



# McGill Youth Advisory Delegation



## **Statement to the 70th Commission on the Status of Women**

This statement is presented by the McGill Youth Advisory Delegation, a youth-led non-governmental organization under the International Relations Students' Association of McGill University. The organization has held consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council since 2006. The McGill Youth Advisory Delegation is committed to integrating young people's voices meaningfully into global policy decisions. Through community consultations and partnerships with youth-centred organizations, we work alongside policymakers to ensure that diverse youth perspectives are represented at the highest levels of decision-making.

In a world marked by instability and crises, including youth perspectives in global policy is more important than ever. Despite the United Nations' pledge to leave no one behind in the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, youth voices remain underrepresented and marginalized in international diplomacy and decision-making processes. Yet, sustainable development and true equality cannot be achieved without the active participation of young advocates, the very individuals who will not only inherit but experience the outcomes of today's global decisions.

As we reflect on the outcome document of the 69th Commission on the Status of Women, we recognize both the progress made and the persistent gaps that remain. Women continue to face violence that undermines their dignity and safety, and structural barriers continue to limit their ability to act as decision makers in political, social, and economic spheres. Without addressing these challenges, the promise of gender equality remains unfulfilled. It is within this context that the priority theme of the 70th Commission on the Status of Women emphasizes the urgent need to bridge these gaps.

In response, we draw attention to three priority areas where further efforts are essential to advancing justice and equality for women and girls. Accordingly, we present focused calls to action for meaningful progress in three key areas: strengthening frameworks surrounding

environmental sustainability, fostering inclusive participation in society, and expanding equitable access to services as a foundation for gender justice.

## **I. Strengthening the Framework for Environmental Sustainability**

In 2023, the *Emergency Events Database* recorded 399 disasters linked to natural hazards, resulting in 86,473 fatalities and affecting 93.1 million people. The *United Nations Children's Fund* notes that women and girls account for an estimated 80 percent of those displaced by climate change, reflecting the disproportionate risks they face during escalating disasters such as floods, droughts, and hurricanes. *The United Nations Development Programme* has further highlighted research showing that, when disasters strike, women and children are up to 14 times more likely than men to lose their lives.

This unequal impact is not incidental but the result of entrenched gender inequalities and societal roles that exacerbate vulnerability. Women are often tasked with securing water, food, fuel, and other resources that are increasingly scarce due to environmental degradation, while denied equal access to decision-making platforms, resources, and legal protections. These barriers not only deepen women's exposure to harm but also undermine their ability to recover, adapt, and lead resilient efforts in their communities.

In recent years, women and girls have gained more attention in climate policies, from the *Beijing Declaration to the Paris Agreement's Gender Action Plan*. Yet progress has fallen short. A 2023 report by the *Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)* states that while climate commitments referencing gender increased from 40 percent in 2016 to 78 percent in 2021, fewer than 2 percent of national climate strategies address the unique needs of girls, who are among the most vulnerable to climate change and biodiversity loss. The consequences of these gaps are profound: climate stressors such as extreme heat, food insecurity, and displacement intensify women's and girls' exposure to poverty and violence, underscoring that climate action is inseparable from the realization of their human rights.

Member States pledged under the *Beijing Declaration and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* to protect women's rights and create gender-responsive systems. Yet, these promises go unfulfilled as climate displacement grows. Without legal recognition for climate refugees, millions of displaced women lack protection or asylum, undermining progress towards *Sustainable Cities and Communities, Climate Action, and Life on Land*.

To achieve the objectives outlined in the *Beijing Declaration and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, we call upon partners of the Commission on the Status of Women to prioritize policies that:

- Recognize climate refugees under international law and ensure women have access to protection and asylum;
- Integrate gender-responsive approaches into disaster risk reduction;
- Strengthen protections against climate-induced gender-based violence, including legal support;
- Ensure women’s meaningful participation in climate decision-making at all levels.

## II. Inclusive Participation for Women and Girls

Women are too often excluded from social, economic, and political opportunities, and this exclusion perpetuates cycles of poverty and inequality. According to the *OECD*, in agriculture, women make up 43 percent of the global labour force yet represent less than 15 percent of landholders, leaving them with fewer rights to inherit, access, and use productive resources. Without secure land rights, women are excluded from decisions on natural resource management and remain more vulnerable to food insecurity and poverty.

Exclusion also persists at the highest levels of political power and diplomacy. According to a 2024 Press Release by the *United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women)*, 113 countries have never had a woman serve as Head of State or Government, and only 26 are currently led by women. In diplomacy, women remain underrepresented as Permanent Representatives to the United Nations, holding only 25 percent of posts in New York, 35 percent in Geneva, and 33.5 percent in Vienna.

Despite disparities, the last decade has seen a rise in women's leadership worldwide. As highlighted in the Secretary-General’s report to the sixty-fifth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, women hold 21 percent of ministerial positions, 5 percentage points higher than in 2010. Nonetheless, at an annual increase of just 0.52 points, gender parity in ministerial positions will not be achieved before 2077. This slow pace reflects the persistent barriers women face in accessing political leadership and decision-making roles. The absence of women in these spaces has concrete consequences: policies and services often fail to take women’s needs into account, as seen in disaster response, where essential items such as menstrual products are frequently overlooked. Ensuring women’s representation in leadership is therefore critical to creating inclusive policies that address the realities women and girls face.

*The Working Group on Communications on the Status of Women* has emphasized the importance of ensuring equal opportunities, and the *Beijing Platform for Action* reaffirmed women’s right to participate in politics. Advancing *Sustainable Development Goal 16* requires turning these

commitments into practice. To achieve the priority theme of the 70th Commission on the Status of Women, we call on Member States to prioritize policies that:

- Promote women's meaningful participation in all levels of decision-making;
- Address and dismantle systemic barriers to women's leadership;
- Strengthen accountability to international commitments on gender equality;
- Accelerate progress toward gender parity in political representation;
- Advance inclusive social policies that ensure women and girls of all backgrounds can fully participate in society.

#### **IV. Equitable Access to Services for All**

The *OECD* reported that in 2024, aid decreased after five continuous years of growth and is expected to decline further in the upcoming years. With the rapid decline of foreign aid, hundreds of women and girls who previously depended on foreign initiatives for services are now left unprotected. This, paired with a lack of initiatives to mitigate the gaps it creates, has exacerbated the need to develop long-lasting and sustainable policies that ensure fair and equitable access to services for all women and girls. Whether it be access to reproductive services, quality education, infrastructure, or even financial systems, access to services is at the heart of addressing all social issues, as it is ubiquitous in nearly every Sustainable Development Goal.

The *Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: Gender Snapshot 2025* highlights both advances and persistent disparities in women's access to essential services. While child pregnancy rates have declined by nearly half over the past 24 years, they have increased among adolescents in developing countries, underscoring the need for more equitable services. At the same time, a sharp decline in global aid has left over 60 percent of women-led Human Immunodeficiency Virus organizations without funding or forced to suspend services in the first months of 2025. Protecting the most vulnerable and ensuring equitable access to resources must remain a priority in the pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals.

To best achieve the goals set out in the Beijing Declaration and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, we call on the partners of the Commission on the Status of Women to push for policies that:

- Uphold sexual and reproductive health and rights as a fundamental right;
- Remove barriers to accessing quality services for women and girls;

- Promote quality education for all children, particularly those in rural areas and marginalized communities;
- Advance progressive taxation that can be used for public services that benefit women and other marginalized groups.