organisations working for women are given the best possible support in the work they do in tackling disadvantage and social exclusion.

### **Jonna Monaghan, Director, Women's Platform**

Jonna leads delivery of the organisation's strategic plan. Women's Platform acts as secretariat for the All Party Group on UNSCR 1325, Women, Peace and Security, and Jonna's role includes building relationships between grassroots women, women's sector organisations and elected representatives. She also coordinates the Northern Ireland civil society response to UN processes and mechanisms for women's rights, including CEDAW and the Commission on the Status of Women.



# Reflections from CSW

## Reflections by Siobhán:

I am so grateful for the opportunity to attend CSW in person having attended online for a couple of years. It is such a great experience! There is so much to learn and share from the CSW events and the ability to hear from women around the world on what they are doing to make women and girls lives better is inspirational. It has really helped to inform, energise and strengthen my own work locally.

I focused on events related to women's poverty, unpaid care and gender budgeting.

### My key takeaways are:

- “*We’re not living, we’re just existing*” – quote from Women’s Regional Consortium research on the impact of the Cost-of-Living Crisis on women’s lives. Various iterations of this quote were heard at CSW events across a range of issues including poverty, unpaid care, climate change and conflict.
- How destructive conflict/war is especially in the lives of women and girls and those who are the most vulnerable. Conflict and war pushes the burden on to women’s shoulders to protect children, families and communities.
- The widespread impacts of the burden of unpaid care for women – including the time poverty women face. Keeps them out of the labour market, education and the ability to improve their financial wellbeing. Despite taking on this burden there is no value placed on this work, no recognition or support given to them.
- Poverty is not inevitable – there are things that can be done if there is the will to do them. As one of the women said at a CSW side event “*we are not poor, we are being impoverished.*”
- Food insecurity and climate change are also major issues and intersect with all the other issues that women face including poverty, unpaid care and gender-based violence.
- It would be transformative for women and girls if actions were taken in these areas – poverty reduction, addressing the unpaid care burden, climate change, conflict reduction.
- There is a great sense of community with women – women know what needs to be done and work well with others – women need to be listened to, resourced and involved. Also a need to resource the organisations that support women.
- Great need for better gender disaggregated data and gender analysis to see where the impacts are and take targeted actions to address them.
- Women must be centred in peace processes and in rebuilding work following conflict to ensure lasting peace and wellbeing for those recovering from conflict.
- There is a need for more women decision makers to effect change – including in politics, local government, decision making more generally and for more women to vote.
- The importance of good quality, accessible and affordable childcare and social care for women’s wellbeing, participation, economic empowerment and financial wellbeing.



## Reflections from Jonna

CSW is a very unique experience and I'm very honoured I had the privilege to attend the conference in person. I had attended online in 2021, 2022 and 2023 and got a clear picture of how extensive the programme and perspectives are, but experiencing it in person is a very different experience; the number of events and perspectives on offer is extremely diverse, and the opportunity to engage with people from so many different places and backgrounds has both deepened my understanding of the women's movement and inspired me to keep going.

I focused on women's leadership, women, peace and security and international relationships during CSW68.

### My key takeaways are:

- The core issues for women and girls are the same across the world, although the specific situation varies: violence; lack of voice, representation, participation and leadership opportunities; gender pay gaps; health inequalities and women's disproportionate unpaid work burden are key issues for all women and girls, and this was highlighted throughout side events
- The backlash to rights is very real. Across both official side events organised by governments and the NGO Parallel Forum, threats and rollbacks to rights and constricting civic space were highlighted as affecting work on gender equality, and there was a shared call for collaborative action, solidarity and sharing good practice.
- Solidarity is much more than a word: working for women's rights locally contributes globally. Women from Afghanistan in particular urged for women across the world to be their voice and share their experiences; the core message was that women are being erased as human beings and the impact will be long term.
- Women, peace and security as an agenda remains vital. Women in conflict and post conflict regions are frequently sidelined from decision making; in many regions, multi cultural and multi ethnic contexts make progress difficult, but women's rights organisations are uniquely placed to reach out across divides, since women's needs and priorities have similarities across cultures and regions. In Iran, a project to build women's skills has helped build a women's network and strengthened their influence in the local community; the project started in an informal settlement in a disadvantaged region with many different cultural and ethnic communities.
- The solutions are there, but political will is required to implement them. There are examples of where this has been achieved; for example the Icelandic women's strike in 2023 has changed the gender pay gap conversation, and women are creating new leadership roles in many African countries.
- Gender budgeting is gaining traction as a way to strengthen gender equality: Albania, Australia, Turkey and Canada are among countries which are implementing a gender lens within national budgets. In Malaysia, the third sector has successfully introduced interest, and pilots are underway.
- Civil society space at CSW is shrinking and many organisations and networks are urging for reform; in particular there is a call for stronger, more influential outcomes.
- The concept of gender is becoming contested: it was reported that many countries wanted to avoid the concept within the negotiation for Agreed Conclusions, and evidence presented highlighted ongoing backlash on LGBTQIA+ rights in particular.



# Engagement with UK and Irish Missions during CSW



***Clockwise from above:***  
*Meeting with Deputy Ambassador Keith McBean and Caoimhe Landy at the Irish Mission to the UN; reception hosted by UK Deputy Ambassador to the UN James Kariuki, with Charles Ramsden of UK Government Equality Hub; engagement with Jess Phillips MP and Siobhán Harding with Irish Ambassador to the UN Fergal Mythen.*

## A flavour of CSW

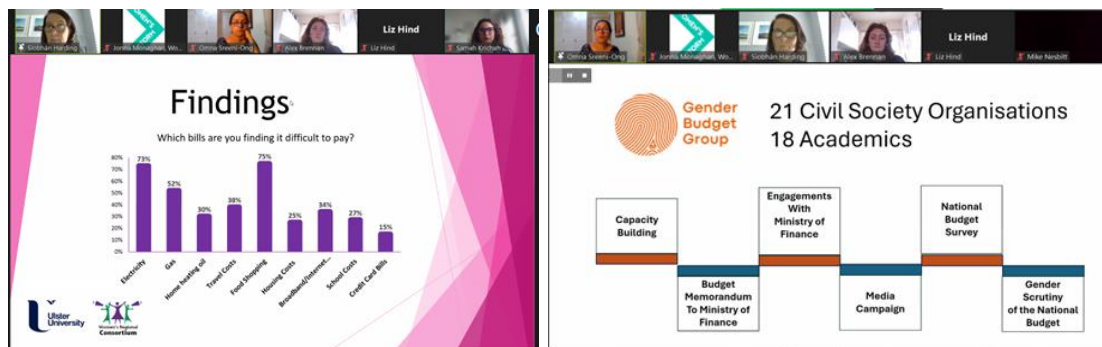


*Pictured: Former Ambassador for Afghanistan to the US Adela Raz with Jonna Monaghan from Women's Platform; Siobhán Harding with Susan McKellar from Scottish Women's Convention at event on child poverty and child payments in Scotland; views of the UN and New York.*



## NI CSW68 side event

### Gender budgeting: A solution to women's poverty



Women's Platform, Women's Support Network and NI Women's Budget Group hosted a virtual CSW68 side event on Thursday 21 March. The event explored gender budgeting as a solution to women's poverty and received very positive feedback. The event attracted a diverse audience from Northern Ireland and beyond, with over 30 participants taking part.

The session highlighted research by Siobhán Harding at Women's Support Network, for the Women's Regional Consortium, on the impact of the cost of living crisis on women in Northern Ireland, which shows that women feel they are existing rather than living, and face both physical and mental health impacts from ongoing financial stress and being unable to meet their families' needs. Omna Sreeni-Ong from Engender Consultancy in Malaysia highlighted a very positive example of gender budgeting in Malaysia, where a number of Ministries have begun piloting gender budgeting. The Malaysian Ministry of Finance is among these, and Omna stressed that this is vital to ensure the process is understood and adopted consistently across Ministries.

Speakers also included Samah Krichah and Liz Hind from UK Women's Budget Group, who underlined the importance of engaging women from a range of backgrounds in the process, and stressed access to data as crucial for effective gender budgeting. Women's Budget Group undertakes analysis of the UK budget and advocates for a gender lens in budgeting, and also teaches grassroots women to use data in their advocacy for more gender sensitive budget decision making.

The side event was recorded and will be made available through the Women's Platform website as soon as possible. It received positive feedback from participants, and follow up will be undertaken to explore how future collaboration with speakers could be developed.

## Agreed Conclusions reached

CSW68 adopted Agreed Conclusions at the very end of CSW68 on Friday evening. Negotiations continued until the very last minute, and adoption became possible as Nigeria agreed to proceed despite reservations in the [concluding plenary session](#).

The [Agreed Conclusions](#) focus on reimagining financing structures, developing gender sensitive economic and social policies, and engaging and supporting women's rights organisations.

## Sharing research on the impact of Brexit on women in Northern Ireland



On the sidelines of CSW68, Dr Katharine Wright, Prof Ruth McAreavey and Rebecca Donaldson from Newcastle University (pictured above with Hillary Rodham Clinton) discussed their recently published research on the impact of Brexit on women in Northern Ireland. The research shows that women are concerned about the future, including the long term impacts of Brexit. It highlights the practical impacts women are facing, which impact in particular access to services on a cross border basis, especially for migrant women, and have compounded to a sense of uncertainty reflecting the current situation in Northern Ireland. The report identifies a range of areas for action, both local and wider in relation to the women, peace and security agenda.

The event was hosted by the National Committee on American Foreign Policy and Irish Consulate in New York at the American Irish Historical Society, and audience members included senior Northern Ireland and international figures. The research report is available [here](#).

The work was commissioned by the Equality Commission for NI.

## Overview of events attended

### Day 1: Monday 11 March 2024

#### **The Improvement of the Situation of Women & Girls in Rural Areas: Ensuring Equal Access to Quality Public Services & Economic Empowerment**

Heard from Mongolia, Canada, China and India

43% of the world's population (more than 3 billion) live in rural areas as did 80% of the world's poor.

Rural women feel climate change impacts disproportionately.

As the representative from Canada noted *"the patriarchy is so entrenched it recreates itself in different forms even with a progressive Government."*

The representative from India said *"there is no difference in the dreams or aspirations of women in rural and urban areas, it's a matter of exposure."*

#### **Breaking Chains: Women's Quest for Life in Gaza**

Heard from Palestine, UN Women, Algeria, Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

A contributor from UN Women highlighted how in situations of poverty and conflict *"women eat less and women eat last."* She highlighted that in conflict/war situations everyone is impacted but women and children are impacted even more. In Gaza, out of all the people killed 70% are women and children.

An emotional and harrowing contribution from the Minister for Women's Affairs in Palestine, Amal Hamad: *"I am the daughter of Gaza, I come to you from a country groaning with pain, injustice and famine"*

The Minister said that 63 women are killed every day including 37 mothers and that 60,000 pregnant women are at risk. She called for all the women of the world to stand by Palestinian women saying *"champion my women, my mother, my sister, my people, I bring this to you with a broken heart."*

#### **A Care-led Transition Towards a Sustainable Future: Pathways to Address Poverty and the Climate Crisis with a Gender Lens**

Heard contributors from Costa Rica, Finland, Chile and Colombia.

Talking about women bearing the burden of unpaid care and how climate change further intensifies this burden.

Care systems are often rooted in structural inequality with women and girls shouldering the burden of care work worldwide. There is a lack of recognition, value and redistribution of care responsibilities.

A contributor stated *"This is no time for gradual and shy change but for bold and transformative policies."*

## **Life through Afghan women's lens**

This event featured experiences of women journalists from Afghanistan, who stressed that women continue to keep hope alive and resist through acts like educating daughters at home. The event highlighted that women and girls in different parts of Afghanistan have a very different experience; in Kabul, some women are still able to work, but in more conservative areas in the north of the country girls have very few opportunities. This has increased suicides among young women; forced marriage is also a risk for many young women particularly where families see no other option. Fear of Taliban forcibly taking women for marriage is also driving parents to marry daughters younger, as is poverty: work has dried up and the majority of people are jobless, often struggling to meet even basic daily needs.

Speakers noted that journalists continue to record events locally, even where they are unable to report them. Women have negotiated the right to work in some places, and stress that even with restrictions on what they can say, working in itself is a basic human right and valuable. In Helmand province, a small radio station is run entirely by women, although men must read content on air, as women cannot be heard in media in this region. Online academies continue to teach girls, and women can sometimes earn an income from this.

Speakers also emphasised financial independence; when women earn money for the family, their standing changes. However, it was noted that social norms are changing, and the longer women are absent, the more ingrained the belief that women should not work in public roles like media becomes.

Speakers called for advocacy on behalf of women in Afghanistan, and stressed the role of international agencies in putting pressure on the Taliban to change rules, through sanctions and financial measures.

## **Follow the Money: Illicit Financial Flows and Anti-Rights Actors**

This session explored how funding flows between the Global North and South are linked to profits extraction, and how anti gender networks use opaque funding to promote their aims.

Speakers highlighted how private funders seek out opportunities to work with organisations primarily in the Global South, in return for agreements allowing funders to influence the work. These funders typically do not report funding in their countries of origin - mostly the US - and this is making following money flows difficult. However, speakers cited available data that shows how such funding for example to faith based media in Africa has increased by over 200% in recent years, and is influencing decision makers in a conservative direction. Specifically, such funding is stalling progress on LGBTQIA+ rights, and supporting anti choice organising.

Speakers stressed that aid flows can also contribute to anti rights movements: analysis of aid to Ghana indicates that over £5m had gone to far right groups with higher figures quoted for Ugandan anti LGBTQIA+ groups. LGBTQIA+ groups in Latin America have had similar experiences.

There was an urgent call for action to increase financing transparency, and also to prevent aid to be used for anti rights action, while overall, priority needs to be given to ensuring support is available for Black and minoritised women, who typically are cut off from all funding.

## **Closing the Gender Representation Gap in Nation-Building**

This session explored how gender parity in decision making can be achieved, primarily from an African perspective.

Speakers stressed that women leaders start from a different basis and can effectively support communities as a whole, including helping girls to access education. Examples included the 'zebra model' from Zambia, under which mayors must be women in areas that have a male MP, and which has helped women rise to senior positions and create change. It was noted that policies alone aren't enough; implementation is the crucial element that must be prioritised, and advocacy should focus on this. However, women must see themselves as leaders, and that requires a mindset change- speakers also reminded the session that African women used to be queens, and need to remember that to start breaking stereotypes, which can be seen as only recently imposed.

### **A gender-equal future for financial freedom**

This event focused on financial policy, independence and freedom as a cornerstone of the Nordic focus on equality, which has seen women in Nordic countries enjoying comparatively high equality in the workplace over several decades. Opening the event, however, Swedish Minister for Gender Equality and Working Life Paulina Brandberg emphasised equality can't be taken for granted; Swedish data indicates parents save more for sons than for daughters.

Minister for Social Security in Finland, Sanni Grahn-Laasonen stressed early childhood education and family leave as drivers of gender equality in Finland, but noted more needs to be done to change attitudes in the workplace, to encourage fathers to take on responsibilities more seriously. This was echoed by all Nordic Ministers; Danish Minister for Digitalisation and Minister for Gender Equality Marie Bjerre said that following legal reform in Denmark where parental leave is equally split between parents, more men are taking their 11 week entitlement. However, the Minister also noted that women still take the second shift, and stressed that women's unpaid work can no longer be invisible, but must be shared, and its economic impact recognised. Icelandic Minister of Social Affairs and the Labour Market / Minister for Nordic Cooperation Guðmundur Ingi Guðbrandsson said In Iceland, women and men traditionally have each taken at least 3 months parental leave, but following extension of leave to 12 months, men are increasingly taking longer. However, the Minister advocated for investing in better childcare, to enable both parents to work.

Minister Nathanielsen noted this is an equality issue; in Greenland, recruitment to childcare is difficult as it's a low pay sector, and the gender pay gap at 23% limits women's choices. Minister Guðbrandsson said action on the gender pay gap is crucial, and highlighted how Icelandic legislation passed in 2018 is beginning to create change.

Speaking for Norway, State Secretary Erlend Kaldestad Hanstveit underlined growing division and polarisation between young women and men and noted urgent action is needed to tackle education and other gaps, as this is not only harming young people, but driving violence against women and girls. Greenland Minister for Housing, Infrastructure, Minerals and Gender Equality Naaja H. Nathanielsen also stressed the need to address gender divides in education, while Faroe Minister of Social Affairs and Culture Sirið Stenberg noted that policies need to support genuine choice for women and protect women from poverty; many women leave the Faroe Islands to access education and few return, while a relatively high birth rate is affecting women's lifetime incomes.

## Day 2: Tuesday 12 March 2024

### **Harnessing Social Protection to Tackle Poverty & Empower Women & Girls**

Heard from UN Women, Morocco, Aruba and the European Commission for Equality  
The unpaid care burden weighs more heavily on women and contributes to the financial vulnerability of women.

Contributors highlighted the need to avoid austerity programmes which impact on social protection.

The Deputy Director of UN Women said *“I am an African woman. I was born in war. Today so many countries are in crisis. This puts the social protection of communities on women’s backs. We need to end these wars.”* She also said *“many women, especially young women, wanted to be here, but were unable to as there was no one to take care of their families and they couldn’t negotiate with the patriarchy to care for their children to allow them to participate.”*

### **Exploring the Feminisation of Poverty**

Heard from Taiwan, Ukraine, Cambodia and Morocco

The feminisation of poverty is an international phenomenon and women are denied employment, healthcare and education which also deprives them of financial income. Poverty is more likely to touch women than men and poverty has a woman’s face.

The majority of the 1.5 billion living on \$1 a day or less are women.

The importance of the role women play in peacekeeping/conflict resolution and that the danger of relapse is greatly increased without women.

Government Minister from Ukraine said that *“wars are won by men but countries are rebuilt by women”*

The message at the event was that *“peace is everything”*.

### **The Affects of the Menopause on Women’s Access to Work and Social Protection**

We heard from the UK Menopause Commissioner, Helen Tomlinson, Carolyn Harris MP, Uganda and Canada

51 is the average age of the menopause and there are 4 million women aged 45-55 employed in the UK. The menopause is not an illness or a disease it is a natural and normal part of a woman’s lifecycle.

Heard from Carolyn Harris MP who is campaigning on this, she has a bookmark with the 40 symptoms of menopause listed on it as awareness of these are so low among women and medical professionals. She encouraged women to share their experiences of the menopause *“what you understand about the menopause, share it with everybody, everyone needs to know what it is.”*

The contributor from Uganda said *“Women have to manage the complications on their own and still work which can impact on productivity. They don’t want to talk about it as they feel that people will not understand.”*

The contributor from Canada said *“Women are treated as incubators and when we age we become disposable.”*

### **United Voices for Peace & UN Symphony Orchestra Global Women in Music concert in celebration of International Women’s Day**

Music only from female composers and with a female conductor.

### **Women in Iran build community through micro business**

This session highlighted community development work with underserved women in rural Iran. This work has focused on Sistan and Baluchistan provinces, which are the most disadvantaged in Iran and has worked with women in informal settlements around towns, where women headed household are common.

Speakers highlighted the Hoda House collective, or House of Hope, which engages women in needlework to generate an income. The community business has also assisted women and their children to access an education and invest in improved infrastructure, and has enabled many women to strengthen their influence within their family and community.

The session emphasised the value of work for women's confidence and independence, and noted that the community built by participants has been crucial in creating new opportunities and services for the informal settlement as a whole. Micro credit schemes, using a model similar to credit unions, have further built women's skills and helped many women establish sustainable livelihoods. Speakers also emphasised that the women led, collective model based on respecting women and supporting their priorities has been crucial for creating change.

### **Widows need advocacy and support**

Widows are among the most marginalised population groups worldwide, including in particular 'functional' widows of people who have disappeared, and widows of forced marriage. Child and teenage widows face the greatest barriers of all.

Speakers underlined that widows face significant violence, which often is legal, such as the practice of levirate, where a widow 'passes' to the next surviving male relatively of their husband. This is exacerbated by financial violence, as widows in many countries lack legal status and are effectively excluded from society.

Global Widows International emphasised that less than 100 countries offer social protection for Widows, and many of those who do link this entitlement to taxation, which effectively excludes access for most, as widows in particular in Africa typically work in the informal section, and many have limited literacy. Age limits also restrict

access for young widows, who account for as many as half of widows.

Hope charity from Libya highlighted work supporting widows through micro finance and skill building, for example carpet weaving, to enable widows to support themselves. This is playing a part in addressing the stigma and shame associated with widowhood, but the event called for stronger international action, including through a specific Optional Protocol to CEDAW, which at present is silent on widows.

### **Sexual and reproductive rights must include women with disabilities**

This session highlighted that 40-60% of girls with disabilities in the Americas experience violence before they turn 18, most within their families. Speakers highlighted how women and girls experience a continuum of violence including forced sterilisation, rape and sexual abuse, and are frightened into silence; some are not aware that what they experience is violence and abuse.

Speakers stressed that CEDAW and CRPD include protections against violence, but that consistent advocacy and pressure for implementation is needed to create change. A common theme across the day's sessions was a call for the voices of people with lived experience to be heard, and to prioritise platforming of women and girls with disabilities to begin breaking down stigma and create visibility. Policies also need to be intersectoral, and understand the specific issues for women with disabilities; this is being developed in Costa Rica and it is hoped that can be a model for Latin America.

Reports detailing evidence and solutions from the Americas and other countries including Central Asia are available [here](#).

### **Gender apartheid: Crimes against humanity in Afghanistan**

This session explored the concept of gender apartheid as a crime against humanity, and argued that it applies to Afghanistan. Speakers highlighted research with women in Afghanistan, who highlighted torture and murder as ongoing threats, in addition to the more than 50 rules restricting women, which have been underlined as fundamental breaches of women's human rights.

Speakers also outlined experiences of women who have left Afghanistan, who recounted violence, harassment and fear of abductions and forced marriage. They also noted that most women who have left Afghanistan are young, and stressed that leaving was difficult and not feasible for many, even when they had visas.

Recommendations from the event focused on uniting forces for collective action, and securing a platform for women human rights defenders and protecting them. It also urged the international community to refrain from recognising the Taliban, recognising gender apartheid and bringing the Taliban to justice. The key message reflected other sessions, and stressed that women will not give up.



## **Closing the gender gap in education**

This session highlighted that millions of girls are currently out of school, including girls in Gaza and Sudan, and girls in Afghanistan who are entirely excluded from their right to education.

Speakers stressed that education for girls is an investment in the future, and is also linked to implementing the women, peace and security agenda. emphasised that second chance education for women also is vital, to enable women's lives and that of their children.

The African Union stressed teacher training is vital to enable girls to go to school with confidence, and called for investment and resources for inclusive education. It was also emphasised that violence against women and girls prevents women from accessing education and must be ended; many speakers stressed that investment in 'second chance education' is vital to improve opportunities for women now and in the future.

UNESCO urged for a broad curriculum to be made available to girls, and underlined that girls need role models across subjects, including women scientists in the media. In a panel of women leaders in their field, former Afghan ambassador Adela Raz noted education was crucial to her journey and is vital for freedom, not only in conflict areas but for all women. This was echoed by Pakistani campaigner , who stressed that in parts of Pakistan, over 60% of girls are married before 18, which ends their education prospects and has direct impacts for their children as well.

Speakers urged for international action and investment in girls' education, based on inclusion and a broad curriculum. This is essential for a better, more sustainable future, and to give girls and women I the world the tools to shape their own lives.

## Day 3: Wednesday 13 March 2024

### **Tackling Child Poverty**

Event run by the Scottish Women's Convention

Heard about all the progressive Scottish policies to tackle child poverty including the Scottish Child Payment. Since its introduction 471,670 applications have been processed and £145.4 million has been paid out.

It's clear the Scottish Child Payment has lifted children out of poverty and prevented destitution.

70% of the Scottish parliament are women and every time there are more women elected there are more policies introduced to ease these type of social issues.

A contributor stated *"Poverty is a scourge anywhere but it's particularly hard to see it in a democratic country when the levers to ease it can be administered."*

Another contributor said that *"education is the route out of poverty but childcare is the bridge."*

As a contributor highlighted *"if we get it right for women, we get it right for everyone."*

### **Feminist Perspectives on Socio-Economic Post-Conflict Recovery & Peacebuilding**

Heard from DRC, South Sudan and Iraq

Realising the nature of conflict and how it tears societies apart.

Poverty is one of the root causes of violence and war.

People at the heart of conflict should participate in its recovery.

When the status of women advances the quality of life improves and when women work economies grow.

Quote from South Sudan *"advocate for the girl child to be more than a property"*.

Feedback from Iraq shows a gender backlash - now the word gender has been banned in central Baghdad and the words 'women's empowerment' are also on the list - shows the extent of the troubles women face.

### **The Role of the Women's Movement in Fighting Poverty**

Heard from Norway, Uganda, Colombia and Guatemala

A few examples were given of how women's movements inspired change with the message that it can't be done without women and fundraising for these movements.

10.3% of women globally live in extreme poverty, as a contributor said *"they don't live, they struggle to just barely survive."* She also said *"Poverty is not an accident, it is a human rights violation and a result of policies taken or not taken and is the ultimate risk multiplier for women and girls"*

The contributor from South Sudan said *"Every woman is a lion stuck in her skin waiting to come out and live her life"* and she also shared this African saying *"if you train a man you are training an individual, if you train a woman you're training a nation."*

The contributor from Colombia said *"Women are powerful transformers of communities"*

## **Leaking through the Cracks: Unprotected by the Social Systems**

Heard from Kenya, Argentina, Morocco and Denmark

In many countries they are cutting social spending to repay debt burdens and this has gendered impacts for women. As one contributor said *"We are all in surviving mode, we are not living."*

In many of these countries women earn less, are concentrated in informal employment sectors with little protection and bear the burden of the responsibility for care work. The importance of women being involved in politics and decision-making to ensure women have a say in social protection policies. As one contributor said *"I am sure the future will be feminist or it will not be!"*

## **Political will drives gender budgeting**

The event highlighted how initiatives are underway to integrate gender budgeting at national level in several countries in the Middle East and North Africa. A general theme highlighted was that GRB is a flexible approach and therefore good practice can be diverse, enabling tailoring to the local context.

Morocco has integrated gender responsive budgeting in budget processes to strengthen gender equality, which has increased visibility for the wider issues across government, in particular the Ministry of Finance. Across the region, GRB has increased the number of policies supported by budgets, and also allowed for better targeted, more precise policies.

Speakers emphasised that political will is essential, and a strong legal basis on gender equality is helpful for driving implementation. Practice to date has shown that impact studies are needed, alongside better data. Longer term, GRB needs to be institutionalised, to develop and maintain consistent practice.

## **Better data for gender budgeting needed**

This session focused on gender responsive budgeting, It featured Ministers from Albania and Türkiye, who highlighted the approach taken in each country to mainstream gender through gender budgeting.

The Minister of Health and Education of Albania, Albania Koçiu stressed that women, peace and security and gender equality are priorities for the Albanian government, and that gender responsive budgeting is a strategic approach and tool for achieving this. GRB has been integrated into Departmental processes since 2016 and the Minister stressed that data show almost 40% of the budget is focused on gender relevant issues. Albania has focused on tackling violence against women through penalise reform and reform of support to victims and survivors of violence, and is investing in supporting rural womrn into employment.

The Minister of Family and Social Services in Türkiye, Mahinur Özdemir Göktaş, stressed the need for a strong legal basis to mainstream gender budgeting, and underlined the value of international treaties as a framework. Work is ongoing to increase women's participation in decision making, and GRB is a mechanism for this.

The event emphasised the need for better data to improve policy making, and ongoing training for officials to ensure consistent and effective implementation.

### **'We're being erased': Poverty and future of women in Afghanistan**

This session gave a platform to women leaders from Afghanistan, who shared their priorities and perspectives on the future of Afghanistan and eradicating the deep, entrenched poverty that means almost all people in Afghanistan go hungry.

Speakers stressed that the situation is even worse than reports show: women are being erased in a very fundamental way. Young women's mental health is suffering, due to fear, uncertainty and poverty; domestic abuse is increasing, and therefore women are also not safe at home. Speakers also stressed that women have always been part of the economy and the country can't afford to lose their contribution.

The session was led by Finland, whose Minister for Education Sanni Grahn-Laasonen opened the event, stressing education as a core starting point and pressure needed to allow women and girls in Afghanistan to get educated and work.

UN Women Deputy Director Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda echoed the urgent need for change, noting that only 17% of women in Afghanistan feel they have any influence, and highlighted work by UN Women in Afghanistan since 2021. UN Women stressed funding and financing as crucial to change, including linking aid to women's rights.

Speakers urged everyone who can to speak for women in Afghanistan, and keep pressure on governments to speak out, and fund aid for women led initiatives. Young women need bursaries to access education abroad, and all women also need long term security, with hope that there will be jobs and the chance to contribute in the future.

### **Sexual and reproductive rights must be shaped by young people**

Planned Parenthood hosted this session focusing on its work on sexual and reproductive rights, and how SRHR can become part of regular public services.

Speakers stressed young people's leadership and noted it is crucial for sexual and reproductive rights, as young people need to be in control of their bodies, voices and destiny for genuine change to happen. Local solutions were also emphasised; for example in Kenya, specific language has been developed to allow young people to get sexuality education and access contraceptives, and get around cultural and policy restrictions.

### **SRHR in crisis, financing near crisis**

This session highlighted the challenges in maintaining even basic sexual and reproductive rights and services in crisis, with a specific focus on Middle East and North Africa. Speakers, who represented feminist funders, underlined that sustainable investment is needed; emergency funds have been made available for regions such as Yemen, but this is not sufficient.

Speakers noted that finance is dependent on donors priorities, and accessing support for example for Palestine can be difficult; where funding is available, reporting requirements may make it too risky or difficult for grassroots organisations to access it. One measure has been using individuals' donations and crowdfunding for these situations, which highlights the importance of this type of unrestricted funding.

Questions explored shrinking funding, which was recognised as an issue, particularly in the US context. Speakers emphasised ongoing advocacy and relationship building, and underlined that this can help maintain a rights based approach even in difficult circumstances . In some cases, organisations may face stigma, shaming and even threats for accepting funding from specific sources. This was emphasised as a challenge across the SRHR sector, but with specific implications actions for funders.

### **Ukraine to rebuild as 'modern European country'**

The reconstruction of Ukrainian infrastructure is currently estimated at \$468 billion, with more than 10% of homes either damaged or completely destroyed. This does not include the cost of human recovery, from fear and violence, including sexual violence. Many women have combined caring for family with volunteering in the war effort, and will need specialist support, while others

Ukrainian speakers stressed that Ukraine seeks to rebuild itself as a modern European country, and underlined gender equality as part of this. The event focused on support by governments and international institutions, all of which stressed investment in women and gender equality

The UK co sponsored the session and stressed investment in gender equality, support for the most vulnerable including LGBTQIA + and Roma communities and engagement for civil society as its core priorities for support to Ukraine, which also informs UK aid funding.

## Day 4: Thursday 14 March 2024

### **Meeting with Irish Mission to the UN**

The delegates met with Keith McBean, Ireland's Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN to talk about the work of Women's Platform and research work by the Women's Regional Consortium on poverty as the key priority area for CSW68.

Also talked about the restoration of the NI Assembly and the need for an Anti-Poverty Strategy (and all the Social Inclusion Strategies).

### **The Care Society: the Intersection of Poverty Eradication & Economic Justice for all Women & Girls**

Heard from Chile, Uruguay, UN Women, Mexico, UNISON, Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Department of Economic & Social Affairs (DESA) Discussions around the burden of unpaid care and the impact on women and girls with the need for more co-responsible social responsibility for care between men and women. As one contributor said *"Society must take care of carers – without carers we will not have a society."*

The reliance on women and girls to provide care and support to families and communities speaks to the unrecognition of women's work to society – the undervaluing of women.

When health services cannot cope the care responsibility is often put on women's shoulders but that shift is not accompanied by resources or funding or support services. As one contributor described it *"In crisis situations women are the frontline responders."*

### **Budgeting with an Equally Perspective: from Policy to Action**

Heard from Indonesia, Australia and Sweden

Discussions about Gender Budgeting - a strategy to achieve gender equality by focusing on how resources are spent.

Gender responsive budgeting is part of good governance and is a transparent use of the public budget.

A contributor said *"there is resistance to Gender Budgeting, after all it's about power and the distribution of resources!"*

The message is *"when society and the economy works for women it works for us all!"*

### **Partnering for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls: the Contribution of Development Finance**

Heard from Ireland, Sierra Leone, Costa Rica, Alliance for Feminist Movements

Heard about the overseas development aid provided by Ireland to Sierra Leone and the work of the Irish Consortium on Gender Based Violence.

Met Ireland's Ambassador to the UN Fergal Mythen who spoke warmly about CSW *"I love CSW, it is the most energising time in the UN calendar, there's an energy that lifts us all. We are living in a world of conflict, climate change, etc and we can get*

*despondent but when you go to meetings like these and hear what's being done on a local level it's really energising."*

He encouraged those attending the side event not to give up, that there's lots we can do working together and to keep up the good work.

Financing for gender equality is a big challenge – development partners can do more and can do better in terms of partnerships.

Funding for gender-based violence work remains unacceptably low as a percentage of total humanitarian funding.

Heard about the importance of core, flexible long-term funding for Feminist Movements rather than short-term restricted funding. As one contributor said *"if you can't fund more, you can fund core."*

### **UK Mission to the UN Reception**

The delegates attended the UK Mission to the UN, where we met James Kariuki the Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN along with all the other NGOs and politicians including Jess Phillips MP.

### **Irish Reception**

Attended the Irish Mission's St Patrick's Day event where we met staff from the Irish Mission and the Deputy and Permanent Representative to the UN Keith McBean and Fergus Mythen.

### **Civil society needs resourcing to deliver Generation Equality**

This session was designed to provide an update on progress of the UN Generation Equality initiative, which was launched

in 2021 to speed up global action on gender equality. Focus was on commitments on violence against women and girls.

Commitment Makers, primarily major organisations, shared their updates on progress. There was a focus on financing, and the need to counteract anti rights movements and funding, but corporations recognised the need to move beyond this into supporting and resourcing women's civil society more directly.

There was frustration expressed by civil society representatives that progress is slow, and reporting requirements on civil society are onerous, while response to civil society feedback is limited and slow. It was stressed that major commit makers need to be held accountable in the same way as civil society to speed up progress. For example, Ford Foundation has pledged investment of up to \$150 million, but transparency on how this is being invested and distributed to civil society needs to be strengthened.

### **The Icelandic Women's Strike: Protesting the gender pay gap as economic violence**

This session gave an overview of the Women's Strike movement in Iceland, which saw 100,000 women and non binary people walk out of all work for a full day in 2023.

Speakers stressed that including non binary people was vital to highlight intersectional discrimination, and it has changed the debate in Iceland

The speakers stressed that the strike was necessary to draw attention to the gender pay gap, and show how it constitutes economic violence against women and non binary people. A similar strike in 1975 was crucial for gender equality in Iceland and the 2023 strike has led to plans to re-evaluate women's work at national level; models from New Zealand are guiding this.

The movement demands equal wages for men and women, decent working conditions, and action to end gaps of marginalised groups. A key demand is also that men take on an equal share of household and other unpaid work, and women and non binary people are safe from all types of violence, and no longer penalised for unpaid work.

### **Crisis as a continuum: Women and the disaster response to the earthquakes in Turkey and Syria**

This session highlighted the difficult conditions that women in Turkey and Syria continue to face over a year after the earthquakes that claimed at least 50,000 lives. Many women still live in temporary shelters with no timeline for reconstruction of destroyed buildings, and the lack of private spaces, sanitation and hygiene facilities increases women's vulnerability to violence and harassment,

The discussion explored issues around political conflict and its impact on the situation. Many of the people affected by the earthquakes are Syrian refugees or Kurdish, and this brings significant additional complexities. It was also noted that the global situation is directly affecting women on the ground, and broad based advocacy is much needed.

The event aimed to unite the women's movement to support women affected by the earthquakes, and ensure that women, children and marginalised groups including LGBTQIA+ people and older people do not need to endure similar challenges and risks in the future.

### **The case for comprehensive RSE**

In this session, the European Women's Lobby launched findings from a project developing sexuality education with a number of countries. This project created education resources based on feminist principles, adaptable to a number of contexts.

Speakers stressed that comprehensive sexuality education helps open up discussions around issues of sexuality and safe, healthy relationships, and can delay young people's sexual debut. This was found in countries as different as Estonia and Zimbabwe, where sexuality education is part of the curriculum, but is patchy and not broad enough. Conversely, Bulgaria and Romania have high rates of unwanted pregnancies among teens, linked to lack of education.

The EU highlighted the new Directive on violence against women and new provisions on cyber crime and domestic abuse. The lack of a consent based rape definition was acknowledged, and it remains an aspiration for the future.



## **Women's leadership: barriers and ways to resist discrimination**

This session launched research by Women for Women International, conducted in Iraq and Nigeria on formal and informal barriers to women's participation in decision making.

Speakers from Nigeria shared experiences of being sidelined, as culture is seen as above law, and women's role in Nigerian culture is limited and lacks influence. In Iraq, the research included Kurdish Women and highlighted significant barriers. The lack of government support and support for gender equality are key issues. Since 2023, gender as a term can't be used, and there are restrictions on work to the extent that some organisations have shut down and some activists have gone into exile. As a response, most organisations now work with a low profile. Speakers stressed that this is happening although Iraq is a state party to CEDAW and a post conflict region, in a context where international funding is reducing.

Speakers stressed that responses have had to be very creative, and change takes time. In Nigeria, women have begun to demand space within communities, as well as changes to policies as a result of learning about their rights. This built from individual women into larger networks, and is slowly gaining traction. In Iraq, women need capacity building and tools to strengthen their leadership. However, women speaking up and for example standing for election face harassment and violence, which can be orchestrated and focused on trying to make women stand down.

The event discussion highlighted both diverse and extensive work by women across Nigeria resisting oppression, and major barriers that women at all levels face. Conflict is compounding challenges, and action is needed not only to support women, but identify and develop champions within authorities as well.

## **Investing in gender data**

This session explored how to create better data set for policy making, which has been underlined as a core need for strengthening gender equality in decision making and integrating gender budgeting. It underlined that trust in data and statistics is deteriorating, and stressed that better data is an urgent priority

Australia highlighted a ten year data set developed following focused work on this. The Australian model has prioritised easy public access, and emphasised that investing in user friendly user interfaces is vital to encourage use of data. The investment is around \$4million per year, and there are plans to double this to strengthen the focus on gender equality in Australian policy making.

It was stressed that a core gap is data on LGBTQIA+ groups and other intersectional data, and experience in many countries show that there is reluctance to gather this data. Speakers noted that engagement with both data subjects and users is vital as part of this, as many marginalised groups also are wary of sharing information, and trust needs to be built to create fully intersections data sets.

Speakers emphasised the need for ongoing data development and advocacy for comprehensive data. Data quality varies both between and within countries and institutions, so a priority need is better, more consistent data collection standards.

## Day 5: Friday 15 March 2024

### **Financial Independence for Gender Equality & Poverty Reduction: Women's Empowerment through Economic Involvement**

Heard from Armenia which is a leader in the technology sector and UN Women Women's involvement is important to establish social justice in society and to stimulate economic progress.

Much needs to be done with regard to poverty reduction and gender equality including strong women's leadership, financing to end women and girls poverty by investing in women's human capital and increasing the collection, analysis and use of gender data. Told the story of Tamara who was a housewife & mother living with her husband's family & totally dependent on him. She got involved in a women's empowerment program on digital technology & now works & is financially independent which has changed her life. As one contributor said *"the world will become a better place if we have educated, financially independent women."*

### **Social Inclusion & Poverty Alleviation for the Well-being of Women & Girls**

Heard from Mexico, New Zealand and UN Women

Poverty disproportionately affects groups of women suffering disadvantage. Poverty hinders their access to social rights including health, education, housing, social security and food. As a contributor said *"we are not poor, we are being impoverished"*

For too long mainstream approaches have focused on how to integrate women and girls into existing bad economic systems. These fail to recognise women's unpaid care and domestic work and ignore the issue of women's time poverty.

Rights based feminist approaches enable the structural determinants of poverty to be identified, challenged and overcome by involving women and girls in designing policies and transforming the social organisation of care.

The message was that investment in women and girls pays off and flows to families, communities and the wider economy. As a contributor said *"investing in women and girls means investment in the entire country."*

Another contributor highlighted the need to *"dignify the career of a care giver."*

### **Strengthening Socio-Economic Resilience of Women & Young People to prevent violent extremism**

Heard from Togo and the Ivory Coast in West Africa

Heard about Togo's efforts to increase the economic empowerment of women despite ongoing conflict and extremism.

The Northern part of the country is volatile and this puts women and girls rights at risk. Actions being taken include financing of credit and savings groups targeting the most vulnerable to increase financial inclusion, providing care and essential services including food, water and sanitation and creating space to promote positive social norms through the mobilisation of women and young people in local communities.

As one contributor said *"the future is about joining forces and facing the context including finding ways to enhance social cohesion to combat violent extremism."*

Another contributor quoted Michelle Obama who said *“there’s no limit to what we can achieve as women.”*

### **Localising women, peace and security**

This session highlighted work in local communities in Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Yemen and Papua New Guinea to localise the women, peace and security agenda. It was stressed that the local approach is vital to develop relevant and responsive national action plans on UNSCR 1325, and allow for meaningful implementation in diverse countries.

Speakers shared experiences and underlined that each participant country is culturally diverse as well as a conflict region, which means agreeing national legislation and policy is challenging, and implementation very difficult. Projects highlighted worked directly with specific communities, and this local knowledge was underlined as a key reason why they were successful in changing conversations, issuing a range of methods such as engaging men to talk about their children's futures.

The session was opened by the US Department of State Secretary Global Ambassador-at-Large for Women's Issues Geeta Rao Gupta, who stressed that WPS and gender equality are key principles in US foreign policy and aid programming. The She Wins programme is a US initiative in Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Yemen and Papua New Guinea, which works with local women's groups to build their capacity and connect women leaders to high level decision making systems.

The US aid budget for gender equality in 2024-25 will be increased to \$3.1bn.

### **Creating hope for migrant women**

This session focused on issues for migrant women in Australia, New Zealand, Canada and Colombia. Speakers highlighted migration statistics for each country; it was noted that 23% of the population in Australia, Canada and New Zealand are migrants, while Colombia with a population of 51 million has over four million migrants, most deemed temporary and linked to crises in neighbouring countries.

Speakers highlighted barriers and drivers of poverty for migrant women, which include barriers to employment, access to childcare and cultural norms around care, as well as issues with achieving immigration status and access to social protection in their own right; spousal visas create issues across countries. In Australia and New Zealand, migrant women are often highly educated, but face challenges accessing the hours and level of employment they want.

Speakers highlighted entrepreneurship and emerging economic fields as solutions for addressing poverty among migrant women, but stressed supportive and inclusive policies are crucial.

The session was opened by a representative for the Australian government, who highlighted a new strategy for gender equality launched last week. This strategy prioritises women's safety, participation and participation, and is linked to gender budgeting, which is being integrated into government practice in Australia.

## **What does peace in Ukraine mean?**

This session gave Ukrainian women's perspective on peacebuilding, and highlighted key issues for women in and outside Ukraine at present. Speakers stressed that women are facing a backlash, rights women had before the war are being cut back and there is very limited space for women to make their voices heard in decision making.

A discussion on priorities explored the roles of different actors, from local women to the international community. It was stressed that more priority must be given to the powerless, listening to their views and amplifying these voices. The role of the UN and its absence in Ukraine was discussed, and it was noted that the lack of reform within the UN since its inception is an issue.

## **A perspective from Haiti**

This session was hosted by the Haitian government, which is currently in a violent and rapidly deteriorating conflict with rival groups and gangs that is marked by weaponised sexual violence. The aim for covering it was to try and strengthen understanding of the issues in Haiti, and the decision made as the conflict was referenced in the event outline. Questions on the conflict were raised by Haitian NGOs, but were not answered. We engaged with Haitian NGOs, who indicated that a political solution is needed, followed by extensive support for women in light of the trauma created by the use of sexual violence, and other forms of intimidation.

The session highlighted work to support women's entrepreneurship, and outlined examples of positive experiences. Speakers expressed a commitment to strengthen gender equality in Haiti, including through capacity building in local communities to build women's skills and diversify income streams, eg. from agriculture to food production and processing and engaging with women to identify their needs.

## **Financing sexual and reproductive rights: Part of climate justice**

This session explored sexual and reproductive health and rights as part of climate justice. It stressed that reproductive rights are vital to directly help address the climate crisis, and also form part of a wider agenda of realising gender equality and tackling violence against women. Discussion stressed that SRHR also must be intersectional and take account of disabled women's needs, as well as other marginalised groups.

Speakers stressed that sharing voices and stories of women is essential to change the narrative and make the case that SRHR are core to climate justice. To increase funding, better data is also needed, for example on the time period between a funding decision and disbursement of funds. Decolonising the narrative is also vital for funders in particular, to understand SRHR in its proper context.

Speakers stressed that a new focus on SRHR is urgent to access climate finance to support SRHR delivery on the ground, which is at risk with the current global situation. In Pakistan, this was achieved through careful collaboration, and speakers emphasised collective efforts are needed to maintain the focus on SRHR in development funding overall.

## **Poverty and exploitation of women's bodies**

This session explored the links between poverty, trafficking and exploitation of women. It was stressed that traffickers are using the global context of conflict and uncertainty, and are targeting women and girls in crisis areas, who already are facing violence and exploitation both at home and on the move.

The UN Office on Drugs and Crime stressed that prevention is the priority, and urged UN member states to focus on eradicating poverty globally, as traffickers target women and girls who are trying to escape poverty and build decent living conditions. It was emphasised that anti trafficking laws need to be built on human rights principles, respect for victims and survivors by ensuring they are not criminalised and investment in early detection. Ending impunity for traffickers is essential, and the UN is seeking commitment to this in the forthcoming Pact for the Future.

The discussion highlighted the increasingly violent nature of porn, and growing porn use linked to the proliferation of online platforms. It was noted that drawing a line between consensual and forced participation can be difficult, especially when women and girls are groomed or coerced and in online settings. Risks for this increase for poorer women and girls, as they have less power to make decisions for themselves.

The event was hosted by the French Women's Lobby, which noted that women in sex work have significant challenges with authorities, in a context of increasing backlash. In particular migrant women in France face discrimination and allegations of lying and even assisting traffickers.

The session explored how consent has limitations in context of sexual exploitation, and some speakers suggested that coercion in the porn industry amounts to torture, which needs to be addressed through legislation and policies on violence against women and girls.

## **Financing work to end FGM**

This session focused on financing work to end FGM, in the context of slowing progress, and a risk of reversal as a Bill in the Gambia is proposing repeal of the ban in current law, on the grounds of cultural norms and practices. Speakers explored the need for specific funding for FGM and the need for wider gender equality resourcing; it was suggested that the need for focused funding and advocacy for this is vital.

The event was sponsored by Canadian organisations, which confirmed their support for increased funding to end FGM.

## Days 6-7: Saturday 16 - Sunday 17 March 2024

### Overview of weekend events

The key event over the weekend was a CSW Youth Forum, which was supported by the UN and sought to increase young people's voices in global decision making. This event focused on invited activists, who will play a key role in building the future movement.

Virtual events for the weekend were more localised than events in week 1, and included an overview of issues with AI in relation to gender equality, and a focus on women's issues in Japan. More global issues were discussed in sessions on gender based violence and economic empowerment, which was a theme in several weekend side events, and was explored from diverse perspectives.

The focus of events was on achieving progress, and there was overall agreement across themes, as in week 1, that solidarity and supporting the priorities of women identified through side events is vital.

## Days 8-9: Monday 18 – Tuesday 19 March 2024

Delegates travelled home on Monday 18 March, so events covered from Tuesday 19 March to Friday 22 March were events available virtually, either through the [UN Web TV service](#) or the NGO Parallel Forum, which enabled access to organisers' virtual platforms.

**Events covered on UN Web TV remain available to watch back; where an event is available in this way, it is indicated at the end of the event summary.**

### Palestinian women and invisible struggles

This session focused on the perspectives of Palestinian women and their allies, and emphasised that the struggle for control of their own lives has gone on long before 7 October. The session highlighted women's experiences before and after 7 October, and described life with no functioning healthcare and no way to secure food for families.

The key message from speakers was to 'drop everything' and focus on supporting a ceasefire. There was frustration expressed at the UN Security Council, and speakers called for reform to remove the veto for the five permanent members, which has blocked action not only in this crisis, but in many others.

Available on UN Web TV [here](#).

## **Building an inclusive future**

This session looked at how the UN can build an inclusive future for LGBTQIA+ folks through its structures, including the Summit of the Future later this year, which aims to set direction for the UN beyond 2030. Speakers stressed that the current SDGs don't include or adequately reflect the needs of LGBTQIA+ people, and rethinking how LGBTQIA+ groups can be included is vital to change this.

Key issues raised focused on collaboration and organising at local, national and global level, inclusion for young LGBTQIA+ people; and creating space for LGBTQIA+ voices to be heard at the UN. Funding was also underlined; the LGBTQIA+ sector consists primarily of small organisations and engagement with the UN requires additional resourcing to ensure a diversity of voices is heard.

Speakers stressed that it is important to be intentional in engagement and focused on human rights based, inclusive language, considering the ongoing threat to human rights in general.

## **Supporting women and girls to rebuild their lives**

This session explored ways to strengthen the voices of girls, with a focus on addressing control of girls and violence from limitations of choice to so called honour killings. Speakers stressed that poverty is a key factor, which drives girls into dangerous situations, and can lead girls to accept marriages as they believe they will have more control in that situation than within their families.

Many of the speakers were UK based and emphasised that trauma from difficult circumstances is a major issue that needs to be considered and addressed, to enable women to take control in their own lives and improve the future of their children. Discrimination and patriarchal norms also need to be addressed, to end for example the preference for boys in some cultures that is associated with both infanticide and restrictions for girls.

## **Challengers and enablers for women's leadership**

This session explored options for strengthening women's leadership, including youth leadership. UN Women Executive Director Sima Sami Bahous highlighted collaboration with other sectors, including private foundations, and stressed that positive progress is being achieved, including through gender budgeting.

India provided examples of how investment in women's needs has contributed to changing women's role in society, and emphasised that the scale of both possibilities and challenges is significant. Speakers overall emphasised that women's participation is not the same as women's leadership, and urged for legislative and policy reform, through ongoing advocacy and grassroots work, is needed to create sustainable change.

**Available on UN Web TV [here](#).**

## **The role of education for young displaced women**

This session explored how education can support displaced young women, and highlighted the role of education in both supporting individual women and contributing to peacebuilding processes. Speakers underlined that education for young women can drive gender equality, as girls build confidence and begin to claim and demand their rights.

Speakers emphasised that actors in the global North have a role in enabling and supporting displaced women to access education and remain in education, which can be difficult especially on the move, and in contexts where girls are expected to take responsibility for care of younger siblings and family members.

Young women speakers noted that social media is available to many young women even when displaced, and can play a key role in educating young women; speakers highlighted the benefit of education for example on health issues. This has been demonstrated for example in Somalia, where girls who have had a chance to access education are beginning to challenge social norms and introduce new models for younger girls.

## **Ending marginalisation of women with disabilities**

This session highlighted the ongoing discrimination and exploitation of women with disabilities. Over 800 million women worldwide live with a disability, and are among the most marginalised, stigmatised and powerless across countries and communities.

Speakers stressed that online learning is part of the solution, but a fundamental shift in policy and practice is needed. A project in Africa was able to support women with disabilities to access learning and services, but it was highlighted that many disabled women in countries like the UK don't have Internet access, due to poverty as a result of lack of support and access to employment.

This session reflected themes highlighted in other sessions on widows, and underlined stigma as a key issue that must be addressed. Speakers discussed specific issues for widows in different cultures and regions, but highlighted the shared issues and needs: widows' rights recognised, social protection for widows and ending shame and stigma.

The session concluded with a standing ovation for UK based widows' rights campaigner Margaret Owen, who initiated work for a UN resolution on widows more than 30 years ago, and at 92, continues campaigning on widows' and human rights.



## Day 10: Wednesday 20 March

### **Ending domestic abuse – the role of the workplace**

This session explored how gender based violence can be prevented more effectively than at present, particularly in the context of global backlash. Speakers underlined that action on gender based violence must be collaboratively addressed by a number of actors and institutions, as the nature of violence is cross cutting and affects all areas of women's lives.

Speakers also noted that working with the private sector is required, not least to address violence and harassment as workplace issues, and enabling women to feel more confident in reporting violence at work. Sexual harassment training is similarly a workplace issue and relevant for all stakeholders from government to the private sector.

### **Promoting women's leadership to end poverty**

This event highlighted the priorities for increasing women's opportunities to fully engage in economic life to end women's poverty. Speakers stressed that culture and social norms need to change to achieve gender equality, in particular to address pay gaps and barriers such as the disproportionate care burden on women.

Key priorities identified included legislation and regulation to underpin equity, rethinking how labour markets operate, and engaging allies including men and boys. Speakers stressed that financing work on women's rights and supporting women and young people must be strengthened;

The event was hosted by the EU and featured Irish MEP Frances Fitzgerald, who set out the context of recent EU Directives in promoting gender equality, and stressed gender equality as a priority for the current Commission. It was emphasised that the forthcoming EU election is vital for ensuring this direction continues, and noted that the election will have an impact on efforts to strengthen gender equality more globally.

**Available on UN Web TV [here](#).**

### **Care and international systems**

This session explored how care can become a bigger part of international, multilateral systems, including international agreements. It underlined that care is undervalued across the world, and change requires re-evaluating care, especially women's unpaid work caring for children, families and communities.

Speakers stressed that the debate must be inclusive of women in all their diversity, and include Indigenous women, women who have worked as maids or domestic labourers abroad, and women from all backgrounds. Above all, it is vital to listen to women when developing policies and programmes, so that they are meaningful and meet the priority issues of women within communities.

There was broad agreement among speakers that the discussion must frame care as an economically productive activity and include social protection floors for all. This needs to include caring activities such as food production, and multilateral work must also explore how corporate activities in this area, such as large scale food production, has impacted for

example on climate change, and affected women's roles as well as the relationship between communities and nature.

Speakers discussed the UN Summit for the Future as a mechanism for achieving change; however, it was noted that this agenda must be incorporated across a number of UN mechanisms to be meaningful.

**Available on UN Web TV [here](#).**

### **Women's empowerment and leadership in customary and informal justice systems**

This session explored women within customary and informal justice systems, which remain important particularly for Indigenous peoples. Speakers stressed that women have traditionally held leading positions in customary justice systems, and strengthening gender equality includes reviewing these roles.

The Philippines highlighted that Indigenous women play core roles in community development and peacebuilding. Customary justice systems have contributed to this, and women have an understanding of how the processes work. However, strengthening women's leadership is important, so that women can engage on the same terms as men. The situation is the same in the US, where customary systems are vital for Indigenous nations; it was stressed a stronger role for women can help address violence against women and girls, by addressing both systems and social norms.

Speakers emphasised that women in all their diversity must be included and engaged in processes to strengthen women's roles, as women's understanding of cultural norms and practices must influence this.

## Day 11: Thursday 21 March 2024

### **Building education to strengthen gender equality**

This session highlighted education as a mechanism to strengthen gender equality, and underlined that education needs to be based on values of inclusivity, cultural understanding and gender equality to be effective.

Speakers focused on southern and eastern Europe, and noted that traditional gender roles still influence education heavily, to the extent that educational outcomes and gender gaps in education lag behind the Nordic countries. Speakers stressed that gender studies form an important part of changing this, and advocacy is needed to strengthen resourcing for this; for example in Romania, there are only two programmes, and gender is one issue among many.

The event underlined that gender equality is an ongoing progress that requires investment and ongoing advocacy to secure political commitment, and stressed that inclusive education is key to change over time.

### **Unlocking maternal health for women with HIV**

This session explored the barriers women with HIV experience not only in accessing maternal healthcare, but healthcare in general. It was stressed that stigma and discrimination affects all women living with HIV, but in particular trans women and sex workers.

Key issues highlighted included violence experienced by women living with HIV, including obstetric violence such as forced abortion and denial of maternal healthcare, as well as lack of access to opportunities overall.

Speakers stressed that solidarity across the world is vital, alongside organising and collaboration to advocate for marginalised women.

### **Caring in the context of climate change**

This session explored how care is impacted by climate change, and how women's economic autonomy and poverty are affected by climate change. Key issues raised focused on increasing displacement related to climate change, deepening poverty and an increasing care burden for women. It was stressed that women in parts of the Global South spend up to 14 hours per day providing unpaid care, and have limited economic opportunities, which drives migration to the Global North.

Speakers emphasised that women's leadership and participation in decision making is critical both for gender equality and sustainable solutions, and addressing structural barriers, such as women's disproportionate care burden, is essential to this. Care must be recognised as work, and women's role in this rewarded in new ways.

Speakers also stressed that building women's capacity and skills is vital to build women's resilience. In Mexico, there is a capacity building programme designed to improve women's skills in managing land in the changing climate, which has contributed to women gaining a stronger role in agriculture, and has also enabled more women to become land owners. This

was identified as vital, as access to land is crucial for being able to adapt to a changing climate, as well as influence decision making on how land is used.

Available on UN Web TV [here](#).

## Day 12: Friday 22 March

### **Closing the gender pay gap**

This session explored ways to address the gender pay gap, including in situations of conflict. Initial speakers highlighted global level data on the significant pay gap that remains across countries, and stressed that low pay in female dominated sectors, caring responsibilities and lack of opportunity drives the gap.

OECD highlighted recent evidence that the maternity penalty is 4-8% of pre maternity pay. OECD surveys also show that over 40% of people now believe men should be prioritised for work if jobs are scarce, and the proportion is growing.

Speakers underlined that active intervention is required, reimagining work, investing in childcare and recognising the economic value of care. There was also a contribution from Ukraine, which highlighted introduction of an Equal Pay Day as a way to highlight issues and also women's significant contribution to the economy during the war.

A recurrent theme raised throughout CSW68 was the lack of progress in gender equality globally, including very slow progress on SDG5 on gender equality. There was also concern about shrinking civil society space, lack of resourcing for women's organisations and the backlash on human rights.

Available on UN Web TV [here](#).

### **Reforming CSW to strengthen gender equality**

Throughout CSW68, a series of briefings was organised to explore these issues and emerging proposals within the UN. A key development raised was the [Summit of the Future](#), which is taking place in the autumn and looks beyond the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2030 to a future approach. The draft text includes limited mention of gender equality, and a key theme at CSW68 was strengthening this.

There was only discussion with no further commitments made. Key proposals raised included a greater focus within the UN on gender equality, with five year plans and clear follow up, looking beyond political declarations and linking CSW more clearly to CEDAW and other human rights frameworks.

Proposals also outline ideas for reform of CSW itself, to widen access for example through rotating the conference at different global UN venues, and increasing civil society participation in the Agreed Conclusions process. Further discussion is expected to follow over the coming year, including through the Summit for the Future process.

Available on UN Web TV [here](#).

## **Women's leadership in recovery and reconstruction**

This session explored post conflict situations and how women can secure, and play, a greater role in recovery and reconstruction. Speakers highlighted the role of access to education, economic opportunities and women's leadership at community level overall; investment in all of these areas has been shown to strengthen women's ability to gain a clear role in recovery and reconstruction. Resourcing of women's organisations and an intersectional approach was also underlined as essential, particularly in areas where access to remote communities is often difficult. Supporting civil society is also vital to build women's confidence to speak freely; in and post conflict women are often afraid to talk about women's rights and in particular their own experiences.

Speakers stressed collaboration of diverse women's groups as key to strengthening women's leadership. It was acknowledged this is a challenge in post conflict situations, and support for this work needs to be a greater priority in peacebuilding. However, it was overall noted that women are working, often informally, and this role is crucial to rebuilding communities, so needs to be recognised as such.