
SEVENTIETH SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN (CSW70)

Report

9 to 19 March 2026, New York

1. Purpose and scope of the report



Between 9 March and 19 March, two members of the care economies team, Tsega G Tefera (Senior Researcher) and Juhi Kasan (Project Lead), attended the seventieth session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW70) in New York, as well as related official events. The team engaged in the conference with two primary objectives. First, to support the Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities (DWYPD) as a co-host of the side event on “Reaffirming Multilateralism in the Context of Backlash”, held on 11 March. Second, to better understand the evolving political and policy context to inform strategies for centring care work within future global and regional agendas while safeguarding existing commitments, in line with Outcome 3 of the project.

During the session, the IEJ team actively participated in both official CSW proceedings and parallel side events held at the United Nations Headquarters and the Church Centre for the United Nations (CCUN), located across the street. This included contributing to the aforementioned co-hosted side event through opening remarks and a message of support. These engagements provided critical insights into the dynamics shaping multilateral negotiations and opportunities to engage with a wide range of stakeholders across government, civil society, and international organisations.

2. Introduction

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is the principal global intergovernmental body dedicated exclusively to promoting gender equality and empowering women.

Established in 1946 as a functional commission of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), CSW plays a central role in setting global norms, reviewing progress, and making recommendations on women's rights across multiple domains. It operates within key international frameworks, including the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (UNSCR 1325), and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 5. It reports to ECOSOC, which oversees its governance by electing 45 Member States based on regional representation and appointing a five-member Bureau to guide its work. CSW is both a normative and political space where Member States, UN entities, and civil society evaluate progress, identify gaps, and negotiate future commitments.

The seventieth session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW70) was held at United Nations Headquarters in New York from 9 to 19 March 2026. In accordance with ECOSOC resolution 2025/3, its priority theme was "Ensuring and strengthening access to justice for all women and girls, including by promoting inclusive and equitable legal systems, eliminating discriminatory laws, policies, and practices, and addressing structural barriers." The review theme focused on women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, building on the agreed conclusions of the sixty-fifth session. The emerging theme addressed the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all older women.

The central challenge addressed at CSW70 is the persistent and systemic failure of justice systems to deliver equitable outcomes for women and girls. The Secretary-General's report ([E/CN.6/2026/3](#)) highlights that access to justice is increasingly under threat, due to intersecting global crises and structural inequalities. As indicated in the report, a key indicator of the problem's scale is that women worldwide possess only 64 per cent of men's legal rights. Additionally, women encounter greater obstacles to justice than men in nearly 70 per cent of countries, highlighting discriminatory legal structures and systemic exclusion from justice systems.

Several challenges were highlighted in the Secretary-General's report (E/CN.6/2026/3) and reinforced through discussions at CSW70. Together, these identified a set of interconnected structural barriers to justice, including technological risks; socio-economic constraints; institutional weaknesses; reliance on informal justice systems; inequalities in conflict-affected contexts; persistent implementation gaps in legal reforms; and broader global pressures such as climate change and shrinking democratic space. The session advanced a set of policy recommendations aimed at addressing these interconnected challenges.

Violence is increasingly taking on new forms with the rapid expansion of digital technologies, as reflected in the rise of technology-facilitated gender-based violence, including online harassment, abuse, and the non-consensual sharing of intimate images, which disproportionately affect women and girls. At the same time, legal and regulatory frameworks have not kept pace, leaving significant gaps in protection and accountability. As a result, perpetrators are often able to act with limited consequences, while survivors face barriers to seeking justice, including jurisdictional challenges, unclear legal protections, and weak

institutional responses. These trends underscore the urgent need for justice systems to adapt to the evolving digital landscape and ensure meaningful protection for women and girls.

The analysis further highlights how legal and institutional barriers are compounded by socio-economic constraints that undermine women's and girls' ability to claim, exercise, and enforce their rights. High legal and transportation costs frequently prevent women, particularly those in rural and low-income contexts, from pursuing cases, while long distances to courts and justice institutions further limit access. Language barriers and low levels of legal literacy also mean that many women are unable to understand procedures, assert their rights, or navigate complex legal systems without assistance. In addition, time poverty linked to unpaid care and domestic responsibilities significantly constrains women's ability to engage with justice processes, including attending hearings or following through with cases. These challenges are reinforced by systemic constraints, including under-resourced justice systems, limited availability of legal aid, and insufficient coordination among institutions, which collectively reduce the accessibility and effectiveness of justice services.

Particular attention was given to the lived realities of women and girls in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, where these structural inequalities become even more severe. As noted, approximately 676 million women and girls live within 50 kilometres of a conflict zone, where justice institutions are often weakened or inaccessible. This severely constrains access to protection, remedies, and accountability mechanisms.

Another critical dimension of the challenge is the reliance on informal justice systems. The report indicates that around 80 per cent of people in developing countries depend on informal or customary justice systems, which often fill gaps left by formal institutions. However, these systems frequently operate within patriarchal norms and may reinforce discriminatory outcomes, particularly in areas such as family law, inheritance, and property rights. Furthermore, although 51 out of 92 countries have adopted laws prohibiting harmful practices such as female genital mutilation, enforcement remains limited where social norms continue to support such practices.

Despite progress in legal reform, implementation gaps remain significant. Strong legal frameworks have not consistently translated into equal access to justice in practice, due to weak enforcement, insufficient resources, and limited accountability.

Broader global dynamics, including climate change and environmental degradation, are intensifying displacement and resource scarcity, which disrupt access to justice systems and disproportionately affect women in rural and marginalised communities. Economic inequality further exacerbates these challenges, as women, particularly those in poverty or informal employment, face barriers in affording legal services and accessing institutions.

CSW70 took place in a sharply polarised global environment, marked by widening pushback against gender equality, shrinking democratic space, and mounting contestation over long-established UN language on gender, sexual and reproductive health, and the role of

multilateral norms. These dynamics undermine the ability of women's organisations and human rights defenders to advocate for accountability and support access to justice, weakening pathways to justice. Overall, the sessions reinforced that justice systems remain a critical site where gender inequality is both reproduced and contested, with significant portions of the world's women and girls still unable to access protection, redress, or equal treatment under the law.

3. Agreed Conclusions

The seventieth session resulted in the adoption of [Agreed Conclusions](#) on the priority theme of access to justice for women and girls. These conclusions call for:

- The elimination of discriminatory laws, policies, and practices;
- Strengthened legal protections for women and girls;
- Improved access to justice systems, including remedies and support services;
- Enhanced responses to violence against women and girls;
- The promotion of gender-responsive justice systems and institutions;
- Strengthening the roles of relevant stakeholders, including civil society, in supporting access to justice.

The Agreed Conclusions of CSW70 reaffirm access to justice as essential to the achievement of gender equality and the realisation of the human rights of women and girls. They call for the elimination of discriminatory laws, policies and practices, and for the strengthening of inclusive and equitable legal systems to ensure effective access to remedies and accountability. The Conclusions further emphasise the need to address violence against women and girls, including in different contexts, and to ensure the availability of accessible, adequately resourced, and survivor-centred services. In doing so, they recognise that persistent structural and institutional barriers continue to limit women's and girls' access to justice and call for coordinated action by States and relevant stakeholders to address these gaps.

The outcome reflects both continuity and adaptation: continuity in reaffirming existing commitments to gender equality, and adaptation in addressing emerging issues such as digital violence, algorithmic bias, and the need for improved gender data systems.

4. The proceedings of the CSW70

4.1. The official opening

The opening of CSW70 on the 9th of March, 2026 set a strong normative and political tone, with Chair Maritza Chan Valverde emphasising access to justice as a cornerstone of dignity, empowerment, and gender equality. She underscored that the Agreed Conclusions were the result of extensive consultations and called on Member States to translate commitments into concrete action. The United Nations Secretary-General, António Guterres, identified justice as central to sustainable development, peace and security, human rights, and a safe and inclusive digital future, while warning that progress is being undermined by conflict, climate crises, inequality, and rapid technological change. The session also highlighted the depth and complexity of current challenges, combining stark evidence of inequality with calls for accountability and systemic reform. Ms Eunice Musiime, Executive Director of Akina Mama

wa Afrika, emphasised that justice underpins global commitments but remains inaccessible to many women and girls, pointing to barriers such as distance to services, patriarchal legal systems, and the rise of online violence. Alongside this, Malala Yousafzai condemned severe restrictions on women's rights, particularly in Afghanistan, describing them as "a system of segregation and domination."

Subsequent interventions by Annalena Baerbock, President of the General Assembly; Bahadur Thapa, President of ECOSOC; Ms Nahla Haidar, Chair of CEDAW; Ms Claudia Flores, Chair of the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls; Reem Alsalem, Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls; and Ms Ljubica Fuentes, youth representative, collectively underscored the depth and complexity of barriers to justice for women and girls. Across their interventions, speakers highlighted persistent global inequalities, including gaps in legal protections, weak enforcement, and limited accountability, alongside the continued marginalisation of women in leadership and decision-making spaces. They also drew attention to emerging and intersecting challenges, including digital- and AI-facilitated violence, the role of care systems in shaping access to justice, and the disproportionate impacts of conflict and systemic impunity. At the same time, concerns were raised about a growing backlash against gender equality, shrinking civic space, and resource constraints affecting key institutions. Together, these contributions reinforced the urgent need for strengthened implementation, sustained financing, and inclusive, well-coordinated justice systems capable of translating global commitments into meaningful outcomes.

4.2. Negotiations and confrontations

CSW70 followed the standard format of a two-week session, with a ministerial segment, general discussions, and negotiations on the Agreed Conclusions. However, in a striking departure from previous sessions, the negotiations were marked by unprecedented contestation and procedural complexity, laying bare the intensity of broader geopolitical tensions.

A central point of contention emerged around the timing and adoption of the Agreed Conclusions. The United States led efforts to delay consideration of the draft text, arguing that delegations had insufficient time to review the final version and proposing that adoption be postponed until the end of the session. Right after International Women's Day, on March 9, Washington called for the withdrawal of the draft and introduced eight amendments, primarily targeting references to gender, sexual and reproductive health, and broader rights-based language. These efforts were framed as concerns over "ambiguous language" and sovereignty, reflecting a broader push to stray from established UN gender norms.

These positions were partially supported by a group of countries, including Egypt, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia, which advocated for additional time and further negotiation to achieve consensus. This grouping reflected a coalition concerned with both procedural issues and substantive language, particularly around gender and family-related norms.

In contrast, a broad coalition of Member States, including the European Union and countries such as Mexico and the Netherlands, pushed to proceed with adoption, emphasising the

need to protect established language and avoid setting a precedent where consensus could be used as a veto. The Chair, Maritza Chan Valverde of Costa Rica, confirmed that negotiations had already taken place over several weeks prior to the convening at the United Nations, including the circulation of drafts and opportunities for written input, and moved the process forward.

Procedurally, the session marked a significant departure from established practice. For the first time in the Commission's history, the Agreed Conclusions were adopted by formal vote rather than by consensus, with 37 votes in favour, 6 abstentions, and 1 vote against (the United States). This outcome highlighted both the persistence of broad support for gender equality commitments and the growing fragmentation of multilateral agreements.

The majority vote reflected the mood on the floor. The room erupted in elation, with many attendees in tears, signalling that although backlash is intensifying, there remains a strong collective commitment to defending women's rights. It was a powerful reminder that champions of gender equality are still banding together, marking an important moment in an increasingly fraught multilateral context.

Similarly, on 19 March 2026, the final day of CSW70, was again marked by intense political signalling and procedural contestation, even as the Commission moved to adopt its outcome. This followed the United States' attempt to introduce a proposal seeking to define the term "gender" within the UN system as referring exclusively to "men and women" on the final day of CSW70, i.e. 19 March.

This move was widely interpreted as an attempt to abandon established UN language and undermine its scope. In response, Belgium, on behalf of the European Union, introduced a "no-action motion," which was adopted (23 in favour, 17 abstentions, 3 against), effectively blocking further consideration of the proposal.

Once again, the atmosphere in the room during the negotiations was highly charged, reflecting both the intensity of contestation and the high stakes of the outcome. As procedural votes unfolded, many delegations responded with visible relief and approval, and when the results appeared on the board, the room erupted into a standing ovation, with some participants visibly emotional.

Despite heightened contestation, several delegations, including Sweden, the United Kingdom and the European Union, strongly reaffirmed their commitment to advancing gender equality and protecting established multilateral norms. The United Kingdom, for example, reiterated its "unwavering commitment to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls," while emphasising the importance of a "consensual, balanced, and action-oriented" outcome. Similarly, Sweden expressed frustration with the slow pace of progress, noting that negotiations were repeatedly consumed by prolonged debates and warning against efforts to "depart from 30–40 years of progress" in agreed language and commitments. The European Union, while acknowledging that "hard compromises" were necessary, maintained that the outcome remained "an important document with concrete commitments" to advancing access to justice for women and girls. At the same time, other

delegations, including the United States, Namibia, and Egypt, expressed reservations or outright opposition to specific provisions, particularly those related to gender, sexual and reproductive health, and intersecting forms of discrimination.

Concerns about unilateral actions and weak consultation processes emerged as a significant point of contention during the negotiations. Several delegations criticised the introduction of proposals without adequate prior engagement, warning that such approaches risk undermining the multilateral process. For example, countries such as Brazil and Belgium asserted that certain proposals were “factually incorrect” and constituted unilateral initiatives introduced without consultation, which could generate division rather than consensus. These critiques were reinforced by broader procedural concerns from delegations, including Namibia, which highlighted the lack of “hearing from the room” and the failure to reach a genuine “deal-making stage.” Together, these interventions reflected growing unease about shifts away from inclusive, consensus-based negotiation practices towards more fragmented and unilateral approaches.

4.3. Emerging and intersecting issues

Climate change emerged as a critical and cross-cutting issue in the negotiations, with several delegations emphasising its profound implications for access to justice and gender equality. Representatives from Pacific Island states, including Tonga, stressed that climate change is not a peripheral concern but “a defining condition,” and in many cases an “existential threat,” shaping the lived realities of women and girls. They highlighted how rising sea levels, extreme weather events, and climate-induced displacement are already disrupting access to services, institutions, and remedies, particularly in vulnerable communities. Delegations further underscored that access to justice must be “continuous and responsive,” enabling women and girls to claim their rights not only in stable settings but also in contexts of disruption and crisis. These interventions called for more explicit recognition of the intersection between climate change and justice within multilateral frameworks, reinforcing the need for policies that address both environmental and structural inequalities.

Meanwhile, South Africa, in its capacity as Chair of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), secured an important regional outcome by tabling a draft resolution on “Women, the Girl Child and HIV/AIDS,” which was adopted following a vote. The proposal tabled by South Africa on behalf of SADC elicited a mixed but engaged response from the room, reflecting both support for its substantive focus and broader tensions within the negotiations. Several delegations, including Uganda and Namibia, underscored the urgency of addressing the disproportionate impact of HIV/AIDS on women and girls, particularly its links to gender-based violence and economic dependency. At the same time, other Member States, including the United States, raised concerns regarding language and process, particularly around terminology related to sexual and reproductive health and the perceived lack of consensus-building. Additional reservations on specific provisions and procedural approaches were also voiced by delegations such as Namibia, highlighting the need for more inclusive and transparent consultations. Despite these tensions, the proposal was widely recognised as timely and relevant, reinforcing the urgency of sustained and targeted responses to the gendered dimensions of the HIV epidemic within the multilateral agenda.

In the closing phase of CSW70, South Africa also delivered a [statement](#) on behalf of SADC, foregrounding the gendered dimensions of HIV/AIDS and highlighting the interlinkages between gender-based violence, economic dependency, and health outcomes. The statement emphasised that HIV in the region continues to have a distinctly female face, with women and girls disproportionately affected due to entrenched structural inequalities and social norms. It further raised concerns about funding-related challenges, particularly disruptions to services following reductions in external financing, which exposed the fragility of HIV responses and underscored the urgency of strengthening domestic resource mobilisation.

Despite these divergences, the Commission ultimately adopted a set of Agreed Conclusions described by facilitators as “concise, action-oriented, and reflecting the broadest possible agreement.” However, the tone of the closing exchanges made clear that this outcome was achieved not through consensus but through compromise under pressure, leaving several delegations dissatisfied and signalling unresolved tensions likely to carry over into future sessions.

4.4. Side events

As indicated on the official [CSW70 side event schedule](#), approximately 80–100 side events were held on UN premises during the two-week session. These events were delivered in in-person, hybrid, and online formats, and were scheduled across multiple days, rooms, and parallel time slots. Many were co-hosted by multiple sponsors, reflecting a high level of engagement by Member States, UN entities, and partner organisations. These events functioned as critical spaces for knowledge exchange, agenda-setting, and coalition-building, enabling civil society actors to influence both the discourse and, indirectly, the negotiation process.

These parallel side events demonstrated that CSW70 also functions as a contested discursive space, utilised to promote competing ideological framings of gender equality beyond formal negotiations.

On one hand, many Member States and civil society actors promoted rights-based and feminist policy approaches, focusing on access to justice, sexual and reproductive health, and protection from violence, including the strengthening of survivor-centred services. For example, Official side events such as “*Building a Community of Gender Commissions in Africa to Strengthen Accountability to Normative Frameworks*,” convened by the Gender Commissions of Zimbabwe, Kenya, Malawi, and South Africa, emphasised the role of Gender Commissions in strengthening accountability to regional and global gender equality commitments. Similarly, an official side event titled “*Justice at Risk – Coordinating Efforts to Combat Gender-Based Violence*,” hosted by Norway and Uganda, brought together policymakers and civil society actors to explore how to strengthen coordinated responses to violence against women and improve access to justice for survivors. This reflects a broader emphasis on accountability, institutional coordination, and survivor-centred justice systems.

On the other hand, a set of countries and organisations advanced more conservative, family-centred frameworks, often challenging the language of “gender” and emphasising motherhood, traditional family structures, and opposition to abortion. For example, side events hosted by actors linked to Burundi and Nigeria, in collaboration with organisations such as Family Watch International, focused on themes such as “*Justice and equality begin in the womb*” and “Motherhood as a global priority”. [The Conference on the State of Women and Family \(CSWF\)](#), a two-day “pro-family, pro-life” event primarily organised by United Families International (UFI) and a coalition of conservative organisations, is another example. These events explicitly sought to reframe justice and gender equality through a family-centred lens, positioning these perspectives as alternatives to the dominant rights-based agenda at CSW.

Similarly, the [NGO CSW70](#) Forum, which runs in parallel to the official Commission, convened over 750 parallel events and brought together thousands of participants from across the globe, including grassroots organisations, feminist networks, youth groups, and advocacy coalitions.

These events reflected a diversity of perspectives, including both complementary and competing normative frameworks on gender equality and justice. Many events advanced rights-based approaches; for example, “*Parental Leave in Law and Practice*,” convened by Make Mothers Matter, framed caregiving and parental leave as central to gender equality, economic participation, and broader development outcomes. Similarly, “*From Land Rights to a Gender-Just Economy: Lessons from Indigenous, Pastoralist and Afro-descendant Women*,” convened by the International Institute for Environment and Development, foregrounded how access to land and resources underpins economic justice and broader gender equality, particularly for marginalised groups.

Alongside these, a smaller number of events, such as “*When Motherhood Disappears: Global Costs to Justice and Women’s Identity*”, introduced alternative framings centred on caregiving, identity, and social roles. Together, these examples illustrate how the NGO Forum operates as a plural and contested space in which diverse actors advance different interpretations of justice and gender equality.

Civil society played a central and highly visible role in CSW70, operating both within and alongside the formal UN process. Through written and oral statements, civil society briefings, and advocacy platforms, NGOs contributed evidence, amplified lived experiences, and shaped policy priorities, reinforcing their role as indispensable actors in advancing gender equality and access to justice.

Taken together, the CSW70 process illustrates how multilateral platforms are increasingly used not only to negotiate outcomes but also to contest meanings, reshape norms, and advance divergent ideological projects. The session reflects a broader shift in global gender governance, where both substantive outcomes and procedural dynamics are shaped by intensifying political contestation.

4.5. South Africa–IEJ Side Event: Reaffirming multilateralism in a context of backlash

On the margins of CSW70, South Africa, in collaboration with the Institute for Economic Justice (IEJ) and CSW Member States, particularly Brazil, Kenya, and the United Kingdom, convened a high-level roundtable dialogue on 11 March 2026 at UN Headquarters titled “*Reaffirming and Strengthening Multilateral Structures as Platforms for Achieving Gender Equality and the Empowerment of All Women and Girls.*” The event was strategically positioned within the CSW70 agenda to reflect on the growing backlash against gender equality and its implications for multilateral cooperation and policy outcomes.

The discussion was anchored in the broader global context of regression in women’s rights, citing evidence that [nearly one in four countries is experiencing backlash against gender equality](#), driven by democratic backsliding, shrinking civic space, and the rise of anti-rights movements.

This context was further linked to South Africa’s experience during its G20 Presidency, where the Empowerment of Women Working Group (EWWG) was unable to adopt a Ministerial Declaration, reflecting increasing contestation over gender equality norms in multilateral settings.

The roundtable was well-attended and brought together government representatives, multilateral organisations, and civil society actors to exchange perspectives on the manifestations and drivers of backlash, including legal and policy reversals, increased violence against women and girls, erosion of civic space, and the promotion of traditionalist gender roles. It also explored strategies to protect and advance hard-won gains, including strengthening accountability to existing commitments, fostering cross-country learning, and reinforcing multilateral cooperation.



A key contribution to the dialogue was delivered by IEJ, which provided [opening remarks and a message of support](#). The remarks reiterated that the EWWG was ultimately unable to reach consensus on its final ministerial declaration, owing to a broader global context in which a “coordinated, well-resourced, and transnational backlash is increasingly shaping policy debates around gender equality”. It also emphasised the urgency of collective action across governments, civil society, and multilateral institutions, noting the need to rethink and reposition strategies to safeguard progress on gender equality in the

face of coordinated backlash. This contribution reinforced the importance of sustained collaboration and highlighted the role of multilateral platforms as critical spaces for defending and advancing women’s rights.

The well-known South African protest slogan, “*Wathint’ abafazi, wathint’ imbokodo*”, meaning “You strike a woman, you strike a rock”, was invoked by South African Minister Sindisiwe Chikunga and echoed several times throughout the room, symbolising the resilience, courage, and collective strength of women.

Overall, the side event underscored the urgency of re-centring gender equality within multilateral agendas, while recognising that current challenges reflect a deeper contestation over the norms and principles underpinning global cooperation. It positioned South Africa’s G20 experience as a critical case for understanding both the risks of fragmentation and the opportunities for rebuilding consensus in advancing women’s rights.

5. The possible merger of UN Women and UNFPA

An important institutional issue that surfaced during CSW70 was the proposed merger of UN Women and UNFPA, as part of broader UN reform discussions based on [Preliminary Findings from the Strategic Merger Assessment](#). Observations from the session on 18 March indicate that the issue elicited a noticeably uneasy, cautious reaction among participants, reflecting both concern and uncertainty about the implications of such a move.

Much of the concern appeared to stem from the distinct mandates and historical foundations of the two institutions. UNFPA’s work is anchored in the commitments of the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action, which centres on sexual and reproductive health and rights, bodily autonomy, and population and development. In contrast, UN Women’s mandate is grounded in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which provides a comprehensive framework for advancing gender equality across economic, social, and political domains. Participants expressed concern that merging these entities could risk blurring or diluting these distinct normative and programmatic priorities.

The reaction in the room suggested a degree of scepticism regarding both the timing and rationale of the proposal, especially in the context of growing global backlash against gender equality. Participants questioned why two of the primary institutions defending women’s rights were among the first to be considered for streamlining, despite not being the most redundant or resource-intensive entities within the UN system. Additional concerns were raised regarding mandate integrity, resource allocation, and the potential weakening of specialised expertise.

In response to these concerns, UN representatives sought to clarify the scope and intent of the process. It was emphasised that the Secretary-General has only requested an assessment of the merits and demerits of a possible merger, and that “there is no predetermined outcome of this process.” Representatives further underscored that the proposal is understood primarily as a structural consideration, noting that “mandates will be maintained” and highlighting that “the two organisations work so well” together in their current form. Importantly, it was reiterated that any final decision would rest with Member States, underscoring the process’s intergovernmental nature.

Overall, the exchange revealed that the proposed merger is not viewed merely as an administrative reform but as a politically sensitive issue tied to the future of gender-equality governance within the UN system. The discussion highlighted underlying tensions between efforts to enhance institutional efficiency and the need to preserve distinct mandates, normative clarity, and specialised areas of work, particularly in a context marked by increasing contestation over gender equality commitments.

6. Conclusions and lessons learned

CSW70 highlighted both the resilience and the fragility of the global gender equality agenda, revealing a multilateral system under increasing strain yet still capable of producing negotiated outcomes. The session demonstrated that while broad commitment to advancing gender equality persists, consensus can no longer be assumed. The shift to a recorded vote for the adoption of the Agreed Conclusions marks a significant turning point in the Commission's history, signalling a transition toward more contested and fragmented multilateral negotiations.

At the same time, CSW70 underscored that access to justice remains a deeply structural challenge. Barriers extend beyond discriminatory laws to include institutional weaknesses, socio-economic constraints, unpaid care burdens, and emerging risks such as technology-facilitated violence. This highlights the need for holistic and integrated approaches that address both legal frameworks and the broader conditions that shape women's ability to claim and exercise their rights.

The session further revealed increasing contestation over established normative frameworks. Long-standing UN language on gender, rights, and justice is being actively challenged, with efforts to reinterpret or narrow its scope. This reflects broader geopolitical shifts and the growing influence of competing ideological perspectives within multilateral spaces.

In this context, procedural dynamics have become central to shaping outcomes. The use of amendments, voting, procedural motions and timing interventions emerged as key tools through which Member States advanced or resisted particular positions, signalling a shift in how multilateral negotiations are conducted, in which the process itself has become a site of political strategy.

CSW70 also demonstrated that multilateral platforms are no longer only sites of negotiation but also arenas of ideological contestation. This was evident both within formal negotiations and across side events and parallel forums, where competing visions of gender equality, ranging from rights-based to more conservative, family-centred approaches, were actively advanced.

Despite these tensions, the role of civil society remains critical. Civil society actors played a central and visible role in shaping discourse, amplifying lived experiences, and supporting accountability, reinforcing their importance in sustaining progressive agendas within multilateral processes, even in contexts of shrinking civic space.

The discussions around the possible merger of UN Women and UNFPA further highlighted emerging institutional uncertainties within the UN system. Participants' reactions reflected concerns about mandate integrity, normative clarity, and the potential implications of structural reforms amid heightened political contestation over gender equality.



Taken together, these dynamics underscore the importance of sustained, strategic engagement by Member States and partners. As multilateral negotiations become more complex, contested, and procedural, there is an increasing need for coordinated positioning, evidence-based advocacy, and coalition-building to safeguard and advance gender equality commitments.

Overall, CSW70 represents a pivotal moment in the evolution of global gender governance. While it successfully delivered an outcome on access to justice for women and girls, it also exposed deepening divisions, signalling that future engagements will require greater diplomatic agility, stronger alliances, and more deliberate strategies to navigate an increasingly polarised global landscape.



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