



INTERNATIONAL LAW
JOURNAL

**WHITE BLACK
LEGAL LAW
JOURNAL
ISSN: 2581-
8503**

Peer - Reviewed & Refereed Journal

The Law Journal strives to provide a platform for discussion of International as well as National Developments in the Field of Law.

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GENDER INEQUALITY: A CRITICAL STUDY IN THE GLOBAL CONTEXT

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INTRODUCTION:

Without any shred of doubt, gender inequality still exists in several parts of the world. Women continue to earn less than men in the formal labour sector, are more likely to live in poverty, are less likely to engage in formal employment, and perform a greater proportion of work in the home sector when taking into account the aspects of economic gender inequality. Especially, there are numerous elements of social gender inequality, some of which are more negative to men than to women: Women are more likely to experience domestic abuse and sexual assault, while men are more likely to experience violence, incarceration, and disability; in certain nations, men have lower educational attainment than women, while in other nations, the pattern is changed. If societies fail to invest equally in the education and training of men and women, do not provide equal possibilities for engagement in more productive labour, and fail to promote equal progression to higher positions over time, eventually it is a basic violation of human rights.

MEANING:

Basically, when women and men have the same rights and opportunities in every aspect of life, such as social interactions, economic participation, and decision-making, and when the different behaviours, goals, and needs of women and men are equally valued and preferred, we can say that gender equality has been reached. (Barnat N, 2019)³

UNDERSTANDING GENDER INEQUALITY:

Gender inequality is surfacing throughout the entire world. Economic gender inequality continues, with women earning less than men in formal work, living in poverty, being less likely to engage in formal work, and doing more work in the household sector. Political gender

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³ Barnat N, MacFeely S, Peltola A. Comparing Global Gender Inequality Indices: How Well Do They Measure the Economic Dimension? J Sustain Res. 2019; 2: e190016. <https://doi.org/10.20900/jsr20190016>, Accessed on 26 July, 2025.

inequality is characterised by women's inadequate representation in elections and corporation appointments.

CHARACTERISTICS OF GENDER INEQUALITY:⁴

Gender inequality differs from other types of inequality, including class, caste, and race. Gender disparity is rooted in disparities, both real and socially created.

Bina Agrawal has identified three specific characteristics of gender inequality

- a. Gender inequality dwells not only outside the household but also centrally within it;
- b. gender inequality stems not only from pre-existing differences in economic endowments (wealth, income, etc.) between women and men, but also from pre-existing gendered social norms and social perceptions, i.e., the inequalities are also ideologically embedded; and
- c. Gender inequalities not only pre-exist in the noted forms, but they can also arise from newly defined rules and procedures that structure the functioning of the governance institution itself. For instance, the rules that guide the governance of CPR (Common Pool Resources) institutions can explicitly or implicitly exclude particular sections of the community, such as women, from its decision-making bodies, or its benefits.

GENDER EQUALITY IN GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE:

There are multiple definitions of gender equality. Gender Equality at the international level generally refers to the principle that it is defined as equal rights, duties, and opportunities for men, women, girls, and boys. Equality does not imply sameness but that the rights of women and men will not depend on the gender they were born with. Gender equality involves considering the interests, needs, and goals of all genders also recognising the variety of categories. Gender equality should involve both genders, as neither men nor women are a uniform group.

According to Article 1 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, "**All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights**". Gender equality is a fundamental human right.⁵

⁴ Dastidar, zulfqar Ashraf wani and Prof. Ruchi Gosh, "Gender Inequality- A global Issue", 2018, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/331009315 International Journal of Research Gender inequality- A Global issue](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/331009315_International_Journal_of_Research_Gender_inequality-A_Global_issue), accessed on 26 July, 2025.

⁵ Barnat N, MacFeely S, Peltola, "Comparing Global Gender Inequality Indices: How Well Do They Measure the Economic Dimension, J Sustain Res. 2019; 1: e190016, https://sustainability.hapres.com/htmls/JSR_1114_Detail.html, accessed on 25 July, 2018.

According to the International Labour Organisation, gender equality means that men and women have equal opportunities to enjoy their full human rights and contribute to and benefit from economic, social, cultural, and political growth. It depends on women and men being treated equally in the household, community, and society.⁶

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF GENDER EQUALITY:⁷

Gender equality has not always been accepted as a fundamental human right. For centuries, women and girls were denied access to many aspects of life, including voting, education, employment, and legal protection. Men maintained the most influence in politics, religion, and society, while women were supposed to focus primarily on family and domestic responsibilities. This disparity was strongly rooted in laws, traditions, and social systems throughout cultures and nations. Although some individual women fought for their rights throughout the world, it wasn't until the twentieth century that the worldwide movement for gender equality gained significant popularity.

The first big attempt took place in the late 1800s and early 1900s, when women in the United States, United Kingdom, and parts of Europe began to seek the right to vote. The effort, also known as the women's suffrage movement, resulted in women gaining voting rights in numerous nations from the early to mid-twentieth century. Even after acquiring the right to vote, women continued to endure discrimination in work, education, and the judicial system. The fight continued, particularly after World War II, when women entered the workforce in large numbers and demonstrated their ability to contribute equally to society. **The United Nations** (UN) played a significant part in making gender equality a worldwide concern. When the United Nations was established in 1945, it became the first international organisation to formally recognise gender equality as a human right. The UN Charter expressly states that men and women are equals. In the years that followed, the United Nations began organising global conferences and signing international treaties that strengthened women's rights. In 1979, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was adopted, which represented an important turning point. CEDAW is commonly referred to as

⁶ Barnat N, MacFeely S, Peltola, "Comparing Global Gender Inequality Indices: How Well Do They Measure the Economic Dimension," *J Sustain Res.* 2019;1: e190016, https://sustainability.hapres.com/htmls/JSR_1114_Detail.html, accessed on 25 July, 2018.

⁷ "Gender Equality, United Nations, <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/gender-equality>. Accessed on 28, July, 2025

the "international bill of rights for women." It demanded governments eliminate discrimination against women in all aspects of life, including politics, health, education, and employment.

Another watershed occasion was the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, when 189 countries agreed on a particular strategy to advance women's rights. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action established a strong global framework for gender equality. Following this, several countries enacted laws to protect women from abuse, promote their employment, and expand their political engagement.

In 2015, the United Nations took another significant step by including gender equality as one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) under Goal 5. This objective includes not just legal equality but also the prevention of violence against women, the sharing of unpaid care work, the protection of female reproductive rights, and the promotion of women's leadership opportunities. Despite these efforts, the world is still far from reaching complete gender equality. Discrimination, violence, and societal hurdles are still prevalent in many areas of the world, and progress has been gradual, particularly in low-income and conflict-affected nations.

In conclusion, the history of gender equality at the global level has progressed from a period of significant disparities to a rising worldwide commitment to women's rights. The United Nations has played a key role in promoting gender equality as a global goal. Although progress has been made, more work is required to achieve true equality for all genders.

ROOT CAUSES OF GENDER INEQUALITY:

Gender inequality stems from a variety of interrelated basic concerns that continue to harm women and individuals of different genders across the world. To achieve real gender equality, nations must address these concerns completely, with fair legislation, equitable opportunities, and the elimination of discriminatory ideas and behaviours.

1) Patriarchal social norms and social beliefs:

Norms are based on the belief that males are inherently superior to women and should dominate in all aspects of life—family, politics, the economy, and religion—while women are expected to be dependent, caring, and limited to domestic responsibilities. Individuals are socialised into gender stereotypes from an early age, with girls being discouraged from

seeking education, leadership, or financial independence. Patriarchal ideals demonstrate themselves in activities such as son preference, dowry, female genital mutilation, and limits on women's mobility and attire. Even in modern, globalised cultures, such views shape laws, media representations, relationships at work, and family structures, restricting women's rights and freedoms. These outdated but persisting opinions normalise discrimination, minimise women's voices, and hinder gender-sensitive changes, making it impossible to achieve real equality on a global scale.

2) Economic disparities and gender pay gap:

Despite globalisation's vast economic opportunities, women in most countries continue to earn less than men for the same or similar work because of systemic gender bias, wage disparity, and an underestimation of female-dominated industries such as care giving, education, and garment work. Women are frequently over-represented in informal and insecure jobs that lack social protection, job stability, or access to financial resources. They also have job problems because of care giving promises and are not represented in high-paying leadership positions. Multinational firms and worldwide supply chains frequently take advantage of inexpensive female labour in undeveloped nations, neglecting to secure equal pay or safe working conditions. This economic imbalance not only restricts women's financial freedom, but it also contributes to greater gender disparities in health, education, and political engagement.

According to the ILO Global Wage Report for 2018/2019, women earn 20% less than males due to factors such as education gaps, pay discrimination, and being a parent, resulting in what the ILO refers to as a "wage penalty." The most current assessment, published for 2024-2025, indicates minimal development. Gender pays disparities exist even in prosperous nations like the United States. Women working full-time earn (on average) 84 cents for every man's dollar, resulting in less support from Social Security and pensions. Women are more likely than males to live in poverty throughout the world, and closing the worldwide gender wage gap might require 170 years if present trends continue.

3) Unequal access to education:

Despite worldwide promises of universal education, millions of girls still face obstacles such as poverty, child marriage, cultural norms, gender-based violence, a lack of sanitary facilities, and restricted access to digital technologies. Many countries continue to prioritise educating boys over girls, resulting in poorer enrolment, retention, and completion rates for

females at all levels of school. This disparity is particularly pronounced in rural communities and conflict zones, where schools may be dangerous or unavailable. Even when girls are enrolled, they frequently face gender-biased curricula and teacher attitudes that limit their opportunities. **In Afghanistan**, where secondary and higher education for women is prohibited, 1.4 million Afghan girls are unable to attend school. Inequality in education harms not only girls but entire societies by raising the probability of poverty, child mortality, and violence.

4) Limited access to healthcare and reproductive rights:

In certain nations, stringent laws and stigma hinder access to abortion and family planning services. Poor reproductive health care increases maternal mortality and makes it difficult for women to attend school and work. Women who lack control over their reproductive choices are unable to fully engage in social and economic life.

According to the Institute for Women's Policy Research, abortion limitations in the United States (which repealed federal abortion rights in 2022) reduce a woman's lifetime earnings and make it less likely that she would complete her education. Researchers have also discovered a correlation between domestic violence and abortion restrictions; when women can't have abortions, rates of assault by partners rise. Threats to reproductive rights exacerbate existing gender inequalities.

5) Digital gender divide:

The digital gender divide refers to the disparity between men's and women's access to digital technology, internet use, and digital literacy, particularly in developing countries. Women are less likely to own mobile phones, use the internet, or obtain digital education, which limits their involvement in the digital economy. This disparity limits their access to online education, job opportunities, financial services, and health information. Social rules and regulations, security concerns, and economics increase the disparity. In a globalised society that is becoming increasingly reliant on technology, this divide contributes to existing gender disparities. Crossing it is critical for inclusive growth and women's empowerment.

In summary, gender inequality is a complicated and profoundly established issue resulting from unequal access to education, economic disparities, discriminatory legislation, gender-based violence, restricted healthcare and political involvement, and detrimental societal norms.

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF GENDER INEQUALITY IN DEVELOPED AND UNDERDEVELOPED COUNTRIES: -

Gender inequality in developed nations:

Gender disparity in developed countries such as the United States, Germany, France, Japan, and Canada is subtle and systematic rather than overt and severe. In these nations, women enjoy about equal access to formal education, career prospects, healthcare, and legal rights as males. However, deep-rooted disparities continue in numerous forms. The gender pay gap remains a major issue, with women frequently earning less than men for the same work or being over-represented in low-wage, care-related industries. Women are similarly under-represented in senior leadership positions in politics, business, and education.

Furthermore, developed countries continue to suffer with unequal divisions of domestic labour, with women carrying the majority of care giving and home chores despite working full-time. Issues such as maternity leave legislation, daycares availability, and different parental expectations all contribute to the load. Even in nations where gender equality is a governmental priority, societal conventions and cultural stereotypes frequently reinforce conventional gender roles. Political representation, while improving, remains uneven, with substantially fewer women in parliaments and decision-making bodies than males.

Thus, while women in developed countries have greater legal rights and opportunities, gender inequality persists due to social frameworks, unconscious discrimination, and institutional frameworks that continue to favour males, particularly in economic and political circles.

a) Gender inequality in underdeveloped nation:

Gender inequality is far more clear, dramatic, and life-changing in underdeveloped or poor nations such as Afghanistan, Chad, South Sudan, and sections of rural India and Sub-Saharan Africa. Women and girls in these areas frequently lack even the most fundamental rights, such as access to education, healthcare, political representation, and financial independence. Patriarchal traditions dominate social and familial life, with women supposed to stay subservient, serve males, marry young, and carry children regardless of their personal goals. Many poor nations deny females education due to poverty, early marriage, or damaging cultural beliefs that prioritise boys' education over girls. Even when females attend school, they have a high dropout rate owing to home

duties, a lack of safety, or a lack of menstrual hygiene facilities. Women in the labour market are frequently unpaid or underpaid informal labourers who lack legal protection, maternity benefits, and safe working conditions.

Reproductive rights are limited, and women generally have little voice in family planning or healthcare decisions. Property and inheritance rules frequently favour males, making women dependant and defence less. Women in poor nations suffer institutional, cultural, and physical challenges that deepen gender inequality in the absence of adequate legal enforcement, knowledge, or resources. Their lives are formed by survival, subordination, and quiet, making the fight for equality not only difficult, but also hazardous.

INTERNATIONAL LEGAL FRAMEWORKS REGARDING GENDER INEQUALITY: ⁸

The international legal framework addressing gender inequality includes a comprehensive set of agreements, declarations, and institutional actions aimed at strengthening women's rights and achieving gender justice. The CEDAW Convention, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and the United Nations Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace, and Security have all had a significant impact on global gender governance. The right to equality and non-discrimination has been further strengthened by foundational human rights treaties such as the ICCPR and ICESCR. Economic inequities are addressed by equal pay rules under labour safeguards such as the ILO Convention No. 100. Non-governmental organisations also make a substantial contribution to gender equality via campaigning, policy influence, and community action.

➤ **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW):**

CEDAW, known as the women's international bill of rights, was accepted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1979. Its primary goal is to promote gender equality. This is one of the most important human rights offers ever (Mishra, 2024) adopted. The document includes a comprehensive set of principles and requirements for abolishing discrimination against women in several areas such as politics, work, education, and healthcare.

⁸ Mishra, Anamika." Legal issues related to gender equality: an analytical approach on the basis of global justice", International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts (IJCRT),2024, [loopholes in gender inq.pdf](#), Accessed on 30 July 2025.

International legal frameworks like CEDAW offer a comprehensive framework to promote gender equality globally. The Convention's signature, ratification, and accession demonstrate states' commitment to eliminating discrimination against women, promoting gender equality, and ensuring equitable distribution of benefits.

➤ **Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action:**

The Beijing Declaration, a major declaration from the 1995 'Fourth World Conference on Women³,' advocates for systematic efforts to promote gender equality and women's empowerment.

➤ **UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security**

The Platform for Action addresses 12 critical areas, including violence against women and girls, the role of men and boys in achieving gender equality, discrimination in education for women with family responsibilities or pregnant learners, and access to health and sexuality information. It also raises concerns about child mortality.

➤ **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR):**

The resolution announced at the Fourth World Conference in 2000 highlights the importance of women's participation in conflict management, resettling, and reconstruction efforts. It protects women in violent situations and recognises their contributions to peace-building. The ICCPR, enacted by the UN in 1966, covers more than only gender issues. The article ensures that men and women have equal protection against discrimination based on gender, and that they have equal rights before national and international courts, including equality under the law.

➤ **International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR):**

The ICESCR, like the ICCPR (which was established in 1966), includes provisions related to gender equality, such as working conditions, education, and healthcare. The ILO Convention of 1951 introduced the idea of equal pay for equal labour for men and women.

➤ **ILO Convention No. 100 on Equal Remuneration for Men and Women**

These tools establish a political basis for promoting gender equality and women's rights globally. Countries that signed these treaties should align their legislation and policies with the underlying principles.

➤ **Gender equality through Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs)**

Advocacy for gender equality involves tackling structural inequities and supporting successful social change. They work relentlessly to create awareness about gender

discrimination, advocate for regulations that safeguard equal rights, and support discriminated individuals. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) do many activities, including gender-related education initiatives. The organisation offers information and legal assistance to empower women in the community. Family planning guidelines have become a key concern.

In summary, True equality, however, necessitates not just legislative obligations but also their efficient execution, global collaboration, and ongoing monitoring in order to close persisting gender inequalities throughout the world.

LEGAL AND STRUCTURAL GAPS IN ACHIEVING GLOBAL GENDER EQUALITY:

Despite the presence of various international treaties, agreements, and declarations advocating gender equality, such as CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action, and SDG 5, gender disparity persists across the world. The discrepancy between legislative obligations and actual implementation exposes various flaws in the international structure itself.

- **Lack of Binding Enforcement Mechanisms**

Many international treaties, such as the CEDAW and the Beijing Declaration, establish moral and political commitments rather than strict legal requirements. Although states ratify these contracts, they frequently avoid accountability owing to a lack of severe enforcement or penalty measures. As a result, governments can disregard or postpone implementation without risking serious penalties.

- **Cultural and Religious Reservations by Member States:**

Several nations ratify international gender equality treaties with specific reservations, notably about clauses that they believe violate their cultural, religious, or traditional beliefs. These exceptions considerably undermine the universal implementation of gender equality rules, allowing discriminatory behaviours to persist under the cover of cultural sovereignty

- **Inconsistent Implementation and Domestic Translation:**

Even when governments make international commitments, they frequently fail to adopt such norms into domestic legislation and practices. The discrepancy between international commitment and national enforcement results in uneven safeguards for women and marginalised genders. Local law systems often lack the will or competence to implement systemic gender changes.

- **Weak Monitoring and Reporting Systems:**

The CEDAW Committee relies on self-reporting from nations, which might be incomplete, biased, or obsolete. There is little independent verification, and civil society engagement in monitoring is generally insufficient. This impedes the accurate assessment of a country's development and causes delays in remedial efforts.

- **Neglect of Intersectional and Emerging Gender Issues:**

Intersectional and emerging gender concerns are largely overlooked in most international frameworks, including discrimination based on race, caste, disability, sexuality, and gender identity. Emerging problems, such as online gender-based violence, reproductive rights, and economic discrimination in the gig economy, are also not sufficiently handled by the present global system.

To conclude, addressing these gaps would need better global accountability structures, inclusive policies, and a greater commitment from nations beyond simple ratification.

LANDMARK CASES:

1. CEDAW Committee – A.T. v. Hungary (2005)⁹

A.T., a lady from Hungary, has been exposed to years of domestic violence by her spouse. Despite numerous petitions for protection, the Hungarian legal system did not offer restraining orders or meaningful remedies. Whether Hungary breached the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) by not protecting A.T. from gender-based violence?

The Committee determined that Hungary breached Articles 2 and 5 of the CEDAW for failing to take necessary legal action to safeguard A.T. and prevent further abuse. It urged immediate legislative change.

2. Opuz v. Turkey (European Court of Human Rights, 2009)¹⁰

Nahide Opuz was frequently assaulted by her husband, despite many complaints to Turkish authorities. Her mother was later murdered by the same guy. Did Turkey fail in its duty to protect Opuz and her mother from domestic violence, violating their human rights?

⁹ United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. *A.T. v. Hungary*, Communication No. 2/2003, 26 Jan. 2005, UN Doc. CEDAW/C/32/D/2/2003.

¹⁰ European Court of Human Rights. *Opuz v. Turkey*, Application No. 33401/02, Judgment, 9 June 2009.

The European Court of Human Rights decided that Turkey breached Articles 2 (right to life), 3 (prohibition of torture), and 14 (non-discrimination) of the European Convention on Human Rights.

3. **Alyne da Silva Pimentel v. Brazil (2011)**¹¹

Alyne, a Brazilian Afro-descendant lady, died as a result of inadequate maternity health care. Her family alleged the government neglected to offer adequate medical care. Whether Brazil breached CEDAW by failing to provide timely and high-quality maternity healthcare, especially to marginalised women?

The CEDAW Committee found Brazil in violation of its duties and emphasised nations' responsibility to provide non-discriminatory healthcare access.

4. **Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan (India, 1997)**¹²

Upper-caste males' gang-raped Bhanwari Devi, a social worker, in revenge for her attempts to thwart a child marriage. There was no clear legal framework in India to deal with sexual harassment in the workplace. Whether the lack of legislation governing workplace sexual harassment violated women's basic rights under the Indian Constitution?

The Supreme Court used international law, notably CEDAW, to establish guidelines for avoiding sexual harassment at work—the "Vishaka Guidelines"—until legislation was established.

SUGGESTIONS FOR ELIMINATING GENDER INEQUALITY

To eradicate gender inequality on a worldwide basis, governments and institutions must prioritise the enforcement of equal rights via comprehensive legislative changes that provide equal income, education, and political involvement for all women. To break down biases, educational facilities ought to teach gender sensitivity training at an early age. Global organisations must finance and support grassroots efforts driven by women to guarantee representation and inclusion. International accords, such as CEDAW, must be properly enforced and monitored via accountability systems. Media should be used to modify narratives about gender roles. Finally, engaging men and boys as allies is critical to creating an inclusive and fair society for all.

¹¹ United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. *Alyne da Silva Pimentel Teixeira v. Brazil*, Communication No. 17/2008, 25 July 2011, UN Doc. CEDAW/C/49/D/17/2008

¹² *Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan*. AIR 1997 SC 3011, Supreme Court of India, 13 Aug. 1997.

CONCLUSION: -

Gender inequality remains a deeply built worldwide issue that affects people in both developed and developing countries. Despite advances in legal frameworks and community understanding, persistent cultural norms, economic imbalances, and systemic flaws impede real equality. Addressing these issues needs global collaboration, inclusive governance, and the destruction of patriarchal systems. Empowering women via education, representation, and equitable opportunity is more than a moral imperative; it is also a road to long-term success. A fair and equal world can only be realised if gender equality becomes a global priority, supported by action at all levels of society.

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