

**Questionnaire on women’s and girls’ human security in the context of poverty and inequality, report by the UN Working Group on discrimination against women and girls**

**UNESCO CONTRIBUTION**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

As the UN custodian agency for Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Indicator 16.10.2, UNESCO continues to report not only on progress on the adoption and the implementation of Access to Information guarantees worldwide, but also promotes efforts around the issue. Access to Information laws allow the general public to access information held by governments, and often, by private entities that perform public duties or receive public funds. It is critical to the exercise of other rights, the reduction of poverty, and meaningful participation and voice. UNESCO therefore takes pleasure in contributing to this important report by Working Group on discrimination against women and girls and stands ready to provide further information as requested.

In UNESCO’s annual survey on Access to Information 24 Member States reported on the promotion of gender equality in access to information legislation implementation. Women are the least likely to demand and receive access to information yet are perhaps the most in need. Challenges faced by women in exercising the right to information include poverty, lack of awareness of the right to information and where/how to make requests to access information, fear, including fear of asking for information or cultural constraints.

The need to assure gender transformative access to information laws is clear from the low percentages of requesters that are women and the scant number of women that appeal against denials of requests. **According to the findings of a questionnaire sent to Information Commissions in 2021 through the International Conference of Information Commissioners (ICIC), of the 18 national responses and 6 subnational, men were requesting information more often than women. In some cases, as much as 75% of requests were submitted by men.**

Women often face the double burden of sustaining income generation while caring for their families. Increasingly, they are the key decision makers as the number of female-headed households has risen due to civil conflicts, and as men find work farther from home. As a result of limited economic and educational opportunities, women represent a disproportionate number of people living below the poverty line and two-thirds of the world's illiterate. With genuine access to information women can take advantage of opportunities to transform their lives, families, and communities.

In particular, access to information:

* empowers women to make more effective decisions, for example with relation to education, crop production, land ownership, and health care;
* enables women to understand and exercise their full range of rights;
* helps women to participate more fully in public life;
* is critical for holding government and service providers accountable;
* bridges gender gaps and helps to shift power in decision-making processes; and
* can link women with the needed resources for achieving economic empowerment.

**QUESTIONNAIRE:**

1. ***What are the concrete action adopted to promote and protect the economic and social human rights of women and girls?***

UNESCO is actively advocating efforts aimed to strengthen access to information for women through celebration of the International Day of Universal Access to Information (IDUAI).

UNESCO declared on 17 November 2015 that the International Day for Universal Access to Information will be marked and celebrated on 28 September every year. Recognizing the significance of access to information, the 74th UN General Assembly proclaimed 28 September as the International Day for Universal Access to Information at the UN level in October 2019.

Since 2016 UNESCO has organized more than 100 global, regional and national IDUAI events aimed to promote the right to information in general and the right of women to access information in particular.

A wide range of partners, such as government institutions, civil society organizations and academia, including the International Conference of Information Commissioners, which comprises IC’s, Ombudspersons and other bodies charged with overseeing the implementation of ATI laws, are supporting UNESCO efforts to advocate for the implementation of ther Sustainable Development Goal, Indicator 16.10.2 which looks at “the number of countries that have adopted and implemented constitutional, statutory and/or policy guarantees for public access to Information”. UNESCO is the UN custodian agency for SDG 16, indicator 10.2.

UNESCO has developed a report titled “[Promoting Gender Equity in the Right of Access to Information](https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000381684)”. The report outlines a number of recommendations on national and international level, aimed to support the right of information for women.

Report notes that at the international level existing instruments and mechanisms have been relatively silent regarding the explicit inclusion of women’s fundamental right of access to information. In general, where these instruments have included access to information, it has been limited to the issues of reproductive rights or information and communication technology. For women to benefit more fully from their right of access to information, the international mechanisms must recognize the gender aspect of the human right and as a foundation for the exercise of other rights, participation, and economic empowerment. This means explicitly including it in the discourse and instruments as well as promoting better oversight and reporting.

According to the report a gender review of a right to information laws on the national level should engage various stakeholders, including government officials, civil society leaders, and gender experts, to consider each of the provisions through a gender lens and whether in practice the current formulation of the legislation may have a negative or chilling effect on women’s exercise of the right to information.

This could include provisions such as the necessity to make requests in writing and/or in person, fees that would preclude persons without the necessary means, or the need to show an identification card, which some women may not have. In reviewing the law, the stakeholders should consider which sections/areas would benefit from greater gender-sensitization, reflecting on issues such as: gendered language, request procedures, access, literacy, ability to pay, priorities within proactive disclosure, etc.

UNESCO has also developed a set of recommendations, which encourage the the Member States, which are part of the UPR process, to recommend the Member States strengthening the right to information of marginalized groups, including women.

1. ***What would be your main recommendation to advance women’s and girls’ socioeconomic human security?***

UNESCO report titled “Promoting Gender Equity in the Right of Access to Information” provides following recommendations for international mechanisms:

1. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW Committee) could publish a general recommendation or statement on women’s right of access to information.
2. The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) could consider:

* Including women’s right of access to information in the final statements and as part of the proceedings through expert panels
* Designating “women’s right of access to information” as an emerging issue and/or priority theme at a future annual session.

1. The UN Special Procedures could be mobilized to advance women’s right to information through:

* The Working Group on Discrimination against Women and Girls publishing a thematic paper on women and the right of access to information
* The Working Group considering the issue during country visits and when making recommendations
* Relevant mandate-holders publishing a joint thematic report/statement on women’s right of access to information

1. The Women’s Major Group for the HLPF could publish annual position papers including a section dedicated to women’s right of access to information
2. UN agencies, programmes and funds could further engage to advance women’s right to information through:

* Mainstreaming women’s right to information into existing programming and focus areas
* Developing joint actions, such as publications, events, and forums
* Including the issue in the work/deliberations of the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality

**UNESCO report titled “Promoting Gender Equity in the Right of Access to Information” provides following recommendations for improving national laws and practice in the field of ATI:**

1. Promote gender-sensitive Right to Information (RTI) laws, including:

* Reviewing of RTI legislation through a gender-lens, including assuring at minimum gender-neutral language and gender-sensitivity, with the ideal of a gender-transformative approach
* Mandatory support for requesters, with specific reference to persons that may be illiterate, functionally literate, or speak different languagesc.
* Incorporating a reduction of fees for search, retrieval and reproduction/copying of documents based on hardship
* Explicitly listing information most critical for women in proactive publication schemese. Gender parity within the Information Commissions to encourage a diversity of opinion and model the value of women’s access to information

2. Access to Information practices should be gender-sensitive, including:

* Increasing women’s awareness of the right to access information and how to exercise it, including through radio, town hall meetings, information booths and/or engagement of civil society organizations
* Placing proactively disclosed information in locations where women can best and most easily and safely access it
* Disaggregating data by sex, such as number of women requesters, number of women denied information, and number of women that appeal denials
* Assuring gender balance in the number of designated information officers to ensure representativity and encourage women requesters
* e. Developing and implementing mandatory gender-sensitivity trainings on the topic of access to information for relevant public officials
* Providing specific support to women that are denied information, to ensure they are aware, equipped, and able to appeal such denials
* Encouraging an increase in data to be disaggregated by gender and ensuring the inclusion of specific sections on women’s right to information in annual reports

3. Development of a comprehensive strategy, plan of action and accompanying dedicated budget to ensure that RTI is equitable, including engaging with the ministries responsible for women’s rights/gender/family/youth, other ministerial gender units and Human Rights bodies/ Ombudspersons

4. Encourage Open Government Partnership Commitments to include national and subnational actions to advance an equitable right of access to information for all women