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Office of the United Nations  
High Commissioner for  
Human Rights (OHCHR)

Background Guide Topic:  
Eliminating the Gender Pay Gap



Senzoku Gakuen Model United Nations February 9-10 2019  
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## Director's Note

Dear Delegates,

Thank you for joining the Beginner Committee of Japan Metropolitan Model United Nations 2021. My name is Yuka Kaneko and I will be the director of this committee. Although the situation of the world is uncertain right now, all of the chairs are looking forward to exploring the charm of Model United Nations with all of you.

This year, the Beginner Committee will be looking into the topic “Eliminating the Gender Pay Gap”. Unequal pay has been an ongoing issue in many parts of the world, with problems yet to be solved. We will mainly look at this topic within three domains: social security, culture, and economy. Delegates are required to have a clear understanding of the main topic and its subtopics. Furthermore, delegates should think what the ideal outcome of this conference is for their country.

My Model United Nations experience started about six years ago when I was living outside Japan. Over the ensuing years, I became involved in MUN, attending MUN practices and conferences around the world as a delegate and sometimes as a chair. One of the most precious experiences in MUN was participating in the New York Model United Nations last year. The confidence that every delegate showed in NYMUN was overwhelming but it also helped me develop my skills in MUN.

What one can learn from experiencing MUN can differ in terms of the region, grade, or the time of year. However, one common point crosses every MUN activity or conference: the beauty of an organization where people from all backgrounds can hold a discussion. I understand that when doing MUN, you can sometimes be really caught in the idea of a reward. However, throughout the two days, I would be delighted if delegates can understand the beauty of MUN as well as the skills needed to be a representative in the global community. Once again, we live in an era where the future is unknown. What we will be able to do and what we will not be able to do might only be known right before the conference. But with that being said, all the chairs of this committee are looking forward to exploring the topic of “Eliminating Gender Pay Gap” with all of the delegates.

Sincerely,



Yuka Kaneko,  
Director the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights  
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Japan Metropolitan Model United Nations 2020  
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## Introduction / History of Committee

Having been founded to maintain international peace, protect human rights, and to avoid war, the United Nations has always been involved in observing, reporting, and improving human rights efforts across the world.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), which began as a small division in the 1940s, is now the nerve center for human rights operations and strategies tackling unique and difficult challenges worldwide. With a mission “to work for the protection of all human rights for all people; to help empower people to realize their rights; and to assist those responsible for upholding such rights in ensuring that they are implemented”<sup>1</sup>, the OHCHR is a crucial organ of the UN.

From the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to the establishment of Human Rights Day, there is no doubt the United Nations has made progress for human rights work on an international level. However, as challenges, conflicts and issues become complex and entangled, there is a greater need for understanding each focal issue and searching for an unorthodox, ideal solution.

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<sup>1</sup> Mission Statement. (n.d.). Retrieved August 30, 2020, from <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/AboutUs/Pages/MissionStatement.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> Figure 2f from: Irimia R, Gottschling M (2016) Taxonomic revision of *Rochefortia* Sw. (Ehretiaceae, Boraginales). *Biodiversity Data Journal* 4: E7720. <https://doi.org/10.3897/BDJ.4.e7720>. (n.d.). doi:10.3897/bdj.4.e7720.figure2f

## Key Terms

Gender <sup>2</sup>

The WHO states that "Gender refers to the roles, behaviours, activities, attributes and opportunities that any society considers appropriate for girls and boys, and women and men. Gender interacts with, but is different from, the binary categories of biological sex."<sup>3</sup>

Gender Pay Gap<sup>4</sup>

"the gap in average wages paid to women compared to men, is a major cause of an overall lifetime income gap between men and women"

Human Rights<sup>5</sup>

"rights inherent to all human beings, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status"

## Current Situation

Equal pay and equal working opportunity has been a factor which people have been determined to achieve for the past few decades. “The gender pay gap represents the difference between average hourly pay for women and men before tax across the economy as a whole. It reflects ongoing discrimination and inequality in the labor market which, in practice, mainly affects women.”<sup>6</sup>

The overall pay gap has been decreasing over the past decade. Still, we continue to

<sup>3</sup> “Gender and health.” World Health Organization. <https://www.who.int/health-topics/gender>

<sup>4</sup> Tackling the Gender Pay Gap. (2016). *UN Women Policy Briefs*. doi:10.18356/c30f3d31-en

<sup>5</sup> Human Rights. (n.d.). Retrieved September 08, 2020, from <https://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/human-rights/>

<sup>6</sup> Press corner. (n.d.). Retrieved August 31, 2020, from [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/sw/IP\\_09\\_341](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/sw/IP_09_341)

see remarkably few women making it to the top of the income distribution today. Women are greatly under-represented in top income groups. The proportion of women is lower at higher income levels. Women make up only one third of the top 10% income earners and what is more, the statistic drops to only one-fifth to one-tenth of women being in the top 0.1% of earners.<sup>7</sup> Women are now better-represented in all top income groups than they were in 2000, but improvements have generally been more limited at the very top. With the exception of Australia, we see a much smaller increase in the share of women amongst the top 0.1% than amongst the top 10%.<sup>8</sup>

According to the data retrieved from the United States Census Bureau<sup>9</sup>, while women are paid 93% of what men are paid at the age of 16-24, the number falls to 75% when reaching the age of 45-54. This clearly indicates that the gender pay gap is larger for older workers. It is crucial to note that the gender pay gap is a statistic that changes during the life of a worker. In most rich countries, it's small when formal education ends and employment begins, and it increases as people get older. This is on behalf of women having higher possibilities of quitting their jobs when they either get married or have a child. The social climate in which women are supposed to be the one doing child care and housework is one of the factors which cause unequal pay. Since the idea of women

doing housework and child care has not yet vanished from society, women eventually semi-force themselves to choose child care and house work. This is often called the motherhood penalty or the childbearing penalty: the phenomenon by which women's pay decreases once they become mothers. Thus women end up in low paid jobs such as part-time jobs, below their skill levels, and with fewer progression.

In addition to these factors, fundamentally, women are paid less than men for the same role. Regardless of having had the same education, ability, intelligence, and career, discrepancy between the total salary of men and women remains. This must not be left overlooked and thus, in this conference, we expect delegates to present us with a solution to combat gender pay gap.

## Statement of the Problem

### *Security*

Even in the US, women are only paid "82% of what men earn."<sup>10</sup> As a result, women have a harder time paying for normal living costs, and this causes them to have a harder time repaying student loans and home loans, a major concern for many. The gender pay gap might only seem to have a small impact on females. However, it actually has a large impact if one calculates the wage difference up to retirement. In the overall retirement income, women only have 70% of what men do in the US. The accumulation of this

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<sup>7</sup>Hasell, J. (n.d.). Top incomes: More women, but still very male-dominated. Retrieved September 1, 2020, from <https://ourworldindata.org/top-incomes-more-women-but-still-very-male-dominated>

<sup>8</sup>Ortiz-Ospina, E., & Roser, M. (2018, March 21). Economic inequality by gender. Retrieved August 31, 2020, from <https://ourworldindata.org/economic-inequality-by-gender>

<sup>9</sup>Bureau, U. (2020, September 15). Historical Income Tables: People. Retrieved October 25, 2020, from

<https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/historical-income-people.html>

<sup>10</sup> Figure 2f from: Irimia R, Gottschling M (2016) Taxonomic revision of *Rocheportia* Sw. (Ehretiaceae, Boraginales). Biodiversity Data Journal 4: E7720. <https://doi.org/10.3897/BDJ.4.e7720>. (n.d.). doi:10.3897/bdj.4.e7720.figure2f

inequality leads to lower benefit levels and unbalanced roles in the family.<sup>11</sup>

Motherhood is one of the key reasons for the gender pay gap. In the US, mothers are paid 69 cents for every dollar fathers make. Referred to as the "motherhood penalty," the financial loss that mothers experience impacts caregiving and creates financial insecurity among mothers as an end result. Furthermore, this financial disparity between mothers and fathers inevitably results in women being more dependent on men for security. This makes the power balance tilt toward fathers, leading to a more severe inequality between genders. Thus a vicious cycle of inequality and insecurity occurs due to the widespread financial imbalance.

### *Cultural Factors*

A study on social role theory suggests "that sex differences and similarities in behavior reflect gender role beliefs that in turn represent people's perceptions of men's and women's social roles in the society in which they live" (Eagly & Wood, 2012, p.). Culture and the gender pay gap are closely tied to gender stereotypes and gender roles. As culture is controversial yet crucial factor in the discourse surrounding the gender pay gap, we will take a look at several cases in which culture affects gender roles.

### Japan

Japan is a country that is noted for its gender disparity and gender pay gap. Before looking at the gender pay gap, it is important to look at the cultural and

historical aspects of the issue.

When Confucian ideas were introduced during the Meiji Era, it created a foundation for societal norms and roles: "women were expected to stay within the home, as opposed to their husbands, who were expected to seek out jobs" (Belarmino & Roberts, 2019, p.2), which implemented conformity and balance as taught in Confucianism.

Japan underwent a huge cultural transformation from the Meiji era to the twentieth century; new ideas replaced Confucian ideas, and women were portrayed as warm, loving protectors of the family. Although women could choose whether they wanted to work outside of the household or not, higher education was extremely hard to access when choosing a path other than homemaking. Moreover, since patriarchy was strengthened long before the pre-World War II era, traditional beliefs (from the post-Confucian era) surrounding gender roles have remained in Japanese society.

In recent years, labor participation for women has gradually increased, as the

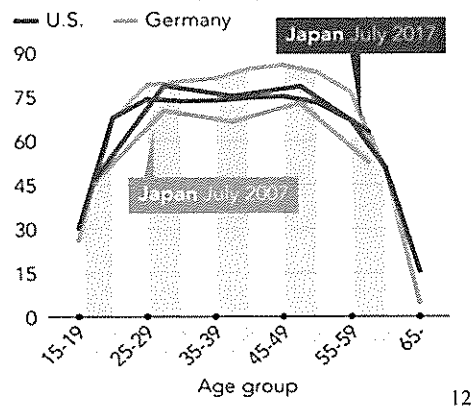
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<sup>11</sup> Figure 12.2. Gender gaps in monthly earnings are larger than gender gaps in hourly earnings. (n.d.). doi:10.1787/888933574665

infamous M-curve has slightly lessened.

### Japan rounding up its M-graph (in percent)

Female labor force participation rate (ILO 2015)



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In recent years there has been much discourse and discussion surrounding gender roles in Japanese society and in the workplace, especially after the former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe introduced “womenomics,”<sup>13</sup> promoting and promising workplace equality. Today, more than six years after to the introduction of “Womenomics,” several media sources point out how Abe’s plan was largely ineffective; *The Japan Times* reports that “negative perceptions regarding women in top leadership roles, both in politics and the private sector, remain persistent not only among Japanese men but also among women.”<sup>14</sup>

Cultural factors of the gender pay gap in Japan are closely tied to gender roles in the workplace and in the household. Moreover, historical elements of the issue should be

considered. Instead of considering certain elements of the issue (e.g. the lack of awareness), closely consider the origins of the problem, and specifically, what the OHCHR could improve on and implement.

### Estonia

Having the highest gender pay gap in the European Union, women working in Estonia earn almost 30% less than men.<sup>15</sup> Here we take a look at Estonia’s gender segregation and the policies implemented to combat the gender pay gap in Estonia.

Estonia’s former Gender Equality Commissioner Mari-Liis Sepper mentioned in an interview: “Estonians like to emphasize that gender should not be an issue when recognizing somebody’s work, when promoting or giving responsibility, etc ... current public opinion and the views of the political elite are very negative, not to say hostile, towards quotas.”<sup>16</sup> As Sepper mentioned in the interview, gender segregation in the labor force remains as the major cause of the gender pay gap in Estonia. Moreover, lawmaking is also a major issue, as there are fewer policies ensuring gender equality inside and outside the workplace, compared to other countries in the EU.

The lack of Estonian official documents on the topic of the gender pay gap clearly

<sup>12</sup> [Digital image]. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Japan-s-female-labor-force-set-to-toss-out-M-curve>

<sup>13</sup> Team, R. (2018, February 17). Reality Check: Has Shinzo Abe's 'womenomics' worked in Japan? Retrieved August 30, 2020, from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-42993519>

<sup>14</sup> *The Japan Times*. (2019, March 8). Six years into Abe's womenomics push, women in Japan still struggling to shine. Retrieved November 14, 2020 from [https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2019/03/08/national/social-](https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2019/03/08/national/social-issues/six-years-abes-womenomics-push-women-japan-still-struggling-shine/)

[issues/six-years-abes-womenomics-push-women-japan-still-struggling-shine/](https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2019/03/08/national/social-issues/six-years-abes-womenomics-push-women-japan-still-struggling-shine/)

<sup>15</sup> EU. (2020, March 3). Gender pay gap in Europe: facts and figures (infographic). Retrieved November 14, 2020 from <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/society/20200227STO73519/gender-pay-gap-in-europe-facts-and-figures-infographic>

<sup>16</sup> Gender Equality in Estonia. (2010, October 18). Retrieved November 14, 2020, from <https://news.err.ee/98113/gender-equality-in-estonia>

highlights the lack of research and laws regarding gender equality.

Information and research usually come before policymaking and lawmaking. Delegates should look into case studies conducted by government officials and think tanks.

### *Dimensionality*

Considering the two subtopics mentioned earlier in this guide, pay inequality impacts almost all dimensions of our society: Social Security, culture, GDP and economic growth. With the increase of attention being paid towards women's rights and equal pay, we must also turn to see just how much the gender pay gap constrains the world economy.

### Japan

Women's low pay may be a contributing factor in threats to global societies. In Japan, the declining birth rate is a serious issue. The declining birth rate has a major impact on the economy as it is predicted that the workforce will decline drastically in the near future. Women's low pay is at the root of this problem.

Japan ranked 111 out of 149 in the World Economic Forum's 2019 Gender Gap Index<sup>17</sup>, which benchmarks countries on their progress toward gender parity across four major areas. Among the primary

reasons for Japan's low rank in the gender gap is the pay gap between men and women which is rated 24.5 percent in 2018.<sup>18</sup> The gender wage gap in Japan is the second largest among OECD nations, surpassed only by South Korea.

The birth rate in the OECD countries corresponds to its gender pay gap. There has been data that show Japan and South Korea again ranking low in the birth rate index. In 2020, Japan ranked last out of the OECD countries with 7.30 births per 1,000 population.<sup>19</sup> This indicates that countries with larger gender parity, especially gender pay gap, have low birth rates. To put it in other words, low birth rate is a result of women's average marriage age rising. The gap between women's and men's pay has caused younger generations of Japanese women to increasingly opt to continue working rather than get married and having children at the expense of their careers. As a result, Japanese women do not have the desire to have children as much as they used to. The small number of births accelerates the decrease in Japan's population. The decline in the absolute number of births is especially stark given that Japan's population in 1899 was about one-third of its approximately 126 million people today.<sup>20</sup> With the population declining sharply, Japan is predicted to face labor shortages, which will almost certainly lead to an economic decline.

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<sup>17</sup>Global Gender Gap Report 2020. (n.d.). Retrieved September 04, 2020, from <https://www.weforum.org/reports/gender-gap-2020-report-100-years-pay-equality>

<sup>18</sup> Yamaguchi, K. (n.d.). Japan's Gender Gap – IMF Finance & Development Magazine: March 2019. Retrieved September 01, 2020, from

<https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/2019/03/gender-equality-in-japan-yamaguchi.htm>

<sup>19</sup> (2018, February 01). Retrieved September 01, 2020, from <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/345.html>

<sup>20</sup> Wamsley, L. (2019, December 24). Japan's Births Decline To Lowest Number On Record. Retrieved September 01, 2020, from <https://www.npr.org/2019/12/24/791132555/japans-births-decline-to-lowest-number-on-record>

Given the fact that the birth rate corresponds to the gender pay gap, we can see a connection between gender pay gap, the birth rate, and the economy, and it is necessary to solve these problems together.

### United States of America

Fifty-seven years have passed since President Kennedy enacted The Equal Pay Act, and yet, seeing the pay gap between men and women still present in America, it can be said that more needs to be done to solve this problem.

It is often claimed that higher education is the path to economic mobility. This fact, however, is not always true for educated women.<sup>21</sup> Women represent 57% of undergraduates yet hold 67% of all student loan debt. In other words, though higher education may enable women to stand at the same level as men academically and with regard to ability, over half of these women shoulder a greater financial burden to get out of debt. The wage gap makes it harder for women to pay back their loans, and defaulting on loans is expected to cost taxpayers \$31.5 billion in the next 10 years.<sup>22</sup> The wage gap created after employment further afflicts women and places them in an unjustified position. Thus the gender pay gap must be a prioritized factor for the world to solve.

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<sup>21</sup>Johnson, H. Mejia, M. Bohn, S. (2018, December). *Higher Education as a Driver of Economic Mobility*. Public Policy Institute of California. Retrieved October 22, 2020, from <https://www.ppic.org/wp-content/uploads/higher-education-as-a-driver-of-economic-mobility-december-2018.pdf>

<sup>22</sup>Dishman, L. (2020, January 07). How the gender pay gap cuts through the U.S. economy. Retrieved August 30, 2020, from <https://www.fastcompany.com/90449297/how-the-gender-pay-gap-cuts-through-the-u-s-economy>

<sup>23</sup>C100 - Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100). (n.d.). Retrieved September 06, 2020, from

In economic matters, it is important to look at other common factors such as education in order to view how the gender pay gap affects the world economy.

### **Past UN Actions**

#### 1. ILO Convention 100<sup>23</sup>

In 1951, the International Labor Organization held a convention which “may be cited as the Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951.” This convention contains a detailed instruction of what each country should do to achieve equal pay between the sexes. Following this convention, many countries have taken further actions to promote equal pay for females.

#### 2. Platform of Champions<sup>24</sup>

In 2017, the United Nations “launched a high-profile network to call for equal pay for work of equal value.” This raises the awareness of the state of the gender pay gap through their enlightenment activities. This platform also seeks to engage with the decision making and policy making concerning the gender pay gap.

#### 3. #StopTheRobbery<sup>25</sup>

UN WOMEN launched this campaign to “raise awareness of the gender pay gap.” This campaign allows people to raise their

[https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100\\_ILO\\_CODE:C100](https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C100)

<sup>24</sup><https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2017/03/un-launches-platform-of-champions-calling-to-end-global-gender-pay-gap/>

<sup>25</sup> Equal pay for work of equal value. (n.d.). Retrieved September 06, 2020, from <https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.un.org/en/observances/equal-pay-day&sa=D&ust=1603627147077000&usg=AOvVaw2jPm37NkKaw7bbw3kda1Obhttps://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/csw61/equal-pay>



voices on this issue. What is unique about this is that it refers to the gender pay gap as a vicious crime: robbery.

4. Equal Pay International Coalition<sup>26</sup> (EPIC) is the only partnership right now that is working to reduce the gender pay gap in all levels :global, regional, and national. On September 18, 2020, EPIC hosted a virtual global event to ensure that necessary steps are taken for combating gender pay gap in the midst of the damage from COVID-19. Many speakers from different states presented their country's solutions and a discussion was held.

5. OHCHR<sup>27</sup> On February 20, 2020, OHCHR issued a paper called “Violence against women, stereotypes and gender pay gap at the centre of the dialogue between the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the Republic of Moldova” to report the investigation of gender differences in the Republic of Moldova. OHCHR regularly inspects countries to find out the state of the gender gap.

## Tips from the Chairs

First and foremost - to ensure a smooth, efficient, and fulfilling MUN experience, the Chairs recommend that delegates thoroughly review basic MUN procedures. Of course, we are happy to assist delegates who are new to MUN, and will assist with Draft Resolution writing when necessary.

Furthermore, delegates are encouraged to speak during the MUN conference. Chairs will ensure that every delegate will have at least one opportunity to speak on camera. We will also guide and give advice to any delegates who are uncomfortable with public speaking. Please use this MUN conference as an opportunity to practice public speaking!

In moderated caucuses, speeches should aim to be succinct and to-the-point. Delegates should also keep in mind that their speech may alter the course of the committee and will potentially give them the opportunity to build a strong bloc during an “unmod” (unmoderated caucus). Delegates should be aware of voice modulation and tone during speeches.

In unmoderated caucuses, show courteous behavior toward other delegates when building a bloc. Keep in mind that leading a big bloc does not ensure any awards or prizes; we support delegates who appreciate teamwork and are willing to listen to other delegates.

It will be helpful for delegates to have necessary documents (e.g. pre-written draft resolutions and research) organized and close at hand. This will provide more evidence for your country’s stance and will be useful when writing a draft resolution. We do not expect all delegates to have done extensive research and have pre-written draft resolutions; however, we expect delegates to have done adequate research

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<sup>26</sup> UN launches 'Platform of Champions' calling to end global gender pay gap – United Nations Sustainable Development. (n.d.). Retrieved September 06, 2020, from <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2017/03/un-launches-platform-of-champions-calling-to-end-global-gender-pay-gap/>

<sup>27</sup> Violence against women, stereotypes and gender pay gap at the centre of the dialogue between the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the Republic of Moldova. (n.d.). Retrieved September 06, 2020, from <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25587>

about the topic to be confident enough to speak during the committee session.

Finally, thank you for taking the time to read through this section! We are aware that there are quite a few first-time MUN-ers in this committee. To be honest, your first MUN will definitely be difficult, and participating will definitely push you to expand your comfort zone. Nevertheless, your MUN experience will award you with new friends, experiences and perspectives. We are looking forward to working with every delegate to shape a memorable, fulfilling MUN experience.

## Questions to Consider

- What can the UN do to equalize the gender pay gap in your country and region?
- What is your country's stance on the gender pay gap? What factors are preventing women from earning as much as men?
- What actions has your country taken in the past concerning gender inequality?
- What social problems exist as a result of the gender pay gap in your nation? How could the country benefit if the pay gap were reduced?
- What is unique about the family structure in your country? How does this structure affect working mothers?

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