

GENDER EQUALITY WITHIN THE UNITED NATIONS: THE CONTRIBUTION OF SPECIALIZED AGENCIES TO WOMEN'S RIGHTS

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Annotation. The article examines the role of the United Nations in promoting gender equality and protecting women's rights through the activities of its specialized agencies. The UN is one of the main international bodies making comprehensive efforts to ensure equal rights and opportunities for women in various spheres of life, including politics, economy, education, health and social sphere. One of the Organization's priorities is to overcome gender discrimination and create conditions for women to realize their full potential in the world.

UN specialized agencies play an important role in implementing the gender equality program by developing strategies, initiatives, and supporting national governments and civil society. They conduct research, provide technical and financial assistance, organize trainings and conferences to raise awareness of women's rights, and create mechanisms to combat violence, exploitation and other forms of discrimination.

Specifically, UN Women supports UN Member States in setting global standards for achieving gender equality and works with government and civil society to develop the laws, policies, programs and services needed to implement these standards. The organization advocates for women's equal participation in all aspects of life and focuses on five priority goals: increasing women's leadership and active participation in development processes; combating violence against women; involving women in all aspects of peace and security processes; empowering women economically; and prioritizing gender equality in national planning and budgeting. In addition, UN Women coordinates and supports the UN system in improving the situation with gender equality. Despite the achievements in this area, gender equality remains one of the biggest challenges in the modern world. The article emphasizes the need to further strengthen institutional mechanisms and international cooperation to achieve real gender equality on a global scale. The mechanisms used by specialized institutions to monitor and protect women's rights in different countries, in particular through research, preparation of reports and recommendations for member states, are considered. Attention is focused on the importance of integrating a gender perspective into all areas of politics, economics and social development. In addition, the challenges faced by the UN specialized agencies, such as gender discrimination, violence against women, and economic and social inequality, are analyzed. The role of international agreements and resolutions that support women's rights is discussed, and it is noted that in order to achieve real changes in ensuring women's rights, it is necessary to intensify efforts at all levels: global, regional and national. The author emphasizes the importance of cooperation between states, civil society organizations and international institutions to create an enabling environment for the realization of women's rights.

Key words: women's rights, United Nations, specialized institutions, gender equality, discrimination, mechanisms for protecting women's rights.

1. Formulation of the problem.

In today's world, the issue of ensuring women's rights remains one of the most pressing. Despite numerous international agreements and the efforts of specialized United Nations agencies, the

situation with women's rights in many countries is still critical. Gender discrimination, violence against women, and social stereotypes create significant obstacles to the realization of their rights and opportunities.

UN specialized agencies play an important role in formulating global policies on gender equality and women's rights. However, despite their efforts, there are significant difficulties in implementing the recommendations and norms implemented at the international level, often due to insufficient political will of states, cultural barriers and economic constraints.

Thus, there is a need to improve existing mechanisms for protecting women's rights, develop effective strategies at the national and international levels, and strengthen the role of civil society in promoting gender equality. All these aspects emphasize the importance of in-depth analysis of the work of UN specialized agencies and assessment of their impact on women's rights in the global context.

2. The state of problem solving.

The UN General Assembly Resolutions, ILO Conventions, UNESCO international legal documents, etc. were used to study various aspects of this topic. However, despite numerous studies in this area, many issues remain unresolved and require further study and elaboration.

3. The article aims to assess the achievements of the UN specialized agencies in the field of gender equality, as well as to identify the main difficulties and obstacles they face in their work.

4. Presentation of the research material.

The United Nations and its specialized agencies pay special attention to the protection of women's rights in developing countries. Legislation on women's equality, even where it exists, does not solve all problems. In these countries, real opportunities for women's wider participation in the workforce are limited by the underdevelopment of industry and the network of institutions where women can apply their labor, as well as the lack of necessary education and training. Women's labor in developing countries is typically used in agriculture. This trend is exacerbated by the migration of labor from rural to urban areas due to harsh working conditions, seasonal work, low wages, and the almost complete lack of labor protection in agriculture.

For example, in many African countries, the vast majority of women are still effectively deprived of the right to the work they want and are forced to accept any, sometimes the most coercive, form of exploitation. They continue to be subject to abuse and oppression in the family. Mass unemployment worsens the situation of women [1].

In fact, prejudice in the workplace begins with blatant injustice in education. Women's literacy affects agricultural productivity and fertility. In industry and commerce, women are involved in small-scale operations: not very costly and, obviously, not with the highest level of secrecy. But even if these operations are extremely successful, women's average income remains consistently low. Lack of education also affects women's access to jobs in the "official" sector. In the end, even successful and educated women can rarely count on a decent position and a decent salary [1].

The underrepresentation of women in technical education, training, and employment is not unique to Africa; it is a problem in most countries of our world. The situation in Africa should be viewed in the context of serious economic and development problems that affect many countries in different regions of the world [1].

In Muslim countries, the gender issue is also perceived ambiguously, often legislative initiatives are declarative, but in society, roles continue to be distributed between men and women according to traditional ideas that profess the role of men as the main one.

Some countries in the region are at the initial stage of developing and ensuring gender equality. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia does not have a Constitution in the modern sense. The role of the Constitution is played by the holy books of Islam - the Koran and the Sunnah. The list of human rights and freedoms is quite narrow (for example, there is a right to property): even such natural human rights as the right to life, the right to respect for honor and dignity are not spelled out in the Basic Nizam [2]. At the present stage, some laws have been adopted to improve women's living standards and socialization, as well as to allow them to act independently without the supervision of their husbands, brothers or fathers [2].

In order to avoid such problems in the future, on December 7, 1962, on the initiative of the Commission on the Status of Women and pursuant to a resolution of the Economic and Social Council, the General Assembly adopted Resolution 1777 (XVII), which invited «the Secretary-General of the United Nations to explore with Member States, the specialized agencies the United Nations Children's Fund and relevant non-governmental organizations, the possibility of allocating and developing new resources exclusively for the purpose of developing and implementing long-term joint programmes for the advancement of women», and «to explore, within the framework of the programme of advisory services on social security, in particular, the possibility of expanding assistance for the advancement of women in developing countries through seminars, fellowships and expert assistance» [3].

The General Assembly requested the Commission on the Status of Women to cooperate with the UN Secretary-General to this end. The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women is a functional commission of ECOSOC, which is the global policymaking body dedicated exclusively to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women. The Commission was established by ECOSOC in 1946 with a mandate to make recommendations for the protection of women's rights in the political, economic, civil, social and educational spheres. The Commission is also responsible for monitoring, reviewing and assessing progress made and challenges encountered in the implementation of the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the 23rd Special Session of the General Assembly in 2000 at all levels, as well as promoting gender mainstreaming. In addition, the Commission contributes to the follow-up to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in order to accelerate the realization of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

At the XIX session of the Commission on the Status of Women in 1966, the report of the UN Secretary-General on the United Nations assistance in the advancement of women was approved [4]. The report stated the main objectives of the United Nations Joint Long-Term Program for the Advancement of Women: to promote universal recognition of the dignity and worth of the human person and of the equality of men and women in accordance with the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; to enable women to participate equally in the development of society; to help both men and women realize the full potential of women and the importance of their contribution to the development of society.

In the same year, 1966, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) also proposed a long-term program for the advancement of women to its member states. Although this was a new priority area in the Organization's overall plan, it was in line with the ethical stance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and was prepared on the basis of normative provisions and recommendations endorsed by a growing number of Member States. The importance of women's economic and social role in the development of countries that are industrialized or on the way to industrialization is widely recognized. Such development will take place with their full and complete participation or not at all. Women are a valuable source of talent and energy, and UNESCO, by teaching adults to read and write, educating children of both sexes, and providing adolescents with a variety of scientific and technical knowledge, is trying to enable women to play the same role in their societies that is considered their birthright under the United Nations Charter. This activity was launched as part of a biennial UNESCO program; it is an integral part of the Decade for Development; it stimulates enthusiasm; and it calls for the goodwill of responsible governmental authorities and non-governmental organizations [5].

In the vast field of UNESCO's activities, special attention must be paid to the more normative proposals that the Organization has developed and proposed to Member States; and two groups of these proposals, published since 1960, greatly facilitate progress towards gender equality in

education. They address this issue, among others, but their significance is great. Thus, referring to the Convention and Recommendation against Discrimination in Education, in particular, Article 1, it is stated that: “For the purposes of this Recommendation, the term ‘discrimination’ means any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, or birth which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing equality in education, and in particular (a) to deprive a person or group of persons of access to different types or levels of education, (b) to restrict to a lower level the education of a person, or (c) except in the circumstances referred to in Article 3 of the present Convention, to establish or maintain separate systems of education or educational institutions for persons or groups of persons, or (d) to subject a person or group of persons to conditions incompatible with human dignity [5].

In Article 2, paragraph 11, the aforementioned laws specify and stipulate with regard to individual institutions: if authorized by the State, the following situations shall not be considered as constituting discrimination as defined in Article 1, paragraph 1, of the current Convention/Recommendation: (a) the establishment or maintenance of separate systems or institutions for students of both sexes, provided that these systems or institutions provide access to equivalent instruction, equally qualified teaching staff, buildings and equipment of equal quality and allow for the study of the same programs or equivalent [5].

This act, which has been supported by thirty-eight countries since 1962, is of great significance and helped launch a long-term UNESCO program. Even as the principle of a Protocol establishing a Conciliation and Assistance Commission, whose task would be to resolve differences that might arise between States Parties to the Convention, was being drafted and ratified by Member States, UNESCO was able to develop a detailed plan for the submission of periodic reports on the application of the two instruments by Member States that had signed the Convention/Recommendation. To date, more than thirty such reports have been submitted to UNESCO by Member States [5].

Another normative proposal, developed after frequent consultations between UNESCO and the International Labor Organization (ILO), should also be seen as having great significance for women. This is the International Recommendation concerning the Status of Teaching Personnel, approved unanimously in October 1966 by 75 representatives of the member states of the two organizations. Since the teaching profession is one of the first professions open to women, and since in many countries women constitute the majority of primary school teachers, and their numbers are steadily increasing at other levels of education, it is worth considering in more detail this act, which differs from the previously mentioned Convention and Recommendation. Paragraph 7(111) of the guidelines provides that “the training and employment of teachers shall not be subject to any discrimination on the grounds of race, color or sex”. In addition, the recommendations on employment set out in paragraph 7 (Articles 54-58) refer to teachers with families, and Articles 102 and 103 refer to maternity leave. The implementation of this recommendation would certainly improve the situation of teachers in general, and especially female teachers, by setting clear standards that remove some of the barriers that still exist in some countries to the employment of married female teachers [5].

UNESCO also maintains contact with many non-governmental organizations, among which women's organizations play an important role. Each of them has the opportunity to express their wishes and make recommendations regarding UNESCO's program [6].

Another entity that deals with gender equality and women's empowerment is UN Women, a global advocate for women and girls, created to accelerate progress in meeting their needs around the world. UN Women was established as part of the UN reform agenda, pooling resources and mandates for greater impact. It brings together and builds on the important work of four previously separate parts of the UN system that focused exclusively on gender equality and women's empowerment: The Division for the Advancement of Women; the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women; the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women; and the United Nations Development Fund for Women [7].

UN Women supports UN Member States in setting global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to develop the laws, policies, programs and services

needed to ensure that these standards are effectively implemented and truly benefit women and girls around the world. The organization works globally to make the vision of the Sustainable Development Goals a reality for women and girls and advocates for women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on four strategic priorities women lead, participate in and benefit equally from systems of governance; women have secure income, decent work and economic independence; all women and girls live lives free from all forms of violence; women and girls contribute to and have greater influence in building sustainable peace and resilience, and benefit equally from disaster and conflict prevention and humanitarian action [7].

UN Women also coordinates and facilitates the work of the UN system in promoting gender equality, as well as in all discussions and agreements related to the 2030 Agenda. The Entity works to position gender equality as fundamental to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and building a more inclusive world [7].

The main objectives of UN Women are to empower women and girls around the world: support intergovernmental bodies, such as the Commission on the Status of Women, in developing policies, global standards and norms; help Member States implement these standards, being ready to provide appropriate technical and financial support to those countries that request it, and establish effective partnerships with civil society; lead and coordinate the work of the UN system in the area of gender equality, and promote accountability, including through regular monitoring of system-wide progress [7].

The fight against discrimination and gender inequality is also a key aspect of the ILO's activities, which gave rise to the following documents: The Equal Remuneration for Men and Women Workers for Work of Equal Value Convention, 1951 (No. 100) [8] and the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111) [9]. Certain provisions are also contained in the Convention on Equal Treatment and Equal Opportunities for Men and Women Workers: Workers with Family Responsibilities (No. 156) [10], the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (Persons with Disabilities) Convention, 1983 (No. 159) [11], the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169) [12], and the Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189) [13], and the Maternity Protection Convention (No. 103) [14].

It is worth paying attention to the General Overview of the Committee on the Application of Standards. As part of its consideration of the issue of achieving equality between women and men at work, the Committee of Experts' Report on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations was presented [15]. As stated in the document, at the global level, the push for gender equality has gained an unforeseen scale over the past 25 years. The adoption of the Beijing Declaration in 1995 and the review of its implementation in 2020 have ensured increased interest in promoting gender equality [16]. In 2021, the UN Commission on the Status of Women called on governments to take action to address the root causes of gender inequality and remove barriers to women's full and equal participation. This was to be done by expanding women's economic opportunities and their right to work, eliminating occupational segregation, etc. Promotion of gender equality includes actions on access and equality in education, training and employment; women's empowerment and economic autonomy; prevention of violence and harassment, including gender-based violence, in particular, domestic violence and sexual harassment; maternity protection; promotion of women to leadership positions and their representation in public authorities, etc. [17].

The main documents of interest to the Committee were: The Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111) [9], the Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention (No. 156) [10] and the Maternity Protection Convention (No. 103) [14]. The following conclusions are important when analyzing these conventions: 1. The Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention (No. 111) [9]: many countries currently prohibit discrimination on seven grounds, but considerable attention is still required to prohibit and combat sexual harassment, discriminatory actions based on sex and gender, as well as multiple and intersecting discrimination. In addition, the existing legal and regulatory tools aimed at establishing equality in employment are still not able to overcome the dynamics of the labor market, which often leave behind certain groups of workers, such as freelancers, self-employed and home-based workers. The Committee emphasizes that the government's focus should also be on the situation of multiple discrimination. Gender stereotypes and occupational segregation remain a major obstacle and systemic barrier to gender equality



at work. The Committee requests member States to take proactive measures in cooperation with the social partners, including awareness-raising, to break down gender stereotypes; 2. Convention concerning Workers with Family Responsibilities (No. 156) [10]: The Committee emphasizes that the tripartite parties should strengthen their efforts to provide affordable and quality social services, including childcare and long-term care facilities, to reconcile work and care for children, elderly or sick relatives; 3. Maternity Protection Convention (No. 103) [14]: Despite the positive changes that have taken place in many member states aimed at strengthening the employment and health care of pregnant and breastfeeding women, expanding maternity insurance, increasing the duration of maternity leave and the amount of cash benefits, facilitating access to maternal health services and taking measures against discrimination in the workplace, it is still considered that this is not enough to bring about fundamental changes in this area. Many pregnant and breastfeeding women around the world are not adequately protected due to legal gaps or lack of effective implementation of maternity legislation. This is especially true for women who work part-time or in temporary employment, home-based work, etc. [17].

With regard to the approach advocated by the ILO, i.e. the application of the three conventions mentioned above, the most effective tool is to provide advice on the application of these instruments, as well as to raise the level of legal awareness of the population.

5. Conclusions.

With the support of the UN, significant progress has been made in the fight for women's rights, including in education, health, political participation and economic equality. However, numerous problems, such as violence against women, discrimination in the labor market, and limited access to justice, remain in many countries. Given global and regional challenges, many of these problems require a more comprehensive approach and changes in national legal systems.

Gender equality is an important component of sustainable development, and the UN's work to ensure women's rights is an integral part of this strategy. The UN specialized agencies contribute to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Goal 5, which aims to achieve gender equality and empower women. Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but its achievement has enormous social and economic implications. Empowering women contributes to economic prosperity by boosting productivity and growth. However, gender inequality remains deeply entrenched in every society. Women do not have access to decent work, face occupational segregation and wage gaps. Too often they are denied access to basic education and health care. Women in all parts of the world suffer from violence and discrimination. They are underrepresented in political and economic decision-making.

Over many decades, the United Nations has made progress in advancing gender equality, including through landmark agreements such as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

To effectively ensure women's rights, cooperation between states, international organizations and civil society needs to be strengthened. The UN should continue to work actively to improve international standards, support reforms at the national level, and combat cultural and social barriers that limit women's equality. In addition, it should focus on increasing women's participation in decision-making at all levels and combating violence in all its forms.

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