

KnightMUNXVIII

United Nations Economic and Social Council





Esteemed Delegates

- - - - X

It is my honor to welcome you to the Economic and Social Council at the 18th annual KnightMUN, hosted by the United Nations Association at UCF! My name is Alexandria Olsen and I will be your director for the duration of the conference. Currently, I am a junior at the University of Central Florida studying Political Science. I have been involved in Model United Nations for 2 years now and this is my first time ever directing a committee! My academic and MUN focus over the years has ranged from international relations, ethnic and internal conflicts, American politics, and comparative governments

The items on our agenda are designed to give committee members a chance to delve into international topics that they may not have considered at length and have not been widely covered by mainstream news media. I encourage creativity in your working papers and position papers, and I will ultimately be deciding committee awards based upon the originality and quality of the ideas you bring to committee as well as how you interact with the other delegates.

The topic for our committee centers around women in leadership and decision-making roles. I am excited to see how you all will choose to tackle this issue and what your ultimate resolution will be. I expect every delegate to do a healthy amount of research into their country's position on this issue, and I encourage you to do your best in accurately and fairly representing your country. As always, the United Nations is all about cooperation, respect, and coming together for a common purpose, and so I expect the delegates of this committee to show these same values throughout the weekend.

Good luck, and happy caucusing!

Alexandria Olsen

Director, Economic and Social Council,
KnightMUN XVIII

Committee History

- - - - x



The United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) is one of the six major organs of the United Nations (UN) established by the UN Charter in 1946. The Council is the principal body for policy recommendations and dialogue on economic, social, and environmental issues, for coordination and implementation of internationally agreed development goals. It is the central platform for

fostering debate and innovative thinking, forging consensus on ways forward, and coordinating efforts to achieve internationally agreed goals.

ECOSOC engages a wide variety of policymakers, politicians, academics, foundations, and over 4,000 registered non-governmental organizations in order to facilitate a productive dialogue on sustainable development. The work of the Council is guided by an issue based approach with an annual theme for each programmatic cycle, ensuring a sustained and focused discussion among stakeholders.

Each year, ECOSOC structures its work around an annual theme of global importance to sustainable development. This ensures focused attention, among ECOSOC's array of partners, and throughout the UN development system.

By emphasizing combined economic, social and environmental concerns, ECOSOC encourages agreement on coherent policies and actions that make fundamental links across all three.



Introduction to the topic

- - - - X

Throughout history, women have been excluded from leadership positions in all kinds of fields for a myriad of reasons. Today, we see greater gender equality in leadership than we have before, and the election of women to local governments such as those in Saudi Arabia in 2015 shows that even some of the more socially conservative countries are beginning to seek change. While progress has been certainly achieved in the fight for gender equality and women's empowerment, women and girls continue to suffer discrimination and violence in every part of the world.

As of 2019, 1 in 5 women and girls between the ages of 15-49 have reported experiencing physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner within a 12-month period and 49 countries currently have no laws protecting women from domestic violence. Progress is occurring regarding harmful practices such as child marriage and FGM (Female Genital Mutilation), which has declined by 30% in the past decade, but there is still much work to be done to completely eliminate such practices.

Providing women and girls with equal access to education, health care, decent work, and representation in political and economic decision-making processes will fuel sustainable economies and benefit societies and humanity at large. Implementing new legal frameworks regarding female equality in the workplace and the eradication of harmful practices targeted at women is crucial to ending the gender-based discrimination prevalent in many countries around the world.

On top of these issues that have been prevalent for women around the world for generations, there is now another issue that is being brought to the forefront of our attention: women in leadership and decision making. The leadership gap between men and women is demonstrated around the world, and is most visible in the fields of business and politics.

Why are we talking about it now?

- - - - X

When it comes to identifying and resolving the issues of gender inequality, the Gender Equality Task Force of the Millennial Development Goals identified three domains:

1. The capability domain, notably girls' and women's education, training and health;
2. Access to resources, notably to assets, including land and finance; and employment;
3. The security domain: protection from violence of all sorts (political, criminal and domestic).

Here, ECOSOC would seek to propose a fourth: Decision-Making and Power. Most of the advances made in the defined sectors have been theoretical rather than actual, and women are prevented from exercising their rights by customs and hierarchies.

Women's representation in parliaments worldwide has risen from 11% in 1975 to 19% in 2015, with advances at the local level as well. As of 2018, there are only 26 countries or territories that are ruled by a woman, which is less than 15% of the world, but also the highest the number has ever been, and even less than 10% of United Nations member states are currently ruled by women.

The issue is not limited to the public sector, however. According to the American Association of University Women, in 2015, only 5% of companies listed in the Standard and Poor's 500 index had female chief executives, and the leadership gap is also prevalent in fields such as non-profits, unions, religious institutions, and academia.

When women can achieve equal representation in leadership positions, it benefits everyone around them, not just women themselves. According to a Credit Suisse study from 2016, private companies with at least one woman on their board of directors experienced on average higher rates of returns on the company's investments, and women in executive positions are less likely to turn to layoffs when their business is facing economic hardships, leading to improved morale and conditions for workers.

Political and governmental leadership positions have an elevated status and privilege that is rarely found in other fields. People in these positions have an expansive power to make a difference in the world, for better or for worse. When women are denied or restricted from achieving these positions, they are denied or restricted from leaving an impact on the world around them. Not only this, but leadership in one area opens doors to other opportunities, which can amplify the benefits of leadership positions.

What are the Obstacles?

- - - - x

The obstacles preventing women from being represented in more leadership positions are numerous. These obstacles, sometimes referred to as the glass ceiling, can take many different forms, and rarely affect men the same way they affect women when it comes to advancing in society. While the majority of people agree that men have a better shot at leadership positions in business and politics, there's little consensus as to why this is the case.

For one, in many countries, traditional gender roles can cause women to be stuck in the position of mother, homemaker, wife, etc. If a woman is restricted from going out alone and participating in public and political life, this can obviously limit her abilities to achieve and maintain a leadership position. A lack of education, both basic and higher, can also work to keep women from socially advancing if they live in a country where women's education is not stressed as an importance.

Many of these obstacles are self-fulfilling, or create almost something of a feedback loop. If women lack the education, social status, or other resources to achieve a leadership position, then the lack of women leaders will make it harder to make education, social status, or other resources available to women.

Conclusion

- - - - X

As it's evident that there's a harrowing gender gap in leadership fields across the world, it's now up to this council to find a solution. There are numerous resolutions that the United Nations has already passed and enacted over the years, and looking to these resolutions for inspiration is not just allowed, but encouraged. Delegates are encouraged to do research on their country's stance on the issue, including but not limited to factors such as current prevalence of women in leadership positions in your country, past actions and policies your country has (or hasn't) implemented to remedy the issue, and any instances of your country cooperating with other nations to resolve the issue.

Questions to consider

1. What barriers are women or other gender minorities facing in your country that inhibit their abilities to participate in leadership? How do these barriers differ in government, business, academia, etc.?
 2. How can these barriers in the different fields be done away with? What policies can the United Nations enact to remedy the issue?
 3. How can nations that are reluctant to raise the position of women be encouraged to decrease the leadership gap?
 4. What measures can be done to address the root causes of gender inequality, such as societal gender roles, education inequality, etc.?
-

Bibliography/ Additional Sources to Consider

“About Us | UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC and SOCIAL COUNCIL.”

<https://www.un.org/ecosoc/en/about-us> (October 6, 2019).

“Barriers and Bias: The Status of Women in Leadership: AAUW.”

<https://www.aauw.org/research/barriers-and-bias/> (October 6, 2019).

“Cultural Barriers to Women’s Leadership: A Worldwide Comparison.”

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/252272062_Cultural_Barriers_to_Women's_Leadership_A_Worldwide_Comparison (October 6, 2019).

“Obstacles to Female Leadership | Pew Research Center.”

<https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2015/01/14/chapter-3-obstacles-to-female-leadership/> (October 6, 2019).

“O’Neil and Domingo - Overcoming Barriers to Leadership and Influence.Pdf.”

<https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/10293.pdf> (October 6, 2019).

O’Neil, Tam, and Pilar Domingo. “Overcoming Barriers to Leadership and Influence.” : 39.
