



Universal Periodic Review: Stakeholder Report

Country in Review- United States of America

Status of Gender Equity and SDG5 by 2030 in the United States

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The Global Freedom Group is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to amplifying the voices of women & girls in public decision-making processes. The organization aims to inspire women & girls worldwide to assume leadership roles across various public spheres. In addition to its advocacy efforts, the Global Freedom Group offers educational & mentoring programs, such as the Global Freedom Exchange. This initiative provides dynamic opportunities for emerging & established women leaders who are actively engaged in combating human trafficking. The Global Freedom Group strives to bridge the gap between women, girls, & policymakers, working towards enhanced human security & social justice.

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Executive Summary

Overview

The following report provides an overview of policies affecting women's rights in the United States, focusing on key areas that have significant implications for gender equality: access to reproductive healthcare, a national childcare framework, & violence against women. It evaluates existing legal frameworks, challenges, & recent policy shifts in these areas to advance women's rights & gender justice. This report addresses & offers recommendations under four key themes:

- A. Advancing Reproductive Health Rights for All Women.
- B. Creation of a U.S. National Framework for Quality Childcare.
- C. Ensuring Equal Opportunities for Women through Objective & Competitive Process Mechanisms.
- D. Underreporting & Funding Cuts: A Dangerous Combination for Domestic Violence Victims.

Methodology

This UPR report examines recent U.S. policy shifts related to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 on gender equality. It focuses on policies affecting women's rights, violence against women, & access to reproductive health, particularly for marginalized groups such as women of color & low-income individuals. The report also discusses global implications & compares U.S. policies with international progress, concluding with recommendations for enhancing women's rights & well-being.

A: Advancing Reproductive Health Rights for All Women

A1: Overview

In June 2022, the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, allowing states to set their regulations on reproductive health. This decision reversed nearly 50 years of legal precedent & led to a mix of responses: some states are preserving access to reproductive care, while others are enacting restrictive policies that significantly impact women. However, the timeliness of access is a crucial factor often overlooked in reproductive policy, which is essential for its effectiveness.

A2: Current Policies

A2-1: Abortion Bans: Post *Roe*, we have 12 states with nearly complete abortion bans, which affects access to safe abortion care (1).

A2-2: Criminalization: The criminalization of abortion, including miscarriage & life-threatening medical issues, has become a public health crisis. In the US, nearly 24 states enforce strict abortion bans, limiting access to reproductive healthcare providers in those areas.

A3: Key Issues

A3-1: Impact on Marginalized Groups: These policy shifts in various states post-Dobbs decision disproportionately affect low-income women & women of color, who may not have the financial means to travel to states where abortion is still legal. Access to safe & legal abortions may now be severely limited for those who live in restrictive states, exacerbating inequalities.

A3-2: Criminalization of abortion access impacts the timely access to healthcare related to pregnancies, causing confusion among healthcare providers & delaying the life-saving medical care for pregnant people, which can impact the maternal mortality rates further, especially in states with restrictive laws. The number of pregnant people who were prosecuted post-Roe has increased & disproportionately affected minority & low-income individuals.

A3-3: The CEDAW & ICCPR protect women's rights to life, health, & reproductive autonomy. The reversal of Roe v. Wade & the criminalization of abortion violates international human rights standards, recognized by the UN & its advocates as a significant setback for women's rights.

A3-4: A National Institute of Health study found disparities in access to contraceptive services for Black, Hispanic, White, & formerly incarcerated women in Alabama, Louisiana, & Mississippi. Appointments for formerly incarcerated patients were 5% lower, & 11% lower for those on Medicaid. Supporting women's reproductive autonomy is vital for their economic security & protection from exploitation. The relationship between race, incarceration, & contraceptive access needs more focus, & national data collection can help drive policy initiatives. Improved legislation is essential for enhancing contraceptive accessibility for socially & economically marginalized women.

A5: Recommendations

A5-1: Updating policies at the federal & state levels to provide provisions that can enhance the health and well-being of pregnant women and preemptively address factors that may contribute to poor overall pregnancy outcomes.

A5-2: Provide legal protections for healthcare professionals who offer pregnancy-related healthcare as a result of Roe versus Wade overturning.

A5-3: Increase funding for family planning services, with a priority on timely access to contraceptive methods & maternal health programs, to reduce unintended pregnancies & provide individuals with the tools they need to make informed reproductive decisions.

B. Creation of a U.S. National Framework for Quality Childcare.

B1: Overview

The absence of adequate & safe childcare is a global crisis that hinders women's full participation in civil society in the United States. Studies show that most unpaid care in the home is disproportionately absorbed by women & mothers (6). The absence of family-friendly policy initiatives stifles economic development & growth at the local, state, & national levels due to a limited or total lack of participation in the workforce for families who are severely constrained as caregivers. The lack of adequate & safe childcare is a global crisis that limits women's participation in civil society in the United States. UNICEF defines early childhood care as involving various forms of unpaid work, including childcare & household tasks. Families, especially those from low- & middle-income levels, face heightened challenges due to the costs & accessibility of childcare. The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency suggests that addressing the burden of unaffordable or inaccessible care involves recognizing & redistributing unpaid domestic work.

B2: Current Policies

As recent as 2022, during the 66th session, the Commission agreed that countries should “take all appropriate measures to recognize, reduce & redistribute women’s & girls’ disproportionate

share of unpaid care & domestic work by promoting work-life balance, the equal sharing of responsibilities between women & men within households & men's & boys' equitable sharing of responsibilities to care & household work, including men's responsibilities as fathers & caregivers, through flexibility in working arrangements, without reductions in labor & social protections (5)."

B3: Key Issues

B3-1: Infrastructure: Shapes accessibility to childcare, & the impact of inaccessibility is a barrier to employment, quality childcare, & safe childcare options that allow parents & families to generate income.

B3-2: Quality of Care: Childcare centers that are safe & have adequate rooms that support the appropriate cognitive milestones & learning during critical formative stages of a child's life. As babies, toddlers, & children grow during the first five years, it is necessary to stimulate the four stages of cognitive development. The first two stages include & are not limited to cultivating & identifying potential issues with senses, motor actions, language, & understanding of concepts & ideas. If some of these stages are not appropriately nurtured, it can impact the latter two stages as children develop critical thinking & problem-solving skills.

B3-3: Cost & Affordability- High Costs- The average annual cost of child care in the US is approximately \$10,900 per child.

B4: Income Burden

B4-1: Childcare costs can consume a significant portion of family income, ranging from 8.9% to 16.0% of the median family income for full-day care.

B4-2: Affordability Challenges: Many families struggle to afford childcare, with some spending more than 24% of their income on it.

B5: Supply & Demand

B5-1: High Demand: A significant portion of children under age 6 have parents available in the workforce, increasing the demand for childcare.

B5-2: Limited Supply: Childcare is scarce in some areas, leading to "childcare deserts" where supply doesn't meet demand.

B5-3: FCC Decline: The number of licensed family childcare (FCC) homes has declined, although the number of licensed childcare centers has rebounded to pre-pandemic levels.

B5-4: Non-Traditional Care: FFN providers are more likely to offer care during non-traditional hours, such as evenings, overnights, & weekends, than center-based providers.

B6: Other Relevant Statistics

B6-1: Childcare Market Size: The US childcare market size was estimated at USD 61.70 billion in 2023 & is expected to reach USD 65.15 billion in 2024.

B6-2: Staff-to-Child Ratios: Childcare centers typically have staff-to-child ratios that are lower for younger children, with one adult caring for no more than three infants, four toddlers, and seven preschoolers.

B6-3: Wages of Childcare Professionals: Childcare professionals in centers earn an average annual wage of \$12.24, or \$25,460.

B6-4: Childcare Costs by Age: Infant care is often more expensive than care for older children.

B6-5: Childcare Costs as a Percentage of Income: Childcare costs can range from 7.3% of a married family's income in Mississippi to 16.7% in California.

B4: Recommendations

Treat childcare workers with dignity by creating a national childcare framework that recognizes their critical role in enabling a stable workforce & strong national security. Customers include not only working citizens but also military members & families.

C. Ensuring Equal Opportunities for Women through Objective & Competitive Process Mechanisms.

C1: Overview

Recommend presenting opportunities in government &/or civil society where UNSCR 1325 can be implemented.

C2: Women, Peace, & Security Act of 2017

This landmark legislation, signed into law in 2017, established a comprehensive framework for U.S. policy on WPS, making the United States the first country to have such a law. It asserted that women should meaningfully participate in conflict prevention, resolution, & post-conflict relief & that the United States should be the global leader in promoting these areas.

C3: U.S. Strategy on Women, Peace, & Security (2019)

This strategy, released by the Trump administration in June 2019, outlines the U.S. government's approach to implementing the WPS agenda & recognizes the benefits of including women & girls as agents of peace through political, economic, & social empowerment.

C3-1: Metrics should be implemented to include milestones, performance & process, & progress toward achieving the following objectives:

1. Women are more prepared & increasingly able to participate in efforts that promote stable & lasting peace.”
2. Women & girls are safer, better protected, & have equal access to government & private assistance programs, including from the United States, international partners, & host nations; &
3. The United States & partner governments have improved institutionalization & capacity to ensure sustainable & long-lasting WPS efforts.”

C4: U.S. Strategy & National Action Plan on Women, Peace, & Security (2023)

This strategy builds upon the previous strategy & outlines the U.S. government's approach to implementing the WPS agenda, focusing on five Lines of Effort: participation, protection, relief,

response, & recovery, integration & institutionalization, & partnerships.

C5: Key Issues

C5-1: Since the new administration took office in 2025, there has been a notable lack of emphasis on implementing the Women, Peace, & Security Strategic Plan.

C5-2: The Department of Defense is a critical department needed for implementing the WPS strategy but has yet to implement the DoD's WPS requirements by releasing a DoD Instruction.

C5-3: Incorporate WPS into all national security plans, including "Nothing about us, without us." Everyone from the population must be included for a greater success rate.

C5-4: Women are not regularly included in peace negotiations. By excluding 50% of the population, you are missing critical parts of the peace solution.

C6: Recommendations

C6-1: Continue to emphasize & hold all federal government departments accountable in accordance with the WPS Strategic Plan.

C6-2. Implement the Department of Defense policy across all components of the Department of Defense in accordance with the WPS Strategy.

C6-3. All departments with a role in WPS are required to submit an annual report on the status of implementing the WPS Strategic Plan & provide all required metrics.

C6-4: Include women in peace negotiations. (Should be expanded to include various generations, races, ethnicities, demographics, and other relevant groups.)

D. Underreporting & Funding Cuts: A Dangerous Combination for Domestic Violence Victims.

D1: Overview

D1-1: Domestic violence in the United States is a widespread issue, with significant underreporting masking its accurate scale. Many victims, both women & men, do not report incidents, which skews understanding of the problem. While the focus has often been on female victims, men also face considerable challenges, including societal stigma & limited resources, when seeking help. This underreporting further clouds awareness of the full extent of domestic violence in the U.S.

D2: Current Law

D2-1: The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), first passed in 1994, is a crucial U.S. federal law aimed at reducing domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, & stalking. It funds victim services such as shelters & legal assistance & mandates training for law enforcement to improve responses. VAWA enhances legal protections for victims, including access to protection orders & stricter penalties for offenders. Initially focused on women, it now includes protections for men, LGBTQ+ individuals, & marginalized communities.

D3: Key Issues

D3-1: Underreporting skews the understanding of domestic violence in communities, leading to inadequate responses & resource allocation. This trend, along with a lack of accurate data, results in critical funding & services not being directed where they are most needed.

D3-2: Funding cuts to the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) & domestic violence programs are worsening conditions for survivors. Federal & state reductions have resulted in shelter closures, decreased support services, & layoffs in nonprofits, particularly affecting rural & underserved communities. Key consequence: Without adequate funding, essential support systems like shelters & hotlines may close or become overwhelmed, limiting survivors' options for safety & discouraging them from seeking help.

D3-3: The Dangerous Synergy: When underreporting & funding cuts converge, the impact on survivors of domestic violence intensifies. Victims are less likely to seek help when services are limited, leading to unmet needs & reduced chances of escaping abuse. Additionally, law enforcement may struggle to respond effectively due to insufficient resources, perpetuating the cycle of violence.

D4: Recommendations

D4-1: Prioritize Long-Term & Sustainable Funding for Domestic Violence Services Advocate for guaranteed long-term funding for programs under the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) & local domestic violence initiatives.

D4-2: Empower Survivors through Better Access to Support Services by ensuring survivors have direct access to comprehensive support services, including counseling, legal aid, housing assistance, & financial resources.

D4-3: Additional focus on public awareness campaigns to educate the public on signs of domestic violence, available resources, & reporting methods.

D4-4: Invest in data collection & research to better understand the scope of underreporting & inform policy decisions & resource allocation.

D4-5: Promote stronger collaboration between governmental agencies, community organizations, healthcare providers, & private-sector entities for a coordinated response to domestic violence.

E1: Conclusions

E1-1: Human Rights

The issues of reproductive health rights, equal opportunities for women, access to childcare, & addressing domestic violence are critical human rights concerns that continue to marginalize women & children socially & economically, perpetuating pay disparities, lack of access to childcare & necessary resources that ensure full participation in academia & the workforce. These rights are essential for protecting individuals' dignity, freedom, & equality, particularly women & marginalized groups. Failing to address these issues through policy & legislation undermines the right to live free from violence & access to necessary health services. By prioritizing inclusive healthcare, equal pay, & support for survivors, the U.S. can fulfill its human rights obligations & advance these rights for all following the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The United States played a pivotal leadership role in the establishment of this universal declaration as First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt served as the chairperson of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights & is credited with changing the phrase "All men are born free & equal" to "All human beings are born free & equal" in Article 1 to include women.

E1-2: Global Implications

Following its announcement in February 2025 of potential withdrawal from the United Nations Human Rights Council, the U.S. is at a critical juncture, raising concerns about its commitment to universal human rights, particularly those of women. This withdrawal represents a shift in its leadership role in joining the world to achieve gender equality & equity by 2030. Nevertheless, it offers a chance for the U.S. to reaffirm its dedication through multilateral cooperation globally, policy directives & passing legislation. By addressing gender equality & ensuring equal access to healthcare & justice, the U.S. can serve as a powerful example for other nations striving for a more just & inclusive world.

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