Study Guide – Comité 2. Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)

Work, Economy and Empowerment: Breaking the Global Glass Ceiling

Guiding question: What recognition and remuneration should be provided, and how can we reduce the gender pay gap?

Open to all levels (with "Challenge" boxes for advanced delegates) · English · Pairs welcome

Figures in this guide come mainly from the ILO, UN Women and the World Bank (2024–2026). They are starting points: every delegation must check and update them, and always cite the source and the year.

1. Welcome and objectives

You sit on the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), the UN's main body dedicated to gender equality. Your task is to debate and negotiate a text that answers two linked questions:

- **Recognition**: whose work counts, and how is it measured, valued and protected (unpaid care and domestic work, informal work, jobs traditionally done by women)?
- **Remuneration**: how do we make sure women are paid fairly, and how do we shrink the gender pay gap?

By the end of your preparation you should be able to:

- explain the gender pay gap and its causes in your own words;
- present your country's situation, laws and position with sources;
- propose realistic policies and defend them against objections;
- write and amend clauses of a resolution, and build compromises.

2. The CSW in brief

- The CSW is a functional commission of the **Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)**, created in 1946. It has **45 member states**, elected for four-year terms. Other UN member states, UN entities and ECOSOC-accredited NGOs take part as observers.
- It meets once a year for **two weeks in March at UN Headquarters in New York**. Its outcome is a set of **agreed conclusions** on a priority theme. They are political commitments, not binding treaties.
- Agreed conclusions are normally adopted **by consensus**. At CSW70 (March 2026, theme: access to justice), the text was put to a vote for the first time in the Commission's history, after objections from some member states to certain language. Expect sensitive wording to be contested.
- **CSW71 (8–19 March 2027)**: the priority theme is *Accelerating the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. Its cross-cutting issue is **poverty and the economic empowerment of women**, which is very close to your topic.

In this simulation your committee may include all UN member states. The real-life rules differ, so follow your organisers' rules of procedure.

3. Decoding the topic

The glass ceiling is the invisible barrier that keeps women out of top positions. Related images: the **sticky floor** (women stuck in low-paid jobs), the **glass cliff** (women given leadership in times of crisis) and the **leaky pipeline** (women leaving a career path stage by stage).

Recognition and remuneration can be broken into five questions, often summarised as the **"5 Rs"**: *Recognise, Reduce, Redistribute, Reward and Represent*.

R	Question	Example
Recognise	Do we count and value care and informal work?	Time-use surveys, satellite accounts, inclusion in policy and statistics
Reduce	Can we lessen the unpaid care burden?	Childcare, elder care, water and energy infrastructure
Redistribute	Can care be shared more equally between women and men, families and the State?	Paid parental leave for both parents, public services
Reward	Are paid care and feminised jobs fairly paid?	Pay for nurses, teachers, domestic workers
Represent	Do women have a voice in decisions?	Leadership, unions, collective bargaining

Glossary

Term	Meaning
Gender pay gap	Difference between average pay of men and women, usually shown as a percentage of men's pay.
Raw (unadjusted) gap	Overall difference in average earnings, without controlling for job, hours or experience.
Adjusted gap	Difference that remains after controlling for factors such as occupation, hours and experience. Part of it can still reflect discrimination.
Equal pay for equal work	Same pay when men and women do the same job.
Equal pay for work of equal value	Same pay for different jobs requiring comparable skills, effort, responsibility and conditions (the ILO standard).
Occupational segregation	Concentration of women and men in different jobs and sectors.

Term	Meaning
Motherhood penalty	Pay and career loss linked to having children.
Unpaid care and domestic work	Cooking, cleaning, caring for children, elders and the sick, without pay.
Informal economy	Work without contracts, social protection or legal coverage.
Pay transparency	Rules that let workers and the public see and compare pay (reports, pay ranges, right to information).
Job evaluation	Method for comparing the value of different jobs using objective criteria.
Gender pension gap	Gap in retirement income caused by lower lifetime earnings and career breaks.
Quota	A legal or voluntary minimum share of women in a body or position.
Intersectionality	The cumulative effect of several forms of discrimination (gender, disability, migration status, ethnicity, etc.).
Gender-responsive budgeting	Planning public budgets to reduce gender inequalities.
Sex-disaggregated data	Statistics broken down by sex.

4. Legal and policy framework

International labour standards (ILO)

- **Convention No. 100 (1951)**: equal remuneration for work of equal value.
- **Convention No. 111 (1958)**: no discrimination in employment and occupation.
- **Convention No. 156 (1981)**: workers with family responsibilities.
- **Convention No. 183 (2000)**: maternity protection.
- **Convention No. 189 (2011)**: domestic workers.
- **Convention No. 190 (2019)** and **Recommendation No. 206**: violence and harassment at work.
- **ILO report "Towards pay equity: a comprehensive response to the gender pay gap" (March 2026)**: presents a whole-of-society approach that combines laws, wage policies, pay transparency, job evaluation, social dialogue, labour inspection, social protection and care policies.

UN framework

- **CEDAW (1979)**, article 11 (employment) and General Recommendations on women and work.
- **Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995)**: economy and care work are key areas.

- **2030 Agenda**: **SDG 5** (target 5.4 on recognising and valuing unpaid care and domestic work), **SDG 8** (target 8.5 on decent work and equal pay for work of equal value) and **SDG 10**.
- **International Equal Pay Day** (18 September) and the **International Day of Care and Support** (29 October), proclaimed by the General Assembly.
- **Equal Pay International Coalition (EPIC)**, led by the ILO, UN Women and the OECD.

Regional and national examples to know

- **European Union**: Directive (EU) 2023/970 on pay transparency, which sets pay information rights and gender pay gap reporting for larger employers. The transposition deadline was **7 June 2026**; reports in late June 2026 said only **four of 27 member states** (Slovakia, Italy, Lithuania, Malta) had fully transposed it on time, and reporting obligations are phased in from June 2027. Verify the current status.
- **Iceland**: equal pay certification requirement (2018).
- **Uruguay**: national integrated care system.
- **Canada**: federal proactive pay equity legislation.
- Many countries now require pay gap reporting (UK, Australia, Japan and others). Check each country's current law.

5. Key figures (check and update)

- **20%**: on average, women in wage employment earn about **20 per cent less** than men, with wider gaps for mothers, informal workers, women with disabilities and migrant women (ILO, March 2026). The UN often expresses this as women earning about **78 cents for every dollar** earned by men.
- **Employment**: fewer than half of working-age women were employed in 2024, compared with about **70 per cent of men** (UN, International Equal Pay Day).
- **Unpaid care**: women do about **three-quarters (76.2 per cent)** of unpaid care work worldwide, roughly **3.2 times** as much as men (ILO). Other UN sources cite **2.5 times**; the difference comes from the data and methods used, so state which source you use.
- **Care and labour force exit**: the ILO estimates that hundreds of millions of women are outside the labour force because of care responsibilities (the ILO reports about **708 million** in its 2025 Beijing+30 report; check the figure in the original).
- **Care sector pay**: women in the health and care sector earn on average **24 per cent less** than male peers (first ILO–WHO global sectoral report). The global care workforce includes about **249 million women and 132 million men**.
- **Value of care**: a conservative World Bank estimate puts women's unpaid care work at about **US$11 trillion, or 9 per cent of global GDP**.
- **European Union**: the gender pay gap was around **12.7 per cent** (as reported when the Directive's deadline passed).
- **Life course**: the ILO notes that care work, career breaks and part-time work accumulate into lower pay and a **gender pension gap**.

> ***Challenge:*** *Why do official gaps differ by source (hourly vs monthly earnings, mean vs median, wage workers vs all workers)? Find one gap measured two ways in your country and explain the difference.*

6. Debate axes

Axis 1. Recognising and valuing unpaid care work

Time-use surveys, satellite accounts, pension credits for carers, care leave, cash benefits for carers.

- Should States measure and report unpaid care in national statistics?
- Is it better to pay carers directly or to invest in public care services? What are the risks of each (for example, locking women into care roles)?

Axis 2. Valuing paid care and feminised jobs

Nurses, teachers, domestic and care workers, often underpaid or in the informal sector.

- How can job evaluation correct undervaluation of female-dominated work?
- What protection do migrant care workers and domestic workers need (ILO Convention No. 189)?

Axis 3. Pay transparency, enforcement and equal pay

Pay reporting, pay ranges in job ads, right to information, audits, sanctions, labour inspection.

- Which measures have worked, and what are the costs for small businesses?
- How should the principle of **work of equal value** be enforced?

Axis 4. Informal work and social protection

Most women in many low- and lower-middle-income countries work informally, outside legal pay protections.

- How can social protection, access to finance, land and training reach informal workers?
- Is formalisation always the best answer?

Axis 5. Breaking the glass ceiling

Leadership and boards, quotas and targets, mentoring, STEM, public-sector leadership.

- Are quotas fair and effective, or do voluntary targets work better?
- How can we tackle stereotypes in education and hiring?

Axis 6. Work–family balance and men's role

Parental leave (including non-transferable leave for fathers), childcare, flexible work, elder care.

- Who should pay for leave and childcare: the State, employers or both?
- How do we avoid policies that make hiring women more costly for employers?

Axis 7. Intersections, technology and safety

Women with disabilities, migrants, rural, Indigenous and older women; AI and automation; harassment and violence at work (Convention No. 190), which push women out of better-paid jobs.

Axis 8. Data, financing and accountability

Sex-disaggregated data, gender budgeting, official development assistance and domestic financing, monitoring of commitments.

Tensions to anticipate

- **Rights vs economic cost**: some States and employers stress the burden of new rules; others stress that gender gaps cost growth and fairness.
- **Universal standards vs national context and culture**: States differ on what they will accept in a text, as the CSW70 vote showed. Wording on gender, sexual and reproductive health and the family can be contested.
- **Different starting points**: in countries with large informal economies, pay reporting by big companies reaches few women; priorities may be social protection, services and jobs.
- **Fiscal space**: care services, leave and pensions cost money; debt and aid levels matter.
- **Targeted vs mainstream measures**: quotas and women-only programmes are supported by some and criticised by others on fairness grounds.
- **Two views on unpaid care**: pay carers, or reduce and redistribute care through services and shared roles.

7. Country positioning guide

Use this table as a starting point for your own research. It lists *research angles*, not official positions; check each State's current laws, votes and statements. Your organisers' delegation list always takes priority.

Profile	Examples and research angles
Pay transparency and reporting pioneers	**Iceland** (equal pay certification), **United Kingdom** (gender pay gap reporting), **Australia** (employer reporting), **Canada** (pay equity law), **Switzerland** (equal pay analyses for larger employers), **Japan** (disclosure by large firms), **Brazil** (equal pay law with transparency reports).
European Union and the Directive	**France, Germany, Spain, Italy, Poland, Ireland, Sweden**: status of transposition, gold-plating, burden on SMEs, role in negotiating CSW texts.
Care system builders and family policy	**Sweden and Norway** (shared parental leave, quotas on boards), **Uruguay and Colombia** (care systems and time-use data), **South Korea and Japan** (large gaps, low birth rates).
Large informal economies	**India, Bangladesh, Nigeria, Kenya, Philippines, Egypt, Indonesia, Mexico**: informal work, garment and domestic work, social protection, migration of care workers.

Profile	Examples and research angles
Rapid change and labour reform	**Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates** (increase in women's employment and equal pay measures: verify), **Rwanda** (gender budgeting, women's representation), **South Africa** (Employment Equity Act).
Contested or restrictive contexts	**Russia** (past list of banned professions for women, cut in 2021), **Iran, Afghanistan** (restrictions on women's work and education; for Afghanistan, check how the country is represented at the UN before assigning it), **Turkey** (low female labour participation).
Large economies with different models	**United States** (Equal Pay Act, state-level pay transparency laws; check federal positions and CSW voting record), **China** (high participation, gaps in pay and leadership).

Note for organisers: include delegations from every region and income level, and brief delegates that they are defending a *national position*, not their personal opinion.

8. Research method

Step 1. Build a country profile

Item	What to find	Sources
Basics	Population, income level, region, UN voting group	World Bank, UN
Women's employment	Labour force participation, employment rate, informality	ILOSTAT
Pay gap	Gap measure, year, method	ILOSTAT, OECD, national statistics office
Unpaid care	Time-use data, care services, leave policies	UN Women, national surveys
Laws	Equal pay laws, pay transparency, leave, quotas	World Bank *Women, Business and the Law*, ILO NATLEX
International commitments	Ratification of ILO Conventions 100, 111, 156, 183, 189, 190; CEDAW	ILO NORMLEX, UN Treaty Collection

Item	What to find	Sources
Recent policies	New laws, plans, reforms	Government sites, UN Women
Voting and statements	Positions at CSW and the Third Committee	UN Digital Library, UN press coverage
Allies and opponents	Groups and likely partners	Your analysis

Step 2. Read primary sources first

Start with the ILO's 2026 report on pay equity, UN Women's CSW pages, the Secretary-General's report for the session and the agreed conclusions of recent sessions.

Step 3. Evaluate sources

- Prefer official sources (UN, ILO, World Bank, OECD, national statistics offices).
- Always note the **year**, **definition** and **method** of a figure.
- Cross-check key claims with **two sources**.
- Be careful with rankings and press summaries; trace them back to the original.

Step 4. Define your strategy

For each axis: your priority, your red lines, what you can offer (funding, expertise, best practice) and what you ask for.

Step 5. Position paper (1–2 pages)

1. **National situation**: data, laws, achievements and challenges.
2. **International commitments and past actions.**
3. **Positions on the debate axes** with concrete proposals.
4. **Areas for compromise.**

9. Recommended sources

- **ILO**: *Towards pay equity: A comprehensive response to the gender pay gap* (2026); ILOSTAT; NORMLEX; NATLEX.
- **UN Women**: CSW pages, Women Count data hub, Secretary-General's reports for CSW.
- **UN Digital Library** and **UN press coverage** of CSW sessions (including CSW70).
- **World Bank**: *Women, Business and the Law*; gender data portal.
- **OECD**: gender wage gap indicators.
- **European Commission**: Pay Transparency Directive pages; **Eurostat** for EU gaps.
- **Equal Pay International Coalition (EPIC)**.
- **International Equal Pay Day** and **International Day of Care and Support** pages on un.org.

10. Delegate checklist

- ☐ I have read this guide and the ILO pay equity report summary.

- ☐ I have completed my country profile and noted the source and year of each figure.
- ☐ I know which ILO conventions my country has ratified.
- ☐ I can explain the difference between raw and adjusted pay gaps.
- ☐ I have a position on each debate axis, with red lines and compromises.
- ☐ I have written my position paper (1–2 pages).
- ☐ I have prepared a one-minute opening speech.
- ☐ I have drafted at least three operative clauses, with a plan B.
- ☐ I have identified three possible allies and two delegations to negotiate with.

Good luck, and enjoy the negotiations!