



ARCMUN

Aristotelio College Model United Nations

UN WOMEN

Promotion of balanced and non-stereotypical
female figures in modern societies

Study Guide

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction to the Topic.....	3
2. Definition of Key Terms.....	3
2.1. Gender stereotypes.....	3
2.2. Gender discrimination	3
2.3. Gender mainstreaming.....	3
2.4. Gender equality.....	4
2.5. Glass ceiling.....	4
3. History of the Topic.....	4
3.1. Women in Ancient Greece and Roman Empire.....	4
3.2. Gender Roles in the Eighteenth Century.....	5
3.3. Feminism and the Suffragettes.....	5
3.4. Today.....	6
4. Legal Framework.....	6
4.1. CEDAW.....	6
4.2. Millennial goals-SDGs.....	6
4.3. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for action.....	7
4.4. Regional legal framework about women’s rights.....	7
4.5. NGOs	8
5. Discussion of the Topic	9
5.1. Education	9
5.2. Media.....	9
5.3. Politics.....	10
6. Questions to be addressed.....	11
7. Conclusion.....	11
8. Bibliography.....	11

1. Introduction to the Topic

UN Women is a recent entity of the United Nations – as it was created only in 2010 – aiming to achieve gender equality through women empowerment. This year’s topic is demanding and essential for today’s society.

Stereotypes have always influenced society in a lot of ways. There are ethnicity-related, age-related or religion-related stereotypes, but the most common are gender stereotypes. Pink and blue, emotions and intelligence, weakness and strength, family and work, all of them are “linked” with a specific gender.

Gender stereotypes exist since ancient times and they have hampered women’s growth and development. They have been obstacles between girls and education, women and work, women and politics and many more social activities. We can consider as sources of these norms the media, the traditions, and the misconception of biology factors.

Therefore, it is necessary for representatives of all countries, to debate, compromise and propose solutions in order to offer to girls and women a safe and fair environment.

2. Definition of Key Terms

2.1. Gender stereotypes

In general, the word stereotype derives from the Greek words ‘στερεός’ (solid) and ‘τύπος’ (impression). Thus, a stereotype means a solid impression on one or more ideas¹.

More specifically, gender stereotypes refer to preconceived ideas, according to which males and females are ascribed arbitrarily assigned characteristics and predetermined roles based solely on their sex. Stereotypical attributes of men are characteristics such as competitiveness and autonomy, whereas women are supposed to be nurturing and cooperative².

Such simplistic and generalized views can lead to deeply engrained norms and prejudices, especially, against women and remain a justification for sexist attitudes towards them³.

2.2. Gender discrimination

Gender discrimination describes any form (either a law (de jure) or a practice (de facto)) of distinction, exclusion or restriction related to one person’s sex. Gender discrimination is opposed to the recognition and exercise of fundamental freedoms and human rights in political, economic, social and other fields⁴.

2.3. Gender mainstreaming

¹ Wikipedia (2017). *Stereotype, Etymology* [Online] Available at: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stereotype>

² UNHRC OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSION. *Gender stereotypes/ stereotyping* [Online] Available at: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Women/WRGS/Pages/GenderStereotypes.aspx>

³ European Union for Gender Equality (EIGE) (2017). *Concepts and Definitions* [Online] Available at: <http://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/concepts-and-definitions>

⁴ European Union for Gender Equality (EIGE) (2017). *Gender discrimination* [Online] Available at: <http://eige.europa.eu/rdc/thesaurus/terms/1161>

The term gender mainstreaming is related to the process of integration and implication of women and men in all political, economic and societal spheres and at all levels. The United Nations system chooses this approach to ensure women's rights. Theoretically, gender mainstreaming is not emphasizing on women's empowerment. Nonetheless, in practice a special attention is in fact given on women due to the existing inequalities that are faced by the majority of females in most of world's societies⁵.

2.4. Gender equality

Gender equality (the opposite of gender inequality, not of gender difference) is one of the most fundamental human rights and simultaneously is considered as both a precondition for and an indicator of people-centered development. By gender equality, it is meant that both sexes have equal rights, responsibilities, opportunities and participation in all spheres of both public and private life. Gender equality respects the right to be different and hence recognizes and values the diversity of different groups of females and males. The preferred terminology within the UN is gender equality, rather than gender equity⁶.

2.5. Glass ceiling

According to UN Women Training Centre's Glossary : 'The term "glass ceiling" is a metaphor that has often been used to describe invisible barriers ("glass") through which women can see elite positions, for example in government or the private sector, but cannot reach them (coming up against the invisible "ceiling").' The result of this phenomenon is that the vast majority of women is usually prevented from obtaining the most powerful and highest-paying positions in the workforce⁷.

For further research on key words and definitions related to gender equality you can use the UN Women Training Centre's Glossary.

(<https://trainingcentre.unwomen.org/mod/glossary/view.php>)

3. History of the Topic

3.1. Women in Ancient Greece and Roman Empire

It is true that women in Ancient Greece had fewer rights in comparison to male citizens. Women belonged to the household and their life purpose was to raise their children. They were unable to vote, to own land or to inherit any kind of heritage; therefore it is reasonable to say that they were excluded from any kind of civil activities. We should not forget to analyze women's role in different cities of Ancient Greece, because, for example, in Sparta women were treated in a better way than those in Athens. However, inequality and stereotypes still existed. In addition, newborn girls in those times had a higher risk to be abandoned after birth than boys,

⁵ UNHRC OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSION (2014). *Women's Rights are Human Rights* [Online] Available at: <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Events/WHRD/WomenRightsAreHR.pdf>

⁶ UN Women Training Centre (2017). *Gender Equality Glossary* [Online] Available at: <https://trainingcentre.unwomen.org/mod/glossary/view.php?id=36&mode=search&hook=gender+equality&sortkey=&sortorder=asc&fullsearch=1&page=1>

⁷ UN Women Training Centre (2017). *Gender Equality Glossary* [Online] Available at: <https://trainingcentre.unwomen.org/mod/glossary/view.php?id=36&mode=&hook=ALL&sortkey=&sortorder=&fullsearch=0&page=3>

while their education focused only on them acquiring the essentials to be good wives and mothers ⁸.

Years passed but women's place did not change. Things in Roman Empire either remained the same or were customized along with the new traditions (naming, marriage or finance). It should be mentioned that, even though women had to nominate a male representative to act in their interests, there were a lot of cases where women not only handled their finances, but also ran and owned businesses. However, it was widely believed that females could not manage finances because of incapability to handle this kind of affairs. As concerns divorcing, taking a divorce was easy in Roman times before Constantine, nevertheless children's custody belonged exclusively to their father or the closest male relative. Generally, things did not change much from Ancient Greece ⁹.

3.2. Gender Roles in the Eighteenth Century

Since hundreds of years had passed since the Roman Empire, it should be reasonable to assume that, during the 18th century, gender roles would have progressed and changed. Unfortunately, change could be seen only in a few circumstances. Society still obligated women to be good housewives and mothers as norms were demanding. Men were expected to work, manage household's finance and protect their family while women were told to clean, cook and raise their children. However, it should be mentioned that women started to be more active in everyday life. A working woman was now acceptable, although women were obliged to do specific kind of jobs. In politics, there were no formal rights given to women but they could and would influence political moves informally, while their society activities included charity and religion.

All of the above were affecting women of the middle and upper class. Among the poor, things changed. Women and men were in general equal as they both strived to make a living and take care of their family. Working for them was not only acceptable but necessary in order to survive. As for politics, civil and political rights were not a reality for poor people no matter their gender ¹⁰.

3.3. Feminism and the Suffragettes

It was the middle of the 19th Century when male superiority started to get questioned by feminist writers. Campaigns started and women – along with some men – started to demand reforms in favor of women's rights such as more equitable divorce laws, an increase of employment and education opportunities and reform of married women's property. It was in 1866 when the suffrage movement started to fight in order to gain the right to vote, a right which, by then, belonged only to males. Frustration and lack of progress lead Suffrages, in 1905, to turn their campaign into militant acts. Violence and vandalism was now their weapon and many of them were

⁸ Cartwright, M. and Cartwright, M. (2016). Women in Ancient Greece. [online] Ancient History Encyclopedia. Available at: <https://www.ancient.eu/article/927/women-in-ancient-greece/>

⁹ Cartwright, M. and Cartwright, M. (2016). The Role of Women in the Roman World. [online] Ancient History Encyclopedia. Available at: <https://www.ancient.eu/article/659/the-role-of-women-in-the-roman-world/>

¹⁰ Clive Emsley, Tim Hitchcock and Robert Shoemaker, "Historical Background - Gender in the Proceedings", Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org)

arrested, imprisoned or executed. Despite the punishments and the beginning of World War I, for the first time, women got the right to vote in 1918 ¹¹.

3.4. Today

It is undoubtable that a lot of progress has been made in gender roles till today. Men and women have the same rights legally almost everywhere in the world. Women are now protected in a lot of aspects like domestic violence, gender discrimination at work and sexual assault. This development in the legal sector of gender equality is considered vital for our society and its prosperity. Do gender stereotypes still exist though? The answer is yes. There are still a lot of things that need to be done to achieve the goal of gender equality. More specifically, today's media are promoting those stereotypes through TV shows, advertisements and movies where women are portrayed vulnerable, dumb, incapable of protecting themselves and others, superficial and many more. Law has been approved gender equality, now it is the society's turn.

4. Legal framework

4.1. CEDAW

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) is an international treaty that was adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly and is consisted of a preamble and 30 articles.

The CEDAW is considered as an international bill of rights for women, since it gives the definition of discrimination against them and establishes the agenda to combat it. Countries that accept the Convention are committed to take measures to tackle discrimination against women through legislation and temporary special measurements (e.g. the incorporation of the principle of equality between the two sexes in their national legal system and the guarantee of women's equal access in public life). In addition to the recognition of women as equal, Article 5 states that countries ought to *'modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women'*.

The provisions of the treaty are legally binding for all States that ratify it and national reports should be submitted at least every four years ¹².

4.2. Millennial goals – Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Another major commitment of States towards the achievement of equality between women and men was the adaptation of the **Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)** and Target 3 in particular. The aim of this Target was to succeed in the elimination of gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2005, and in all levels of education by 2015. These goals have indeed been widely achieved and had a significant effect on educating girls and women in comparison to 15 years ago ¹³.

¹¹ C N Trueman "Suffragettes" historylearningsite.co.uk. The History Learning Site, 17 Mar 2015

¹² UN WOMEN. *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* [Online] Available at: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/>

¹³ UN WOMEN. *Progress towards meeting the MDGs for women and girls* [Online] Available at: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/mdg-momentum#MDG3>

However, gender disparity is a still present phenomenon in societies across the world and girls' access to education is proven to be insufficient for gender equality if other indicators such as the representation in national parliaments are not included. Hence, gender equality, a fundamental human right, continues to be a high priority goal, the achievement of which will lead to a prosperous and sustainable world ¹⁴.

Bearing in mind the aforementioned, the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, a set of goals that were adopted by countries to address major challenges of the 21st century humanity over the next 15 years, set a stand-alone goal about women, **Goal 5**. According to this, women's equality and empowerment are considered to be both a part of the problem and its solution. These targets can be accomplished by 2030 through advanced efforts at all fronts. UN Women uses all of its programs and advocacy to reach the ultimate goal of women empowerment ¹⁵.

4.3. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

Another important part of the legal framework on this topic is the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which was adopted during the Fourth World Conference on Women in September 1995. This declaration made comprehensive commitments under the 12 critical areas of concern, which include, among other points, education, health, media, economy, power and decision-making and institutional mechanisms for advancement concerning women. Thus, the Platform for Action envisions clearly women's empowerment and equality in all spheres including the economic, social, cultural life and political decision-making ¹⁶. On the basis of the Beijing process, countries have taken great steps towards the equality of both sexes and as result there has been a tremendous improvement in women's lives. Even though the agenda for gender equality is still not a fully reached goal, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action remains an inspiration and a guidance tool for future actions ¹⁷.

4.4. Regional legal framework about women's rights

In addition to international treaties, regional instruments play a significant role in protecting and guarantying women's rights.

The African Union adopted in 1982 **The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (Banjul Charter)**. More specifically, Article 2 prohibits discrimination based on, inter alia, sex in the exercise of rights ensured by the Charter. Furthermore, according to Article 18, African States are obliged to take measures to eliminate any form of discrimination against women and protect their rights as defined in declarations and convention on an international level ¹⁸. In 2003 the African Union, in order to guarantee all women's rights, adopted the **Maputo Protocol (The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women**

¹⁴ Sustainable Development Goals. 17 Goals to transform our world. *Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls* [Online] Available at:

<http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality/>

¹⁵ UN WOMEN. SDG 5: *Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls* [Online]

Available at: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/women-and-the-sdgs/sdg-5-gender-equality>

¹⁶ COMHIONANNAS INSCNE IN ÉIRINN GENDER EQUALITY IN IRELAND. *Beijing Platform for action* [Online] Available at: <http://www.genderequality.ie/en/GE/Pages/BeijingPlatform>

¹⁷ UN WOMEN *The Beijing Platform for Action: inspiration then and now* [Online] Available at: <http://beijing20.unwomen.org/en/about>

¹⁸ UNHRC OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSION (2014). *Women's Rights are Human Rights* [Online] Available at: <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Events/WHRD/WomenRightsAreHR.pdf>

in Africa), which aims to ensure women’s participation in the political process, equality between both sexes in social and political life etc ¹⁹.

The **Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM)** was established in 1928 and falls within the Organization of American States. It was the first inter-governmental agency with the goal of addressing the civil and political needs of women ²⁰.

Furthermore, in 1948 The American Declaration on the Rights and Duties of Man (the “American Declaration”; also known as the “Bogota Declaration”) was adopted and according to Article 2 all people are equal before law regardless of , inter alia, their sex ²¹. Nondiscrimination provision were also included in Article 3 of **The American Convention on Human Rights**, also known as the **Pact of San José** and the **Additional Protocol to the American Convention on Human Rights in the area of Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights ("Protocol of San Salvador")** ²².

In 1953 the Council of Europe entered in force the **European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)**, which is an international treaty that protects the fundamental human rights and freedoms. Article 14 prohibits discrimination on any ground and thus promotes equality also between the two sexes. Allegations of violations of this Convention can be examined by the European Court of Human Rights since 1998 ²³.

The **Association of Southeast Asian Nations**, the **Economic Community of West African States** and other regional political organizations have also adopted protocols and treaties to ensure women’s rights.

4.5. NGOs

Despite the existence of regulations that recognize the equal rights between men and women, the problem of inequality is in reality not fully combated. Gender based stereotypes are still existing and discrimination against women is unfortunately a usual phenomenon. Therefore, there is a wide number of Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) that try to eliminate gender stereotypes and close the gap of gender inequality. A few examples of such NGOs are **Equality Now**, **The Gender and Development Network** and **InterAction** ²⁴.

5. Discussion of the Topic

From a very young age, women are often subjected to gender stereotypes that affect their behavior and character development. They fall into a “pink” reality, adopting a

¹⁹ Wikipedia (2017). *Maputo Protocol* [Online] Available at:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maputo_Protocol

²⁰ Wikipedia (2017). *Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM)* [Online] Available at:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inter-American_Commission_of_Women

²¹ Wikipedia (2017). *American Declaration on the Rights and Duties of Man* [Online] Available at:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Declaration_of_the_Rights_and_Duties_of_Man

²² Wikipedia (2016). *American Convention on Human Rights* [Online] Available at:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Convention_on_Human_Rights

²³ Wikipedia (2017). *European Convention on Human Rights* [Online] Available at:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_Convention_on_Human_Rights

²⁴ Raptim humanitarian travel. *Focus on NGOs – 20 Organizations That Address Gender Equality*

[Online] Available at: <https://www.raptim.org/focus-on-ngos-20-organizations-that-address-gender-equality/>

stereotypical feminine role, which matches the helpless princesses from the fairy-tales that are waiting for the heroic knight to save them. However, in the future those stereotypes will pose a crucial obstacle in many aspects of their lives.

5.1. Education

To begin with, there are cases, that, due to gender stereotypes that the society or the religion reproduces, women do not have access to complete education. For example, African girls can expect a maximum of 5 years of education. Across sub-Saharan region almost 30 million girls between the ages of 6-15 are not in school. Also, women with children are more likely to be excluded from every educational process and learning opportunities. Poverty, family values and the role of women in the Muslim societies, are some of the factors that lead to such inequality ²⁵**Σφάλμα! Το αρχείο προέλευσης της αναφοράς δεν βρέθηκε..**

However, the school itself and generally the educational system “promote” gender stereotypes in both the western and the oriental world. Firstly, societies see girls as future housewives and mothers and sometimes do not grant them the right to seek employment for the aforementioned reasons. Furthermore, societies, either consciously or unconsciously, promote men to follow a career in the field of STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics), while women focus more on humanitarian and social studies, due to their sensitivity and their physical appearance. Therefore, since school is, in fact, a sub-system of those societies, boys are prepared for public life, choosing subjects that are considered “difficult”, while girls predominate in courses in education, health care and social studies, that are linked to humanitarian issues ²⁶.

Last but not least, the EU Commission presented a survey, according to whom only a 25% of women occupy job positions in the field of STEM, and concluded that girls do not, usually, choose this specific career “path”, because they think that it is not very “attracting”. There is no doubt, that stereotypes pose an important role for the advancement of opinions like this, since they make societies believe that careers in these fields do not suit women. Also, the under-representation of female professors in those studies enhances this opinion.

5.2. Media

Gender stereotypes are still perpetuated in the field of Media. On the one hand, men are portrayed as active, adventurous, powerful, aggressive, characteristics that highlight their masculinity and their skills. On the other hand, women are portrayed as sexual objects, young and beautiful, passive, dependent, feminine, and often incompetent. In news broadcasts or political shows, women talk less than men and have fewer opinions, while in the entertaining branch of media they are usually the “center of attention”. This happens, because media want to promote the stereotype of women that do not care about important issues, such as politics, economics, security

²⁵ UNICEF (n.d.). *Gender Discrimination / All In School*. [online] Allinschool.org. Available at: <http://allinschool.org/barriers-to-education/gender/>.

²⁶ Report of the 2nd Conference of the Council of Europe National Focal Points on Gender Equality In-text: (Council Of Europe, 2014) [online] Unesco.org. Available at: <http://www.unesco.org/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/FIELD/Tehran/Report2NFP.pdf>

and human rights, but instead they put themselves with inferior interests, like celebrity gossips or reality shows.

The stereotypes that women are encouraged to develop, lead to their objectification and, most importantly, make them subject to men's sexual desires. Advertisers try to promote specific body standards for women that make them attractive and irresistible for men. This also shows that women are dependent to men and that they are defined by their appearance and males' treatment. All in all, media and advertisements try to enhance a modified depiction of women as "decorative" objects that exist only by the side of strong and independent male figure²⁷.

Gender stereotypes result in the underrepresentation of female figures in the field of media, especially in the western countries: In the primetime zone, white men are three times more than women. In the news branch, the positions that female employees occupy is only 16%. Additionally, a research by the United Nations in 100 countries found that the 46% of news stories promote the reproduction of gender stereotypes, while only 6% highlight gender equality²⁸.

5.3. Politics

The UN First World Conference On Women, which took place in Mexico City in 1975 underlined that member-states should enhance and promote equal participation of women. However political participation was not a priority back then. The World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the UN decade for Women in Nairobi (1985), encouraged member-states to make commitments for women's more active participation in the field of politics. Even though progress was made all these years, it did so under a very slow pace: women owned 10,9% of the parliamentary seats in 1975, a percentage that only rose to 18,6 during the first two decades of the 21st century²⁹. For example, in the USA, "the land of freedom", only 18% of women participate in leadership positions in the US government, while 49% of women own governmental positions in Uganda³⁰.

The underrepresentation of women in the political life is connected with gender stereotypes. Traits that are necessary in political life, such as confidence, competitiveness and power are traits that women are taught to refrain from, while men are encouraged to embrace. Contrary to that, females are considered to be caring, compassionate, weak and over-emotional³¹. This means that women, even today, are confined to their stereotypical gender roles that were raised by society to follow (child-care, household activities etc.)³².

²⁷Wood, J. (n.d.). [online] Nyu.edu. Available at:

<https://www.nyu.edu/classes/jackson/causes.of.gender.inequality/Readings/Wood%20-%20Gendered%20Media%20-%202094.pdf>.

²⁸ UN Women | The Beijing Platform for Action Turns 20. (n.d.). *In Focus: Women and the Media*. [online] Available at: <http://beijing20.unwomen.org/en/in-focus/media>

²⁹ Unchronicle.un.org. (2010). *Women in Politics - The Fight to End Violence Against Women | UN Chronicle*. [online] Available at: <https://unchronicle.un.org/article/women-politics-fight-end-violence-against-women>

³⁰ Gonzalez, E. (2013). *The One Thing Our Country Needs More Of*. [online] HuffPost. Available at: https://www.huffingtonpost.com/ella-gonzalez/women-in-politics_b_4077687.html

³¹ Bauer, N. (2015). *Gender stereotypes and female political candidates - Journalist's Resource*. [online] Journalist's Resource. Available at:

<https://journalistsresource.org/studies/politics/elections/gender-stereotypes-female-political-candidates>

³² Gonzalez, E. (2013). *The One Thing Our Country Needs More Of*. [online] HuffPost. Available at: https://www.huffingtonpost.com/ella-gonzalez/women-in-politics_b_4077687.html

Moreover, as Mlambo Ngcuka, the Executive Director of UN Women, has noted “Political Parties are male dominated. Men tend to choose those who are made in their own image.”³³

As a result, even though women represent half of the world’s population, there is an undoubted underrepresentation in national and international governance. Therefore, males decide about women’s reproductive health and their rights leading to cases of violation or inactivity concerning women’s rights.

To sum up, stereotypes affect public opinion about gender and politics. Masculine stereotypes can be a source of advantage, as they match the longstanding standards for successful political leaders, while feminine stereotypes contradict them.

6. Points to be addressed

- What has been done so far and why these efforts were not enough regarding gender equality?
- How can stereotypes be eliminated through education?
- Should the portrayal of women in media be changed and how this could be achieved?
- What measures could be implemented to eliminate all forms of gender discrimination in politics?
- Do stereotypes affect women in labor market and how this issue could be tackled?

7. Conclusion

Gender stereotypes, undoubtedly, affect most of women’s lives, since they lead to their discrimination and inequality in the field of education, media and political life. Those stereotypes have multiple effects, such as women’s underrepresentation, their exclusion from decision-making procedure and, generally, the perpetuation of their discrimination. All member-states should take measures to eliminate this phenomenon and promote equality among all members of their societies.

We hope that this study guide help you gain understanding of the committee’s topic facilitate your research on it.

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³³ Alexovich, A. (2017). *UN launches latest ‘Women in Politics’ map*. [online] United Nations Sustainable Development. Available at: <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2017/03/womens-political-parity-slow-to-grow-as-un-launches-latest-women-in-politics-map/>

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