



Doc. 12812

05 January 2012

Advancing women's rights worldwide

Report¹

Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men

Rapporteur: Ms Lydie ERR, Luxembourg, Socialist Group

Summary

Despite the numerous commitments made by states in the last decades to promote and protect women's rights, progress in improving the status of women on a global scale has fallen short of expectations. Inequality and discrimination against women remain systematic and widespread in all areas.

While welcoming the establishment of UN Women, which raises the profile and visibility of women's rights, the Parliamentary Assembly should call on the Secretary General of the Council of Europe to develop and formalise the existing co-operation between the Council of Europe and UN Women.

Council of Europe member states should step up efforts to combat discrimination against women and encourage political decision-makers to take into account the gender dimension in the development of policies and legislation. The Assembly should also ask all member states to give a renewed impetus to the protection, promotion and effective implementation of women's rights worldwide as well as their periodic evaluation.

1. Reference to committee: [Doc. 12065](#), Reference 3643 of 29 January 2010.



Contents	Page
A. Draft resolution	3
B. Explanatory memorandum by Ms Err, rapporteur	5
1. Introduction	5
2. Assessing progress in the respect of women's rights	5
2.1. The periodic reviews of the World Conferences on Women	6
2.2. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women	6
2.3. The Millennium Development Goals	7
3. Equality, discrimination, sex and gender: how semantic quarrels hold back progress in improving women's real life	8
4. Three critical areas for political action	8
5. The right to life, physical and psychological integrity and health	10
5.1. Maternal health	10
5.2. Access to basic health services, reproductive health and family planning	10
6. The need to fight all forms of violence against women	12
6.1. Violence against women and domestic violence	13
6.2. Trafficking in human beings for the purpose of sexual exploitation	14
7. Education, professional training and equal participation in all spheres of life	16
7.1. Illiteracy and access to education for young girls	16
7.2. Feminisation of poverty	17
7.3. Equal participation of men and women in family life	18
7.4. Women in politics and decision making	19
8. UN Women: a higher profile for women's rights	19
9. Conclusions and recommendations	20

A. Draft resolution²

1. Despite the numerous commitments made by states in the last decades to promote gender equality and advance women's rights, progress in improving the status of women on a global scale has fallen short of expectations. The Parliamentary Assembly calls for a renewed impetus to be given to the protection, promotion and effective implementation of women's rights worldwide as well as their periodic evaluation.
2. Even if 187 of the 193 United Nations member states have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), 42 have made reservations to one or more articles, a considerable proportion of which contradict the spirit of the convention. In addition, only 103 states have ratified the Optional Protocol, which recognises the competence of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women to receive complaints from individuals or groups. The effective implementation of the convention itself remains unsatisfactory.
3. The full achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, in particular Goal 3 on promoting gender equality and empowering women and Goal 5 on improving maternal health, appears unlikely by 2015, contrary to what was agreed at the Beijing Conference in 1995.
4. The Assembly regrets the widespread and systematic discrimination against women and is concerned that inequalities might deepen even more as a result of the measures taken by states to counter the economic and financial crisis. It considers it important to concentrate efforts in some particular areas, as lack of progress in them prevents women from enjoying other rights.
5. More than two thirds of the world's poor are women, which leads to secondary discrimination in access to health care, education and property.
6. Worldwide, violence affects women disproportionately, with one in three women being beaten, coerced into sex or abused in their lifetime. Some 603 million women and girls live in countries where there is no specific legal protection from domestic violence; more than one tenth have suffered sexual violence involving the use of force, often in the context of armed conflicts; 80% of people trafficked at any given time are women and children.
7. Furthermore, one in three women cannot read or write, in a world where literacy is an essential key to empowerment. Only 19% of parliamentarians worldwide are women, which weakens the importance of gender equality issues in national agendas and governments' political accountability in this area.
8. Against this state of affairs, the Assembly welcomes the establishment of UN Women, in 2010, and strongly supports its activities, hoping that this agency will be able to create a new momentum for the advancement of women's rights worldwide, also by raising their profile and visibility. The Assembly also welcomes the establishment of UN Women national committees.
9. In view of these considerations, the Assembly calls on the Council of Europe member states to:
 - 9.1. step up efforts to combat discrimination against women and to raise the profile of gender equality issues and women's rights;
 - 9.2. encourage political decision-makers to take into account the gender dimension in all policies and legislation through gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting;
 - 9.3. create a system to estimate the economic costs for society of all the types of discrimination and violence experienced by women, and support research on this topic;
 - 9.4. encourage research on the differentiated impact of the economic crisis on women and men and, on this basis, introduce appropriate measures to redress inequalities;
 - 9.5. ensure that reproductive health programmes receive adequate funding, and to lift limitations on access to reproductive health services;
 - 9.6. ensure balanced participation and representation of women in political life and political decision-making bodies. This can only be achieved if national constitutions allow for the possibility of positive action if the number of political mandates is limited and if there is a strong political will on the part of political parties;
 - 9.7. consider including the principle of gender equality in the system of the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5), through the elaboration of a new protocol;

2. Draft resolution adopted unanimously by the committee on 8 December 2011.

- 9.8. sign, ratify and implement the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (CETS No. 210);
- 9.9. if they have not already done so, ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.
10. The Assembly also calls on the Council of Europe member and observer states, as well as states whose parliaments enjoy observer and partner for democracy status with the Assembly, to:
 - 10.1. do their utmost to limit reservations to international human rights instruments, including the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women;
 - 10.2. withdraw existing reservations to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women;
 - 10.3. intensify the application of the accountability mechanism in international treaties, considering that the accountability failure reinforces gender-based inequality and may lead to human rights violations;
 - 10.4. ensure that UN Women and UN Women national committees receive the resources needed to fulfil their objectives to expand women's voice, leadership and participation;
 - 10.5. make additional efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, including Goal 3 on promoting gender equality and empowering women and Goal 5 on improving maternal health;
 - 10.6. provide support to the United Nations to ensure the conduct of a global evaluation of the advancement of women's rights every ten years starting from 2015.
11. The Assembly calls on Council of Europe observer states and states whose parliaments enjoy observer and partner for democracy status with the Assembly to:
 - 11.1. consider seeking accession to the Council of Europe instruments open to non-member states which would have an impact on enhancing the status of women and gender equality, including:
 - 11.1.1. the European Convention on nationality (ETS No. 166);
 - 11.1.2. the Council of Europe Convention on action against trafficking in human beings (CETS No. 197);
 - 11.1.3. the Council of Europe Convention on the protection of children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse (CETS No. 201);
 - 11.1.4. the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence;
 - 11.2. become members of the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) and submit their laws on gender equality to it for review.
12. The Assembly calls on the Secretary General of the Council of Europe to develop and formalise the existing co-operation between the Council of Europe and UN Women through an exchange of letters between the two organisations.
13. The Assembly resolves to pursue its co-operation in this area with the European Union and the Inter-Parliamentary Union.
14. The Assembly also wishes to strengthen its partnership with non-governmental organisations for the promotion and advancement of women's rights and encourages them to continue research on the situation of women's rights on a national, regional and international scale in order to establish trends on progress.

B. Explanatory memorandum by Ms Err, rapporteur

1. Introduction

1. Despite the numerous commitments undertaken by states in the last two decades, at national and global level, to promote gender equality and advance women's rights, progress in improving the status of women worldwide has fallen short of expectations. For too many women worldwide, poverty and violence are everyday facts of life as they struggle to acquire the same rights as men with respect to health, employment and family, as well as access to public resources and services.

2. This report aims to take stock of the advancement of women's rights worldwide and appeals to states to give a stronger impetus to assessing, defending and developing global political action towards the improvement of women's situation in theory and practice.

3. In this endeavour, we are not starting from scratch. There exists a sound international legal framework for the defence of women's rights. However, political action must be geared to achieving the effective implementation of existing legal instruments and, at the same time, developing a higher profile for women's rights and gender equality on the global political agenda.

4. The creation of UN Women, in July 2010, represents an important step forward in this direction. UN Women is the best possible actor to take on the responsibility of raising equality questions at the highest possible level, of promoting the effective implementation of women's rights and of catalysing co-operation. Therefore this agency deserves all our support

5. The need for synergy and co-operation is particularly important, especially in relation to three areas where progress has been very limited:

- the right to life, health and physical integrity;
- the elimination of all forms of violence against women;
- the right to education and women's empowerment in all spheres of life.

6. This report finds its origin in a motion for a resolution presented by Mr Ducarme and others,³ who expressed concern about the global backlash against women's rights and quoted examples from Sudan, Afghanistan, Mali and Yemen. In the course of my work, I decided to change the title of the report to "Advancing women's rights worldwide", because my main objective is not only to make an assessment of the situation, but to propose a way forward.

7. In preparation of this report, I carried out a fact-finding visit to New York from 21 to 23 September 2010, during which I attended the summit on the Millennium Development Goals and met, amongst others, Ms Rachel Mayanja, Assistant Secretary-General and Special Adviser to the Secretary General on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, as well as representatives of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the Division for the Advancement of Women.

8. In addition, the Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men organised a hearing on 9 September 2011 in Paris with the participation of Ms Dagmar Schumacher, Director of the UN Women Office in Brussels, who provided essential information for the preparation of this report and briefed us on UN Women's activities, objectives and challenges.

2. Assessing progress in the respect of women's rights

9. It would be a daunting challenge to provide a detailed analysis of progress in the implementation of women's rights worldwide. However, there exist some benchmarks which make it possible to identify a general trend. These are:

- the results of the periodic reviews of the World Conferences on the Status of Women;
- progress in relation to the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW);
- progress made by states towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), as set in Beijing in 1995.

3. [Doc. 12065](#).

2.1. The periodic reviews of the World Conferences on Women

10. The main impetus for the improvement of women's rights worldwide was given by the four World Conferences on the Status of Women of the United Nations in Mexico City (1975), Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985) and Beijing (1995), organised by the Commission on the Status of Women.⁴

11. The conferences aimed at making it publicly evident at international level that discrimination towards women was persisting all around the world and in various areas of everyday life. They led to the drafting of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, adopted in 1979 by the United Nations General Assembly and often described as an international bill of rights for women.

12. Since 1975, the United Nations conferences have systematically followed up progress in the implementation of measures in critical areas of concern, addressing action-oriented recommendations to states with a view to facilitating and improving the implementation of the convention's commitments.

13. Since the 1995 Beijing World Conference, the Commission on the Status of Women has organised periodic reviews every five years (Beijing +5, ten-year review, fifteen-year review) in order to monitor and assess the progress made by states in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Beijing Declaration.⁵

14. Despite the profound interest created by these conferences, it is evident today that progress is being made at a slower speed than that originally wished and that different attitudes towards equality have resulted in different levels of inequality around the world.

15. The original structure of these conferences, which bring together governments and politicians, but also representatives of civil society and actors inspired by a diversity of beliefs and/or religious faiths can be seen as a possible factor accounting for the limited progress made in several issues of critical importance. This limited progress at global level can also be due to very diverging levels of gender equality and respect for women's rights in different countries of the world.

16. Regrettably, and as a consequence of the different speeds in the advancement in the fight against all forms of discrimination announced by the World Conferences, the progress made in defending and improving women's rights worldwide since 1995 has entered a phase of a consented stagnation, if not of real retreat.

17. To redress this trend, a more binding system of control and evaluation than the one established by the world conferences and the post-Beijing platform needs to be put urgently into practice.

2.2. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

18. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) is the most comprehensive international human rights instrument addressing discrimination against women to date. Since its adoption on 6 October 1999, it has been considered as the reference text in the area of women's rights. It is the first binding instrument which defines "discrimination against women" and asks states to make a commitment to eradicate it. The CEDAW has been signed by 99 states and 187 have ratified it.

19. The Optional Protocol to the CEDAW, which recognises the competence of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women to receive complaints from individuals or groups, has been ratified by 103 states, which include all Council of Europe member states with the exception of Estonia, Latvia, Malta and Monaco.

20. Despite these international commitments, some contradictions persist between national legislation and the provisions of the convention as well as other relevant human rights instruments.

21. For example, contrary to the letter and spirit of the CEDAW and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990), several European countries allow marriage under the age of 18. The statutory age of marriage should be 18 so as to comply with the CEDAW and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and exceptions to this principle, if foreseen, should be strictly regulated and ensure that there is no discrimination between women and men in the application of the principle.⁶

4. www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing.

5. Beijing +5, Beijing +10 and Beijing +15 constitute the Beijing Platform for Action producing reviews and recommendations every five years, www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/index.html.

6. Advancing Equal Rights for Women and Girls: The Status of CEDAW Legislative Compliance in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, UNFPA Publication:
<http://eeca.unfpa.org/webdav/site/eeca/shared/documents/publications/2009/advancingequalrights.pdf>.

22. An additional matter of concern is that 42 United Nations member states have made reservations to one or more substantive articles of the CEDAW.⁷ According to the information provided by UN Women, “30 Member States have imposed reservations on article 16, in relation to women’s equal rights within marriage and in the family; 22 Member States have reservations in relation to compatibility with religious laws or traditional codes; 20 Member States have reservations in relation to articles on women’s equal nationality rights; and 17 Member States have imposed reservations in relation to article 2, on the elimination of discrimination, which is the foundation of the Convention”.⁸

23. The Maldives⁹ have ratified the CEDAW with a reservation regarding equality in marriage and family life (including the right to decide the number and spacing of children). According to this reservation, Article 16 of the Convention concerning the equality of men and women in all matters relating to marriage and family relations shall apply “without prejudice to the provisions of the Islamic Sharia, which governs all marital and family relations of the 100% Muslim population of the Maldives”.

24. In its General Recommendation No. 4, the Committee for the Elimination of Discrimination against Women expressed “concern in relation to the significant number of reservations that appeared to be incompatible with the object and purpose of the Convention” and suggested “that all States parties concerned reconsider such reservations with a view to withdrawing them”.¹⁰ UN Women noted that the articles of the CEDAW relating to family law are those on which states have most frequently imposed reservations citing cultural or religious factors, limiting or excluding the application of these provisions.¹¹

25. Limiting the number of reservations is a way for states to show their commitment to act for the improvement of the situation of women and therefore one of the ways of changing realities. States that have ratified or acceded to the CEDAW are legally bound to move beyond *de jure* equality to achieve *de facto* equality.

26. Having said this, there are some signs of improvement. According to UN Women, the trend today is towards the progressive withdrawal of reservations. For example, Morocco withdrew its reservation to Article 16 in April 2011. Algeria removed its reservation to Article 9.2 on nationality of children in 2009 and Egypt did likewise in 2008. Malaysia withdrew its reservation to Article 16.2 on child marriage in July 2010. Luxembourg withdrew its reservations to Article 7 (elimination of discrimination against women in political and public life)¹² and Article 16.1.g (right to choose a family name) of the convention on 9 January 2008.¹³ Progress is slow and international organisations will have to continue their efforts jointly with civil society to confirm this trend.

27. Further impulse in re-launching political will and action is needed today also in relation to the CEDAW. Priority objectives should be:

- limiting or withdrawing existing reservations which contravene the letter and spirit of the convention;
- repeal or revise national legislation which is contrary to the convention;
- ratify the convention’s optional protocol;
- reinforce the convention control mechanism to ensure effective control on national implementation and strengthen states’ accountability.

2.3. The Millennium Development Goals

28. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) agreed at the Beijing Conference provide an additional framework for action. In particular, MDGs 2, 3 and 5 make direct reference to the situation of women in relation to maternal health, education and women’s empowerment.¹⁴

7. Data provided by the UN Women research in a contribution paper “Additional briefing notes on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) reservations” submitted on 16 November 2011.

8. Ibid.

9. All reservations can be found at this link: www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/reservations-country.htm.

10. CEDAW Recommendation N.4: www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/recommendations/recomm.htm#recom4.

11. Data provided by the UN Women research in a contribution paper “Additional briefing notes on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) reservations” submitted on 16 November 2011.

12. This reservation was related to the hereditary transmission of the crown of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, <http://sim.law.uu.nl/SIM/Library/RATIF.nsf/f8bbb7ac2d00a38141256bfb00342a3f/6753ec48ee1ebe01c12568b900479a03?OpenDocument>.

13. CEDAW Concluding Observations, 23 January 2008, http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cedaw/docs/CEDAW.C.LUX.CO.5_en.pdf.

29. The full achievement of the MDGs, in particular MDG 3 on promoting gender equality and empowering women and MDG 5 on improving maternal health appears unlikely by 2015, the year in which all countries should meet the MDGs.

30. There is a need to revise the state of advancement in relation to the MDGs, especially of the three relating to the situation of women. In a recent publication, the United Nations gave an opinion on the systems to assess progress in the states that have committed to the MDGs.¹⁵ In particular, the report recommends requesting an account of the individual achievements made by each country.

31. Similarly, the United Nations argues that the MDGs and other international commitments to women will only be met if gender-responsive accountability systems are put in place both nationally and internationally.¹⁶

3. Equality, discrimination, sex and gender: how semantic quarrels hold back progress in improving women's real life

32. Disagreement on crucial concepts regarding the status of women can only further delay substantive progress on the issues at stake. There is a need to better define the concepts of "equality" and "discrimination" in order to improve future legal frameworks for political action. However, concepts of "sex" and "gender" are often used with no distinction, making the debates around "equality" and "discrimination" hard to follow.

33. During the recent global meetings addressing women's rights such as the annual Commission on the Status of Women (the 55th session took place from 22 February to 4 March and on 14 March 2011) as well as the 44th Session of the United Nations Commission on Population and Development (11-15 April 2011), the internationally agreed notions of gender have been opposed by a number of countries.

34. This year's Commission on the Status of Women produced setbacks in already agreed upon language from the Beijing Platform for Action. Groups of states including, on the one hand, the Holy See, the Organization of the Islamic Conference (Qatar, Iran, Yemen, Pakistan, Syria) and Benin (on behalf of the African Group) and, on the other hand, Switzerland, the European Union, Turkey and Mexico, disagreed primarily on terms such as "gender", "gender mainstreaming", "gender equality", "gender-based analysis", "sexuality education", "sexual and reproductive health", "maternal health" and "women's rights".

35. The Holy See and the African Group had strong misgivings about the use of these expressions and repeatedly asked for the words "men and women" to be added after the term "gender", or a footnote to be added along these lines in the definition included in the Beijing Platform for Action. Their underlying concern is not to acknowledge a notion of gender identity going beyond the biological sexes of males and females, therefore denying all legal recognition of the concept of "gender" as a social construct, including gay, lesbian, transgender and no-gender persons.

36. I find this debate in itself a setback on what has been agreed so far. The existing definitions of the concepts "gender", "sex", "equality" and "discrimination" are and should be broad enough to cover different understandings and sensitivities; an exceedingly narrow definition would shrink the achievements which have been made so far by a number of states in recognising the rights of lesbian, gay and transgender people (LGBT). Furthermore, the hours of discussion that are spent over the meaning of these concepts could be more usefully spent on improving the day-to-day life of women and all those who suffer violations of their rights because of their sex, gender or sexual orientation. In a global context, it is essential to work towards a total separation between the state and religion so as to ensure a real advancement of women's rights.

4. Three critical areas for political action

37. Equality in theory and in practice for women can only be achieved if all human rights are guaranteed to women in terms of law and practice. They include:

- the right to life, physical and psychological integrity and health;

14. The UN Millennium Development Goals were officially agreed following the conclusion of the United Nations Summit on the MDGs in 2000. A global plan of action to achieve eight anti-poverty goals by the year 2015 also contained new commitments by all 192 member states along with 23 international organisations, for women's and children's health as well as initiatives against poverty, hunger and disease.

15. UNIFEM, *Progress of the World's Women 2008/2009: Who Answers to Women?*
www.unifem.org/materials/item_detail.php?ProductID=134.

16. Ibid.

- freedom from all forms of violence;
- education, professional training and equal participation in all spheres of life.

38. These basic rights are the preconditions for women to participate equally at all levels of the economic, political, social, cultural and family spheres of life.

39. Other issues needing close attention and follow-up will not be covered in the report since they do not affect all geographical areas in the same way. These issues include:

- Prenatal sex selection (Assembly [Resolution 1829](#) and [Recommendation 1979 \(2011\)](#));
- Femicides ([Resolution 1654](#) and [Recommendation 1861 \(2009\)](#));
- Rape as a war weapon ([Resolution 1670](#) and [Recommendation 1873 \(2009\)](#) on sexual violence against women in armed conflict);
- Forced marriage ([Resolution 1468](#) and [Recommendation 1723 \(2005\)](#) on forced marriages and child marriages)
- Honour crimes ([Resolution 1681](#) and [Recommendation 1881 \(2009\)](#) on the urgent need to combat so-called “honour crimes”);
- Malnutrition;
- HIV-AIDS ([Recommendation 1785 \(2007\)](#) on the spread of the HIV/AIDS epidemic to women and girls in Europe);
- Equality before the law ([Resolution 1780](#) and [Recommendation 1949 \(2010\)](#) on promoting the most favourable gender equality laws in Europe);
- Gender roles and stereotypes ([Resolution 1751](#) and [Recommendation 1931 \(2010\)](#) on combating sexist stereotypes in the media);
- Female genital mutilation ([Resolution 1247 \(2001\)](#)).

40. Many countries have made enormous strides in promoting gender equality, yet women are often denied control over their bodies, denied a voice in decision making and denied protection from violence. Justice is still not guaranteed for millions of women and girls. Globally 53% of working women, that is 600 million in total, are in precarious jobs or jobs lacking the protection of labour laws. On average, women are still paid 10% to 30% less than men across all regions and sectors.¹⁷

41. Millions of women experience violence in their lifetime, while the systematic targeting of women for brutal sexual violence is a feature of modern conflicts.

42. Since the beginning of 2011 the Arab Spring has highlighted the active role of women in the democratisation process and represented a “precious opportunity” for women.¹⁸ However, revolutions have often been accompanied by serious and systematic human rights violations, especially violations of women’s rights. Announcements made in October 2011 in Libya on the use of Sharia as the basic source of legislation and the plan to remove restrictions to the law on polygamy¹⁹ may lead to a step backwards for women’s rights.²⁰

43. While all forms of discrimination towards women deserve special attention, this report focuses on the three issues that I consider critical for the future advancement and improvement of women’s status in every place in the world: the right to life, physical and psychological integrity and health, the need to fight all forms of violence against women, and education and empowerment to ensure equal participation in all spheres of life.

17. www.unwomen.org/un-women-launches-first-major-report-progress-of-the-world%E2%80%99s-women-in-pursuit-of-justice/.

18. http://assembly.coe.int/ASP/NewsManager/EMB_NewsManagerView.asp?ID=6349.

19. Libya looks set to chart moderate course on Islam, BBC, 4 November 2011, www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-15500682.

20. Sharia law and the Arab Spring, Euronews, 26 October 2011, www.euronews.net/2011/10/26/sharia-law-and-the-arab-spring/.

5. The right to life, physical and psychological integrity and health

5.1. Maternal health

44. The lack of maternal health care violates women's rights to life, health, equality and non-discrimination. No woman should die due to inadequate access to family planning or to pregnancy and delivery care.

45. The Millennium Development Goal 5 on "Improving maternal health" focuses on reducing maternal mortality and achieving universal access to reproductive health. According to United Nations reports on progress made on the MDGs,²¹ MDG 5 is amongst those where the least progress has been made. In fact, globally, it is the most off-track of all of the Goals, with only 23 countries likely to achieve it by 2015.

46. The World Health Organization estimates that more than 350 000 women die annually from complications during pregnancy or childbirth, almost all of them – 99% – in developing countries.²²

47. Progress in achieving MDG 5 depends upon other MDGs, in particular MDG 2 on "Achieving Universal Primary Education" and MDG 3 on "Promoting gender equality and empowering women". MDG 2, which highlights the importance of education, is directly linked to maternal health and mortality as educated women are more likely to seek medical care during pregnancy, ensure their children are immunised, be better informed about their children's nutritional requirements, and adopt improved sanitation practices.

48. Furthermore, MDG 3, which promotes gender equality and women's empowerment, is closely linked to the MDG 5, as gender inequality is one of the social determinants at the heart of disparity in health (so-called health inequity). Evidence indicates that investing in maternal health not only improves a mother's health, but also increases the number of women in the workforce and promotes the economic well-being of communities.

5.2. Access to basic health services, reproductive health and family planning

49. Indian economist and philosopher Amartya Sen has denounced the fact that every year 100 million women are "missing", in the sense of dying without reason, without anyone trying to estimate the real economic costs of such human losses.

50. Every year, nearly half a million women die and untold numbers suffer temporary or long-term disabilities from preventable pregnancy-related causes. Many maternal health advocates focus only on maternity and antenatal care, skilled attendance at delivery and emergency obstetric services. These are clearly critical services, but maternity care is just one element of the comprehensive sexual and reproductive rights and health package.²³

51. While the number of women dying due to complications during pregnancy and childbirth has decreased by 34% from an estimated 546 000 in 1990 to 358 000 in 2008, the annual rate of decline is less than half of what is needed to achieve the MDG 5 target of reducing the maternal mortality ratio by 75% between 1990 and 2015.²⁴

52. Pregnant women still die from four major causes: severe bleeding after childbirth, infections, hypertensive disorders and unsafe abortion. About 1 000 women died every day due to these complications in 2008. The risk of a woman in a developing country dying from a pregnancy-related cause during her lifetime is about 36 times higher than that of a woman living in a developed country. Some 99% of all maternal deaths in 2008 occurred in developing regions, with sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia accounting for 57% and 30% of all deaths respectively.²⁵

53. Some figures can be mentioned to complete the overall picture:

- only about one half of the 123 million women who give birth each year receive antenatal, delivery and newborn care (including routine care and care for complications) and many who get care do not receive all the components of care they need;²⁶

21. The most recent report is "The Millennium Development Goals Report 2011", published on 7 June 2011, www.beta.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/MDG/english/MDG_Report_2011_EN.pdf.

22. WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA, The World Bank, "Trends in Maternal Mortality: 1990-2008", 2010, www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/monitoring/9789241500265/en/.

23. www.iwhc.org/index.php?option=com_advancedtags&view=tag&id=12&Itemid=1324.

24. *Ibid*; and WHO, News release, "Maternal deaths worldwide drop by third": www.who.int/mediacentre/news/releases/2010/maternal_mortality_20100915/en/index.html.

25. www.iwhc.org/index.php?option=com_advancedtags&view=tag&id=12&Itemid=1324; and WHO, Making pregnancy safer, www.who.int/making_pregnancy_safer/topics/maternal_mortality/en/.

- an estimated 215 million women who want to avoid a pregnancy are not using an effective method of contraception, despite significant increases in use in recent years;²⁷
 - about 20 million women have unsafe abortions each year,²⁸ and three million of the estimated 8.5 million who need care for subsequent health complications do not receive it.²⁹
54. Leaders at all levels can save women's lives and improve their health by:
- making sexual and reproductive health and rights a priority in health policies and budgets;
 - involving women and young people in policy development and evaluation;
 - speaking out against gender inequality, sexual coercion and violence, and child marriage.
55. About one third of the world's population is under 19. Typically denied health services and information, girls are often vulnerable to unwanted or coerced sex, unwanted pregnancy, unsafe abortion and sexually transmitted infections. Millions of girls are married and expected to bear children before they are physically or emotionally ready.³⁰
56. The total cost of investing simultaneously in modern family planning and maternal and newborn health services to meet existing needs would be US\$24.6 billion, an increase of US\$12.8 billion annually. While this is a little more than double current spending on these services in the developing world, the total represents only US\$4.50 per capita. As with current spending for health care, the additional funds needed for these services would come from a combination of domestic and international resources.³¹
57. Funding and political support for strengthening health systems should increase, and priority should be given to poor women of reproductive age and their very young children. Sufficient funding has to be allocated for reproductive health programmes in national budgets and within co-operation and development projects. Building capacity to deliver sexual and reproductive health services, including prenatal and obstetric care, and making services attractive to men and adolescents will provide a foundation for strengthening health services overall.³²
58. In contrast, progress can be threatened by political unwillingness to sustain progress. A contemporary example of retreat in women's reproductive rights can be that of the recent amendments to the Abortion Law in Russia.³³ For example, according to new legislation backed by the Russian Orthodox Church, husbands could be handed the final say over whether their wives can have an abortion. A new law will place restrictions on abortion by requiring that clinics warn women of associated health hazards such as fertility loss.
59. Overall, in Europe, maternal mortality declined to 14.1 deaths per 100 000 live births in 2008, nearly 50% of the 1990 level. According to the World Health Organization, a large number of maternal deaths in the European region are related to mostly preventable causes like haemorrhage, unsafe abortion and toxæmia.
60. There is a great need throughout the central and eastern European region to expand the range of contraceptive methods available to users and to make them affordable to the population, especially to vulnerable populations, through mechanisms of subsidising prices. For example, worrying developments have taken place in the Slovak Republic where in September 2011, the National Council (the Parliament) adopted provisions to the Act on the Scope and Conditions of Drugs, Medical Devices and Dietetic Foods Coverage by Public Health Insurance and on Amending and Supplementing Certain Acts that explicitly prohibit any contraceptives used for pregnancy prevention from being covered by the public health insurance scheme. The Act also removes section 3 of the Abortion Law which requires that "prescription contraceptives on prevention of pregnancy, medical examinations, and follow-up examinations associated therewith shall be provided to a woman free of charge".

26. www.womancareglobal.org/sites/default/files/WCG_Issues_Fact%20Sheet%20Aug%202011.pdf.

27. *Adding It Up: The Costs and Benefits of Investing in Family Planning and Maternal and Newborn Health*, by Guttmacher Institute and UNFPA: www.guttmacher.org/pubs/AddingItUp2009.pdf.

28. WHO, "Unsafe abortion: the preventable pandemic", www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/general/lancet_4.pdf.

29. www.guttmacher.org/pubs/summaries/AIU-Summary.pdf.

30. www.iwhc.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=3418&Itemid=455.

31. www.guttmacher.org/pubs/FB-AIU-summary.pdf.

32. www.iwhc.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=3418&Itemid=455.

33. www.nationalrighttolifenews.org/news/2011/07/russia-passes-law-requiring-warning-of-abortion-complications/#.Vtcd5Wf2bmQ and www.themoscownews.com/society/20110815/188926434.html.

61. The increasing cost of contraceptives on the open market in Europe, upon which most women rely, is a concern. Additionally, access to services for women living in remote areas remains a key barrier to service utilisation. A lack of information about services is another major barrier.³⁴

62. The highest rate of adolescent pregnancies is found in Bulgaria (41%), Romania (36%) and the United Kingdom (26%).³⁵ In some European regions, return to traditional practices such as child marriage is considered one of the factors contributing to the high rate of teen pregnancies still observed in some countries (e.g. Azerbaijan, Ukraine and Georgia). Young adolescents are more likely to die or experience complications in pregnancy and childbirth than adult women. Moreover, the children of these young mothers have a higher risk of morbidity and mortality.

63. A recent report by the Inter-Parliamentary Union on “Access to health as a basic right: the role of Parliaments in addressing key challenges to securing the health of women and children” called on the states parties to ensure women’s and children’s right to health without being subject to discrimination of any kind.³⁶

64. On 24 October 2011, in his report “Right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health”,³⁷ the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health posed a fundamental challenge to laws and policies that limit access to abortion, dictate a woman’s conduct during pregnancy, restrict comprehensive sexuality education, and act as a barrier to contraception and family planning information and services.

65. The report examined the disproportionate impact these laws and policies have on those who already suffer human rights violations and the denial of adequate health care (for example, women, impoverished people), emphasising individuals’ right to dignity and autonomy in health-related decision-making. It should be noted that the former Rapporteur on Health, Mr Paul Hunt, pushed for United Nations Human Rights Council recognition of maternal mortality as a human rights issue, which can already be seen in court judgments in India³⁸ and pending judgments in Uganda.³⁹

6. The need to fight all forms of violence against women

66. Violence against women is so widespread and systematic that it can be defined as pandemic. Freeing women from such a threat, both in the public and private sphere, is essential to their empowerment. In every country in the world, women from all classes and cultures experience sexual, physical and emotional violence.

67. Violence against women is usually perpetrated in places where women ought to feel safe: at home, at work and even in places under protection. Violence can be part of the day-to-day existence of women living in camps for refugees or internally displaced persons. For example, in Haiti, sexual violence against women is increasing. An Amnesty International report cites over 250 cases of rape in displaced persons camps in the first 150 days after the January 2010 earthquake.

68. One in three women will be beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in their lifetime.⁴⁰ Violence aggravates women’s vulnerability to HIV infection, limits women’s access to life-saving sexual and reproductive health services, and increases stigma and discrimination.

69. Violence against women is a serious violation of women’s human rights.

70. General Recommendation No. 19 (1992) on violence against women of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women noted that gender-based violence is discrimination within the meaning of Article 1 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

34. “MDG Trends in the UNECE Region”, Background Note prepared by the UNECE Secretariat (2010), Regional Consultation on the Millennium Development Goals, Geneva, Millennium Development Goals in the WHO European Region, World Health Organization 2010, www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/87438/E93723.pdf.

35. *Adolescent Pregnancy and Childbearing: Levels and Trends in Developed Countries, Family Planning Perspectives*, Volume 32, Number 1, January/February 1999, www.guttmacher.org/pubs/journals/3201400.html.

36. IPU report on “Access to health as a basic right: the role of Parliaments in addressing key challenges to securing the health of women and children”, www.ipu.org/conf-e/125/3Cmt-dr-rpt.pdf.

37. www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/66/254.

38. <http://reproductiverights.org/en/press-room/delhi-high-court-stands-up-against-cruel-treatment-of-pregnant-women>.

39. www.cehurd.org/2011/09/maternal-deaths-emblematic-of-rot-in-uganda%E2%80%99s-healthcare-system/.

40. www.unifem.org/gender_issues/violence_against_women/facts_figures.php.

71. The 1993 United Nations Declaration on the elimination of violence against women provides a very broad and inclusive framework for studying violence against women. According to this definition: “Violence against women means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life”.⁴¹ Specifically, the Declaration outlines a broad variety of acts and circumstances that are included in this definition:

- “Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation, and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation”;
- “Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation occurring at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, and trafficking in women and forced prostitution”;
- “Physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the State, wherever it occurs.”

72. The Declaration recognises that some groups of women are particularly vulnerable to violence, such as women belonging to minority groups, indigenous women, refugee women, migrant women, women living in rural or remote communities, destitute women, women in institutions or in detention, girl children, women with disabilities, elderly women and women in situations of armed conflict.

73. Because it is so inclusive, the 1993 Declaration’s definition of violence against women provides a good conceptual framework for studying this phenomenon. However, because the types of violence vary greatly in their characteristics, the methods for collecting data on violence against women must be adapted according to the type of violence under study. Particular attention needs to be paid to addressing forms of violence against women by region, since data for a number of countries and types of violence remain underreported, and to assessing the prevalence of violence in certain hard to reach populations.

6.1. Violence against women and domestic violence

74. During the exchange of views organised at the committee meeting in Paris on 9 September 2011, Ms Dagmar Schumacher, Director of the UN Women Office in Brussels, said that some 603 million women and girls continue to live in countries where there is no specific legal protection from domestic violence. In Europe, between 8% and 35% of women have experienced physical violence at least once in their lifetime.

75. On 11 May 2011, the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (CETS No. 210) was opened for signature at the Committee of Ministers session in Istanbul.

76. Based on the “three Ps” formula (Prevention, Protection and Prosecution⁴²), the convention is indeed the most comprehensive instrument in the world on this subject. At present, only 16 Council of Europe member states have signed it and Turkey is the only one which has also ratified it.⁴³ All member states should be encouraged to ratify the Convention as soon as possible, so that it can enter into force. In addition, more states should be encouraged to sign and ratify it. This would not only be the sign of a political commitment to eradicate violence against women but also a sign of the will to make a real change to women’s lives.

77. When addressing the issue of domestic violence, a number of elements should be taken into account:

- reporting rates: domestic violence is one of the most chronically underreported crimes;
- economic impact: according to estimates from the 2001 US National Violence Against Women Survey, the cost of intimate partner violence exceeded US\$5.8 billion each year, US\$4.1 billion of which was for direct medical and mental health services;
- child witnesses: domestic violence is, in the majority of cases, violence against women conducted by men of their immediate social environment. Whenever a mother is subjected to violence, there is a great probability that a child is witnessing this violence. Every single child exposed to violence at home has his or her own reactions, but witnessing violence against his or her mother is, in any case, a form of psychological abuse to a child with potentially severe consequences.⁴⁴

41. Article 1 of General Assembly Resolution (Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women) 48/104 of 20 December 1993.

42. <http://www.un.org/ga/president/62/letters/Background190308.pdf>.

43. Austria, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Luxembourg, Montenegro, Norway, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”, Turkey and Ukraine.

- sexual assault: sexual assault is closely related to domestic violence. Sexual assault or forced sex occurs in approximately 40% to 45% of battering relationships.⁴⁵

78. Within the current European Union regulatory framework, there is no specific instrument on domestic violence, even if a number of instruments address the problem in the context of fundamental rights, gender equality, criminal justice and public health. Because of its complexity, this pervasive issue requires a more cohesive European Union-wide strategy to prevent violence and protect women, as called for by the European Parliament.⁴⁶

79. The European Commission Vice-President, Viviane Reding, has defined violence against women as a violation of women's fundamental rights and has showed strong commitment to creating a more coherent policy framework to combat such violence, and some promising developments are currently under discussion, such as setting up a European Union-wide data collection system on violence against women.

80. The economic costs of violence also need to be taken into consideration. Calculating costs of violence by men against women is not only about establishing figures, but about providing a holistic view of the problem.

81. A report by the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare (Kostnader för våld mot kvinnor – En samhällsekonomisk analys – “Costs for violence against women – A socioeconomic analysis”) highlights that violence against women involves severe economic strain for a number of social bodies.⁴⁷

82. In Sweden, almost 23 000 cases of maltreatment of women are reported to the police annually. In addition, over 2 000 cases of gross violation of women's integrity, almost 18 000 cases of unlawful threats against women and over 15 000 cases of harassment of women are reported. Many cases go unreported. Children suffer greatly from violence, either as witnesses or as direct victims. Around 10% of all children have on at least one occasion experienced this type of violence and 5% experience it often.

83. In its 2006 report, the National Board of Health and Welfare estimated that the cost of violence by men against women amounts to between 2.7 billion Swedish krona (SEK) and SEK 3.3 billion (297 to 362 million euros) per year in Sweden. This corresponds to between SEK 35 900 and SEK 44 000 per woman (3 931 to 4 818 euros).

84. The direct costs of this are estimated to be SEK 1 978 – 2 536 (216 to 277 euros), which include hospital treatment, legal costs, social services, women's shelters and support groups for crime victims and corresponding costs in the public sector, as well as support for treatment of violent men. In addition, there are costs for processing these cases incurred by central authorities and the social insurance office. Indirect costs are estimated in the report to be between SEK 717 million and SEK 764 million (78 to 84 million euros) per year. To this must be added the value of the loss in production and voluntary work. In addition to this, the costs of transfers have been estimated to be SEK 690 million, of which sickness benefit amounts to SEK 347 million. Transfers for economic assistance have been estimated to be SEK 378 million and for criminal injury compensation SEK 10 million.

85. The costs that have not been included in the study are for dental care, medicines, injury and pain and suffering of the children affected by violence. Another extensive issue that has not been included in the calculations is the cost of psychiatric care. The results of a British study indicate that these costs are extremely extensive and if the amounts in this study were to be translated to Swedish conditions, it is estimated in the report of the National Board of Health and Welfare that the sum total of the costs presented in the report would increase.

6.2. Trafficking in human beings for the purpose of sexual exploitation

86. Within the next 10 years, crime experts expect trafficking in human beings to surpass drug and arms trafficking in its incidence, cost to human well-being, and profitability to criminals.⁴⁸ As with the international drug trade and the illicit arms trade, profit is the driving motive for human trafficking. As people become vulnerable to exploitation and businesses continually seek the lowest-cost labour sources, trafficking in human beings generates profit and a market for human trafficking is created.

44. See Assembly Doc. 12155.

45. The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV): www.ncadv.org/.

46. www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?language=en&type=IM-PRESS&reference=20100315IPR70629.

47. www.socialstyrelsen.se/Lists/Artikelkatalog/Attachments/9744/2006-131-34_200613134_rev.pdf. See also: “Men's Violence Against Women In Close Relationships. What is the price of men's violence?” Seminar at the Riksdag, 22 November 2007, www.coe.int/t/pace/campaign/stopviolence/Source/sweden_seminar_costviolence_22112007_en.pdf.

87. The United Nations estimate that approximately 2.5 million people are being trafficked around the world at any given time, 80% of them being women and children.⁴⁹ According to the International Labour Organization, the sex industry generates some US\$32 billion annually.⁵⁰ However, estimates of income generated from prostitution in one city, Las Vegas, are as high as US\$5 billion.⁵¹ According to EUROPOL data, this market generates more profits than arms and drugs because of the zero costs of the “raw material”.

88. According to the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (CETS No. 197): “Trafficking in human beings shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.”⁵²

89. Indeed, primary victims worldwide are women and girls, the majority of whom are trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Sexual exploitation is by far the most commonly identified form of trafficking (79%), followed by forced labour (18%).⁵³

90. Great economic disparities between countries, together with limited possibilities for people to ensure their livelihoods, have fuelled trafficking of women from Africa, Asia, central and eastern Europe, mainly to western Europe and North America.

91. It is necessary to reflect not only on the reasons behind trafficking but also on the impact that trafficking for prostitution has on women. For example, foremost among the health risks of prostitution is premature death. In a recent study in the United States of almost 2 000 prostitutes followed over a 30-year period, by far the most common causes of death were homicide, suicide, drug and alcohol-related problems, HIV infection and accidents – in that order. The homicide rate among active female prostitutes was 17 times higher than that of the age-matched general population.⁵⁴

92. There is strong resistance of many actors to recognise that the presence of “prostitution markets” in destination countries is a pull-factor for trafficking. Trafficking in human beings is a real business, with a market, a supplier’s side creating monopolies depending on geographical regions and a product differentiation with persons who are considered as products. Without the demand for women in the sex-industry, there would be no prostitution business and as a result no need for a “supply” chain. According to a study by the International Organization for Migration, “traffickers take advantage of the disparity between low wages and lack of employment opportunities in some areas and the abundant jobs and high wages in other areas”.⁵⁵ The United Nations evaluation system established very clearly that the Swedish system – in which recourse to prostitution is criminalised – is the only one that really fights against the problem of trafficking and addresses the issue of demand creating supply.⁵⁶

93. Globally, over the past few years, the number of countries that have taken steps to implement the foremost international agreement in this area – the United Nations Protocol against Trafficking in Persons – has doubled. However, there are still many countries, particularly in Africa, that lack the necessary legal system and instruments. The number of convictions is increasing, but not proportionally to the growing awareness of the problem.⁵⁷

48. “Economics of Human Trafficking”, *International Migration* Vol. 48 (4) 2010.

49. UNGIFT, *Human trafficking: an overview*, 2008, www.ungift.org/docs/ungift/pdf/knowledge/ebook.pdf.

50. www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_norm/@declaration/documents/publication/wcms_090356.pdf.

51. <http://prostitutionresearch.com/>.

52. <http://conventions.coe.int/treaty/en/treaties/html/197.htm>.

53. UNODC, “Global Report on Trafficking in Persons”, 2009, www.unodc.org/documents/human-trafficking/Executive_summary_english.pdf.

54. Potterat J.J., Brewer D.D., Muth S.Q., Rothenberg R.B., Woodhouse D.E., Muth J.B. et al. “Mortality in a long-term open cohort of prostitute women”. *Am J Epidemiology* 2004;159:778-85, quoted on www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC450337/.

55. International Organization for Migration, “Economics of human trafficking” *International Migration*, Vol. 48 (4) 2010, <http://nfsacademy.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/Wheaton-Economics-of-Human-Trafficking.pdf>.

56. “Evaluation of the prohibition of the purchase of sexual services”, Chancellor of Justice Anna Skarhed, 2 July 2010, www.regeringen.se/sb/d/13420/a/151488.

94. There is a way to take action because we know what can work against the problem. We can begin to defeat sex trafficking if we severely punish its national and multi-national profiteers, impose criminal sanctions on its customers, offer a way out to its victims and create economic alternatives for girls and women who are at risk.

7. Education, professional training and equal participation in all spheres of life

95. Education is a human right and an essential tool for achieving the goals of equality, development and peace. Non-discriminatory education benefits both girls and boys and thus ultimately contributes to more equal relationships between women and men. As the Nobel Laureate of Literature (1991) Nadine Gordimer has stated: "Illiteracy is poverty of the intellect".

96. The education of women and children, especially girls, can create greater opportunities for women to lift themselves out of poverty and increase their social position. Countries with strong gender discrimination and social hierarchies limit women's access to basic education. According to the latest estimates by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), girls make up more than half of the 101 million children of primary school age that are not in school.⁵⁸

97. Even within the household, girls' education is often sacrificed to allow male siblings to attend school. An important aspect of capabilities is the freedom to make informed choices and have opportunities to achieve goals, and a basic requirement to actively use resources and information is basic education. This not only enables women to reduce household poverty, but also increases children's chances of education, and enhances maternal health and freedom of movement.

7.1. Illiteracy and access to education for young girls

98. For people around the world, especially women, literacy is the bridge from devastating poverty to renewed hope. The illiteracy rate has risen substantially over the past fifty years, but during the past five years it has become stagnant, hovering around 23%. One in four adults in the world is illiterate.⁵⁹

99. In spite of the fact that most development agencies identify women's literacy as the single most important factor in development, one in every three women in the world cannot read and write. Illiteracy is not confined to adults; in 1986, 105 million children between the ages of 6 and 11 were not in school. This activity explores several aspects of the issue of global literacy: the gender gap; personal stories of people affected by illiteracy; and programmes that work.⁶⁰

100. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) defines an illiterate person as "someone who cannot, with understanding, both read and write a short, simple statement on his or her daily life. A person who can only read but not write, or can write but not read is considered to be illiterate. A person who can only write figures, his or her name or a memorized ritual phrase is also not considered literate" (Beijing Platform).

101. According to the Global Campaign for Education, research shows that primary education is the minimum threshold needed to benefit from health information programmes. Not only is a basic education essential to be able to process and evaluate information, it also gives the most marginalised groups in society – notably young women – the status and confidence needed to act on information and refuse unsafe sex.⁶¹ A 32-country study found that women with post-primary education were five times more likely than illiterate women to know facts about HIV/AIDS. Illiterate women, on the other hand, were four times more likely to believe that there is no way to prevent HIV infection.⁶²

57. Comparing the conviction rate for trafficking in persons with other offences: as of 2007, about 40% of the world had not recorded a single conviction for trafficking in persons. Not only are traffickers not convicted in many countries, but when convictions are recorded the numbers seem low compared to the estimated number of victims. The bulk of convictions were recorded in a few regions, mainly western and central Europe, eastern Europe, central Asia and south Asia.

58. UNICEF, International Women's Day: Special podcast on education and gender equality, 2010, www.educationandtransition.org/resources/stories/international-womens-day-special-podcast-on-education-and-gender-equality/.

59. www.munfw.org/archive/50th/csw1.htm.

60. www.globaled.org/curriculum/wlit.html.

61. Global Campaign for Education, 2004, "Learning to survive: How education for all would save millions of young people from HIV/AIDS", http://siteresources.worldbank.org/CSO/Resources/Learning_to_Survive_by_Oxfam.pdf.

102. Much of the research that has focused on women and education also shows that post-primary education has the greatest impact, providing the greatest pay-off for women's empowerment. Higher levels of education provide much more than specific information on health risks. They also provide adults and young people with the larger life skills they need to make informed choices and to develop both economic and intellectual independence. Girls and women gain self-esteem along with knowledge.

103. Education has an impact on young women's health risks but can also change women's lives by:

- reducing poverty: for example, rural women with no education are twice as likely to be living in extreme poverty as those who have benefited from eight or more years of education;
- improving the health of women and their children: educated mothers make more use of health-care facilities, including the health services that effectively prevent fatal childhood diseases. Worldwide, the risk of a child dying prematurely is reduced by around 8% for each year that its mother spent in primary school;
- delaying marriage: in Bangladesh and Ethiopia, for example, increasing education has played a vital role in reducing child marriage, in part by ensuring that girls have access to the information and social networks that can protect them;
- reducing female genital mutilation (FGM): educated women are less than half as likely to be subjected to female genital mutilation and four times more likely to oppose it for their daughters;
- increasing self-confidence and decision-making power: evidence from across the world shows that although women everywhere continue to be constrained by unequal power relations, increased education helps women to gain in status and secure greater decision-making power in the family and the wider community.⁶³

104. Great challenges still remain. Many women – especially girls – are still excluded from education, and many more are enrolled in school but are learning too little to prepare them for 21st-century job markets. In some countries, access to the secondary and higher education that helps create a skilled and knowledgeable labour force continues to be limited; even where access is not a problem, the quality of the education provided is often low.⁶⁴

105. The Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, recognised that women's literacy is key to empowering women's participation in decision-making in society and to improving families' well-being. In addition, the United Nations has articulated the Millennium Development Goals, which include goals for improved education, gender equality, and women's empowerment. The MDGs emphasise education's essential role in building democratic societies and creating a foundation for sustained economic growth.⁶⁵

106. In the increasingly open global economy, various trends (such as the desire to have a labour force that is skilled but inexpensive) pose special challenges to women who are illiterate or have limited education. Economies' export orientation and the growing importance of small and medium-sized enterprises create opportunities for women; at the same time, however, women need the appropriate education and training to take full advantage of these opportunities⁶⁶.

7.2. Feminisation of poverty

107. The term "feminisation of poverty" originates from debates in the United States about single mothers and welfare, dating from the 1970s. It indicates that women represent a disproportionate percentage of the world's poor. The United Nations Development Fund for Women describes it as "the burden of poverty borne by women, especially in developing countries".⁶⁷

108. The term "feminisation of poverty" itself is controversial and has been defined in many different ways. It is normally used to indicate three distinct facts:

- that women have a higher incidence of poverty than men;

62. Vandermoortele J. and Delamonica E., 2000, "The Education 'Vaccine' Against HIV/AIDS", Current Issues in Education (1).

63. www.unfpa.org/hiv/women/report/chapter5.html.

64. www.prb.org/Publications/PolicyBriefs/EmpoweringWomenDevelopingSocietyFemaleEducationintheMiddleEastandNorthAfrica.aspx.

65. Ibid.

66. Ibid.

67. UNIFEM, Progress of the World's Women 2005, www.sarpn.org/documents/d0001563/Women_work_UNIFEM.pdf.

- that their poverty is more severe than that of men;
- that there is a trend to greater poverty among women, particularly associated with rising rates of female-headed households.⁶⁸

109. Despite the lack of a precise definition, multilateral and bilateral development agencies have focused their gender policies on the connection between gender inequality and an increase in the incidence of poverty. According to the United Nations Development Programme, “poverty has a woman’s face, 1.3 billion people living in poverty, 70% are women”. However, the lack of systematic data that disaggregates expenditure or consumption by gender weakens the reliability of such statements. There is a need for further research in order to find precise evidence behind correlations.

110. There is, however, evidence to demonstrate that because of the weaker and conditional basis of their entitlements, women are generally more vulnerable to poverty and, once poor, have less options in terms of escape. Gender discrimination in the household and the labour market can result in the unequal distribution of resources, leading to women experiencing a greater severity of poverty than men.⁶⁹

111. This concept is not only a consequence of lack of income, but is also the result of the deprivation of capabilities and gender biases present in both societies and administrations. This includes the poverty of choices and opportunities, such as the ability to lead a long, healthy and creative life, and enjoy basic rights like freedom, respect, and dignity.

7.3. Equal participation of men and women in family life

112. Restricted to narrow spheres of activity in the life of society, denied educational opportunities and basic human rights, subjected to violence, and frequently treated as less than human, women have been prevented from realising their true potential.⁷⁰ A potential that is good for them, their families and society as a whole.

113. Amartya Sen makes a compelling case for the notion that societies need to see women less as passive recipients of help and more as dynamic promoters of social transformation, a view strongly supported by a body of evidence suggesting that the education, employment and ownership rights of women have a powerful influence on their ability to control their environment and contribute to economic development.⁷¹

114. A worldwide equal and non-transferable parental leave policy may seem utopian today. But the results and consequences of such a policy are too promising for us not to pursue it. There is a range of research that indicates that an increased degree of sharing of care work in families results in a whole set of benefits for all parties involved, including for society as a whole.⁷²

115. Numerous studies show that active and regular paternal involvement with a child predicts a range of positive outcomes, both in terms of child health and development and the mother’s well-being and mental health post-partum.⁷³

116. A national household survey in Norway from 2006 concluded that increased paternity leave combined with other efforts to promote men’s involvement in families resulted in lower violence against women and children. A study by the Swedish Institute of Labour Market Policy Evaluation showed that a mother’s future earnings increase on average by 7% for every month the father takes paternity leave.⁷⁴

117. Paternity and maternity leave have been shown to contribute to better child health outcomes. Aggregated data for 16 European countries found that more generously paid parental leave reduces deaths of infants and young children. The study found that an extra week of paid maternity leave correlates with a 2% to 3% reduction in infant mortality rates.⁷⁵

68. www.bridge.ids.ac.uk/reports/femofpov.pdf.

69. Ibid.

70. www.bahai.org/documents/nsa-usa/two-wings-bird.

71. www.ncwo-online.org/data/images/WorldEconomicForum.pdf.

72. www.engagingmen.net/blog/klashyllander/2011/01/working-towards-equal-and-non-transferable-parental-leave-europe.

73. Ibid.

74. Brief on the Global Campaign to Engage Men as Caregiving Partners to Promote Better Maternal Health and Sexual and Reproductive Health, Reduce Gender-Based Violence and Promote Child Development and Economic Empowerment for Women.

75. Ibid.

118. There is, of course, a critical issue to address through political will and action: equality of men and women in taking parental leave needs to start at the level of the employer-employee relationship.

7.4. Women in politics and decision making

119. Although women in Europe represent an increasingly high proportion of the labour market, they still remain considerably under-represented in top management, including in economic and social decision-making bodies.⁷⁶ It is not necessary to repeat that progressive measures should be introduced to enable women to reconcile family and professional responsibilities without having to choose between them.

120. As to the participation of women in the political sphere, there are various considerations to look at. First, we would need to improve female representation to an extent which would allow women to exercise a real influence on law-making in states. When presenting the situation of female presence in politics in 2010, the Inter-Parliamentary Union stated that the introduction of quotas would be the only efficient way to increase the number of women in decision-making positions. In that way and in order to achieve a balanced presence of both sexes in the higher levels of decision making and politics, it would be necessary to fix quotas for both sexes, creating a critical mass of both women and men.

121. An increased presence of women in politics is especially necessary because the absence of balanced representation of men and women in decision making threatens democratic legitimacy and constitutes a violation of the fundamental right to equality. The politics of those responsible reflects their priorities. Leaders participating in decision making should be representative since the general interest concerns society as a whole, which is made up of men and women.

122. An adequate proportion of men and women is not itself an objective but a means to change politics so as to guarantee that all decisions take into consideration the priorities of the two halves of humanity. It is true that electoral laws do not have gender equality as their primary objective, but instead an adequate representation of the population and therefore of the political parties. It is no less important that both halves of humanity (men and women) that are different and equal are represented before the institutions of a given country in an adequate way. The limitation of the number of mandates held by one person could effectively contribute to increasing the participation of women in political life.

123. Among many political factors, it is the strength of women's movements and political parties that play an important role, as they represent the history and the cultural and religious context of a country. The importance of all these factors is generally accepted, but this is seldom the case for the electoral systems that are in a strict sense "the means" by which the voters express their political preference and the way the votes are translated into mandates/seats. In fact, certain characteristics of the electoral systems are determinants for the adequate representation of both sexes because the impact of quotas is different depending on the modalities of the electoral systems. According to the conclusions of a report elaborated by the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), in general, the countries that apply a system of proportional representation also have the highest proportion of women within their parliaments.⁷⁷ I have already addressed this issue in my report on "Increasing women's representation in politics through the electoral system", which led to the adoption of Assembly [Resolution 1706 \(2010\)](#).⁷⁸

124. Finally, it should be recalled that educating young people and children on equality, but also those working in politics, the press, the legal system and education can considerably improve equality in both the private and public spheres. Political will is after all the driving force of all change.

8. UN Women: a higher profile for women's rights

125. With a view to achieving greater effectiveness and harmonisation of programmes protecting and advancing women's rights worldwide, the United Nations General Assembly voted unanimously on 2 July 2010 to set up UN Women, the United Nations agency for gender equality and the empowerment of women (United Nations General Assembly Resolution 64/289).⁷⁹

76. Assembly [Doc. 12540](#).

77. European Commission for Democracy through Law, Venice Commission, Report on the impact of electoral systems on women's representation in politics, 13 June 2009, [www.venice.coe.int/docs/2009/CDL-AD\(2009\)029-e.asp](http://www.venice.coe.int/docs/2009/CDL-AD(2009)029-e.asp).

78. See also [Doc. 12097](#).

79. www.unwomen.org/en/.

126. The former Chilean President, Michelle Bachelet, was appointed by the United Nations Secretary-General on 14 September 2010 to head the agency. UN Women is an amalgamation of the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW, established in 1946), the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW, established in 1976), the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI, since 1997) and UNIFEM (established in 1976).

127. The objectives of UN Women are to:

- expand women's voice, leadership and participation;
- enhance women's economic empowerment;
- end violence against women and girls;
- increase women's role in the peace and security agenda;
- make gender equality priorities central to national and local planning and budgeting.⁸⁰

128. UN Women is present in 80 countries and is looking to expand its presence worldwide. UN Women is funded both from the United Nations regular budget and voluntary contributions (governments, foundations, companies, organisations and individuals). It is deemed to require an annual operating budget of at least 500 million dollars.⁸¹ UN Women received 58 million dollars by way of core resources in 2011.⁸² UN Women is also active via its national committees, which are present in 10 Council of Europe member states.⁸³

129. Other UN agencies are continuing to work for gender equality and empowerment, such as the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Children's Fund and the United Nations Population Fund. The Human Rights Council special rapporteur on violence against women and the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General on sexual violence in armed conflict also play a key role. I also wish to welcome the appointment by the Human Rights Council, in March 2011, of the five members of the Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice.

130. To date, the Council of Europe has signed co-operation agreements with United Nations specialised agencies such as the International Labour Organization (1951), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (1952), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (1952 and 2007), the World Health Organization (1952), UNESCO (1952), and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) (1956). In addition, the Council of Europe works closely with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the United Nations Development Programme. Although co-operation with UNIFEM was not formalised, representatives from both organisations have attended co-ordination and discussion meetings in order to facilitate day-to-day co-operation. United Nations General Assembly Resolution 63/14 encourages the continuation and development of this co-operation, including to combat violence against women.⁸⁴

131. Co-operation between UN Women and the Council of Europe could be formalised through an exchange of letters between the Secretary General of the Council of Europe and the UN Women Executive Director. Parliamentarians could have a specific role in promoting the work of both organisations in their own countries and undertaking to provide assistance in finding political and financial support. Such co-operation could be used to promote knowledge of Council of Europe instruments for the protection of women's rights worldwide and possibly to encourage accession. Knowledge of landmark judgments of the European Court of Human Rights might also be promoted through this channel.

9. Conclusions and recommendations

132. In this report, I have taken stock of the current situation as regards the implementation of women's rights worldwide. I have relied on benchmarks such as the periodic reviews of the World Conferences on the Status of Women, the state of implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals. All of them show that progress is slow. In fact, in many areas, there is no progress, but a significant standstill and in others even a setback.

80. Address to the French National Assembly, Paris, 23 March 2011.

81. www.unwomen.org/about-us/faq/#budget.

82. www.unwomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/2011_pledges_UN_Women_core_resources.pdf.

83. Austria, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom, www.unwomen-usnc.org/aunifemcommitt.

84. www.coe.int/t/der/docs/UNARES6314_en.pdf.

133. The Assembly should call for a renewed impetus in making women's rights become a reality. It is essential that states bridge the gap between commitments and tangible results.

134. Inequality and discrimination against women are systematic and widespread in all areas. However, addressing inequality and discrimination in some of them is of particular importance because it can have an impact on the enjoyment of other rights. It is obvious, therefore, that women's right to life, health and physical integrity should be a priority concern, along with their right to live free from violence and to be given access to instruments for political and economic empowerment, and above all education.

135. Unfortunately, it is difficult not to have the impression of a hierarchy between human rights and between different Millennium Development Goals, and that the implementation of those human rights and of MDGs which most affect women's lives is lagging behind.

136. This reminds me of the thinking of the ethnologist and anthropologist Françoise Héritier, who has pointed out how male dominance is a constant feature of all human societies, based on sexual discrimination which places women in a position of inferiority to men.

137. If this is the case, as Ms Héritier says, we have to dissolve the hierarchy. We have to change people's mentality. We have to ensure that our governments are held accountable for lack of effort, lack of political will and failure to deliver what they have promised, namely to protect women's rights and enhance their status. We have to push women's rights up to the top of national and global agendas. We must make our governments accountable, also to women.

138. As politicians, we are in a privileged position to bring about this change, by working for women's rights at national level, supporting the Council of Europe's efforts to promote equal rights and dignity for women and men, and helping UN Women, the new agency which gives a voice to women worldwide, to play its important role.