

# COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

## WHAT IS THE CSW?

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) works within the United Nations (UN) system on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. It is a so-called functional commission of the UN's Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), which means it carries out certain tasks on their behalf, and advises it on gender-related issues. Together with UN Women, the CSW works on:

- ✔ Setting global standards and policies that promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls;
- ✔ Providing recommendations on emerging trends and on promoting the rights of women and girls in political, economic, civil, social, and education fields;
- ✔ Supporting gender mainstreaming within the UN (agencies, commissions etc.) and outside of it;
- ✔ Monitoring, reviewing and assessing the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action at the national, regional, and international level. This is done through the annual CSW session which usually takes place in March.

## BEIJING DECLARATION AND PLATFORM FOR ACTION

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA) was adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, and is one of the key guiding documents on gender equality which has set the international agenda for the empowerment of women and girls for the past two decades. The Platform's goal is to remove all obstacles that prevent women's equal participation by highlighting 12 'critical areas of concern' that are vital to the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls:

- ✔ Violence against women
- ✔ The human rights of women
- ✔ Women and armed conflict
- ✔ Women and poverty
- ✔ Education and training of women
- ✔ Women and health
- ✔ Women and the media
- ✔ Women and the economy
- ✔ Women in power and decision-making
- ✔ Women and the environment
- ✔ Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women
- ✔ The girl child

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action requires all states that have ratified the platform to develop national policies and plans of action describing how they will implement these commitments nationally.

## QUICK FACTS

### WHAT?

UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)

### FOCUS?

Gender equality and women's empowerment

### WHO?

45 UN Member States are elected to sit on the Commission for 4 years, but all UN Member States and observers can participate.

### REPORTS TO?

United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)

### WHEN?

The CSW hosts an annual 10 Day Session in March

### WHERE?

United Nations Headquarters in New York City, United States of America

## UN WOMEN

The UN Agency UN Women supports the CSW's work in several important ways, including by serving as its Secretariat and organizing the annual session, and by preparing documents that analyse the focus themes which serve as the basis for the session's discussions and outcome documents. UN Women also plays a big role in supporting civil society's participation at the CSW by hosting special briefings and a youth forum during the annual session.

## WHY IS THE CSW IMPORTANT?

Firstly, the annual session is a valuable opportunity to review global, regional, and national progress towards achieving gender equality, and women's and girl's empowerment, by identifying challenges and opportunities, and sharing best practices. It is also an important space where member states come together to re-confirm their commitment to achieving these goals, and set (new) global standards, norms, and policies that promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls worldwide.

Secondly, the CSW's outcome documents (the agreed conclusion and resolutions) are important advocacy tools, because they contain so-called 'agreed' language that was negotiated and which UN member states have publicly committed to, and can therefore be used to hold governments accountable. Note, however, that some states put reservations on certain parts of the text, meaning that they will not implement this part of the agreement. It is therefore important that advocates continue to try and influence these documents to ensure that they reflect an increasingly more progressive agenda.

➔ **For more information on UN language advocacy and how to influence check out our UN resources at [choiceforyouth.org](http://choiceforyouth.org)!**

## WHAT HAPPENS AT THE CSW?

Every year the CSW also hosts a 10-day session, usually in March, where UN member states (who send delegations to represent their country), civil society (citizens and organizations outside of the government and private sector), and gender experts gather at the UN headquarters in New York to discuss important issues related to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. The session tackles three themes that change annually: a priority theme, a review theme (this reviews the progress on implementing the agreed conclusions from an earlier year), and an emerging issue theme. These themes are based on one of the 12 issues of concern highlighted in the Beijing Platform (e.g. a priority theme could be ending violence against women).

At the end of the two weeks member states will also have negotiated a series of action-oriented outcome documents in the form of agreed conclusions and resolutions, based on the themes up for discussion that year (although note that in exceptional cases, such as in 2012 and 2000, consensus on the agreed conclusions cannot be reached and no outcome documents are adopted). While civil society is not able to take part in the negotiations of these texts (unless they are invited to be a member of a delegation), they are still able to influence the process by advocating with different delegations to



include their issues in the text. Many civil society representatives act within so-called caucuses, for example the Women's Rights Caucus or the Youth caucus, where they can strategize and coordinate their work. Once adopted the outcomes and recommendations of the annual session are forwarded to ECOSOC for follow up.

The CSW is divided into two parts: the so-called "formals" which are open to all attendees, and the "informals" which are open only to member state delegations. In addition to the formals and informals, governments and civil society organizations will also host so-called "side-events" (e.g. panels, expert discussions, presentations, dialogues, exhibitions, film showing etc.) that delve into the special theme.

### Formals

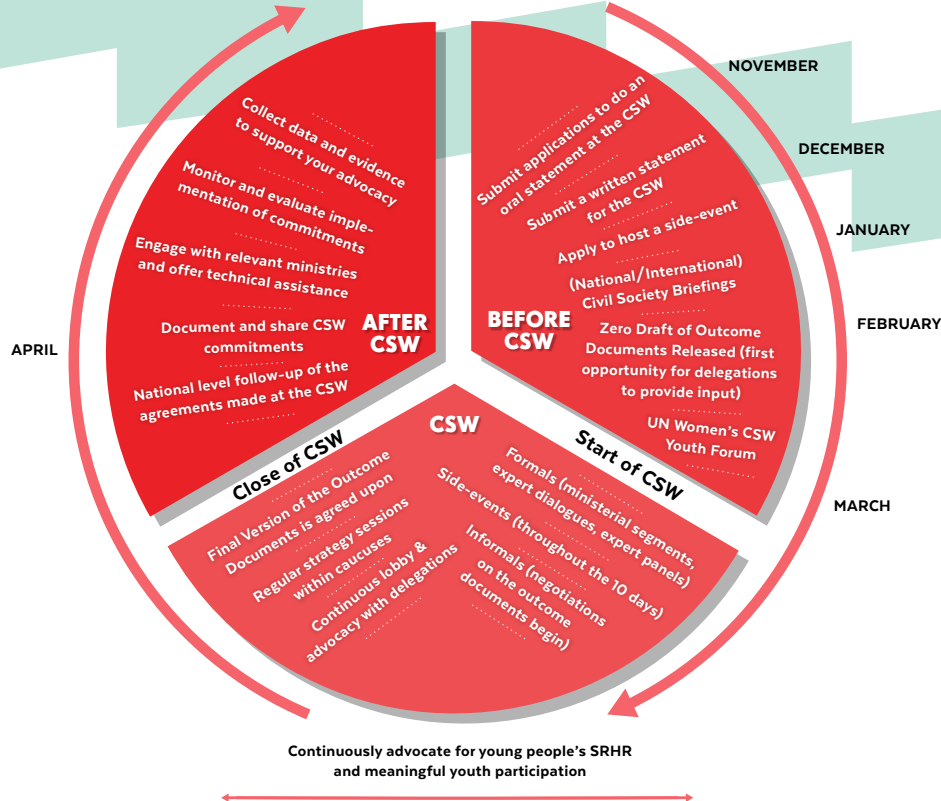
The CSW has several plenary sessions, known as the formals, which are open for all CSW attendees, and can be followed live via UN TV. Usually some space is set aside during these sessions for civil society to provide oral statements. The formal segment of the CSW includes several interactive discussions and events, including:

- ✔ **Ministerial segment:** a series of roundtables and high-level interactive dialogues which are (unsurprisingly) attended by ministers and other high-level persons to ensure greater political commitment and buy-in;
- ✔ **Interactive expert panels on the priority theme:** experts from governments, the UN system, civil society, and other key stakeholder groups are invited to a panel to discuss the priority theme;
- ✔ **Interactive dialogue on the review theme:** voluntary presentations by member states from different regions on the review theme, where states share their lessons learned, challenges, and best practices.

### Informals

In contrast, the informals are only open to UN member state delegations, who spend the majority of the two weeks negotiating the outcome documents behind closed doors. These outcome documents are important tools for advocacy, as they are formal agreements that can be used to hold governments accountable to actually putting their words into action. For this reason it is vital that the outcome documents accurately reflect young people's needs and realities. Because delegations are ultimately the ones with the negotiating power, they are an important entry point for advocacy - if your delegation is willing to fight for your issue(s), you have a much higher chance of them making it into the final outcome document of the process. Before the CSW starts delegations have the opportunity to provide input on the first versions of an outcome document, so it is important to find out if there are any opportunities to share your feedback and standpoints ahead of time.

## START PREPARING FOR THE NEXT CSW









## WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE TO BE INVOLVED?

First and foremost, young people have a fundamental right to co-decide on issues that concern us directly, as is guaranteed under articles 12 and 13 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). International agreements, such as those made at the CSW, have extremely important implications for the day-to-day realities of young people worldwide. For these agreements to effectively address young people's key issues, it is imperative that we are meaningfully involved in their design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation; after all, no one understands the challenges young people face better than young people themselves!

Unfortunately, outside of topics like early and forced marriages and female genital mutilation/cutting, young people's issues don't receive much attention at the CSW, and even when young people are the topic of conversation we are rarely meaningfully involved. Young people's exclusion from these key decision making spaces means that our leaders prioritize their own beliefs and political gains above representing the needs and realities of young people back home. For this reason, it is more important than ever that a diverse and international group of young people are enabled to become meaningfully involved in UN processes like the CSW. Below you can find some ways you can start advocating for your issues at the CSW - be sure to also check out our other advocacy resources at [choiceforyouth.org](http://choiceforyouth.org)!

## HOW CAN I GET INVOLVED

### The Top Five things you can do!

-  1. Collect evidence on the priority themes and how they affect young people, (e.g. create factsheets, reports, campaigns), and distribute this widely amongst the general population, relevant ministries, youth advocates, delegates etc.
  -  2. Advocate for the meaningful consultation and inclusion of young people at the CSW (including their participation on delegations)
  -  3. Advocate with delegations to include your issues and proposed language in the outcome documents of the CSW
  -  4. Document and widely share the commitments made at the CSW to increase national awareness and commitment
  -  5. Engage with your government and offer support to help implement the agreements, and monitor and evaluate their progress (e.g. by tracking policies and budget spending, but also by holding focus group discussions and interviews with young people to measure the impact)
-  **For more information on how to do UN language advocacy please see our other UN resources and tools at [choiceforyouth.org](http://choiceforyouth.org)!**

## NOT GOING TO THE CSW? YOU CAN STILL BE INVOLVED!

Even if you are unable to physically go to New York you can still play an important part in ensuring young people's voices are heard at the CSW. To begin with, you can play an active role in the preparations:

- ✓ if your government or national CSOs host them you can attend the civil society briefings and rally up support for key youth issues;
- ✓ create factsheets and reports which can be shared widely amongst CSOs, youth advocates, delegates and your government;
- ✓ meet with your delegation and advocate for young people's issues and for their meaningful participation in the process (for example, through the meaningful consultation of young people ahead of the Commission, and by having a youth civil society representative on the delegation).

While the CSW is taking place you can follow developments online (through listservs, email groups, WhatsApp, UN TV etc.), and support the advocates who are there on the ground:

- ✓ by providing them with text suggestions, and evidence and data;
- ✓ by continuing to lobby with your government and the relevant ministries to steer your delegation in the right direction;
- ✓ if your government is unresponsive, you can also try to use the media and the general public to apply greater pressure on your delegation to support your issues.

You can also play an important role in the follow-up and implementation of the commitments made at the CSW:

- ✓ by creating youth-friendly factsheets for the media, general public, and for relevant ministries explaining what your government has agreed to and what this means for the national context;
- ✓ by engaging with your government and offering the relevant ministries technical assistance and support in implementing the agreements, for example, by advocating for them to meaningfully consult the young people who would be impacted by them;
- ✓ by monitoring and evaluating the implementation of these commitments; and of course you can also work on implementing these agreements yourself!

This Factsheet was created by CHOICE for Youth & Sexuality as part of the Right Here, Right Now! alliance.

## THINKING OF GETTING INVOLVED IN UN ADVOCACY?

CHOICE supports partners and youth advocates attending UN processes to ensure that young people from around the world are meaningfully participating and claiming their rights; thinking of getting involved? Contact us at [info@choiceforyouth.org](mailto:info@choiceforyouth.org) to see how we can potentially collaborate!

### CSW WEBSITE

<http://www.unwomen.org/en/csw>

### CSW AGREED CONCLUSIONS AND RESOLUTIONS

<http://www.unwomen.org/en/csw/outcomes>

### UN TV

<http://webtv.un.org/>

### BEIJING DECLARATION AND PLATFORM FOR ACTION

<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/>

### CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD (CRC)

<http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

### CRC IN CHILD FRIENDLY LANGUAGE

<https://www.unicef.org/rightsite/files/uncrcchildfriendlylanguage.pdf>

## QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS?

We appreciate your input! CHOICE places a high value on being inclusive and participatory; if you feel like anything in this factsheet is not accurate, or that we are missing something important, please do not hesitate to contact us at [info@choiceforyouth.org](mailto:info@choiceforyouth.org)

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