



# CSW 69 Beijing +30 Shadow Report

## Women and Poverty

*Elahe Amani*

The Beijing Platform for Action recognizes that women's poverty is set in the context of public policies and social practices that privilege men and create barriers for women in an unequal economy. In the face of higher rates of poverty among women, the Platform asks governments to provide **adequate safety nets** and strengthen state and community support systems to enable women living in poverty to preserve their means of livelihood in times of stress (para 58g). To strengthen women's capabilities to earn a living, governments and community entities need to mobilize to protect women's right to full and **equal access to economic resources**, including the right to inheritance and to ownership of land and equal access to credit (para 60f). To track changes in women's poverty, **gender and age-disaggregated data** on poverty and all aspects of economic activity are essential (para 68a).

In the United States, nearly half of the workforce is composed of women, and they are now the sole or co-breadwinners in half of American families with children.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, women earn more college and graduate degrees than men.<sup>2</sup> However, women still earn considerably less than men,<sup>3</sup> leading to lower retirement benefits and reduced income for families. A key factor is the persistent gender wage gap for working women in all sectors of the US economy.

**Closing the gender wage gap is essential to reducing poverty among women across all US states.** According to an analysis by the Institute for Women's Policy Research, achieving equal pay would reduce poverty for families with working women by more than half.<sup>4</sup> Since 1990, the female employment rate in the US has remained relatively steady, peaking at 57.5% in 2000. By 2023, this rate stood at 55.4%, up from 54.3% in 1990.<sup>5</sup>

**Women in the United States are 35 percent more likely than men to be poor in America,** and single mothers face the highest risk. Currently, 35 percent of single women with children live and raise their families in poverty.<sup>6</sup> Achieving equal pay would reduce the poverty rate for working women from 8.0% to 3.8%. For working single mothers, equal pay would lower the poverty rate from 28.9% to 14.5%.<sup>7</sup> Equal pay would reduce the number of children with working mothers living in poverty from 5.6 million to 3.1 million and add \$513 billion to the national economy.<sup>8</sup>

**Equal pay would impact states with higher-than-average poverty rates.** In **New Mexico**, the poverty rate for working women would drop from 13.9% to 8.4% and in **Mississippi**, the rate would decrease from 13.6% to 8%.<sup>9</sup>

**US macroeconomic policies addressing women's poverty focus on several key areas.** These policies aim to empower women economically, reduce poverty, and promote gender equality. However, their impact has been mixed.

- **Pay Transparency** The US has not implemented federal-level gender pay transparency laws since the commitments at Beijing Platform for Action. However, steps are being taken at the state level, and there are ongoing discussions about potential federal action. Some states and cities have introduced laws requiring employers to provide salary ranges or disclose wage information to improve pay transparency. **California** requires employers to disclose pay scales upon request, and it has rules around equal pay. **Colorado** has one of the strongest pay transparency laws, requiring employers to include pay ranges in job postings. **New York City** passed a law requiring employers to disclose salary ranges in job ads, which took effect in November 2022.<sup>10</sup> The **Paycheck Fairness Act** has been proposed multiple times to address wage discrimination and increase transparency but has not passed Congress.<sup>11</sup>
- **Salary History Bans** Salary history bans prohibit employers from asking about salary history to prevent past pay discrimination from affecting future earnings.<sup>12</sup> While this has not been implemented at the federal level, several states have taken steps to address pay inequality. Currently, states with these bans include **Alabama, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina (state agencies), Oregon, Pennsylvania (state agencies only), Rhode Island, Vermont, Virginia (State Agencies), and Washington**. Additionally, the **District of Columbia** and **Puerto Rico** have similar bans.<sup>13</sup>
- **Pay Discrimination** A positive development in the United States since the Beijing Conference is the passage of the **Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act (2009)** that allows individuals facing pay discrimination to file a complaint within 180 days of their last paycheck, resetting the clock with each discriminatory paycheck.
- **Collective bargaining** Unions have made significant improvements in collective bargaining for women. Encouraging unionization enhances bargaining power for better wages and benefits.<sup>14</sup> Women represented by unions earn approximately 4.7% more in hourly wages compared to non-unionized women, helping to reduce the gender pay

gap.<sup>15</sup> Unions also negotiate for clear pay standards and transparency, mitigating the impacts of gender discrimination. Sectoral bargaining, advocating for bargaining at industry or regional levels, addresses pay gaps more effectively across wider worker groups. Unions ensure women are represented in decision-making roles, influencing outcomes that benefit women workers.

**Social safety net programs are critical in facilitating women's capacity to work and reducing financial hardship** though some of the programs have significant shortcomings and much more needs to be done.

- **Subsidized childcare and paid maternity leave** are vital for women to remain in the workforce, especially for poorer women facing higher childcare costs relative to their income. The United States has made efforts to expand subsidized childcare and paid maternity leave, but the success has been mixed. The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) allocated \$39 billion in childcare to states,<sup>16</sup> leading to various state-level initiatives to lower costs and expand access. However, these efforts often rely on temporary funding, raising concerns about long-term sustainability. While there have been proposals to expand paid family leave, comprehensive federal legislation has not been enacted. Some states have implemented their own paid leave programs, but nationwide coverage remains limited.
- **Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)**<sup>17</sup> created in 1996, replaced the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program, shifting from an entitlement program to a block grant system. TANF has seen a decline in assistance receipt among eligible women due to state incentives to reduce caseloads. Only 21 out of every 100 families in poverty received benefits by 2020, compared to 68 out of 100 in 1996, leaving many without needed support.<sup>18</sup>
- **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)**,<sup>19</sup> originally established as the Food Stamp Program in 1939, evolved to electronic benefit transfers (EBT) to reduce food insecurity, especially benefiting women as heads of households. 63% of adult recipient of SNAP are women, and households headed by single women are common among SNAP beneficiaries, with 92% of such households led by women.<sup>20</sup> While SNAP is effective in alleviating food insecurity, challenges remain, such as inadequate benefit levels and barriers to participation for some vulnerable groups.
- **Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP)**<sup>21</sup> provides health services to children in families with incomes too high to qualify for Medicaid but too low to afford private coverage. The program is managed by states according to federal requirements though there are significant state differences.<sup>22</sup>

### Better Gender Data

While significant research and data collection have been conducted on women and poverty, some gaps remain. An imperative is the need for more nuanced gender-disaggregated data, especially around intersecting factors like race, disability, and immigration status, to fully understand the feminization of poverty. Longitudinal studies tracking the impact of specific policies on reducing women's poverty are needed to assess the effectiveness of interventions. While research informs policy, there remains a lag in implementing evidence-based gender-sensitive policies at the federal level.

<sup>1</sup> Sarah Jane Glynn 2019. *Breadwinning Mothers Continue to be the U.S. Norm*. Center for American Progress.

<sup>2</sup> Michael T. Nietzel 2024. *Women Continue to Outpace Men in College Enrollment and Graduation*.

<sup>3</sup> Suzanna Fritzberg and Ksenia Shadrina 2024. *Spotlighting Women's Retirement Security*.

<sup>4</sup> Institute for Women's Policy Research 2014. *How Equal Pay for Working Women Would Reduce Poverty and Grow the American Economy*.

<sup>5</sup> Statistic Research Department 2024. *Employment Rate of Women in the US Since 1990*.

<sup>6</sup> The Women's Legal Defense and Education Fund n.d. *Women and Poverty in America*.

<sup>7</sup> Diversity Plus Magazine n.d. *Equal Pay Would Cut the Poverty Rate for Children with a Working Mother by Half*.

<sup>8</sup> Jessica Milli et al. 2017. *The Impact of Equal Pay on Poverty and the Economy*. Institute for Women's Policy Research.

<sup>9</sup> Elyse Shaw and Halie Mariano 2021. *The Economic Impact of Equal Pay by State*. Institute for Women's Policy Research.

<sup>10</sup> Pay Analytics 2024. *US Pay Transparency Laws by State*.

<sup>11</sup> US Congress 2024. *118th Congress H.R. 17 Paycheck Fairness Act*.

<sup>12</sup> Amy Dalrymple 2023. *Equal Pay in the United States: Salary History Bans*. US Department of Labor Women's Bureau.

<sup>13</sup> Paycor 2022. *States with Salary History Bans*.

<sup>14</sup> Elise Gould and Celine McNicholas 2017. *Unions Help Narrow the Gender Wage Gap*.

<sup>15</sup> Economic Policy Institute 2021. *Unions Help Reduce Disparities and Strengthen Our Democracy*.

<sup>16</sup> US Health and Human Services Office of Child Care 2024. *American Rescue Plan Act Child Care Stabilization Funds FAQ*.

<sup>17</sup> US Department of Health and Human Services Office of Family Assistance. *Temporary Assistance for Needy Families*.

<sup>18</sup> Aditi Shrivastava and Gina Azito Thompson 2022. *TANF Cash Assistance Should Reach Millions More Families*.

<sup>19</sup> US Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Program. *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program*.

<sup>20</sup> National Women's Law Center 2023. *NWLC, MomsRising and FRAC Lead Other Gender Justice Groups in Pushing to Strengthen Snap Benefits*.

<sup>21</sup> US Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. *Children's Health Insurance Program*.

<sup>22</sup> US Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. *CHIP State Program Information*.

**US feminists collaborating to advance human rights and gender equity for women and girls worldwide**

[www.uswomenscaucus.org](http://www.uswomenscaucus.org)

[info@uswomenscaucus.org](mailto:info@uswomenscaucus.org)



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### Women and Health

*Graciela J. Soto, M.D., M.S.*

According to the Beijing Platform for Action, women and girls have the right to enjoy the highest standard of physical and mental health (para 89) and to decide on all aspects of their health including their sexual and reproductive health without discriminatory norms and practices (paras 92, 96).<sup>1</sup> The Beijing Platform sets out five strategic objectives for women's health under Area of Concern C:

- C.1. Increase women's access throughout the life cycle to appropriate, affordable and quality health care, information and related services.*
- C.2. Strengthen preventive programmes that promote women's health.*
- C.3. Undertake gender-sensitive initiatives that address sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS, and sexual and reproductive health issues.*
- C.4. Promote research and disseminate information on women's health.*
- C.5. Increase resources and monitor follow-up for women's health.*

After 30 years, none of these have been achieved in the US despite federal regulations and national initiatives. Women and girls in the US still face multiple challenges to exercise their right to health. Three of the most concerning issues include: 1) unequal access to healthcare; 2) reproductive health and abortion rights; and 3) the maternal health crisis.

**Unequal Access to Healthcare:** Women in the US are more likely than men to have chronic conditions that require ongoing medical treatment and prescription medications. However, they have inadequate access to healthcare, worse health outcomes, and poor health standards.<sup>2</sup> Pervasive socioeconomic inequalities such as higher poverty rates, uninsurance rates, gender wage disparities, and out-of-pocket costs are the most important factors that contribute to these gender differences. Even when excluding pregnancy-related costs, working women with employer-sponsored insurance have 18% higher out-of-pocket annual medical expenses compared to men.<sup>3</sup> In addition, uninsured women receive a lower standard of care once they are in the health system.

In 2020, **12.6 million US women and girls lacked health insurance** and women were significantly more likely to be uninsured than men (18% vs. 14%).<sup>4</sup> Among women of reproductive age (15-44 years), those living in **southern states** (Texas, Georgia, Oklahoma) **have the highest rates of uninsurance**.<sup>5</sup> In addition to gender differences, there are racial disparities in poverty and healthcare access. As of 2022, American Indian/Alaska Native (AIAN, 48%), Black (43%), Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (NHPI, 41%), and Hispanic women (40%) of reproductive age are twice as likely as Whites (24%) to have low income (below 200% of the federal poverty level).<sup>6</sup> **Uninsurance rates are higher among American Indian/Alaska Native (22%), Hispanic (21%), and Black (11%) women compared to White women (7%).**<sup>7</sup>

**Reproductive Health and Abortion Rights:** Women of diverse racial groups have limited access to contraceptives and other sexual health services for family planning and perinatal care due to long-standing social inequities, language barriers, lack of insurance, and higher poverty rates.<sup>8</sup> This disparity ultimately translates into higher rates of unplanned pregnancies, abortion rates, and maternal and infant mortality. The most recent abortion data disaggregated by race (2021) confirmed that Black women have the highest abortion rates compared to other racial groups (Black 28.6, Hispanic 12.3, White 6.4/1,000 pregnancies).<sup>9</sup>

The US Supreme Court decision overturning *Roe v. Wade* in 2022 has altered both access to reproductive health care services and treatment for pregnancy complications in the states that ban or restrict abortions. The Dobbs ruling eliminated the federal right to abortion, and abortion rights are now decided by states. As of December 2024, **13 US states have total abortion bans and 28 have gestational limits on abortion**.<sup>10</sup> While there have been inequities in abortion access for many years, the Dobbs ruling widened those differences with a disproportionate impact on women of color residing in the South and Midwest due to state-level restrictions and underlying socioeconomic inequities. Among women of reproductive age, 60% of Black and 59% of American Indian/Alaska Native women are more likely to live in states with abortion bans and restrictions than White (53%) or Hispanic women (45%).<sup>11</sup>

In addition, there are racial disparities in healthcare coverage in states with abortion bans. Non-white women of reproductive age have significantly higher uninsured rates than Whites (AIAN 22%, Hispanic 21%, NHPI 14%, Black 11%, White 7%).<sup>12</sup> This difference is concerning since **uninsured rates are 2 times higher in states that ban abortion** compared to those with broader access in each racial and ethnic group (Black 14% vs. 7%, Hispanic 33% vs. 15%, Asian 10% vs. 5%,

White 10% vs. 5%).<sup>13</sup> Across racial and ethnic groups, women in states that have banned or restricted abortion are more likely to have low income than women in states that allow abortions. Furthermore, the out-of-pocket cost of a medical or surgical abortion is \$500-600, a prohibitive price when over 57% of Black and Hispanic women of reproductive age cannot cover an emergency expense of \$500, more than the already high 36% of White women.<sup>14</sup>

**The Maternal Health Crisis:** Pregnancy-related complications are one of the leading causes of morbidity and mortality of women of reproductive age. Women must have access to perinatal care to ensure a safe pregnancy, decrease maternal deaths, and guarantee their best chances of delivering a healthy child (Beijing Platform for Action paras 94, 97). However, due to socioeconomic factors and challenges with reproductive healthcare access for women and girls, the **US has the highest maternal mortality rate of any high-income nation** (19 deaths/100,000 live births),<sup>15</sup> more than double the rate in most other developed countries.<sup>16</sup> Maternal mortality is the highest in the poorest US regions such as the Mississippi Delta (Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee).<sup>17</sup>

For several decades, the US has experienced major increases in maternal mortality rates across all racial and ethnic groups. The 2024 National Vital Statistics System data demonstrate dramatic racial inequities. Regardless of education and income level, **Black women are three times more likely to die of pregnancy-related complications** than Whites (51 deaths vs. 15 deaths/100,000 live births).<sup>18</sup> In addition, **Native American and Alaska Native women are two times more likely to die of pregnancy complications** than White women, and **rural women are 60% more likely to die**.<sup>19</sup> Blacks receive worse quality care than Whites on 52 indicators including measures of care process, ability to receive needed care, and outcomes (e.g. mortality).<sup>20</sup> Lack of health coverage is associated with late or no prenatal care, preterm birth, and low birthweight infants in minority women compared to Whites. This is especially concerning for non-white adolescents (15-19 years) who have birth rates over two times higher than Whites (AIAN 22.5, Hispanics 21, Blacks 20, NHPI 20/1,000 births vs. White 9/1,000).<sup>21</sup>

Lastly, lack of abortion access limits termination of pregnancy for medical reasons and many women are forced to continue the pregnancy even if it threatens their health.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, abortion bans and restrictions prevent timely care for women with pregnancy loss (miscarriage and stillbirth) and jeopardize their health due to providers' concerns about criminal charges. **Fetal mortality rates are the highest in Black and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander women** (9.8 fetal deaths/1000 live births) compared to White women (4.8 per 1,000).<sup>23</sup>

To address the high rates of maternal mortality, the Biden administration launched several initiatives to address health inequities and correct system failures such as the White House Blueprint for Addressing the Maternal Health Crisis (2022), the White House Initiative on Women's Health Research (2023),<sup>24</sup> and the National Institutes of Health Pathways to Prevention Panel (NIH 2024).<sup>25</sup>

<sup>1</sup> UN Fourth World Conference on Women 1995. *Beijing Platform for Action*.

<sup>2</sup> Kaiser Family Foundation December 13, 2023. *Women's Health Insurance Coverage*.

<sup>3</sup> Deloitte 2023. *Hiding in Plain Sight: The Health Care Gender Toll*.

<sup>4</sup> Hudson, V. et al. 2023. *Shadow CEDAW Report for the United States*.

<sup>5</sup> Collins, Sara R. et al. 2024. *2024 State Scorecard on Women's Health and Reproductive Care*.

<sup>6</sup> Hill, Latoya et al. 2024. *What are the Implications of the Dobbs Ruling for Racial Disparities?*

<sup>7</sup> Hill, Latoya et al. 2024.

<sup>8</sup> Harper, C.C., Brown, K., Arora, K.S. 2024. *Contraceptive Access in the US Post-Dobbs*.

<sup>9</sup> Kortsmitt, K. et al. 2023. *Abortion Surveillance United States 2021*.

<sup>10</sup> Guttmacher Institute 2024. *State Bans on Abortion Throughout Pregnancy*.

<sup>11</sup> Hill, Latoya et al. 2024.

<sup>12</sup> Hill, Latoya et al. 2024.

<sup>13</sup> Hill, Latoya et al. 2024.

<sup>14</sup> Hill, Latoya et al. 2024.

<sup>15</sup> National Center for Health Statistics 2024. *Provisional Maternal Mortality Rates*.

<sup>16</sup> White House 2022. *White House Blueprint for Addressing the Maternal Health Crisis*.

<sup>17</sup> Collins, Sara R. et al. 2024.

<sup>18</sup> National Center for Health Statistics 2024.

<sup>19</sup> White House 2022.

<sup>20</sup> Agency for Health Care Research and Quality 2023. *2023 National Healthcare Quality and Disparities Report*.

<sup>21</sup> Driscoll, A.K. et al. 2024. *Changes in First and Second Births to US Teenagers from 2000 to 2022*.

<sup>22</sup> Brubaker, L. et al. 2024. *Health and the 2024 US Election*.

<sup>23</sup> Ranji, U. et al. 2024. *Dobbs-Era Abortion Bans and Restrictions*.

<sup>24</sup> White House 2023. *Memorandum on the White House Initiative on Women's Health Research*.

<sup>25</sup> Davidson, K.W. et al. 2024. *Maternal Mortality: A National Institutes of Health Pathways to Prevention Panel Report*.



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### Violence Against Women

*Behjat (Beth) Dehghan*

The Beijing Platform for Action highlights violence against women as a significant barrier to achieving equality, development, and peace, infringing upon women's human rights and freedoms (para 112). Despite advancements in understanding the causes, consequences, and prevalence of such violence, it remains a pervasive issue across all societies, affecting women and girls regardless of income, class, or culture. The interplay between women's low social and economic status and violence is both a cause and a consequence, underscoring the need for comprehensive measures to combat this widespread abuse.

Grassroots advocacy and legislative changes can be very effective in reducing the rates of violence against women. In the United States, the **Violence Against Women Act (VAWA)**, first passed in 1994, has been a landmark legislative package designed to end violence against women, and it has been improved every time it has been reauthorized. This important law treats domestic violence as a serious crime instead of a private family issue. Several factors helped bring about VAWA including lawsuits against police for not enforcing domestic violence laws as well as research and statistics showing how widespread violence against women was.<sup>1</sup>

VAWA provided funding to investigate and prosecute violent crimes against women, created the Office on Violence Against Women in the Department of Justice, and imposed stricter penalties for offenders. The act supported victim services like shelters, rape crisis centers, and legal aid.

#### VAWA Reauthorization Improvements

- 2000 Extended programs for elderly and disabled women, added protections for foreign nationals and battered immigrant women, provided funding to improve responses to sexual assault and domestic violence on college campuses, and enhanced federal penalties for domestic violence and stalking.
- 2005 Added protections for American Indian (AI) women victims of domestic violence and increased penalties for repeat stalking offenders.
- 2013 Granted AI tribes criminal jurisdiction over non-Indians who committed domestic violence and other crimes on tribal land.
- 2022 Added new programs to deal with untested sexual assault kit backlogs, and provisions to address cybercrime. Expanded special Tribal criminal jurisdiction (STCJ) to cover non-Native perpetrators of sexual assault, child abuse, stalking, sex trafficking, and assaults on Tribal law enforcement officers on Tribal lands.<sup>2</sup>

#### Despite increased enforcement and penalties from VAWA, violence against women is still widespread.

- The **National Crime Victimization Survey** reported 2.7 rapes or sexual assaults per 1,000 people aged 12 or older (734,630 incidents) and 4.8 domestic violence incidents per 1,000 people aged 12 or older (1,333,050 incidents). Among these, 3.1 incidents per 1,000 people (847,230 incidents) involved intimate partners. These numbers were higher than in 2016 and 2017.<sup>3</sup>

- The **National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey** (NISVS) reports that 47.3 % of women and 44.2 % of men have experienced rape or other sexual violence, physical violence, or stalking by an intimate partner in their lifetime.<sup>4</sup> Women are disproportionately affected, making up 84% of spouse abuse victims and 86% of those abused by a boyfriend or girlfriend.<sup>5</sup> Intimate partner abuse can also involve financial control, isolation, and psychological domination.
- **Sexual Violence:** Men are more often the perpetrators of sexual violence and harassment. While men also experience rape, women are the predominant victims of all sorts of sexual violence. According to the NISVS, 26.8% of women have faced completed or attempted rape in their lifetime, compared to 3.8% of men.
- **Murder:** On average, more than four women are murdered by their husbands or boyfriends in the United States each day. Of the 4,970 women murdered in 2021 in the US, 34% were killed by an intimate partner.<sup>6</sup> The availability of guns contributes to the lethality of intimate partner violence. Every month in the US, an average of 70 women, more than 2 per day, are shot and killed by an intimate partner.<sup>7</sup> These appalling statistics highlight the need for the US government to establish a femicide watch as called for by the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women.<sup>8</sup> The watch should include individual data as modeled by Women Count USA.<sup>9</sup>
- **Cost:** It is estimated that domestic violence costs over \$8.3 billion per year, covering medical care, mental health services, and lost productivity.<sup>10</sup> These statistics highlight the critical need for ongoing efforts to address and prevent violence against women.

#### How can we stop violence against women in the U.S.? Government leaders can take the following actions:

1. Mandate age-appropriate education on gender-based violence at all grade levels.
2. Pass and enforce “red flag” laws when intimate partner violence is reported.
3. Fully fund women’s shelters and crisis hot-lines for women facing violence.
4. Provide funding for affordable housing for women fleeing violence, especially those with children.
5. Appoint a working group to establish a femicide watch nationally and in each state, disaggregating data by age and ethnicity of victims, sex of perpetrators, and relationship of perpetrator to victims.
6. Provide training to judicial and law enforcement personnel on dynamics of intimate partner violence, including technology-facilitated violence.
7. Provide funding for full implementation of the *US National Plan to End Gender-Based Violence*.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Rosie Hidalgo September 2023. *Violence Against Women Act: Milestones Achieved and the Road Ahead*. Office on Violence Against Women.

<sup>2</sup> Rosie Hidalgo 2023.

<sup>3</sup> Rachel E. Morgan and Barbara A. Oudekerk September 2019. *Criminal Victimization, 2018*. Bureau of Justice Statistics.

<sup>4</sup> Ruth W. Leemis et al. 2022. *The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey: 2016/2017 Report on Intimate Partner Violence*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

<sup>5</sup> Matthew R. Durose et al. 2005. *Family Violence Statistics*. Bureau of Justice Statistics.

<sup>6</sup> Erica L. Smith December 2022. *Female Murder Victims and Victim-Offender Relationship, 2021*. Bureau of Justice Statistics.

<sup>7</sup> Everytown for Gun Safety June 2024. *Guns and Violence Against Women*.

<sup>8</sup> Julia Canney August 2021. *Establishing a National Femicide Watch in the United States*.

<sup>9</sup> See the Women Count USA website (<https://womenscountusa.org/home>) for detailed lists of women murdered each day.

<sup>10</sup> Center for Domestic Peace. *Economic Impact of Domestic Violence*.

<sup>11</sup> White House Gender Policy Council 2023. *US National Plan to End Gender-Based Violence*.



## CSW 69 Beijing +30 Shadow Report

### Women and Armed Conflict

Özlem Altıok, Ph.D., M.P.S.A.

The **Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action** marks one of the most important documents in the recognition of women's rights as human rights. A product of the engagement of the international women's movement with the United Nations at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, the Platform recognizes that women are impacted disproportionately by the world's biggest challenges, and that women's equal representation in decision-making at all levels is key to addressing these challenges.

The Beijing Platform highlights twelve Areas of Concern, from poverty to armed conflict, that continue to be pressing problems 30 years after the Beijing Conference. Recognizing that “grave violations of the human rights of women occur, particularly in times of armed conflict, and include murder, torture, systematic rape, forced pregnancy and forced abortion, in particular under policies of ethnic cleansing” (paragraph 11), *as well as* the contributions women have made to peace movements, the Beijing Platform puts forth **six strategic objectives with respect to women and armed conflict**:

- E.1. Increase the participation of women in conflict resolution at decision-making levels and protect women living in situations of armed and other conflicts or under foreign occupation (para 142)*
- E.2. Reduce excessive military expenditures and control the availability of armaments (para 143)*
- E.3. Promote non-violent forms of conflict resolution and reduce the incidence of human rights abuse in conflict situations (para 144)*
- E.4. Promote women's contribution to fostering a culture of peace (para 146)*
- E.5. Provide protection, assistance and training to refugee women, other displaced women in need of international protection and internally displaced women (para 147)*
- E.6. Provide assistance to the women of the colonies and non-self-governing territories (para 149).<sup>1</sup>*

Linking the political economy of war to the political need to achieve gender equality, and paying particular attention to displaced women and refugees, the Beijing Platform calls for specific actions to be taken by governments and the international community to reach these six objectives. **Thirty years later, these objectives have not been reached.** Women, and society at large, continue to suffer from patriarchy and militarism, and we are far from creating a gender-just and sustainable peace based on the realization of social and economic rights.<sup>2</sup>

#### Military expenditures

The Beijing Platform's **second** strategic objective to “reduce excessive military expenditures and control the availability of armaments” has not been met. Military spending globally has grown steadily, reaching \$2.44 trillion in 2023.<sup>3</sup> The outbreak of war between Russia and Ukraine in 2022, the Israel-Gaza war, and tensions in the South China Sea only add to an increase in global military spending.

**The United States leads with the highest military spending in the world:** \$916 billion or 3.5% of GDP, corresponding to over 40% of the total military spending *worldwide* in 2023.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the US Congressional Budget Office projects that outlays for defense will rise to \$1.1 trillion by 2033. As the leading exporter of arms, the United States profits from war around the world. The US has long provided financial and military support to Israel and continues to support it even during its brutal military campaign against Palestinians since October 7, 2023 that the International Court of Justice has found is plausibly genocidal.<sup>5</sup> In view of the egregious violations of human rights in the Gaza war documented by the UN Human Rights Council,<sup>6</sup> the United States has not succeeded in achieving the Beijing Platform's **third** strategic objective to “promote non-violent forms of conflict resolution and reduce the incidence of human rights abuse in conflict situations.” The US government cut funding to UNRWA, the UN agency tasked with assisting Palestinian refugees and the main provider of international aid in Gaza, and has not resumed the aid despite the desperate needs of the Gaza population, including over 1 million women and girls.<sup>7</sup> While the US has provided Gaza aid through other channels,<sup>8</sup> US foreign policy remains far from meeting the Beijing Platform's **fifth** strategic objective, to “provide protection, assistance and training to refugee women, other displaced women in need of international protection and internally displaced women.”

## Participation of women in conflict resolution and decision making

Between 1992 and 2019, women averaged only 13% of negotiators, 6% of mediators, and 6% of signatories in major peace processes, and the global trend on regression on gender equality does not bode well for the future.<sup>9</sup> According to the UN Secretary-General's 2023 report, the number of women and girls living in conflict-affected countries increased by 50% since 2017, reaching 614 million in 2022, while their participation in decision-making and formal peace processes is still very limited.<sup>10</sup> **Negotiating parties continue to exclude women from peace processes** in violation of the Beijing Platform's **first** strategic objective, and impunity for atrocities against women and girls is still prevalent. In 2022, of 18 peace agreements reached, only one was signed or witnessed by a representative of a women's group or organization.<sup>11</sup> That the Doha meeting of the Special Envoys on Afghanistan, held on July 1, 2024 with the Taliban, did not include Afghan women is a case in point.<sup>12</sup>

Nevertheless, since the Beijing Conference, there has been some progress, namely the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2000 which established the **Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda**. Per UNSCR 1325's encouragement that countries implement National Action Plans (NAPs) to fulfill tenets of the WPS agenda, the US passed a domestic law on Women, Peace, and Security in 2017. By 2019, the US government had adopted a WPS Strategy based on the law and updated it in 2023 "to advance women's meaningful participation in preventing and resolving conflict, countering violent extremism (CVE), and building post-conflict peace and security."<sup>13</sup> The US Departments of State, Defense, Homeland Security, and USAID have all produced implementation plans.

The existence of a US law that specifically aims to incorporate the WPS agenda at the national level is commendable. However, as the country with the highest military expenditures and the highest number of military bases in the world, the US is far from meeting the six strategic goals of the Beijing Platform.

**There is a paucity of data on American women's participation in foreign policy-making.** The 2019 and 2023 WPS Strategy plans focus on increasing women's participation in decision-making *in other countries*, but neither document provides any data on the inclusion of American women in US or international operations, including peace negotiations. We do not know the percentage of US women involved in peace negotiations and foreign-policy decision making at different levels.<sup>14</sup> This lack of data on the participation of US women in foreign-policy decision making is not explicitly acknowledged in the 2023 WPS Strategy. Another challenge, which is acknowledged in the 2023 WPS Strategy, is the lack of expert staff to implement and coordinate the WPS agenda across the four departments.

The US has had **three women as Secretaries of State** since 1995: Madeleine Albright (1997-2001), Condoleezza Rice (2005-2009), and Hillary Clinton (2009-2013). This may be seen as an improvement for the implementation of the WPS agenda. On the other hand, some of the costliest foreign policy decisions, including the first Bush Administration's decision to impose sanctions on Iraq, which contributed to more than doubling child mortality in Iraq, and the second Bush Administration's 2003 deadly war on Iraq, were voted for and defended by these women. There is little progress towards the Beijing Platform's **fourth** strategic objective, promoting women's contribution to fostering a culture of peace.<sup>15</sup>

## Recommendation for better gender data

Female policymakers as a group do not share the same views any more than male policymakers do, nor is there a foreign policy agenda (feminist or not) on which they would all agree. To assess women's participation in, and its impact on, foreign policy and peacebuilding processes, both the sex of decision-makers and the gendered nature of decision-making processes must be analyzed together. For this, there should be **gender-disaggregated data** on the participation of women in different offices at different levels of foreign-policy decision-making within each of the four departments tasked with the implementation of the National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security. In addition, qualitative studies of the gendered process of decision-making itself are needed.

<sup>1</sup> United Nations 1995. *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*.

<sup>2</sup> Yakın Ertürk 2020. The political economy of peace processes and the Women, Peace and Security agenda. *Conflict, Security & Development* 20(4), 419-439.

<sup>3</sup> Einar H. Dyvik 2024. *Countries with the Highest Military Spending 2023*.

<sup>4</sup> Dyvik 2024.

<sup>5</sup> Fatima Al-Kassab 2024. *A Top UN Court Says Gaza Genocide is "Plausible."*

<sup>6</sup> US Human Rights Council 2024. *Israeli Authorities, Palestinian Armed Groups are Responsible for War Crimes*.

<sup>7</sup> UN Women 2024. *Scarcity and Fear: A Gender Analysis*.

<sup>8</sup> US State Department 2024. *United States Announces Additional Humanitarian Assistance*.

<sup>9</sup> The White House 2023. *US Strategy and National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security*. Pg. 8.

<sup>10</sup> UN Security Council 2023. *Women, Peace, and Security: Report of the Secretary-General*. Para. 2.

<sup>11</sup> UN Security Council 2023, para 8.

<sup>12</sup> Rosemary DiCarlo 2024. *USG DiCarlo Highlights Afghan Women's Concerns*.

<sup>13</sup> The White House 2023, pg. 41.

<sup>14</sup> Valerie Hudson et al. 2023. *Shadow CEDAW Report for the United States*. Texas A&M University Bush School of Government and Public Service. Pp. 312-314.

<sup>15</sup> Mohamed M. Ali and Iqbal H. Shah 2000. Sanctions and childhood mortality in Iraq. *The Lancet* 355.9218 (2000): 1851-1857.



## CSW 69 Beijing +30 Shadow Report

### Women and the Economy

*Rianka Roy, Ph.D.*

The Beijing Platform for Action recognizes women's persistent economic marginality as one of its key areas of concern. Particularly pertinent to the US is the **intersectional focus** of the Beijing Platform for Action, that expects governments and non-governmental enterprises to remove inequality and discrimination at all levels on the basis of gender, race, ethnicity, language, religion, national origin, age, and disability (para 46). **Migrant women** experience more economic vulnerability than male migrants and non-migrant workers in the host country (para 154), significant for the US as the largest global recipient of immigrants. **Indigenous women's** right to education and access to capital (para 167c), and the need to recognize their traditional knowledge about economic development (para 175f) all are especially relevant for the US.<sup>1</sup>

Three issues require urgent policy attention to alleviate US women's economic inequality:

#### 1) Gender discrimination in hiring leads to occupational segregation and the gender wage gap.

The Beijing Platform for Action reported that gender discrimination in hiring would lead to occupational gender segregation, excluding women from high-end, high-paying, decision-making, and managerial roles. They would end up disproportionately in informal jobs without wage and welfare protection. While occupational gender segregation has decreased in the US over the last 30 years, women in the US continue to be hired in low-income and service-based work. Even in relatively high-income occupations, such as jobs in tech companies, women find it harder to rise to managerial roles. Women of color and foreign-born women experience higher barriers in this regard.

- Only 86 women are promoted to manager positions for every 100 men in tech jobs in the US, and the number drops to 52 women when they are considered for technical manager roles.<sup>2</sup>
- Women working full-time and year-round earn an average of 84 cents for every dollar a man earns in the US, and in over 90% of occupations, women earn less than men.<sup>3</sup>
- Women of color and women with disabilities experience wider gaps. Black women, for instance, earn 66 cents<sup>4</sup> and Indigenous women earn 59 cents compared to non-Hispanic white men.<sup>5</sup>
- Immigrant women make up 16% of the US female labor force but earn less (\$59,900) than US-born women (\$64,300). Immigrant women from the Dominican Republic had the lowest median household income (\$40,000). Immigrant men had higher income than both groups (\$79,000).<sup>6</sup>

#### 2) Limited access to capital, skills, and technology keeps women underemployed.

Women's access to capital has shown some progress in the US in recent years. The Obama administration increased the availability of Small Business Administration (SBA) loans, which were three to five times more likely to be accessed by minority and women-owned businesses than commercial loans. Yet the number of women-owned firms and women's access to skills and technology remain limited.

- Between January 2009 and December 2013, the SBA issued 57,831 loans worth US \$17.2 billion to women business owners—\$3.8 billion in 2013 alone, a 31% increase since 2009.<sup>7</sup>
- Women-employer firms grew 6% between 2014 and 2016—twice the growth rate of men-owned firms. Much of the growth was driven by businesses owned by minority women that grew by 14%.<sup>8</sup>
- Despite that vigorous growth, leading to 1.1 million women-owned businesses, women business owners accounted for only 20% of all employer firms in 2019.

- In 2023, women received just 18% of degrees in computer science, and the number of women pursuing STEM fields in higher education is declining.<sup>9</sup>
- Women are under-represented in technology-based jobs—with just 27% of computing roles held by women, and a mere 3% held by Black women and 2% by Hispanic women.<sup>10</sup>

### 3) Inflexible work settings and lack of childcare support force women out of the labor market.

The US government's report on Beijing+20 showed that it had adopted various effective measures to help working women—including increased access to childcare, paid leave, and overtime protections for home and personal care workers.<sup>11</sup> These measures were meant to help women balance care and paid work responsibilities so that they could retain their jobs. But the inadequacy of these measures and the need for more robust family support came to light with the COVID-19 pandemic. Women's rate of unemployment was much higher than men's during the pandemic, and persistent inaccessibility to child care continues to affect women's sustainable participation in employment and economic growth.

- One out of four women who were unemployed during the pandemic reported that their job loss was due to lack of childcare—twice the rate of men.<sup>12</sup>
- Between February and August 2020, mothers of children aged between 0 to 12 years lost 2.2 million jobs compared to 870,000 jobs that fathers lost.<sup>13</sup>
- Child care remains unaffordable for most families. About 2.7 million parents across the US reported job changes due to poor child care support.<sup>14</sup>
- Only 14.5% of qualifying children from low-income families receive child care subsidies. In 2022, public preschool enrollment remained below pre-pandemic levels at 125.9 million.<sup>15</sup>

### Recommendations for Better Gender Data

US government data for Beijing+20 shows some progress and positive impact of measures taken to reverse gender inequality in the US economy. However, the data mostly elaborates issues of child care and access to capital. Insights into the persistence of gender inequality in hiring and wages remain insufficient. Reports released by independent think tanks, such as the Center for American Progress and the Brookings Institute, present a closer look at all three issues discussed above. These reports highlight the effects of recent crises like COVID-19. While such reports present details on the status of Black, Latino, and Indigenous women, more focused assessment of the impact of race and ethnicity is necessary. Disaggregated gender data focusing on age, dis/ability,<sup>16</sup> migration status, religion, and location in the US can provide useful policy directions for women's greater inclusion in the economy

<sup>1</sup> *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.*

<sup>2</sup> McKinsey and Company March 1, 2022. *Repairing the Broken Rung on the Career Ladder for Women in Technical Roles.*

<sup>3</sup> President Joe Biden March 11, 2024. *National Equal Pay Day Proclamation 2024.*

<sup>4</sup> Equal Pay Today July 9, 2024. *Black Women's Equal Pay Day 2024.*

<sup>5</sup> National Women's Law Center March 5, 2024. *The Wage Gap by State for Native American Women.*

<sup>6</sup> American Immigration Council. *A Snapshot of Immigrant Women in the United States.*

<sup>7</sup> United States 2015. *Report on the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*, pg. 32.

<sup>8</sup> US Small Business Administration December 23, 2021. *A Year of Historic Achievements for Women-Owned Businesses.*

<sup>9</sup> Susan Laborde 2024. *The Latest Women in Tech Statistics to Know in 2023.*

<sup>10</sup> Sarah K. White March 8, 2024. *Women in Tech Statistics: The Hard Truths of an Uphill Battle.*

<sup>11</sup> United States 2015. *Report on the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.*

<sup>12</sup> Nicole Bateman and Martha Ross October 2020. *Why Has COVID-19 Been Especially Harmful for Working Women?*

<sup>13</sup> Bateman and Ross 2020.

<sup>14</sup> Allie Schneider and Hailey Gibbs December 14, 2023. *Data Dashboard: An Overview of Child Care and Early Learning in the United States.*

<sup>15</sup> Schneider and Gibbs 2023.

<sup>16</sup> Shorthand for ability/disability status.



## CSW 69 Beijing +30 Shadow Report

### Women in Power and Decision-Making

*Shaila Rao Mistry, BS, MA, MS, MA, MSW, FWPI*

Prioritizing women's leadership is a catalytic mechanism critical to fulfilling the Beijing Platform for Action and achieving a sustainable and equitable future for all. The Beijing Platform calls for developing a critical mass of female leaders, executives, and managers (para 192a) that must include all sectors of the economy, business, entrepreneurship, STEM, artificial intelligence, government, and international organizations. It highlights the need to collect and disseminate data on women in decision-making positions, both public and private (para 190e), and to monitor women's access to senior levels of decision-making (para 192b).<sup>1</sup> To advance gender equality, female leadership is integral to ensuring that women's perspectives are included in policymaking, treaties, and instruments of authority.

#### US Achievements - Impactful Leadership for Systemic Change

Since the Beijing World Conference on Women in 1995, **US women entrepreneurs and chief executive officers** have contributed directly to national prosperity and economic growth through diverse, innovative, out-of-the-box thinking and decision-making, creating inclusive solutions and providing opportunities for future younger generations.

- The number of businesses owned by women is on the rise in the United States. In 1997, women owned 5.4 million businesses in the US.<sup>2</sup> By 2019, women owned over 12 million<sup>3</sup> or 42% of all US businesses,<sup>4</sup> employing over 10 million Americans and generating \$2.1 trillion in sales.<sup>5</sup>
- While still far from parity, more and more companies have female chief executives. In 1995, fewer than 1% of Fortune 500 companies, the largest US companies, had female executives. By 2023, more than 10% were female, a steady improvement.<sup>6</sup>
- In 2021, the US Securities and Exchange Commission approved new board diversity rules for companies listed on the Nasdaq stock exchange, requiring at least two diverse directors, including one woman.<sup>7</sup> California legislation on board diversity led the way for the Nasdaq requirement.<sup>8</sup>
- Despite efforts to increase female representation on boards, the number of women on Russell 3000 boards of directors increased only 1% from 2022 to 2023, and the percentage of new female directors dropped by 7 percentage points. Women of color held only 7.7% of Board seats.<sup>9</sup>

**Women in political leadership** have made progress in governance and politics since 1995 when only 10 heads of state or government were women.<sup>10</sup> US progress towards more women in elective office has been steady though far from equal.

- The US elected the first female Vice President in 2020, Kamala Harris (CA), who became the Democratic candidate for President in 2024.
- Women held 25% of US Senate seats in 2024, up from 8% in 1995.<sup>11</sup> In the US House of Representatives, women held 125 seats, up from 47 in 1995.<sup>12</sup>
- In 2007, Rep. Nancy Pelosi (CA) was elected the first female Speaker of the House and served for eight years in two terms.<sup>13</sup>
- In 1995, the US had one female governor, Republican Christine Todd Whitman of New Jersey. In 2024, there are 12 female governors, including 8 Democrats and 4 Republicans.<sup>14</sup>
- Over 2,400 US women serve in state legislatures, up from 1500 in 1995.<sup>15</sup>

## Barriers to Entry - Paradigm Shifts are Needed to Fast-Track Women in Power in all Sectors

Board-ready women face discriminatory paradigms and resistant mindsets when seeking to enter or fast-track to positions of power and reach an effective mass representation. Barriers that women face include:

- Breaking the male exclusivity culture and gaining access to networks, mentors, and opportunities
- Overcoming required prior board experience in finance and technology open only to males
- Difficulties in reaching critical mass, to effectively influence key decision-making
- Combatting biased male leadership traits that hinder women's advancement
- Bias, harassment, hostile work environments, and lack of work-family flexibility biases.<sup>16</sup>

## Recommendations - Measurable Action for Success

Collaborate with multi-sectoral leadership in the economy, politics, law, finance, and STEM fields to re-position women as co-leaders in all sectors and shift the paradigm of diversity and inclusion. Include civil society as the largest mass of influencers of women at cabinet and other high levels.

Urge the US electorate to choose a female president, and recruit and retain women at senior levels in all sectors and international organizations to promote a culture of gender parity and gender mainstreaming. Require financial regulations to be evaluated for positive impact on female and minority candidates.

Be intentional in promoting policies and legislation and take other actions that recognize women-inclusive boards perform better financially and non-financially. Create a paradigm shift in mindset towards Intentional listening and openness to new perspectives towards the "equal empowerment model" by:

- A. Passing legislation and policies requiring equitable inclusion of women in companies and political parties
- B. Changing mindsets and organizational culture with critical inclusive action and messaging
- C. Proactively inserting women in power positions and building pipelines to high leadership
- D. Increasing access to capital and equitable financial practices of loans and credit to women
- E. Moving from gender neutrality to recognizing gender strengths to avoid skewed results
- F. Presenting Inclusive slates of candidates to achieve a critical mass of representation of women
- G. Training and mentorship for women-friendly infrastructure enlisting male leaders' allies
- H. Prioritizing STEM training and Artificial Intelligence essential to leadership.

<sup>1</sup> [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.](#)

<sup>2</sup> United States Census 2017. [Women-Owned Businesses.](#)

<sup>3</sup> Small Business Administration Office of Advocacy 2024. [Facts About Small Business: Women Ownership Statistics 2024.](#)

<sup>4</sup> Small Business Administration. [National Women's Small Business Month.](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Facts About Small Business 2024.](#)

<sup>6</sup> Pew Research Center 2024. [Women CEOs in Fortune 500 Companies, 1995-2023.](#)

<sup>7</sup> David A. Bell, Ron C. Llewellyn, and Julia Forbess 2021. [SEC Adopts Nasdaq Rules on Board Diversity.](#)

<sup>8</sup> California Secretary of State 2024. [Women on Boards.](#)

<sup>9</sup> 50-50 Women on Boards 2024. [Gender Diversity Index Fourth Quarter 2023 Key Findings.](#)

<sup>10</sup> Wikipedia 2024. [List of Elected and Appointed Female Heads of State and Government.](#)

<sup>11</sup> United States Senate 2024. [Women Senators.](#)

<sup>12</sup> Center for American Women and Politics 2024. [Women in the US House of Representatives 2024.](#)

<sup>13</sup> Center for American Women and Politics 2024. [Milestones for Women in American Politics.](#)

<sup>14</sup> Center for American Women and Politics 2024. [History of Women Governors.](#)

<sup>15</sup> Center for American Women and Politics 2024. [Women Elected Officials by Position.](#)

<sup>16</sup> World Economic Forum 2021. [How Can We Create Space for More Female Leaders?](#)



# CSW 69 Beijing +30 Shadow Report

## Institutional Mechanisms

### for the Advancement of Women

*Ameena Mohyuddin Zia, Ph.D.*

Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women are structured policies, programs, and initiatives designed by governments, organizations, or institutions to promote gender equality and empower women in different spheres of life. These mechanisms are intended to address disparities between genders, overcome barriers to women's participation and leadership, and foster an environment of equality. The Beijing Platform for Action, in Area of Concern H, sets forth three Strategic Objectives to strengthen institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women:

- H.1. Create or strengthen national machineries and other governmental bodies*
- H.2. Integrate gender perspectives in legislation, public policies, programmes and projects*
- H.3. Generate and disseminate gender-disaggregated data and information for planning and evaluation.<sup>1</sup>*

**H.1.** In the United States, a variety of institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women have been established, including **national machineries** such as councils, commissions, and offices, that address gender inequality and promote women's empowerment in various sectors, such as the following:

- White House gender equality commissions and councils
  - The President's Commission on the Status of Women, created by President Kennedy (1961)
  - The President's Interagency Council on Women, created by President Clinton (1995)
  - The White House Council on Women and Girls, created by President Obama (2009)
  - The White House Gender Policy Council, created by President Biden (2021)
- US government offices and commissions
  - US Department of Labor Women's Bureau (1920)
  - US Commission on Civil Rights (1957)
  - The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (1964)
  - Small Business Administration Office of Women's Business Ownership (1979)
  - US Department of Health and Human Services Office of Family Violence Prevention and Services (1984)
  - National Institutes of Health Office of Research on Women's Health (1990)
  - US Department of Health and Human Services Office on Women's Health (1991)
  - Advisory Committee on Research on Women's Health (1993)
  - US State Department Office of Global Women's Issues (1994)
  - Department of Justice Office on Violence Against Women (1994)

**H.2.** In addition to these governmental bodies, the US has passed important **legislation** and instituted **policies and programs** aimed to advance gender equality, including the following:

- Federal legislative frameworks and laws
  - The Equal Pay Act of 1963
  - Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964
  - Title X (Family Planning Services and Population Research Act of 1970)
  - Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972
  - Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978
  - Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (1984)
  - Family and Medical Leave Act (1993)
  - The Violence Against Women Act of 1994 and its subsequent reauthorizations
  - The Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act (2009)
  - The Women, Peace, and Security Act of 2017
  - Pregnant Workers Fairness Act of 2023

- State legislation

13 US states and a federal district have mandatory paid family and medical leave programs including:

California (2002)	New Jersey (2008)	Rhode Island (2013)
New York (2016)	District of Columbia (2016)	Washington state (2017)
Massachusetts (2018)	Connecticut (2019)	Oregon (2019)
Colorado (2020)	Delaware (2022)	Maryland (2022)
Maine (2023)	Minnesota (2023)	

**H.3.** A number of governmental units collect **gender-disaggregated data** on women and girls, including the following:

The US Census Bureau  
 The Department of Labor Women’s Bureau  
 The National Institutes of Health  
 The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) National Center for Health Statistics  
 The CDC National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey  
 The CDC National Violent Death Reporting System  
 The Federal Bureau of Investigation Uniform Crime Reporting Program

In addition to US governmental structures, legislation aimed at gender equality, and data collection programs, the US has many **civil society organizations** that focus on advancing gender equality. Some prominent examples include the following:

Planned Parenthood	League of Women Voters
American Association of University Women	YWCA
National Organization for Women	Feminist Majority Foundation
Institute for Women’s Policy Research	Emily’s List
Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace, and Security	Rutgers Center for American Women in Politics

The United States does not have a dedicated, **high-level department focused on gender equality**, social justice, and the advancement of women’s rights. As mentioned above, the US government includes agencies, commissions, and programs with dedicated approaches to specific issues but there is no centralized agency that focuses on prioritizing strategy on the highest levels of governance. While the current White House Gender Policy Council has provided a high-level presence, a Congressionally-mandated department would be a stronger foundation for women’s advancement. As per the Beijing Platform for Action’s call for strong national machineries, this high-level department would be beneficial because it would:

1. Centralize governmental focus on gender equality
2. Coordinate policy, advocacy, and resource allocation
3. Address gender inequality in key priority areas
4. Improve women’s political participation at all levels of government
5. Combat gender-based violence and streamline data collection on femicide and other violations
6. Address intersectionality and diversity in governmental programs
7. Improve access to social services and support
8. Promote US global advocacy and international leadership
9. Elevate women’s voices, especially from marginalized communities
10. Address women’s underrepresentation in male-dominated sectors of the workforce

A high-level department dedicated to ensuring women’s advancement would drive long-term systemic change, improve the lives of women and girls, and contribute to a more equitable society.

<sup>1</sup> Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women, *Beijing Platform for Action*.



# CSW 69 Beijing +30 Shadow Report

## Human Rights of Women

*Diana Papademas, Ph.D.*

The United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995) established the landmark Beijing Platform for Action with the global goals of equality, development, and peace. Among the twelve Areas of Concern, the section on the Human Rights of Women included **three strategic objectives**:

- I.1. Promote and protect the human rights of women, through the full implementation of all human rights instruments, especially the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*
- I.2. Ensure equality and non-discrimination under the law and in practice*
- I.3. Achieve legal literacy.<sup>1</sup>*

All nations, including the United States, share the same challenge: since human rights and fundamental freedoms are the birthright of all human beings, their protection and promotion is the first responsibility of governments (paragraph 210). The Platform for Action reaffirms that all human rights - civil, cultural, economic, political and social - are **universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated**, as expressed in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action adopted by the World Conference on Human Rights (para 213). Human rights intersect at multiple points with the other Beijing Platform Areas of Concern: women and poverty, education, health, violence against women, women and armed conflict, women and the economy, women in power and decision-making, institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women, women and the media, women and the environment, and the girl-child.

We focus here on the laws and strategies that position the United States as a global leader for women's human rights. In consonance with the Beijing Platform's first human rights strategic objective, the United States has ratified and endorsed the following **international documents that embody women's human rights**:

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), presented to the General Assembly by former US First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt
- The Inter-American Convention on the Granting of Civil Rights to Women (1948)
- The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ratified 1994)
- The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) as well as Beijing +5, +10, +15, +20, and +25
- UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (2000)
- The Sustainable Development Goals, including Goal #5 on Gender Equality (2015)

At the same time, the United States has not fully complied with the Beijing Platform call (paras 230-a, 230-b) to join international and regional human rights treaties including:

- The **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)**, one of only 7 UN member states that have not ratified CEDAW.<sup>2</sup>
- The Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence Against Women (Convention of Belém do Pará), one of only 3 countries of the Organization of American States that have not joined the treaty.<sup>3</sup>

The United States is the only UN member state that has not acceded to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), called for by the Beijing Platform in paragraph 230-l.<sup>4</sup>

The Beijing Platform second human rights strategic objective calls on member states to ensure equality for women under their national laws (para 232-c). The United States has enacted several outstanding pieces of **legislation to safeguard women's human rights** nationally including:

- The Americans with Disabilities Act (1990)
- The Family and Medical Leave Act (1993)
- The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) of 1994, reauthorized in 2000, 2005, 2013, and 2022.
- The Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Restoration Act (2009)
- The Affordable Care Act (2010)
- The Women, Peace, and Security Act of 2017

Despite these important advances, the United States has taken steps that backtrack on women's human rights such as the [US Supreme Court decision \*Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization\*](#) (2022) removing constitutional guarantees for women's reproductive healthcare. In the aftermath of that high court decision, many US states passed laws limiting women's access to abortion services, with twenty states that were very restrictive or most restrictive according to the Guttmacher Institute.<sup>5</sup>

The Beijing Platform for Action calls for member states to provide constitutional guarantees to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex (para 232-b). The US Constitution lacks an explicit guarantee of women's human rights. A constitutional amendment to provide that guarantee, the [Equal Rights Amendment](#), has been ratified by three-fourths of US states, with Virginia ratifying in 2020 as the 38<sup>th</sup> state.<sup>6</sup> Despite meeting the constitution requirements, the Equal Rights Amendment has not been formally recognized as part of the US Constitution. In the absence of a national equal rights guarantee, many US states have enacted state-level guarantees, with twenty states having a full equal rights guarantee.<sup>7</sup> A comprehensive New York state amendment approved in the November 2024 election specifies that equal rights include "sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, pregnancy, pregnancy outcomes, reproductive health care, and autonomy."<sup>8</sup>

Another provision of the Beijing Platform for Action human rights approach is to create [national action plans](#) to identify steps to improve the protection of women's human rights (para 230-d). The White House Gender Policy Council has developed two comprehensive plans to set out strategies to advance women's equality, including the *National Strategy on Gender Equity and Equality* (2021)<sup>9</sup> and the *National Plan to End Gender-Based Violence* (2023).<sup>10</sup>

The *National Strategy* outlines an agenda to help "close pernicious gender gaps"<sup>11</sup> and highlights those women who face barriers to their human rights: "The restaurant worker organizing for fair wages. The migrant farmworker putting food on our tables. The girl studying hard, despite the barriers that stand in her way, to discover the next vaccine or scientific breakthrough in the fight against climate change. The millions of frontline workers -disproportionately women - whose heroic work in our hospitals, grocery stores, schools, childcare centers, domestic violence shelters, nursing homes, and elsewhere kept us going during one of the darkest periods in recent history."<sup>12</sup> The strategy expresses concern for those long denied their rightful opportunities: "women and girls of color, LGBTQI+ people, people with disabilities, and all of those whose lives are affected by persistent poverty and inequality."<sup>13</sup>

The US Women's Caucus supports the strategies that are detailed in the *National Strategy* and *National Plan* reports, including their "whole-of-government" approach to implementation. Prioritizing women's human rights would bring the United States closer to adopting the Equal Rights Amendment into the US Constitution, ratifying and implementing CEDAW, upholding accountability through the Human Rights Council Universal Periodic Review, and affirming equal rights of all women and girls.

<sup>1</sup> United Nations 1995. [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#).

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Human Rights Treaty Bodies 2024. [Ratification Status for CEDAW](#).

<sup>3</sup> Organization of American States 2024. [Status of Signatures and Ratifications, Convention of Belem do Para](#).

<sup>4</sup> United Nations Treaty Collection 2024. [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#).

<sup>5</sup> Guttmacher Institute 2024. [US Abortion Policies and Access After Roe](#).

<sup>6</sup> Center for American Progress 2024. [What Comes Next for the Equal Rights Amendment?](#)

<sup>7</sup> The Brennan Center for Justice 2024. [State-Level Equal Rights Amendments](#).

<sup>8</sup> League of Women Voters 2024. [The New York Equal Rights Amendment](#).

<sup>9</sup> White House Gender Policy Council 2021. [National Strategy on Gender Equity and Equality](#).

<sup>10</sup> White House Gender Policy Council 2023. [US National Plan to End Gender-Based Violence](#).

<sup>11</sup> White House Gender Policy Council 2021.

<sup>12</sup> White House Gender Policy Council 2021.

<sup>13</sup> White House Gender Policy Council 2021.



# CSW 69 Beijing +30 Shadow Report

## The Girl Child

*Rachel Hershberger*

*Master of Science in Health and Wellness Management*

The 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action recognized the importance of improving the lives of young girls. Gender bias and discrimination against girls can lead to low self-esteem and a lack of equal opportunities for girls, which can impact their well-being and the trajectory of their lives. As part of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, nine strategic objectives were set forth in order to create a better future for girls. These objectives included:

- L.1. Eliminate all forms of discrimination against the girl child
- L.2. Eliminate negative cultural attitudes and practices against girls
- L.3. Promote and protect the rights of the girl-child and increase awareness of her needs and potential
- L.4. Eliminate discrimination against girls in education, skills development and training
- L.5. Eliminate discrimination against girls in health and nutrition
- L.6. Eliminate the economic exploitation of child labour and protection of young girls at work
- L.7. Eradicate violence against the girl child
- L.8. Promote the girl child's awareness of and participation in social, economic and political life
- L.9. Strengthen the role of the family in improving the status of the girl-child.<sup>1</sup>

Since the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action, progress has been made in addressing the rights and needs of the girl child in the United States. Key areas of improvement include increased access to education and healthcare and a greater societal awareness of the challenges faced by young girls. However, significant issues remain, such as child poverty, violence against girls, and unequal access to opportunities. Currently, the girl child in the U.S. faces a mixed reality. While many benefit from improved legislation and advocacy efforts, others continue to struggle against systemic barriers and inequities.

### Education

Education is a fundamental right, yet disparities persist in the United States. The Beijing Platform's strategic objective calls for eliminating discrimination in education and improving access for all girls. While the US has achieved near-universal primary school enrollment for girls, significant gaps remain in STEM participation and higher education for girls of color and those from low-income households.

- Women and girls from marginalized groups have less access to college-level STEM classes in high school and a lower level of attainment of STEM degrees than men.<sup>2</sup>
- Graduation rates for girls in underserved communities have improved, with high school graduation rates rising to 86% in 2020, but disparities persist for Native American girls at 74%.<sup>3</sup>

### Child Poverty

Poverty disproportionately impacts girls, especially in single-parent households. The Beijing Platform emphasizes eradicating child poverty as a core strategy for advancing the rights of the girl child.

- In 2021, the poverty rate for the overall population increased, with women and girls experiencing a more significant increase.<sup>4</sup>

- Single-mother households face higher poverty rates at 34%, compared to 6% for married-couple households.<sup>5</sup>
- 1 in 3 households led by single moms experienced food insecurity in 2023, compared to 1 in 4 households led by single dads.<sup>6</sup>

Despite federal programs like the expanded Child Tax Credit temporarily reducing child poverty to a historic low in 2021, the expansion was temporary and left out marginalized groups, with poverty rates rising again in 2022.<sup>7</sup>

## Protection Against Violence

The Beijing Platform advocates for the elimination of violence against girls, including trafficking, sexual exploitation, and domestic abuse. While some progress has been made, violence remains a significant concern.

- According to the Rape, Abuse, & Incest National Network, girls from age 16-19 are four times more likely to be victims of rape or sexual assault, compared to the general population, and 82% of all victims under 18 are women.<sup>8</sup>
- For every 10 victims of human trafficking identified globally, five are adult women and two are young girls.<sup>9</sup>

Efforts such as the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) reauthorization in 2022 have increased funding for protective services but lack sufficient implementation metrics.<sup>10</sup>

## Recommendations for Better Gender Data

While some progress has been made in tracking issues affecting the girl child, gaps in data collection hinder comprehensive analysis and targeted action. Key recommendations include:

1. Establish gender-disaggregated data collection across education, health and violence metrics.
2. Increase funding for longitudinal studies on the impacts of federal programs, such as the Child Tax Credit and VAWA.
3. Prioritize intersectional analysis to address disparities by race, ethnicity, income and geography.

Improved data collection and reporting will enable policymakers to design more effective interventions, ensuring the US advances the Beijing Platform's objectives for the girl child.

<sup>1</sup> UN Women (2020). *Beijing Platform for Action*.

<sup>2</sup> Ed Trust (2024). *Why STEM Equity Must Address the Experiences of Women of Color*.

<sup>3</sup> National Center for Education Statistics (2020). *High school graduation rates for girls*.

<sup>4</sup> National Women's Law Center (2022). *National Snapshot: Poverty Among Women & Families in 2022*.

<sup>5</sup> The Hill (2022). *America's single-parent families*.

<sup>6</sup> Feeding America (2023). *Facts about child hunger*.

<sup>7</sup> Columbia University Center on Poverty and Social Policy (2022). *Children Left Behind by the Child Tax Credit in 2022*.

<sup>8</sup> Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (2023). *RAINN Children and Teens: Statistics*.

<sup>9</sup> UN Office on Drugs and Crime (2021). *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2020*.

<sup>10</sup> US Department of Justice (2023). *The 2022 Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) Reauthorization*.