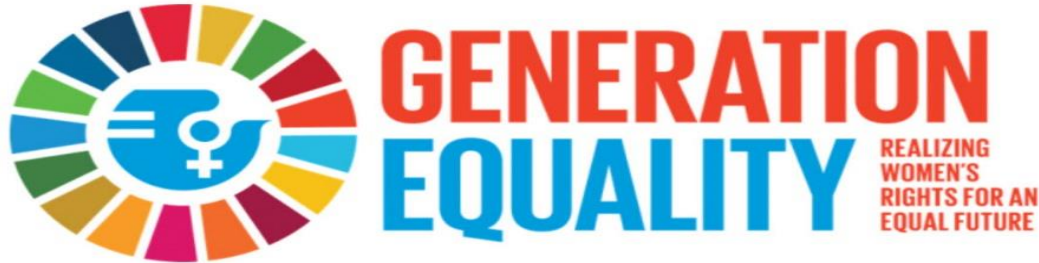




**GW I UPDATE – 8 November 2019**  
**Beijing+25 Regional Review Meeting and Civil Society Forum**  
**Special Edition**



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*The Beijing+25 Regional Review Meeting took place from 29-30 October 2019 at the United Nations Office in Geneva, Switzerland.*

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— GW I at the Civil Society Forum —

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*Opening session of the Generation Equality CSO Forum.*

On 28 October, Graduate Women International (GWI) participated in the Generation Equality Regional Civil Society Forum (CSO) in Geneva, Switzerland at the International Conference Centre. This forum served as a platform for all civil society organisations from Europe and its neighbours to come together and discuss the main issues that have prevented the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA), adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995. The BPfA provided a critical instrument to women's rights worldwide and laid out

a substantial set of 12 critical areas for achieving the empowerment of women which was adopted by 189 United Nations member states. In preparation of its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2020, the international community is now coming together in various regional meetings to examine actions that are needed to meet these criteria. To accomplish goals, the CSO Forum comprised 22 roundtable discussions, notably on women's education and training, violence against women, climate change and women and rural women. The conclusions reached during these discussions were compiled into a written statement read passionately by İlayda Eskitaşçioğlu, the Civil Society representative chosen to transmit the recommendations agreed upon on the CSO Forum the day before, the following day at the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Beijing+25 Regional Review Meeting at the United Nations Geneva. Alongside the Forum, GWI operated an exhibit booth to promote GWI's work, values and mission to attendees throughout the day. The CSO Forum was a success and GWI looks forward to welcoming the many new members who expressed interest in GWI's international network of graduate women.

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— GW I at the UNECE Beijing+25 Regional Review Meeting —

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## Opening session of the UNECE Beijing +25 Regional Review Meeting, 29-30 October

With regards to the 1995 BPfA, the Beijing +25 Regional Review Meeting took place from 29-30 October 2019 at the United Nations in Geneva, Switzerland. Organised by the UNECE and UN Women, the meeting served as an opportunity for UNECE member states to discuss the progress and challenges of implementing the BPfA. During the opening session, Olga Algayerova, the UNECE Executive Secretary, outlined three areas of focus for the meeting over the two days, which included violence against women, economic empowerment, and political participation. Algayerova mentioned the importance of addressing emerging topics such as climate change, education justice, and structural problems. İlayda Eskitaşçıoğlu detailed multiple key conclusions reached regarding the 12 critical areas. With the goal of leaving no one behind, the speakers emphasised inclusion and the incorporation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in relation to the BPfA.



*From left to right: Stacy Dry Lara (Executive Director), Terry Oudraad (President), Katharina Strub (Treasurer).*

## Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG): lessons and solutions from the region

The meeting's first day concluded with presentations about VAWG. The panellists, including Special Rapporteur on VAWG Dubravka Simonovic, represented a variety of areas such as states, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), civil society and the private sector that represented Spain, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Belgium, Switzerland, the Republic of Moldova, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the Council of Europe. Concerns were expressed about the misconception of traditional values that may translate into violence and that VAWG occurs everywhere, whether it is online, in politics, at home, etc. The Special Rapporteur also highlighted that there has been slow progress on implementing the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in the UNECE region. When it came to solutions, many reiterated that any action plan to combat violence against women of all ages must first be consented to by civil society representatives so that their involvement in implementing the action plan is guaranteed.

## GWJ joined the session on education for gender equality



*Side event on education for gender equality.*

During the UNECE Regional Review Meeting, GWJ participated in a side event about education as a powerful tool for transformation towards gender equality. Concerns were raised on the alarming gender disparity in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), which are considered to contain the jobs of the future, and the systematic discrimination women and girls face in education in general. Furthermore, the session emphasised the interlinkages between all SDGs, meaning that without achieving SDG 5 on gender equality, sustainable development could not be reached. Finally, the session brought forward several projects intended to empower women in STEM, such as the [UNESCO STEM and gender advancement \(SAGA\) project](#), as well as successes celebrated with regard to pushing back gender discrimination in education in Finland by fostering the teacher profession, and in Ukraine by adapting school textbooks.

## Women in leadership: Women's representation in policy- and decision-making

This session shared strategies and measures aimed to leave no woman. Women in policy- and decision-making positions, including in conflict prevention and resolution, bring positive change and influence the outcome of negotiations positively. Marija Blagojevic from the Women's Political Network, Montenegro, noted that their biggest element of success was the incorporation of women from 16 different political parties including government and opposition. According to her, gender equality has no borders and connects us all. After one century of fighting for women's political rights, all actors involved should understand the importance of the movement for gender equality. She furthermore suggested separate budget lines for women entrepreneurs in order to equilibrate the economic disadvantages women face. Doctor Kateryna Levchenko, Ukraine's Government Commissioner for Gender Policy, emphasised the need to acknowledge the gender imbalance in decision-making processes. Although more and more men support women's leadership, women themselves lack confidence and income to strive for greatness, and their primary caretaking duties constitute a barrier between women and leadership positions. Interestingly, she noted that the lower the level of decision-making, the higher the percentage of women partaking. GWI strives for women's active partaking in leadership and decision-making by advocating for the removal of all barriers to women and girls' participation in decision-making at the highest level and in all areas of life.



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## Empowering women to build climate resilience



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Item 10 of the UNECE Regional Review Meeting's plenary session was dedicated to climate change. It was raised that in order to successfully address the cause and consequences of the current climate crisis, a gender perspective is indispensable. Hereby, the role of rural women was particularly emphasised, because they are the most vulnerable to the negative effects of climate change. GWI recently highlighted this in its [press release](#) and [advocacy toolkit](#) commemorating the International Day of Rural Women. However, instead of considering rural women passive victims, they should be encouraged to actively participate in tackling climate change in their local communities by providing them with training and equipment. Founder and director of Women Organising for Change in Agriculture and Natural Resource Management (WOCAN), Jeannette Gurung, further stressed the urgent need for data and results measurement, financing for women's associations as well as the need to mainstream climate into gender to gain more attention to climate actions within the BPfA. She also stated that 73% of initiatives for women and girls do not engage women-based organisations and that only 9% of gender funding for reaches women-based organisations. Get access to the sessions' concept paper [here](#).

## Striving for gender equality in the Balkans and Eastern Europe

To start the Beijing+25 Regional Review Meeting, GWI attended a side event organised inter alia by the Women's Political Network Montenegro, the Swedish Gender Equality Agency, Georgia, Armenia and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The side event focused on the fact that without concrete policies on the ground, gender equality legislation cannot be successfully implemented. The support of politicians and policymakers is hereby indispensable, but women are still highly underrepresented in politics and decision-making positions. Marija Blagojevic from the Women's Political Network brought forward how the Network incorporates women politicians from 16 different Moldovan political parties, which shows that dialogue and solidarity for gender equality are possible. Civil society activist in women's rights, Ismeta Dervoz, remarked, however, that a top-down approach does not deliver the necessary results. She emphasised the need for synergies among activists and the inclusion of youth to bring new energy to the gender equality movement in order to counter gender backlash. Young leaders and new methodologies such as social media campaigns, have the power to disseminate information and allow the movement to be one step ahead. Countries like Ukraine and Bosnia and Herzegovina dispose of solid legislation stipulating gender equality, but the next generation is the key to women's equal participation in policy- and decision-making.

## Rural women entrepreneurs as agents for change



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Since one of the ways of improving the position of women is their economic empowerment, UN Women, the UNDP, Azerbaijan and others organised a side event celebrating successes in fostering rural women's economic empowerment in the South Caucasus region. The focus was hereby on the Women's Resources Centre in Azerbaijan (WRC), funded by UNDP, the European Union (EU), Azerbaijan, Switzerland and others, and which had a transformative impact on women's lives by developing their business and technical skills, giving them mentoring support and market access and launching them as entrepreneurs in different fields. Since the launch of these projects, over 6000 women have

received free training on a range of soft and hard skills - from accounting and financial literacy, computer science, fundraising to presentation skills and networking. The panellists included a woman who, with the help of the WRC, started her own art school. By now, several of her students attend art colleges. Another success story was shared by a woman who not only managed to start her own business, but at the same time became very involved with the WRC, to the point of her becoming WRC projects coordinator and acquiring legal status for her own NGO "Support to Women's Social Development in Sabirabad".

## Changing demographics: ageing and its implications for gender equality

GWI attended a side event hosted by France, Italy, Germany and civil society representatives to address the topic of ageing and the implications for gender equality. The event highlighted key challenges and solutions in promoting gender equality in the older population as well as addressing methods to be adapted to the elderly population. Alfredo Ferrante, President of the Italian Council of Ministers, stated that the proportion of people aged 80 years old and more is predicted to more than double in the next century due to medical advancements. With this prominent change in demographics, the



GWI participates in a side event on ageing and its impact on women.

issue of gender equality pertains since women are generally seen to live longer than males. Common key challenges addressed in this session included the lack of prevention for domestic violence against older women, the negative perception of the elderly as unproductive or burdensome, leading to less working hours and wages resulting in the pension gap. One main reason to explain the lack of attention to older women can be due to the lack of adequate inclusion of the elderly in research and surveys that are used to create policies, which generally only includes people up to the age of 65. To address these issues, the discussion called for more flexibility in compensation and pension rights, division of work and life balance in addition to unpaid care work for both genders and stronger government involvement in implementation of policies adapting to the older population. The UNECE is currently creating policy addressing ageing that is expected to be presented in an upcoming conference.

### **Beyond Beijing+25 in the EU: Sustainable and inclusive growth through the lens of women's empowerment**

On 29 October, GWI participated a session on the EU's Beijing+25 review which addressed the greatest gender equality challenges that EU member states are facing and the ways in which to overcome these through policy action. This was co-organised by the European Institute for Gender Equality, the Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health in Finland and by the French High Council for Gender Equality (FHCGE). This session drew attention to alarming facts including that it will take 190 years to achieve gender parity in economic decision-making due to the slow rate that EU states are progressing. All panellists also mentioned how violence against women and girls is still so prominent in the EU and how the world of technology is now making it even easier to target women and girls; social media has become an unregulated platform for sexual harassment. The FHCGE also reported that every three days in France, a woman dies from male partner violence. In this context, France has recently released an annual report on sexism and hopes that this will act as an example for other countries to follow.

### **Discussions on the upcoming Generation Equality Forums in Mexico and Paris**

GWI attended a side event organised by France and UN Women with the Permanent Representative of Mexico to the United Nations as a guest to discuss preparations for the upcoming Generation Equality Forums that will be held in Mexico City on 7-8 May 2020 and in Paris on 7-10 July 2020. These forums will follow on from the Beijing+25 national and regional reviews and the 64<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in March 2020. The purpose of these forums is to create concrete objectives and actions for advancing women's rights and achieving the SDGs, especially [SDG 5](#). It was also encouraging to have the Permanent Representative of Armenia attend this event since Armenia currently holds the presidency of CSW. During this session, three main topics were discussed including the emancipation of girls in digital media, equitable investment for girls, and protection from violence such as child marriage. As suggestions for future action, UN Women underscored the vitality of young activists in the movement while Mexico highlighted the significance of collaboration between governments, international organisations and beyond. The need for accelerating the implementation of policies into a legal framework as well as the principles of inclusivity and accountability was raised by the Vice Chair of the Committee on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women. Considering the various aspects discussed in this event, France and Mexico assured action-oriented and comprehensive conclusions in these forums.



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## Ending VAWG: prevalence, proposals and partnerships



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Organised by the International Council of Women and the Council of Europe, and co-sponsored by the Permanent Mission of Canada to the United Nation and NGO CSW Geneva, this side event addressed VAWG as a barrier to women's full participation in society and as a wider threat to peace. It also demonstrated the extensive health, social and economic implications for victims of VAWG. Particularly touching was a testimony by Mohinder Watson, founder of Action on Child, Early and Forced Marriage, and main UN NGO Permanent Representative of the International Council of Women, Geneva, who spoke of her personal experience with forced marriage and

so-called honour killings. Education was mentioned as a way for women to step away from harmful practices and to achieve more independence. Since its inauguration, GWI has been working tirelessly to grant access to education to women and girls, which in turn opens opportunities for them to choose their own path in life. Read the full concept note on the side event [here](#).

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## — Our 2019 Fall Interns —

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From left to right: Anna, Kate and Ciara.

### **Anna Indermaur**

My name is Anna Indermaur and I am 25 years old. I recently graduated from a Master's programme in European and International Human Rights Law at Leiden University in the Netherlands. Before that, I studied international relations at the University of Geneva. As a Swiss citizen, I have the privilege to choose my own career path, and I have the opportunity to pursue education up to the highest level if I wish to do so. I do not take this for granted. Coming from a background of farming from both my mother's as well as my father's side, I am the first one ever in my family to study. This makes me proud, and it shows that with the right educational system, education does become accessible to everyone, as it should be. I now consider it my mission to pass on my privilege to others, and to support others in achieving what was given to me simply due to where I was born. So far, I have done so by joining the youth organisation AIESEC and the Red Cross in Geneva during my undergrad studies. My internship with GWI gives me now the opportunity to pursue my dedication professionally and to understand the work of an NGO advocating

for a cause like girls' education. After my time with GWI I intend to proceed in promoting universal access to education, because I firmly believe that a person with access to education can achieve anything.

### **Kate Choi**

My name is Kate Choi and I am 20 years old. I am currently a third-year student at Boston University in the United States studying International Relations and Public Health. I was originally born in South Korea but grew up mostly in Canada and the United States. By having the opportunity to live in various parts of the world I was exposed to diverse cultures and people, which piqued my interest in International Relations. Within International Relations, I am passionate about human rights, especially women's rights, and am interested in international organisations as well as the NGO sector. I am grateful for the opportunity to intern for GWI which allowed me to experience the daily operations of an international NGO based in Geneva and contribute to ensuring lifelong education for women and girls worldwide.

### **Ciara Rainsby**

My name is Ciara Rainsby and I have recently graduated from the University of Exeter where I did my Bachelors' degree in International Relations. I am 22 years-old, originally half Irish and half English but have lived most of my life between Switzerland, France and the US - this is what sparked my fascination with International Relations! I am very thankful to have the opportunity to do this internship as I am deeply interested in women's rights issues. It also provides you with great exposure into how an NGO functions on a day-to-day basis and how other international organisations, like the UN, work. I have currently been interning with GWI for 2 months so far and have learnt so much!

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## **Follow us on social media!**



Empowering women and girls through lifelong education for leadership, decision-making and peace. GWI, formerly IFUW, is in special consultative status with ECOSOC since 1947 and is an NGO maintaining official relations with UNESCO and ILO.

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