



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
December 2025

Original: Language

Commission on the Status of Women

Seventieth session

9-20 March 2026

**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and
to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly
entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and
peace for the twenty-first century”**

Statement submitted by NGO-Coordination post Beijing Switzerland, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

Statement

Introduction: From Beijing 1995 to Today

In 1995, the Governments of the world made a historic commitment in Beijing: with the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action they set out a comprehensive roadmap for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. A central element of this agenda is equal access to justice – not as an abstract legal principle, but as a concrete prerequisite for women to fully realize their rights in all areas of life. In line with the Review Theme of the seventieth session of the Commission on the Status of Women – “Women’s full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls” – this statement highlights access to justice as a key enabler of both participation and freedom from violence. More than three decades after Beijing, we must acknowledge: the gap between normative commitments and reality remains wide. Although many discriminatory laws have been reformed and international legal instruments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development have strengthened the framework for gender equality, in practice women and girls continue to face structural, financial, linguistic and cultural barriers when they seek to claim their rights. As NGO-Coordination post Beijing Switzerland, we use the seventieth session of the Commission on the Status of Women as an occasion to take stock, identify deficits and formulate recommendations to strengthen access to justice for all women and girls – worldwide and in Switzerland.

1. Why Access to Justice Is Central

Rights are only effective when they can be enforced. Without access to justice, many legal advances remain without impact. Access to justice is a cornerstone of the rule of law and a human right in itself. It is crucial for victims of gender-based violence to obtain protection, redress and justice. It is essential for social and economic participation, since discrimination in education, work or health can only be effectively addressed if those affected can assert their claims. And it strengthens democracy: legal systems that exclude women and girls from decision-making are neither inclusive nor legitimate.

2. Global Progress Since Beijing

Progress over the last decades should not be overlooked. Numerous countries have adopted or strengthened laws against gender-based violence, established quota systems and equality laws, created specialized courts or ombudspersons for women’s rights, and ratified international instruments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Civil society has contributed through monitoring, advocacy and supporting victims, making justice systems more open and responsive to the concerns of women and girls.

3. Persistent Challenges

Despite progress, implementation remains insufficient. Key challenges include discriminatory legal norms that still exist in many countries, structural barriers such as costs of legal proceedings, lack of legal aid, language barriers or geographical distances, cultural and social norms that stigmatize women who seek justice, and violence and intimidation that expose women to retraumatization or renewed exclusion. Even where progressive laws exist, there is often a lack of consistent enforcement by police, prosecutors or courts. Gender-based violence remains a persistent obstacle to equality, highlighting that formal equality alone is not enough to ensure real safety and empowerment for women.

Access to justice must also evolve in the digital age. Digital justice tools, online reporting mechanisms, and artificial intelligence-based translation or legal assistance can expand access for women in remote or marginalized contexts – provided that technology is inclusive, transparent and rights-based.

4. The Role of Switzerland in the Global Context

Switzerland, often considered a role model for the rule of law, still faces challenges. Progress includes strong institutions, independent courts, broad ratification of international treaties, and expanded support services for victims of domestic violence. Deficits remain, however: high procedural costs discourage women with low income, implementation of protective measures varies across cantons, migrant and asylum-seeking women face language and residency barriers, and victims of domestic and sexual violence often experience that complaints are not taken seriously, or proceedings are discontinued. Moreover, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women is rarely invoked or applied in legal practice, limiting its transformative potential. Switzerland demonstrates that even in wealthy countries, formal equality does not automatically translate into real equality, and violence persists unless actively addressed.

An intersectional and intergenerational approach is essential: young women, migrant women, older women, and women with disabilities often face unique barriers that require tailored responses and meaningful participation in policy design.

5. Recommendations by NGO-Coordination post Beijing Switzerland

We urge Member States, including Switzerland, as well as the United Nations and international partners to: end all legal discrimination, abolishing discriminatory provisions in family, labour and inheritance law; provide affordable legal counselling and legal aid, translation services, mobile courts and inclusive digital services; make gender training mandatory for police, judges and prosecutors, establish specialized chambers for cases of gender-based violence, and impose sanctions on state actors who violate women's rights; ensure protection of victims and women human rights defenders, including safe complaint mechanisms; and recognize civil society as equal partners, providing financial support for monitoring and counselling structures and ensuring open dialogue between government, judiciary and civil society. Without sustainable, predictable funding for women's rights organizations and legal aid structures, progress cannot be sustained. States should commit to gender-responsive budgeting and mandatory reporting on justice outcomes. Innovative practices – such as mobile legal clinics, participatory justice platforms, and community paralegals – demonstrate how local action can transform systemic barriers. These should be scaled up through international cooperation. We recommend establishing a periodic review mechanism under the Commission on the Status of Women to monitor progress on access to justice for women, ensuring accountability and peer learning among Member States.

6. Links with Other Agendas

Access to justice is linked to broader international commitments: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, especially Goal 5 on gender equality and Goal 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; and the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence. Access to justice for women also intersects with environmental and climate justice. Women are often on the front lines of climate impacts and resource conflicts, yet their rights to land, water and participation remain limited. Coherent action requires national measures to be systematically connected and regularly evaluated and data-driven, ensuring transparency, accountability, and effective prevention of violence.

7. Data, Sustainable Development Goal 17, and Funding

Data as a foundation for justice, equality, and financing is essential: inclusive, disaggregated data – by gender, age, disability, migration status, and other relevant factors – makes discrimination and violence visible, allows progress to be measured, and enables resources to be allocated effectively. Achieving this requires Sustainable Development Goal 17 partnerships, fostering cooperation between governments, United Nations agencies, academia, and civil society to collect, analyze, and utilize data for programs targeting women and girls. Reliable data also supports resource mobilization, demonstrating impact and allowing governments and donors to invest efficiently in sustainable programs. Furthermore, an intersectional perspective is critical: data must capture multiple, overlapping forms of discrimination – for example, affecting migrant women, older women, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex persons, and people with disabilities – to ensure programs are truly inclusive and effective. However, to capture the lived realities of women, new analytical categories and instruments must be developed. Existing data systems often fail to reflect the gender-specific nature of certain forms of violence and inequality. Data collection is essential, but equally important is

the redefinition of the categories through which States and institutions think and measure. Only when phenomena are named and classified as gender-specific can they be fully understood and addressed. For example, femicide is still recorded under general homicide or manslaughter in many legal and statistical systems, causing its gender-specific dimension to disappear from both public awareness and policymaking. Recognizing and establishing such distinct categories is a necessary step towards making invisible forms of violence and discrimination visible, and thus preventable. Developing such gender-sensitive data frameworks requires sustained investment and cooperation between governments, research institutions, and civil society. Without redefining what we measure, progress towards equality will remain partial and incomplete.

8. The Role and Responsibility of Civil Society

Since 1995, civil society has played a decisive role in holding States accountable, documenting gaps, providing support to victims, and driving innovation. The Commission on the Status of Women must not be a forum for governments alone. Without strong civil society engagement, commitments risk remaining on paper.

Conclusion

The seventieth session of the Commission on the Status of Women is an opportunity to reinvigorate the commitments made in Beijing. Access to justice and active elimination of violence for all women and girls are not optional but the foundation of equality, democracy and human rights. We call on Member States to critically review their laws and institutions, remove barriers, and engage civil society as equal partners and use data to guide effective financing and implementation. Only in this way can the vision of Beijing – equality, justice and dignity for all women and girls – become reality. Without justice there can be no equality. Without equality there can be no justice.