

## Gynecology and Women's Health Care

# Human Rights for Women and Girls Under International Law – What Is the Effect of CEDAW Under State Sovereignty and Cultural Norms?

Raya Raijaleena Brink

*Law Firm Leo's Peace, Finland.*

**\*Correspondence author**

**Raya Raijaleena Brink,**  
Law Firm Leo's Peace,  
Finland.

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### Abstract

*Under International Law, all States are obliged to protect their citizens, regardless of whether they are parties to CEDAW - the foremost treaty on women's and girls' rights. Despite constituting half the global population and playing vital life-sustaining and caregiving roles, women and girls continue to face marginalization due to persistent gender inequality. To establish a holistic view, this research adopts a doctrinal, qualitative, and critical approach to analyze International Law and judicial practices, aiming to advance gender equality through interdisciplinary insights. While CEDAW provides vital protections, State sovereignty means that non-party states are not legally bound by it. Yet, most countries have ratified the treaty, and some have also ratified the Optional Protocol, which permits individuals to lodge complaints directly to the CEDAW Committee.*

*Notably, the nations with the lowest gender equality have not ratified the treaty or its Optional Protocol. For such states, adopting all 30 Articles of the ten-page CEDAW treaty at once may be overwhelming. A gradual, article-by-article approach might be more feasible. Simplifying legal language and distributing it through accessible formats, such as spoken content or educational materials, could improve understanding and implementation. Moreover, a comprehensive strategy by donor-funded schools and paid teachers providing women and girls with vocational training, contraception, and hygiene products could also serve as a practical incentive to adopt the CEDAW Convention. A combined "carrot-and-stick" strategy - linking incentives with accountability - may prove more effective in promoting gender equality than aid without accountability.*

**Keywords :** Accountability to CEDAW in Getting Aid, Protection Evaluation, Ratified vs. Non-Party States, Suggestions for Improvement, Stick-and-Carrot Approach, UNGA Resolutions.

### Introduction to Human Rights for Women and Girls under International Law: Between Treaty Commitments and State Practices

Nations often appear to sign treaties to boost their political legitimacy on the international stage. However, implementation frequently falls short - especially for women and girls, whose rights are repeatedly affirmed in principle but ignored in practice. Women and girls make up half the global population and, with it, half the world's potential. Yet, gender inequality remains widespread, holding back social progress (UN Sustainable Development Goals). Klabbers (2021) argues that nations respect International Law when it benefits them, and will do the opposite if there is no advantage (Klabbers, 2021). Although women's human rights are vital for all women and girls worldwide, Klabbers (2021) argues that States are sovereign entities and the primary subjects of International Law and do not thus need to accept authority from others. Moreover, human rights were originally established to protect individuals from their governments (Klabbers, 2021).

These human rights for women and girls, established by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), are crucial everywhere - especially for those from non-Western countries, yet they are often overlooked for various reasons. The most important human right is *CEDAW*, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, established by the United Nations General Assembly (CEDAW, A/RES/34/180, adopted on December 18, 1979). However, Klabbers highlights that human rights provisions have been transformed into the almost opposite, as international treaties binding states increasingly place the responsibility of protecting citizens on individual nations. With this responsibility, they can also face criticism for undesirable conduct (Klabbers, 2021).

UNGA Resolution, A/RES/60/1, para 138, obligates States to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity (UNGA, October 24, 2005). Sexual violence, such as rape, is a crime against humanity and a war crime in the International Criminal Law, under the Rome Statute (RS, Art. 7(g), Art. 8(xxii)).

Furthermore, Resolution A/RES/60/1, para 58 on *Gender equality and empowerment of women* affirms that gender equality benefits *all* and commits to eliminating discrimination against women and girls. This is established by ensuring equal rights, access to education, health, employment, property, and political participation, while integrating gender perspectives into all policies (UNGA, A/RES/60/1, October 24, 2005, paras 58, 138). Thus, this research examines the effect of CEDAW and whether enhancements are in place for women and girls (later, only *women*). Even though CEDAW employs the term *women* to mean both girls and women, maybe a clarification is needed to ensure that girls are also taken into account? This research will nevertheless employ the same strategy, only referring to *women* when addressing both women's and girls' rights. Thus, the main sources in order of significance include:

- CEDAW by A/RES/34/180 (CEDAW, December 18, 1979)
- CEDAW by A/RES/54/4. Optional Protocol (CEDAW, October 15, 1999)
- Gender equality and State responsibility to protect populations by A/RES/60/1 (UNGA, October 24, 2005)
- Comparison of UN Member States: Finland, Myanmar, the USA, and Somalia
- Jurisprudence studies on women and other scholarly literature, such as development studies and accountability in getting aid
- Extra UN sources, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Since basic human rights for women can be absent in patriarchal developing countries, this research investigates whether the CEDAW effectively protects women and explores what can be done to improve women's human rights under CEDAW or other measures. Additional attention will be given to the potential differences in the treatment of women, depending on whether States comply with the treaty or basic human rights, for that matter. The main research question reads as follows:

*How effective has CEDAW been in promoting women's rights around the world?*

More precisely, this research will examine the effect of CEDAW, specifically between ratified and non-ratified States of the treaty and its Optional Protocol, and propose enhancements where needed. For example, the USA has adopted CEDAW but has not ratified it (UN, February 10, 2004). This can mean that the effect of the treaty differs between signatory and non-signatory states:

1. *Is there a difference in women's treatment between States that have fully committed to CEDAW and its Optional Protocol and those that have not?*
2. *What strategies or measures can be implemented to strengthen CEDAW's effect in contexts where these rights are non-existing or inadequate?*

## Interdisciplinary Materials Employing the Doctrinal Legal Method

This research employs a doctrinal approach, analyzing legal texts, statutes, and academic writings through a qualitative and critical lens. It also draws on knowledge from multiple disciplines to develop a comprehensive understanding of the challenges women face due to gender inequality and the non-implementation of international treaties. These disciplines include Public International Law, which governs relationships between sovereign states, such as CEDAW, United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) Resolutions, and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Jurisprudence studies on women highlights the starting point of International Law for women and its potential pitfalls. This research recognizes that no single body of International Law can fully capture the complexities of women's experiences. To improve clarity, the UN sources will later be marked without the UN acronyms in the text. These treaties and other bodies are CEDAW, OHCHR and OCHA.

As women should have the same rights as men, this principle cannot always be applied due to bodily differences - women can, for example, become pregnant, whereas men cannot, etc. In line with a broader academic movement, recent research has increasingly employed comparative and theoretical perspectives to advocate for changes in the law (Hutchinson, 2015). It is also the aim of this study. The analysis is rooted in doctrinal legal research and concentrates on key legal instruments and well-intentioned measures for women.

## Challenges by Men Built International Law and the Underrepresentation of Women Researchers

Women make up less than 30% of global researchers, and their involvement in science and policymaking remains limited. As a result, fields such as gender studies, feminist epistemology, and the ethics of care - key areas within the social and human sciences - are mainly pursued by women scholars (UNESCO, 2019; St. Lera Clair, 2011). Charlesworth and Chinkin (2000) argue that International Law is fundamentally patriarchal. They highlight how legal systems have been shaped by men, for men, often excluding women in both language and participation (Charlesworth & Chinkin, 2000). Law also tends to favor male perspectives by stressing rationality and objectivity, while associating women with emotion and subjectivity. Women's inequality can stem from male dominance, noting that traits such as care and compromise are undervalued (Charlesworth & Chinkin, 2000).

Charlesworth highlights how the public domain - particularly in areas such as politics and government - is, on the one hand, predominantly controlled by men. Women, on the other hand, are often associated with the private sphere of home and family, thereby neglecting the experiences of many women and silencing their voices in International Law (Charlesworth, April 1999). This narrow framing perpetuates stereotypes and overlooks the diverse experiences of women (Charlesworth & Chinkin, 2000). Other perspectives further reduce women to fixed characteristics, ignoring differences across approximately 200 nationalities, cultures, religions, languages, and ethnicities

(Charlesworth, April 1999; Charlesworth & Chinkin, 2000). Nonetheless, women face common issues worldwide, such as gender-based violence, demonstrating the limitations of a one-size-fits-all legal approach (Charlesworth & Chinkin, 2000).

### **Women's Barriers Are Widely Known - So Where Is the Action?**

Women face vulnerabilities beyond family-related issues, as extreme heat and armed conflict disproportionately affect them. Uwamahoro (August 15, 2022) argues that the drought in Somalia worsens access to education, as displacement, destroyed schools, and closures caused by water and food shortages disrupt learning. Girls who can attend school often split their time between classes and fetching water - a responsibility traditionally assigned to women and girls (Uwamahoro, August 15, 2022). Food scarcity and malnourishment are also problematic, especially for breastfeeding mothers, since breastfeeding alone causes weight loss and caloric shortfall, not to mention times of hunger (Hahn-Holbrook et al., February 4, 2013).

When looking at the circumstances for women and girls in Palestine, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reports how women are discriminated against by gender-based violence, incest and forced marriages. Seemingly, violence against women has increased, a phenomenon that also occurs in climate change (OCHA, March 8, 2022; Thomas, February 19, 2023). Women need hygiene support due to menstruation, such as gender-segregated school toilets (OCHA, March 8, 2022). In displacement or resettlement, like in Palestine currently, Thomas highlights how females are easy targets for their own and can be victims of forced labor, organ removal, and forced prostitution (Thomas, February 19, 2023). Importantly, the World Health Organization (WHO) reports that women have also limited access to contraceptives, as 164 million women in 2021 had an unmet need for family planning and contraception (WHO, July 3, 2025). For girls and women who menstruate, sanitation, toilets and access to hygiene materials are essential, as lack of menstrual hygiene negatively impacts a female's dignity (World Bank Group; Ward, November 1, 2021).

### **The Marginalization of Women's Rights Through Imprecise and Inaccessible Terminology**

It is essential to define key terms to ensure a shared and accurate understanding among all participants. While CEDAW uses the term *women*, it also concerns girls. Hellum and Sinding Aasen emphasize how human rights instruments, such as CEDAW and the UN Charter, initially used the term *sex* and later *gender*, but lack precise definitions. The term *gender*, as a social category, only entered the human rights discourse in the 1990s and is now widely used without a clear definition [*sic!*] (Hellum & Sinding Aasen, August 2013). Although CEDAW mentions only sex-based discrimination in General Recommendation 28, examining Article 1 with Articles 2(f) and 5(a) shows that it also addresses gender-based discrimination. Sex refers to biological differences, while gender relates to socially constructed roles and meanings that often result in

unequal power and rights, disadvantaging women (UN Digital Library, 2010; CEDAW/C/GC/28, 2010, para 5). This research finds that simple definitions are made too complicated. Why not begin with a principle in plain language: *same rights for men and women*?

While women deserve equal rights with men, broad terms like *gender* and *empowerment* can be counterproductive because of their vagueness. Such terms often hide specific issues, such as access to land or inheritance. Even when used positively, they need clarification. Cornwall (2014) defines empowerment as both control over resources - such as finances and autonomy - and over beliefs and values. Providing women with loans and business opportunities can help them escape poverty and reshape their self-image (Cornwall, 2014). Ultimately, empowerment includes the ability to make independent decisions on healthcare, income, and spending (Baldé, January 2020). However, using terms such as *gender equality* in reference to women fails them. This is evident in, for example, climate funding. Atmadja et al. (December 2020) found that national implementers of climate funding often do not fully understand what the terms mean or their importance for women (Atmadja et al., December 2020). As a result, women may not receive the funding they are entitled to.

### **From Intentions to Implementation: The UN Struggles to Enforce Women's Rights**

The United Nations has 193 Member States, each holding one seat in the General Assembly (UN Membership). There is a total of 195 sovereign States in the world, although some entities, such as Palestine, lack full recognition despite ongoing international pressure for universal recognition of Palestinian statehood (Worldometer; Neuman, August 1, 2025). These figures indirectly suggest that nearly the entire world should have similar provisions, such as those for women. Mégret and Alston (April 2, 2020) stress that human rights require governments to be accountable, and to support this, the UN has established various mechanisms to monitor compliance and address violations. Since 1945, these efforts have established a complex system with inconsistent effectiveness, frequently undermined by politicization, State resistance, inadequate funding, and a lack of expertise (Mégret & Alston, April 2, 2020). This research argues that despite the aim to monitor compliance, there seem to be no tangible consequences for non-implementation at this stage. Perhaps the strategy relies instead on a *naming* and *shaming* approach as a deterrent?

The UN conveys its positive intentions for women's rights through various initiatives, notably by Sustainable Development Goal 5, which promotes gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls (UN, SDG 5). The other goals also reflect good intentions and highlight the vulnerabilities of women. For example, SDG 2, which aims to end hunger and achieve food security, acknowledges that "hunger has a woman's face", stressing the gendered impact of food insecurity (UN, SDG 2). Accordingly, SDG 6 emphasizes that access to water, adequate sanitation, and safe drinking water is essential for everyone. This is especially the case for women, as poor sanitation poses significant health risks for them (UN Women, SDG 6).



## **CEDAW and the Optional Protocol: Wide Adoption but Tenacious Exceptions in States with Low Gender Equality**

CEDAW is the most important international treaty for women's rights and has been in force since 1981. As of 2023, it has been ratified by 189 countries, making them State Parties that are legally bound by its provisions (OHCHR, February 21, 2023). Two countries - the United States and Palau - have signed but not ratified the treaty, indicating that they are not legally bound by it. Other countries, including Iran, Somalia, and Sudan, have neither signed nor ratified CEDAW, signaling no commitment to it (OHCHR, February 21, 2023). States that have ratified the Convention must:

- eliminate all forms of discrimination against women
- promote women's full development and equal enjoyment of rights, and
- report regularly to the CEDAW Committee on their progress on adoption of the legislative, judicial, administrative or other measures. The Committee reviews these reports publicly and issues recommendations to each State (UN Human Rights; CEDAW, Art. 18, December 18, 1979), aligning with the *naming* and *shaming* approach.

The Optional Protocol is vital for women, as it enables individuals to bring complaints directly to the CEDAW Committee without the State officials. However, only 116 countries have ratified this Protocol (OHCHR, February 21, 2023; CEDAW, A/RES/54/5, October 15, 1999). While 11 countries have signed but not ratified it, 70 countries have taken no action at all. Notably, Myanmar, although a State Party to CEDAW, has neither signed nor ratified the Optional Protocol (OHCHR, February 21, 2023). Yet, Somalia has shown no interest in either CEDAW or its Protocol. Accordingly, Somalia, Sudan, and Iran - non-parties to CEDAW - are among the 10 least gender-equal nations (UNDP; World Population Review, 2025; OHCHR, February 21, 2023). This is unfortunate, as the Optional Protocol rules, under Article 3, that the Committee cannot consider complaints against a State Party that has not ratified it (CEDAW, A/RES/54/4, October 15, 1999). Peru is a State Party to the Optional Protocol, and an individual complaint was sent by a 13-year-old victim of rape and incest who requested access to legal abortion but received no final response. She had thereafter a spontaneous abortion and was convicted of self-abortion, but later acquitted on plea (OHCHR, March 2023).

In countries where the Optional Protocol has been ratified, CEDAW has helped reduce discrimination and advance equal rights for women, including in areas like inheritance and property (UN Human Rights). The treaty obliges Member States to ensure genuine gender equality across all spheres of life, including the private domain. This requires integrating CEDAW into national legal systems and raising awareness in the justice sector through training for judges, lawyers, and prosecutors (Lange, January 2017). Despite notable progress, full implementation remains difficult. UN Women highlights how in many Southeast Asian ASEAN nations, the legal standing of CEDAW within domestic law is uncertain. Greater

clarity is needed on its influence over legislation, policy, judicial rulings, and resource distribution to drive gender equality (UN Women).

## **Comparing Approaches to the UN and CEDAW: Finland, Myanmar, the USA, and Somalia**

CEDAW entails vital provisions for women, but as Klabbers (2021) stresses, non-party states are not obligated to apply it due to their sovereignty (Klabbers, 2021). While most countries have ratified the Convention, State engagement with CEDAW and its Optional Protocol can be categorized into four levels. These are: non-adoption, signature without ratification, full ratification of the Convention, and ratification of the Optional Protocol, enabling individuals to send complaints directly to the CEDAW Committee. All the compared States here are Members of the United Nations: Finland joined the UN in 1955, Myanmar in 1948, the USA in 1945, Somalia in 1960 (UN, February 10, 2004).

### **Finland: Full CEDAW Commitment and High Gender Equality, Yet Violence Against Women Persists**

Finland is a Nordic country and shares second place in global gender equality with Norway, with an index of 0.875 - while a score of one indicates full equality (World Population Review, 2025). Finland ratified the CEDAW in 1986 and its Optional Protocol in 2000 (OHCHR, Human Rights Treaty Bodies). By ratifying the Optional Protocol, individuals can, under Article 2, directly lodge complaints and make inquiries to the CEDAW Committee (CEDAW, A/RES/54/4, October 15, 1999, Article 2). One of the Finnish governmental reports to CEDAW highlights the high level of violence against women in Finnish society. However, some progress is evident, as the law ending mediation in cases of domestic or intimate partner violence took effect in January 2025, making domestic violence always a crime (Human Rights Centre, May 16, 2025; Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, December 19, 2024). An additional European report on Finnish statistics emphasizes that, in femicide, based on 2022 data, women account for 80% of those killed by a current or former intimate partner, and 65% of all victims in domestic homicides (European Institute for Gender Equality).

### **Myanmar: CEDAW Ratification, Yet Systematic Gender Inequality Targeting Minority Women, No Optional Protocol**

Myanmar, formerly Burma, is a State party to CEDAW but has not ratified the CEDAW Optional Protocol - thus, individuals cannot personally complain to the CEDAW Committee (OHCHR, February 21, 2023; OHCHR, Human Rights Treaty Bodies). Myanmar exhibits significant gender disparities. The 2020 Gender Inequality Index ranked it 147th out of 189 countries, and in 2021, it was named one of the most discriminatory countries in Southeast Asia (Jimeno, July 21, 2021). Major concerns include high maternal death rates, limited access to reproductive and basic healthcare, low female participation in decision-making and the workforce, rising HIV rates among women, and a lack of reliable, gender-specific data to guide policies and programs. Gender inequality

is particularly severe in rural areas and among certain ethnic groups (UN Women, Asia and the Pacific, Myanmar).

Discrimination against a minority appears to target the most vulnerable, women and girls. The UN highlights how the Rohingya, a Muslim minority in Myanmar's Rakhine state, have lived there for centuries but lack official recognition and citizenship. Since 1982, they have been stateless, making them the world's largest stateless population (UN, latest news, August 21, 2025). This leaves the minority group without basic rights and protection, exposing them to exploitation and abuse. Most now live as refugees in Bangladesh and Malaysia (UN, latest news, August 21, 2025).

In the State report to the CEDAW Committee, the Myanmar officials assure that even though there are accusations that Rohingya Muslim women and girls are targeted with sexual violence and rape, "there is no evidence to support these wild claims". Accordingly, there have been allegations against the security forces, but "there have been no evidence [...] to convict anyone" (CEDAW/C/MMR/EP/1, February 7, 2019). In the answer to Myanmar, the CEDAW Committee regrets the systematic and widespread violence, especially against Rohingya women and girls, and the massive displacement of more than 745,000 Rohingya to Bangladesh. It emphasizes that the violence against this minority has entailed rape, gang rape, sexual slavery and humiliation, mutilation, and some women were killed (CEDAW/C/MMR/CO/EP/1, March 18, 2019). The Committee urges the State, among others, to make sure that the head of the military officially informs all members of the security forces that *all types of sexual violence are strictly forbidden* (CEDAW/C/MMR/CO/EP/1, March 18, 2019).

### **The USA: UN Engagement, No CEDAW Ratification, and Violence against Women Is a Serious Issue**

The USA joined the UN in 1945 but has only adopted CEDAW, indicating that it is not obligated to apply it. Its gender gap index is 0.747, meaning that 25.3% of the gap remains (UN, February 10, 2004; World Population Review, 2025). As in Finland, domestic violence is a serious issue in the USA. An estimated 10 million people experience domestic violence annually, mostly affecting women (The Global Statistics, The Date Expert).

### **Somalia: UN Engagement, No CEDAW, Among the Worst for Women and Girls, as Systemic Discrimination Perseveres**

In Somalia, a non-party to CEDAW, gender inequality manifests through practices such as female genital mutilation, forced child marriages, and high maternal mortality rates (OHCHR, February 21, 2023; Calfo, December 12, 2020). Women's human rights in Somalia are severely limited. It ranks fourth lowest worldwide on the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Gender Inequality Index, with a score of 0.776, where a score of one denotes complete inequality (UNDP, Somalia). Millions of women and girls face daily discrimination rooted in traditional patriarchy and exacerbated by decades of conflict (RYB, Red Yellow Blue). Somalia's clan-

based, patriarchal society has historically excluded women from power. Men dominate decision-making, property rights, and family roles, while religious and cultural norms restrict women's freedoms (RYB). By 2021, only 2 of 295 judges and 14 of 65 prosecutors were women, underscoring the need for gender parity (UN Women Africa).

### **Aid Without Conditions? Rethinking Accountability and Highlighting Economic Advancements**

Non-party governments to CEDAW that receive development aid do not seem to have genuine accountability for eliminating issues like violence against women. According to Stokke (1995), the British government suspended all forms of aid to Sudan, Burma (Myanmar), and Somalia. The UK gave only humanitarian assistance, thus introducing conditional requirements for disbursing financial aid (Stokke, 1995). In Sudan, for example, widespread acts of sexual violence are committed against women and girls to terrorize the population (UN News, April 2, 2025). To ease the humanitarian crisis there, the European Commission and Member States pledged €522 million in aid for 2025. Two years of armed conflict have created the crisis, severely affecting the population (European Commission, April 16, 2025).

On the one hand, accountability for the distribution of development aid appears almost nonexistent, and institutional reforms are needed for poverty reduction, for example (Wenar, 2006). On the other hand, there is a growing focus on assessing developmental failures and democratic deficits to improve transparency and accountability (Gaventa & McGee, August 2, 2013). The attention on accountability in development aid often centres on donors, which makes sense given the power imbalance in donor-recipient relationships. However, the limited success of aid - especially in Africa - has raised concerns about how recipients use the funds, prompting calls for greater transparency and accountability in recipient countries (Dann, December 2006). Since these governments manage public funds, they should also be held accountable for their use (Dann, December 2006). While developing countries need more resources, both sides must join forces to end corruption. This is not about strict conditions, but about joint action to ensure resources are effective (Transparency International, July 6, 2005).

Collier argues that the global refugee system is broken, as it would be safer for refugees to remain in nearby countries that are safer and more familiar, and where they can find employment. Accordingly, the underfunded UNHCR aiding refugees and displaced persons prioritizes only humanitarian aid, not long-term economic solutions such as employment (Collier, October 2, 2018 and November 30, 2016). Collier stresses that we need to shift from crisis response to long-term strategies: helping people within their home regions through investment in jobs and development, rather than dedicating most resources to the few who reach Europe. An updated international consensus is essential to effectively address mass displacement (Collier, October 3, 2018 and November 30, 2016). This research further argues that work to help refugees

has shown how mothers from states with low gender equality face challenges in integration. This failure can hinder their ability to support their children with school, and make children feel mentally or emotionally “stateless” - lacking a clear sense of identity or belonging.

### Key Shortcomings and Measures to Strengthen CEDAW Implementation

While global awareness on challenges and good intentions exists, implementation continues to fall short in effectively protecting women. The failure of women’s rights may stem from the male bias in International Law, a lack of

accountability in aid distribution, and cultural and religious factors. Accordingly, the terminology might not be understood by laypersons. Moreover, Finland, Myanmar, the USA and Somalia are all Member States of the UN, and all of them violate women’s rights according to reports by the CEDAW Committee and other related reports. See Chart 1 below for a comparison of different approaches to UN, CEDAW, and women (e.g. Human Rights Centre; Jimeno; OHCHR; Reports Myanmar - CEDAW; RYB; The Global Statistics, The Date Expert; UNDP; UN Membership; UN Women; World Population Review):

Memberships, Gaps and Safety	Somalia	The USA	Myanmar	Finland
UN Member State	YES	YES	YES	YES
State Party to CEDAW	NO	NO: Has adopted it but not ratified it	YES	YES
State Party to Optional Protocol	NO	NO	NO	YES
Gender equality gaps or successes	Fourth-lowest gender equality globally	Gender equality gap index: 0.747	Gender Inequality: 147 <sup>th</sup> / 189 countries	Shared 2 <sup>nd</sup> place, gender equality index: 0.875
Safety for women	E.g. high maternal mortality	E.g. high rate of domestic violence, mainly targeting women	Grave violence against minority females, including rape, sexual slavery, and killings	E.g. high rate of domestic violence, mainly targeting women

**Chart 1:** Four Different Approaches to Women, the UN and CEDAW

As can be concluded from Chart 1, full CEDAW ratification correlates with high gender equality States, but is not the only solution or indication. Holistic measures are required for the common good of women in the world. Below are the suggestions, and in Chart 2, concluded measures to enhance women’s rights.

### A Step-by-Step Approach to Attract More State Parties to CEDAW and Its Optional Protocol

As non-party states are not obligated to comply with the CEDAW or its Optional Protocol, measures must be taken to gain a greater foothold for women’s rights. Even though the UNGA Resolution A/RES/60/1, para 138 clearly indicates that States have to protect their citizens, the situation in Myanmar is in dire straits for stateless minority women (UNGA, October 24, 2005; CEDAW, March 18, 2019). For countries with low gender equality, fully adopting the ten-page treaty with all 30 Articles at once may appear overwhelming, thus:

- A step-by-step approach, such as beginning with CEDAW’s Article 10 on education for women. This kind of partial ratification is usually not possible, but to widen women’s rights globally, it would be easier to start implementing CEDAW in States with low gender equality.
- Same step-by-step approach for ratification of the Optional Protocol

### Incentives Tying Foreign Aid to Accountability with CEDAW and Long-Term Economic Improvement

- A stick-and-carrot approach, making aid conditional on States

- Giving benefits to States that apply CEDAW and increasing them with improved accountability, and lessening them when women are discriminated against
- Firstly, one expected measure could be whether the State has fully implemented CEDAW in its national laws, or
- Secondly, if the State has improved its economy and created employment and education for women

### Adapting Terminology for Broader Understanding: Making Language Audience-Appropriate

Women must be informed of their rights in clear, audience-appropriate language, as these rights might not be familiar to women in low gender equality states. The current language appears to reach scholars and other experts, but not those who need the information the most. Using accurate but simple terms helps ensure understanding, especially at the grassroots level, where concepts like *gender* and *empowerment* may be unfamiliar (Atmadja et al., December 2020). A jointly agreed plain-language format can support stronger implementation of CEDAW:

- The use of plain language or easy-to-understand language, and broadcast in spoken form, for those who are illiterate
- The use of these kinds of terms: same rights for men and women

### Creating Wide Support and Togetherness: Humans for Humans, Men for Women

We are all born of mothers; thus, supporting women should be a shared responsibility. As affirmed by UNGA Resolution A/RES/60/1, gender equality benefits everyone (UNGA,



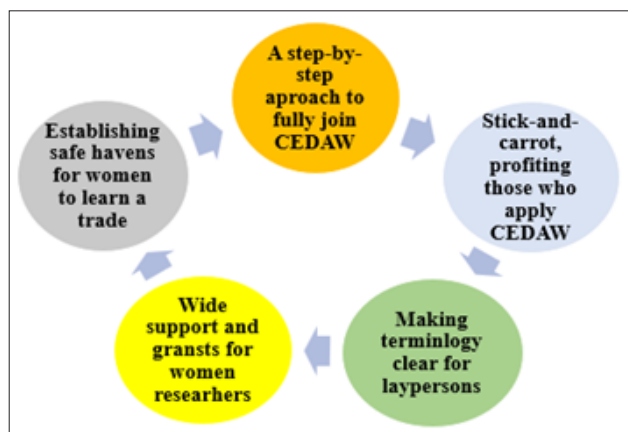
October 24, 2005). UNESCO and scholars like St. Lera Clair highlight that women researchers often focus on women's issues, and they only comprise ca. 30% of global researchers. Greater funding for their work is essential to ensure these critical perspectives are fully represented (St. Lera Clair, 2011; UNESCO, 2019). Thus,

→ More grants for women researchers to highlight women's value globally

### Establishing Comprehensive Women's Centres: Providing Safety, Health Care and Family Planning, and Learning a Trade

Importantly, half of the world's population is women and girls. Strangely, there appear to exist numerous humanitarian projects, but women continue to suffer greatly. Maybe a holistic approach with safe havens would succeed?

- Establishing safe havens for women in their countries, donated schools and paid teachers where they can bring their children and learn a trade. Food, healthcare, childcare, and contraceptives would also be available. Transportation would be organized, and this centre would have guards outside to ensure the safety of the women.
- Learn women make, e.g. solar panels (a high-demand commodity in Western countries) and give them tools as they make progress, like a simple phone
- Even here, there must be compliance with mutually set targets
- Women's accountability: we help you if you also help yourselves



**Chart 2:** Main measures to widen the effect of CEDAW

### Conclusion on Compliance with CEDAW through Incentives and Accountability Mechanisms

While CEDAW and its Optional Protocol are vital international tools for advancing women's human rights, their impact remains inconsistent across the globe. Women's rights do not appear to differ remarkably based on the ratification or non-ratification of the CEDAW. Yet, there seems to be a link between the ratio of gender equality and CEDAW's implementation. Finland's equality ranking is high, and reports to CEDAW basically "only" mention violence. Myanmar discriminates against its minority women, although it is a State Party to CEDAW. Yet, ratification of the Optional Protocol could bring benefits

to women, as their complaints would not need to go through government officials. Nevertheless, Somalia represents the lowest equality ranking in this research and has shown no interest in CEDAW.

To ensure CEDAW's full effectiveness, stronger enforcement mechanisms, clearer terminology, and conditionalities linked to any aid, whether humanitarian or developmental, are necessary, alongside a deeper understanding of local contexts and feminist legal critique. Ratification alone does not guarantee implementation, especially in contexts where patriarchal norms persist and accountability is weak. Countries like Finland have made progress despite challenges, whereas nations like Somalia, which have not ratified CEDAW, continue to exhibit alarming levels of gender inequality. The situation might be manageable for Myanmar's majority women, while the minority suffers greatly. The overarching message is clear: current efforts to advance women's rights are insufficient, and *a fundamentally different approach is needed*.

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