

THE PREMIER VIRGINIA TECH MODEL UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE

# Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)

FEBRUARY 2ND, 2023 - FEBRUARY 4TH, 2023  
GENERAL ASSEMBLY | BLACKSBURG, VA



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THE PREMIER VIRGINIA TECH MODEL UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE  
VTMUNC.ORG





**Dear Delegates of VTMUNC I,**

We appreciate your participation and dedication to the premier Virginia Tech Model United Nations Conference's efforts to promote productive and civil discourse and conversation. Nevertheless, please be warned that some presentations, discussions, and or information found in the background guides may contain delicate or triggering material. At Virginia Tech, we prioritize fostering a safe and inclusive environment, so we want to ensure that you are prepared for the nature of the discussions to occur.

That being said, the following content areas may contain sensitive material:

- 1. Conflict Zones & Human Rights Violations:** Some conversations may involve sensitive global problems including human rights violations, armed conflicts, and or other difficult themes.
- 2. Sensitive Cultural or Religious Topics:** Some topics may raise sensitive cultural or religious issues for individuals.
- 3. Violence and Trauma:** In their speeches or resolutions, delegates may reference incidents of violence, trauma, or abuse in real-world scenarios that may potentially be a sensitive topic to delegates in committee.
- 4. Discussions about Discrimination and Marginalization:** Emotionally intense discussions concerning discrimination, marginalization, or inequity may arise during committee.

As you prepare for the conference, we encourage all of our delegates to approach these discussions with both respect and empathy for differing perspectives. If the content of these committees is something that you are uncomfortable with, we recommend that you take the appropriate steps to prioritize your well-being, such as seeking support from conference staff or Secretariat of VTMUNC I.

Bound by the motto *Ut Prosim* (That I May Serve), we serve to ensure that we will promote constructive and respectful dialogue during committee sessions. As you prepare and participate in the conference, we promise that VTMUNC I will stay committed to creating a space where all your voices are heard and are welcome.

Thank you for your compassion and cooperation to our goal of respectful and intellectual discourse for all. We hope that as you progress with our conference, you continue to bloom.

Sincerely,

**Aaryan Menon, Secretary General of VTMUNC I**

**Shriya Chemudupati, Under-Secretary General of General Assemblies of VTMUNC I**

**Madeline Pedersen, Under-Secretary General of Specialized Agencies of VTMUNC I**

**Juan Camilo Bonilla, Under-Secretary General of Crisis Committees of VTMUNC I**



## CONFERENCE GUIDELINES

The first iteration of the Virginia Tech Model United Nations Conference, otherwise known as VTMUNC I, is committed to providing a safe and pleasurable experience for all delegates, advisors, and individuals involved with VTMUNC I. Although participating in Model UN is being involved in competitive activity, its fundamental purpose is to uphold and put into practice both the principles of diplomacy, collaboration, and cooperation. Any individual that violates the policies and procedures of VTMUNC I and the ideals of an open and inclusive environment will be subject to disciplinary action from the staff of VTMUNC I; disciplinary action may include a warning or being disqualified from receiving awards. Promoting an environment that is open to all by being safe, equitable, and exhilarating is our utmost priority. In order to ensure this, the following are **prohibited**:

1. Any pre-writing or working on committee content outside of VTMUNC I committee sessions (as described by the Schedule of Program).
2. Any speeches, directives, crisis arcs, or actions in committee that intend to create violence or promote a violent environment to a specific group of people, including mentions of sexual violence, graphic violence, and other behavior that is beyond committee guidelines.
3. Any hate speech, written documents, or behavior that uses language that is discriminatory and disrespectful, including but not limited to any language that is racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, xenophobic, antisemitic, Islamophobic, or language harmful to any specific group.
4. Any actions that are deliberate, both knowingly and intentionally, to bully, harass, or otherwise harmful behavior that may or has hurt other delegates' physical and or mental health.





Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the 1st annual Virginia Tech Model United Nations Conference! We are so grateful for everyone's attendance at our first-ever conference and thrilled to make this the best weekend possible. Teagan (co-chair), Rachel (tech chair), and I (Jyotsna, head-chair) are incredibly excited to see substantial debate on the economic empowerment of women around the world. While the general empowerment of women is often discussed, as an international relations and economics major, I found a lack of conversation on how marginalized women can be provided with "the education, training, and skills that they need to find a job, earn an income and become self-supporting" in the face of social and cultural barriers.

The Commission on the Status of Women is the primary intergovernmental body dedicated to promoting gender equality and women's rights. The functional commission was established as part of the Economic and Social Commission (ECOSOC) in 1946 to address growing concerns about the United Nations' ability to focus on gender equality. In March 2024, the 68th session of the commission will take place addressing how women in marginalized groups can achieve economic empowerment in the 21st century.

This committee allows member states to shape expectations and policies on gender equality around the world. Throughout the weekend, we hope to see unique solutions beyond what has already been implemented by the United Nations, to reach the most marginalized groups of women. The three topics of rural women, migrant women, and maternal mortality are quite distinct from one another, and we hope to see policies that reflect those distinctions by creating targeted solutions. Additionally, despite the focus on women, this topic impacts every one of all genders, ages, and backgrounds as women often serve as the head of their household and contribute greatly not only to their social spheres but to the global economy (As Beyoncé said, who runs the world? Girls!). Therefore, we hope delegates will find a way to recognize and balance the domestic work women perform at home, with their economic independence. We also look forward to seeing how countries of very different cultural backgrounds can collaborate to put forth policy ideas that can assist in combatting the social stigmas of women in the workplace. We're looking for well-researched delegates who prioritize diplomacy, kindness, and feasible and innovative solutions.

We hope that you all enjoy this committee and walk away from this weekend with newfound knowledge not only on women's economic empowerment but also on the qualities of a good delegate. Our USGs, chairs, and volunteers are working diligently to ensure that this weekend is the best experience possible. Please feel free to contact the Under Secretary General of General Assemblies or us if you have any questions. We can't wait to meet you! Good luck!

Best Regards,

The Commission on the Status of Women Dias

Shriya Chemudupati | Under Secretary General of General Assemblies and Regional Bodies |

Jyotsna Rathinam | Head Chair |

Teagan Ross | Co-Chair |

Rachel Rugumayo | Technology Chair |



## **Topic 1: Economic Empowerment of Rural Women**

### Background Information

Despite their integral role in social and economic issues and sustainable development, rural women continue to face barriers to economic empowerment in society.<sup>1</sup> These barriers stem from a variety of issues including restricted access to resources and services including but not limited to education, healthcare, technology, and financial institutions.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, recent crises from global food crises, environmental crises, and the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbate these issues. These gender barriers must be addressed to ensure that rural societies, which currently consist of 45% of the population<sup>2</sup>, can continue to grow and prosper in society.



<sup>1</sup> “Rural Women.” n.d. UN Women – Headquarters.  
<https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/economic-empowerment/rural-women>.

<sup>2</sup> “Joint Programme on Accelerating Progress towards the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women.” n.d. IFAD.  
<https://www.ifad.org/en/jprwee>.

### Existing Programs

In recent years, the United Nations has prioritized the issue of economically empowering women through a variety of initiatives. The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, otherwise known as UN Women, in particular, supports the leadership of rural women in legal reform, strategies, policies, and contributing to food security.<sup>1</sup> Several specific programs have been enacted to economically empower rural women.

For example in India, with support from the UN Women’s Fund for Gender Equality, Dalit women have been empowered to have bank accounts in their name and defend their rights, resulting in an increase in economic participation from women to 2,800 individuals to 14,000 individuals.<sup>1</sup>

Another example of economic empowerment globally is with women in Zimbabwe. In Zimbabwe, rural women were given equipment and training for fishing, a typically male-dominated industry. Without having to rely on men, sales have doubled and women can extend their market reach.<sup>1</sup> In China, UN Women helped provide irrigation technology as well as educational training to rural women to assist them in acquiring and maintaining their irrigation systems. Through education, they have also been able to better deal with the consequences of climate change on local water resources.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to UN Women, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) plays a major role in assisting rural women through their initiative in partnership with the UN,

the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), and the World Food Programme (WFP), an initiative known as “Accelerating Progress towards the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women”.<sup>1</sup> This program aims not only to help rural women but also to contribute to global policy to discuss the rights of women.

### *Current challenges*

One of the most pressing issues to rural women’s economic empowerment is climate change. These women, who typically rely on agricultural systems are disproportionately affected by the disastrous impacts of climate change.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, these women who usually are perceived as the head of the household, must compensate for distance to biofuel sources as well as energy and water used for domestic and agricultural purposes. As a consequence, women often spend time within the domestic sphere while failing to invest in productive activities.<sup>3</sup>

Another important consideration to the empowerment of rural women in the climate crisis is the unique knowledge rural women have in encouraging sustainable development. For example in Brazil, women farmers play a critical role in conserving biodiversity, protecting indigenous crops, and instilling sustainable production

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<sup>3</sup> United Nations. n.d. “Rural Women’s Economic Empowerment and the Road to 2030: Agency for Climate Action | United Nations.”

<https://www.un.org/en/un-chronicle/rural-women%E2%80%99s-economic-empowerment-and-road-2030-agency-climate-action>.

methods in farming, energy, and water management.<sup>3</sup>

Evidently, the economic empowerment of rural women and sustainable development are intrinsically linked, and therefore to economically empower rural women it is essential to consider the impacts of climate change and consider how women can empower themselves through indigenous knowledge and climate-resilient agriculture strategies.



### *Post-COVID challenges*

COVID-19 devastated individuals and societies across the globe, and rural women are no exception to that. In fact, the current cost-of-living crisis is predicted to impact women the most as they remain uncompensated for domestic work due to the wage gap. When crises like the pandemic hit, women are often burdened with being the primary caretakers of the family and therefore pulled away from employment opportunities. Furthermore, a lack of government social services provided for

women, especially in rural areas, leaves women in more dire circumstances.<sup>4</sup> Specifically for rural women, the disruptions in farming as a result of the pandemic continue to cause significant barriers to economic independence and empowerment. For example, in Tanzania, approximately 80% of women rely on subsistence farming, and in Tunisia, 70% of the agricultural workforce is comprised of women.<sup>4</sup> Rural women commonly struggle to acquire land as well as agricultural supplies. These issues have been exacerbated not only by the pandemic but also by the current conflict in Ukraine which contributes a significant amount of the global fertilizer supply.

### *Social Norms for Rural Women*

As previously mentioned women are often pushed to unpaid care and domestic work due to societal norms and traditional gender roles. For instance, in Tanzania, women spend more than 3.7 times more of their time on unpaid care and domestic work than men and therefore have less time to

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<sup>4</sup> “Three Challenges for Rural Women amid a Cost-of-Living Crisis | UN Women – Headquarters.” 2022. UN Women – Headquarters. October 13, 2022. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/feature-story/2022/10/three-challenges-for-rural-women-amid-a-cost-of-living-crisis#:~:text=Limited%20access%20to%20services,-Lack%20of%20access&text=Women%20are%20less%20likely%20to%20have%20access%20to%20financial%20credit,economic%20opportunities%20such%20as%20entrepreneurship.>

spend on entrepreneurship. Additionally, due to harmful gender roles, women are often discouraged and discriminated against when trying to take leadership roles in their communities or on a government level, therefore making it difficult for them to advocate for themselves.<sup>4</sup>

These societal norms often translate to a lack of services in the financial and governmental sectors. Inequalities in these sectors, often rooted in patriarchal beliefs, cause women to be less likely to access markets, land, and formal financial services in spite of their high participation in agricultural sectors.<sup>4</sup> Women often face reduced access to loans, credit, insurance, and productive resources in comparison to their male counterparts.<sup>4</sup> In fact, 70% of female entrepreneurs in developing countries say they have inadequate access to the capital necessary for business growth.<sup>5</sup> A lack of financial management and business knowledge often exacerbates these issues for women.<sup>4</sup> Providing the same financial services for women as banks do for men, could increase annual revenue by up to 700 billion dollars, and if women participated equally in the economy, 12 trillion dollars could be added to the global GDP by 2025.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, the inclusion of women is essential to the future economy.

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<sup>5</sup> “Women’s World Banking.” Women’s World Banking. October 30, 2023. [https://www.womensworldbanking.org/?utm\\_source=google&utm\\_medium=search&utm\\_campaign=wwbbrand&gclid=Cj0KCQiAuqKqBhDxARIsAFZELmJ3RmyqoFBdrzWeINin0XV6qbQe4UhkK0wn8yYls2X4P\\_VbkhU92OYaAkgdEALw\\_wcB.](https://www.womensworldbanking.org/?utm_source=google&utm_medium=search&utm_campaign=wwbbrand&gclid=Cj0KCQiAuqKqBhDxARIsAFZELmJ3RmyqoFBdrzWeINin0XV6qbQe4UhkK0wn8yYls2X4P_VbkhU92OYaAkgdEALw_wcB.)



A previously mentioned program, the Joint Program on Accelerating Progress Towards Rural Women's Economic Empowerment aims to address this issue by engaging with men and their roles in religious, traditional, or local leaders to recognize the struggles and rights of rural women.<sup>4</sup> This program has been helping participants identify gender inequalities within the household, however, to continue to economically empower women delegates must identify unique ways to overcome social barriers to rural women's equality.

*Looking towards the future: issues that must be addressed*

Despite current initiatives, the economic empowerment of rural women is a problem far from being solved. To further break down barriers, delegates must grapple with how national financial inclusion measures can be instituted so that governments can adopt policies to reduce inequalities. Currently, less than 35% of countries have a national financial inclusion strategy.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, governments must recognize the benefits of including and promoting women's financial inclusion and do so through policy, regulatory reforms, and improving health and educational access.<sup>5</sup>

Lack of access to resources continues to plague the economic empowerment of rural women. The FAO estimates that if women farmers had the same access to resources as men, agricultural output in 34 developing countries would rise by an estimated average

of four percent. While this number seems small this change has the power to reduce the number of undernourished people in those countries by 17%, or 150 million people.<sup>5</sup>

The UN has a responsibility to figure out mechanisms to enforce domestic policies that contribute to equality within rural populations. Rural women are key players in sustainable development, economic growth, and prosperous societies.

***Questions to Consider:***

- I. How can policies be created that combat climate change in a way that empowers rural women?
- II. What can countries and international organizations do to help societies overcome stigma and social expectations that prevent women from seeking work or economic independence?
- III. What initiatives can be taken to help reestablish agricultural systems to economically empower rural women facing the COVID-19 crisis?
- IV. How can countries encourage rural women, who are typically burdened with a majority of household and domestic work, to be economically empowered using both their indigenous and grassroots knowledge?
- V. In what ways, if at all possible, can we provide economic education to rural women in order to increase economic participation and empowerment?

## **Topic 2: Economic Barriers and Undercompensation Towards Migrant Women**

### Background Information

Women's participation in the labor force has been around for centuries, but can the same be said for fair compensation?

Participation in the labor force varies around the globe but nowhere has it quite reached parity with male counterparts. Migratory flows are often influenced by the lack of decent work and equal rights for women in their home countries. This is why globally, migrant women continue to seek out opportunities and better living conditions. However, the path to migration can have its benefits and repercussions. Though migration has its benefits, it also has many risks that can lead to the exploitation of domestic labor and vulnerability.

This category encompasses women who have been unsuccessful in obtaining employment and women who have migrated for the purpose of work but have been trafficked. We also recognize that even where women are not migrating with the primary purpose of working, there will be an element of work involved in their move, whether it be temporary work that is used to facilitate their move, or unpaid care duties that are undertaken to support their family and/or facilitate the abilities of others to work.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Mrclent. "Female Migrant Workers: Challenges and Strengths." Migrants & Refugees Section, July 28, 2022.

### The UN's Stance

UN Women is a notable organization that advocates for the improvement of employment and economic opportunity for women. This organization values the integrity of women who seek migration for employment opportunities. With that, the improvement of employment policies, labor market conditions, and advancement in the frequency of decent work for women is what UN Women aims to tackle. Action taken by UN Women in various countries exhibits exactly the kind of change that must be accomplished to allow migrant women to have security in their venture for economic mobility.

For example, the UN Women's work in Pakistan, in collaboration with the International Labor Organization (ILO), improved women's accessibility to lobby for Pakistan's first Home-Based Workers Policy. This policy allowed for women's easier access to the field of finance and markets, and in turn, created a clearer path for women to pursue better work and earn decent compensation. Specifically in the district of Sialkot, the UN Women and ILO's pursuit in seeking out employment openings and their determination to cooperate with businesses to provide fair pay for women resulted in more than 1,000 previously unemployed

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<https://migrants-refugees.va/2022/08/04/female-migrant-workers/>.

women having new jobs and income security.<sup>7</sup>

In Ethiopia, in collaboration with the Federal Micro and Small Enterprises Agency, UN Women was able to lead a joint UN programme on gender equality that provides financial support to the said agency in order for thousands of women to be trained on subjects such as how to develop a business, value chains, and green business incubators. It is reported that 8,000 women in Ethiopia have used their training to start and build businesses.<sup>7</sup>

The work of UN Women in Nepal is a great exhibition of action taken towards the security and safety of women who choose to migrate in search of economic opportunity. In 2007, UN Women advocated for the Foreign Employment Act which would ban discrimination based on gender in the workplace. The act removed restrictions on women working abroad and provided for measures that aimed to guarantee the security of women's rights. Recruiting agencies are now subject to transparency towards the women in search of jobs and when assessing contractual obligations of the employer and migrant women in their destination countries.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> "Employment and Migration." UN Women – Headquarters. Accessed November 28, 2023. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/economic-empowerment/employment-and-migration>.

### Current Challenges

There are various challenges that migrant women face that lead to their decision to migrate for employment, as well as within their employment. Oftentimes women will seek out employment elsewhere due to stereotypical beliefs hosted by their origin country. These stereotypical beliefs are typically based on the idea that a woman's "work" should be domestic, and though many women who choose to enter the workforce do it with the sole purpose of supporting their families, misogynistic ideologies often create a barrier for them. Therefore women will seek out work elsewhere as the opportunities in their origins are slim and/or discriminatory.

As for challenges within migrant women's work, there is a large tendency for migrant women to work in "invisible sectors." "Invisible sectors" or illegitimate work, expose migrant women to exploitation in indecent work, human trafficking, and abuse. Violence against migrant women is a huge issue that can not only be directed toward these women as a physical threat but migrant women can also be endangered through the structural violence that is often perpetuated in many areas of work for migrant women.

Structural violence in these "invisible sectors" can be in the form of gender and racial discrimination, as well as exclusion, marginalization, and exploitation. Many human rights violations occur through recurring structural violence, however, a majority of migrant women are ultimately powerless in these situations due to irregular



status. Migrant women with irregular or illegitimate status are therefore unable to speak out to find justice due to fear of deportation. Migrant women are vulnerable to sexual harassment in their work as well. Employers (especially those who live nearby) will take advantage of unequal power dynamics and pressure migrant women into inappropriate relationships. Particularly in the case of agricultural workers or live-in care workers, this is not uncommon. Refusing such advances or filing a complaint/criminal charge could put migrant women's jobs in jeopardy. Ultimately the result is that migrant women will remain silent and suppress their distress.<sup>6</sup>

Undercompensation and inability to send remittances are also challenges that migrant women will face in their destination countries. Migrant women are often “deskilled” when they accept work in a foreign place. Regardless of their qualifications and certifications, deskilled positions are more commonly offered because they must work jobs reflective of their education. This results in many migrant women working in the care industry, meaning a career in service in places such as private homes or nursing homes. “80 percent of care and domestic workers are women.” Many policies and programs that are provided by destination countries will advertise recruitment to attract migrant women in search of employment and leave them to deal with the evolving ‘care crisis’ in destination countries. Many contracts for women working under the ‘care crisis’ are

often required to provide live-in service. Employers will take advantage of their employees' hours and are paid much less per hour for care work than men are for male-dominated occupations. Female migrant workers are also often prohibited or unable to send remittances back home causing a disconnect between familial relationships.<sup>6</sup>

COVID-19 is a more recent challenge that has added hurdles to the already difficult road for migrant women in search of employment. Women workers' health, well-being, and livelihoods have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 crisis, and despite the reality that many migrant women work under the umbrella of healthcare and work essential jobs during the pandemic, many have had to return to their countries. Returning home is not the end to a migrant woman's distress as returning to their origin countries not only means a return to unemployment, but they frequently face stigma and face struggle when confronted with reintegration and approaching possible employment opportunities.<sup>7</sup>

#### *What has yet to be solved?*

The continued existence of weak labor protections and laws in many regions and countries does not sufficiently protect the rights of migrant workers, and enforcement of existing laws can be untrustworthy. This makes it easier for employers to exploit vulnerable workers, like migrant women. The continued enforcement of weak labor protection laws

will continue to reproduce poor conditions for workers until the changing of these laws is acted upon.

The frequency of migrant women who lack legal status is an issue that keeps migrant women in a state of vulnerability. Lacking legal documentation or work permits isn't uncommon among migrant women, hence the fear of deportation remains high and the likelihood of reporting any workplace abuses remains low. Providing legal pathways for migrant workers can help mitigate this issue.

The economic incentive of work opportunities unfortunately drives the demand for low-wage labor in certain industries. Because of this, the continuation of source economic incentives for employers to undercompensate and exploit migrant workers who would be willing to accept lower wages due to economic desperation in their home countries is a solution that many industries take advantage of.

Many political and policy challenges have also yet to be made globally if we want to protect working migrant women. Policymaking related to immigration and labor rights can be contentious which can slow down the implementation of necessary laws and policies to allow for more ease through immigration. However, the implementation of thorough and just laws addressing immigration and labor protection could easily create an easier path to employment for migrant women, but at what cost?

Structural inequality goes hand in hand with policymaking as it is ingrained

into the foundation of many institutions. Economic inequalities and discrimination based on factors like race, gender, and migration status are still social limitations that are active in many societies.

Confronting these systemic inequalities is a long-term process that would require significant and dependable societal and policy changes.

Access to education and training is also a huge barrier in many countries. Many migrant women face barriers to accessing education, skills training, and certifications which can limit their ability to secure higher-paying jobs.<sup>8</sup>

#### *Why does this issue need to be solved?*

The issue of migrant women facing economic barriers in the workforce needs to be solved because it is simply a matter of human rights, gender equality, and social inclusion. It's essential to ensure that all individuals, regardless of their gender or migrant status, have equal access to employment opportunities, fair wages, and safe working conditions. Addressing these barriers not only brings light to an issue that has been suppressed under migrant women's vulnerability but also can contribute to the economic healing and overall health of migrant women and the longevity of economic empowerment in the workforce

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<sup>8</sup> Mrclient. "Migrant Workers Discrimination and Inequalities." Migrants & Refugees Section, April 5, 2022. <https://migrants-refugees.va/2022/04/07/migrant-workers-discrimination-inequalities/>.

whether or not it is outside of their origin country.

***Questions to Consider:***

- I. What is a different kind of approach the UN could take to address this topic?
- II. Why do you think the implementation of laws and policies for immigration and the protection of labor rights hasn't been

implemented? What is at stake if they are implemented?

- III. How can governments and employers work to ensure fair wages and safe working conditions for migrant women in low-skilled and "invisible sectors"?
- IV. How could access to education or skills training impact the kind of jobs migrant women typically pursue

**Topic 3: Addressing and Reducing Maternal Mortality**

***Background Information***

Maternal mortality remains a pressing concern across the globe, its impact reflecting disparities in healthcare access, socioeconomic status, and gender equality. The term maternal mortality refers to deaths resulting from complications during pregnancy or childbirth (reproductive age as considered by the UN is 15 to 49 years).<sup>9,10</sup> Although the global maternal mortality ratio (MMR, measured as a factor per 100,000 live births<sup>9</sup>) has declined by 34% from 2000 to 2020, MMRs in lower and middle-income countries vary greatly when compared to

those of high-income countries. In 2020, an estimated 287,000 women died during and following pregnancy and childbirth; nearly 95% of these maternal deaths occurred in low and middle-income countries with the majority of these cases being preventable.<sup>11</sup>

Regionally, Sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia are the most impacted by high MMRs with the combined regions accounting for 87% (253,000) of estimated maternal deaths in the year 2020.<sup>11</sup> Sub-Saharan Africa alone made up 70% of maternal deaths that same year (202,000) while Southern Asia accounted for 16% (47,000).<sup>11</sup> However, Southern Asia has had the second highest reduction of MMR between the years 2000 and 2020 at 67%

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<sup>9</sup> "Maternal Mortality." UNICEF DATA. Last modified May 26, 2023. <https://data.unicef.org/topic/maternal-health/maternal-mortality/>.

<sup>10</sup> "Family Planning/contraception Methods." World Health Organization (WHO). Last modified September 5, 2023. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/family-planning-contraception>.

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<sup>11</sup> "Maternal Mortality." World Health Organization (WHO). Last modified February 22, 2023. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/maternal-mortality>.



(from 408 to 134),<sup>11</sup> while Eastern Europe achieved the highest reduction at 70% (from 38 to 11).<sup>11</sup> Great progress in the area of reduction of MMRs is occurring globally with four different Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) sub-regions nearly halving their ratios during this same period (Eastern Africa, Central Asia, Eastern Asia, and Northern Africa).<sup>11</sup>

The United Nations has also recognized and reduced maternal mortality rates as a priority with SDG target 3.1 being to reduce maternal mortality to less than 70% maternal deaths per 100,000 live births by 2030.<sup>12</sup> UN entities like UNICEF, the World Health Organization, as well as other partnering agencies, have been committed to working with country governments and other partners to advance progress in maternal and newborn health worldwide.<sup>9</sup> New strategies and groups aiming to develop new plans for the reduction of MMRs are making substantive changes, as seen through the projects of Every Newborn Action Plan (ENAP) and Ending Preventable Maternal Mortality (EPMM). These programs work to ensure every pregnant individual receives the necessary information and interventions, including four or more antenatal care visits, the presence of a skilled birth attendant at birth,

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<sup>12</sup> "Trends in Maternal Mortality 2000 to 2020: Estimates by WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA, World Bank Group and UNDESA/Population Division." World Health Organization (WHO). Last modified February 23, 2023. <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240068759>.

and the guarantee of postnatal care for both the mother and newborn within two days of childbirth.<sup>9</sup>

### *Current and Intersecting Issues*

#### *Family Planning Access*

Access to healthcare is a key concern in the eradication of maternal mortality and care by qualified healthcare professionals before, during, and after childbirth is necessary to save the lives of both women and their newborns.<sup>11</sup> Pregnancy and reproductive healthcare begin with family planning education and access. In 2022, the global contraceptive prevalence of any method was estimated at 65%. Many varying types of contraception exist, however, context is extremely important to acknowledge as many countries and situations have negative views on particular forms of family planning methods. Contraception methods range from contraceptive pills, implants, injectables, patches, vaginal rings, intrauterine devices, condoms, male and female sterilization, lactational amenorrhea methods, withdrawal, and fertility awareness-based methods.<sup>10</sup> The effectiveness of contraceptive methods is measured by the number of pregnancies per 100 women using the method per year:<sup>10</sup>

Methods are classified by their effectiveness per 100 women:

- Very effective (0–0.9 pregnancies)
- Effective (1–9 pregnancies)

- Moderately effective (10–19 pregnancies)
- Less effective (20 or more pregnancies)<sup>10</sup>

The use of contraception prevents both STD/IS and pregnancy-related health risks for women, this is particularly emphasized for adolescent girls, and when expressed in terms of interbirth intervals, children born within 2 years of an elder sibling have a 60% increased risk of infant death, and those born within 2–3 years a 10% increased risk.<sup>10</sup> The number of women desiring to use family planning has increased markedly over the past two decades, from 900 million in 2000 to nearly 1.1 billion in 2021.<sup>10</sup> The proportion of women of reproductive age who have their need for family planning satisfied with modern methods is 77.5% globally in 2022.<sup>10</sup>

Ensuring equitable access to quality healthcare is the most important way to enable women and otherwise identify uterus-having individuals will have adequate knowledge about and access to contraception.<sup>10</sup> Limited access to a variety of methods of contraception, limited access to services (especially among younger, poorer, and unmarried individuals), a fear of the side effects or a lack of knowledge about the contraceptive method, poor quality of available services, as well as other gender-based hurdles have contributed to the barriers faced for accessing family planning.<sup>10</sup>

### *Adolescent Birth Rates*

The problem of teenage pregnancy (or adolescent birth rates ABR) is also necessary to consider when creating holistic solutions, as pregnancy and complications with childbirth are the leading causes of death among 15 to 19-year-old girls globally.<sup>13</sup> It is imperative to recognize the importance of safe contraceptive access and education, the right of any uterus bearer's bodily autonomy in deciding a course of action, and the cultural and economic situation of the individual. As of 2019, adolescents aged 15-19 in low and middle-income countries had an estimated 21 million pregnancies each year, of which approximately 50% were unintended and which resulted in an estimated 12 million births.<sup>14</sup> Based on 2019 data, 55% of unintended pregnancies among adolescent girls aged 15-19 years end in abortions, which are often unsafe in lower-middle-income countries (LMICs).<sup>14</sup> Links to ABRs to education may be a helpful path in resolving this problem. Adolescent mothers (aged 10-19 years) face higher risks of eclampsia, puerperal endometritis, and systemic infections than

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<sup>13</sup> "Adolescent Health." World Health Organization (WHO). Last modified November 26, 2019.

[https://www.who.int/health-topics/adolescent-health/pregnancy-and-childbirth-complications-are-the-leading-cause-of-death-among-15-19-year-old-girls#tab=tab\\_1](https://www.who.int/health-topics/adolescent-health/pregnancy-and-childbirth-complications-are-the-leading-cause-of-death-among-15-19-year-old-girls#tab=tab_1).

<sup>14</sup> "Adolescent Pregnancy." World Health Organization (WHO). Last modified June 2, 2023.

<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/adolescent-pregnancy>.

women aged 20-24 years, and babies of adolescent mothers face higher risks of low birth weight, preterm birth, and severe neonatal conditions.<sup>14</sup>

Destigmatization of conversations surrounding sexual health and safety and increased access to family planning will be essential parts of the solution to address. Maternal mortality is highly linked to child mortality and in decreasing maternal mortality we hope to simultaneously and significantly decrease child mortality rates as well. The decline in neonatal mortality from 1990 to 2021 has been slower than that of post-neonatal under-5 mortality and there are approximately 6,400 newborn deaths every day, amounting to nearly 47% of all child deaths under the age of 5 years of age.<sup>15</sup>

### *Socioeconomic Inequalities*

Inequalities are specifically highlighted within the issue of maternal mortality, the gap between rich and poor regions and their ability to access quality healthcare amplifies the necessity for this issue to be addressed. The MMR in low-income countries in 2020 was 430 versus 12 in higher-income countries.<sup>11</sup> This lack of access to wealth in countries without socialized or free healthcare can often result

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<sup>15</sup> "Child Mortality and Causes of Death." World Health Organization (WHO). Accessed December 22, 2023. <https://www.who.int/data/gho/data/themes/topics/topic-details/GHO/child-mortality-and-causes-of-death>.

in a lack of access to quality healthcare, leaving economically disenfranchised regions disproportionately impacted by the lack of access to quality healthcare.<sup>16</sup>

Acknowledging and addressing racial disparities in maternal mortality is another essential part of ensuring equitable access to healthcare. There are a multitude of reasons that contribute to racial disparities in healthcare, including variations in quality healthcare, underlying chronic conditions, structural racism in the healthcare system, and implicit biases.<sup>17</sup> In the United States, black women are three times more likely to die from a pregnancy-related cause than white women.<sup>17</sup> Structural racism can also impact where a person lives and their income, which in turn impacts which medical providers they have access to and can afford. Addressing the intersection of social and economic issues will be key to creating long-lasting solutions to the problem of maternal mortality.

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<sup>16</sup> "Why Maternal Mortality in the World Remains Tragedy in Low-income Countries and Shame for High-income Ones: Will Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Help?" De Gruyter. Last modified February 1, 2023.

<https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.1515/jpm-2022-0061/html?lang=en#:~:text=If%20we%20look%20at%20a,during%20lifetime%20due%20to%20pregnancy%2D>.

<sup>17</sup> "Working Together to Reduce Black Maternal Mortality." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Last modified April 27, 2023.

<https://www.cdc.gov/healthequity/features/maternal-mortality/index.html>.



### *Country Stability and Crises*

Humanitarian issues and conflicts also have the potential to affect progress in the reduction of MMRs. Unforeseen conflicts, crises, humanitarian catastrophes, and governmental instability have massive national consequences and their impacts ripple throughout the healthcare system as well. According to the Fragile States Index, 9 countries were classified as “very high alert” or “high alert” (from highest to lowest: Yemen, Somalia, South Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Central African Republic, Chad, Sudan, and Afghanistan) and these countries had MMRs ranging from 30 (the Syrian Arab Republic) to 1223 (South Sudan) in 2020. The average MMR for very high and high-alert fragile states in 2020 was 551 per 100,000, which is a rate that is over double the world’s average.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, conflicts that were formally classified as ‘wars’ were associated with an increase during the period of war of 36.9 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births.<sup>18</sup>

### *Causes of Death*

It is essential to remember that most maternal deaths are preventable and that healthcare solutions to prevent or manage complications are well known: all women

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<sup>18</sup> Jawad, Mohammed, Thomas Hone, Eszter P. Vamos, Valeria Cetorelli, and Christopher Millett. "Implications of armed conflict for maternal and child health: A regression analysis of data from 181 countries for 2000–2019." *PLOS Medicine* 18, no. 9 (2021), e1003810. doi:10.1371/journal.pmed.1003810.

need access to high-quality care during pregnancy, and during and after childbirth.<sup>11</sup> The major causes of death for those giving birth are:

- **Severe bleeding** after birth can kill a healthy woman within hours if she is unattended. Injecting oxytocics immediately after childbirth effectively reduces the risk of bleeding.
- **Infection** after childbirth can be eliminated if good hygiene is practiced and if early signs of infection are recognized and treated promptly.
- **Pre-eclampsia** should be detected and appropriately managed before the onset of convulsions (eclampsia) and other life-threatening complications. Administering drugs such as magnesium sulfate for pre-eclampsia can lower a woman’s risk of developing eclampsia.
- **Unsafe abortions**

The listed causes account for nearly 75% of all maternal deaths.<sup>11</sup>

### *Questions to Consider*

- I. What steps should the UN take to ensure the maintenance of a global decrease in MMRs and related health disasters?
- II. How can we uplift marginalized communities economically and socially to decrease the issue of maternal mortality?

- III. How can countries respect the religious and personal freedoms of their citizens while educating their populations about sexual health and maternal mortality?
- IV. How can access to quality maternal healthcare services be improved in low-income countries, and what role can the UN play in ensuring equitable healthcare infrastructure and resources?
- V. In what ways can the UN advocate for the implementation and enforcement of laws and policies that protect the rights and well-being of

pregnant women, including access to safe abortion services where legal? How can the UN work with governments to ensure that health systems are prepared for obstetric emergencies and that healthcare providers are adequately trained to handle complications during pregnancy and childbirth? What strategies can the UN employ to address the impact of environmental factors, such as climate change and natural disasters, on maternal health and mortality, and how can vulnerable communities be better protected?