**Committee:** Human Rights Council (HRC)

**Issue:** Enacting Workplace Protections Against Inequality and Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

**Student Officer:** Annelie Spanopoulos

**Position:** Co-chair 

**PERSONAL INTRODUCTION**

Hey everyone! My name is Annelie, I’m seventeen years old, and I am a 12th grader in Pinewood’s AP program! First things first, I’m so excited to meet all of you and get to know the first committee I have the honor of chairing! My other co-chair and I will be there to help you guys throughout the conference and answer any questions, while our wonderful main chair will be conducting the sessions!

The topic I am in charge of writing about this year is “Inequalities and Discrimination in the Workplace”. As this is a topic that still has a drastic impact on us, as we will soon be heading into the workplace ourselves, it is extremely important to acknowledge and talk about, and I am very excited to see what you all have to offer to the discussion of this pressing topic. The study guide below will hopefully give you a rough idea of what we will be discussing, but do please research for your specific delegations as information may vary per your assigned role.

I hope we can make this conference as memorable and as fun as my previous ones. MUN has done so much for me and sparked a love for debating I never knew I had, given me so many experiences, and I only hope I can pass this torch on and help even just one of you find your love for MUN as well.

If anyone has any questions for me about the study guide, any information, or pretty much anything you might need clarification or help with, please feel free to reach out and send me an email at Spanopoulos.a@pinewood-school.gr!

Can't wait to meet you all!

Annelie Spanopoulos,

**TOPIC INTRODUCTION**

Even after decades of global progress towards equality, discrimination in the workplace remains a widespread and deeply rooted issue. Due to their gender, race, ethnicity, religion, disability, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic background, millions of workers around the world continue to face unfair treatment that limits their potential and compromises their fundamental human rights. In addition to being unethical, these inequalities lead to a decline in productivity, due to an unwelcoming working environment, and more importantly, the loss of talented individuals who are overlooked because of who they are. Another impact of this issue is that it also leads to an economic recession both domestically and internationally.

Discrimination can take on many forms; most commonly, it tends to take shape in biased hiring practices, hostile work environments, pay gaps, and glass ceilings. For example, ethnic minorities face barriers to progress, women are sometimes paid less for performing the same work as men, and those with disabilities are often excluded from the workforce entirely.[[1]](#footnote-0) In many places, outdated legal protections, failure to enforce treaties, laws, policies, acts, and resolutions, and a lack of accountability only worsen these pressing issues.

The workplace is changing at an unprecedented rate due to factors such as globalization and new technology. While such factors can create new opportunities, they also put many vulnerable people at risk of being left behind. This topic is important as it prompts an examination of where discrimination comes from, how it affects people, and what can actually be done to fix it. You guys will need to think about fair and realistic solutions that help protect workers, support equality, and build a more inclusive world where no one is forgotten.

It is crucial that we address this matter from both a legal and humanitarian perspective as Human Rights Council representatives. Think about how global firms, international organizations, and grassroots movements can either support or undermine workplace inequality in addition to the role played by national governments. Consider seriously how intersectionality—the overlap of several identities, such as gender, race, and disability—can exacerbate prejudice and necessitate complex, multidimensional solutions.

Furthermore, we need to consider who is benefiting from these advancements and who is losing out as the world economy moves toward automation, artificial intelligence, and flexible work arrangements. In addition to new legislation, solutions will need more robust enforcement, accountability, and transparency frameworks that hold both public and private actors accountable. In order to ascertain what has and has not succeeded, as well as what novel concepts can spur significant change, delegates must assess current frameworks, including regional human rights courts, ILO Conventions, and corporate social responsibility guidelines.

Above all, this is a human issue rather than simply a policy one. Every number represents a person who has been denied fairness, opportunity, or decency. The challenge for you, delegates, is not only to comprehend the extent of workplace discrimination, but also to envision what a truly inclusive and equitable global workforce can entail—and how we can all work together to achieve it.

**DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS**

**Accountability**The condition of being responsible for actions and being expected to explain them.[[2]](#footnote-1)

**Bias**A strong feeling in favor of or against one group of people, or one side in an argument, often not based on fair judgment.[[3]](#footnote-2)

**Discrimination**The practice of treating someone or a particular group in society less fairly than others.[[4]](#footnote-3)

**Diversity and Inclusion**“Diversity” is the presence of differences within a setting; “inclusion” is ensuring everyone feels welcome, respected, and able to participate fully.[[5]](#footnote-4)

**Equal Pay**The concept that men and women should receive the same remuneration for the same work or work of equal value.[[6]](#footnote-5)

**Glass ceiling**

An [unacknowledged](https://www.google.com/search?safe=active&client=safari&sca_esv=350ce77c903cf1b3&hl=en-gr&q=unacknowledged&si=AMgyJEsLTdbRPs4CIty9OfcBRxtZHmGZmRfEMgr85TiDgHgR9H5Am3vSnGj05wjWb7h7NCbbyBHdRGiWc-irTIyw2OJVgwLxDXINpmnn_kHOefmHC26A2w0%3D&expnd=1&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwju9r-11-aOAxWAQvEDHd91D6wQyecJegQINBAN) barrier to advancement in a profession, especially affecting women and members of [minorities](https://www.google.com/search?safe=active&client=safari&sca_esv=350ce77c903cf1b3&hl=en-gr&q=minorities&si=AMgyJEt_i95eqLH3KOj-Ut-VGJJ7WervDnt9DDSg-vZNDxWxNMSuUcnUB2rh9WH2stf4GpNSLLtkgcdtfjuyDaGXbK5-qxGQzudLw4RcjXI2-wcpRjfZaOE%3D&expnd=1&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwju9r-11-aOAxWAQvEDHd91D6wQyecJegQINBAO).[[7]](#footnote-6)

**Grassroots**

A type of movement or campaign that attempts to mobilize individuals to take some action to influence an outcome, often of a political nature.[[8]](#footnote-7)

**Harassment**Behavior that annoys or upsets someone, or that creates a hostile work environment, especially because of their race, religion, sex, etc.[[9]](#footnote-8)

**Inadequate Policies**Situations where existing rules or regulations are insufficient to address discrimination, or are poorly implemented.[[10]](#footnote-9)

**Lack of Awareness**Not recognizing that discrimination or bias is occurring, often due to unconscious attitudes.[[11]](#footnote-10)

**Lack of Diversity**A condition where an organization lacks representation of people from different backgrounds, identities, or perspectives.[[12]](#footnote-11)

**Lack of Opportunity**The absence of equal chances for people to develop, succeed, or progress, typically due to systemic barriers or unequal access.[[13]](#footnote-12)

**Mentorship**A system of guidance where a more experienced person helps a less experienced person develop skills, confidence, and career opportunities.[[14]](#footnote-13)

**Pay Gap**The difference between the average earnings of two groups of people doing the same or similar work, especially between men and women.[[15]](#footnote-14)

**Societal Norms**Unwritten rules or expectations about how people should behave in a particular society or social group.[[16]](#footnote-15)

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

#### Understanding Workplace Discrimination

#### Understanding Workplace Discrimination

Discrimination in the workplace is not a relic of the past — it remains a present-day reality for millions of workers around the world. Whether it shows up as pay disparities, limited access to promotions, biased recruitment, or even daily microaggressions, inequality continues to define the experiences of many employees. The reasons vary — from gender and race to disability, religion, or sexual orientation — but the effect is the same: individuals being treated unfairly because of who they are. According to the International Labour Organization, more than 60% of people worldwide believe that discrimination is happening in their workplace, yet the majority of cases are never formally reported.[[17]](#footnote-16)

These challenges are not limited to one region or industry. In fact, both wealthy and developing countries are still struggling with deeply embedded structural inequalities. A 2023 report by the World Economic Forum found that women globally earn just 77 cents for every dollar earned by men.[[18]](#footnote-17) The gap widens further for migrant women and women of color. Meanwhile, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) states that only 28% of people with disabilities are employed in developed countries, compared to around 80% of people without disabilities.[[19]](#footnote-18)

Discrimination not only undermines equality but also creates serious practical problems. A 2022 Harvard Business Review study found that workers who face bias are twice as likely to consider quitting and three times more likely to mentally disengage from their jobs.[[20]](#footnote-19) This suggests that discrimination doesn't just hurt individuals — it hurts businesses, too.

#### Gender-Based Discrimination

Gender inequality is one of the most visible and persistent forms of workplace discrimination. Even though many countries have signed international agreements like ILO Convention No. 100, which calls for equal pay for equal work, the reality still lags far behind. According to the European Institute for Gender Equality, women in the EU earn, on average, 13% less per hour than men.[[21]](#footnote-20)

In some regions, gender discrimination goes far beyond wages. In countries across South Asia and the Middle East, women are often excluded from the workforce entirely due to social expectations, unpaid caregiving roles, or laws that restrict their employment. In Afghanistan, for example, women have been banned from working with NGOs and international organizations — a policy that has sparked global criticism.[[22]](#footnote-21)

Harassment and violence are also serious issues that disproportionately affect women in the workplace. UN Women’s 2021 global survey found that one in three women had experienced sexual harassment or assault at work.[[23]](#footnote-22) While ILO Convention No. 190 was created to protect workers from violence and harassment, implementation has been inconsistent across countries.

#### Racial and Ethnic Discrimination

Racial and ethnic minorities continue to face significant barriers to employment and advancement, even in countries with legal protections. A 2020 report by the ILO found that ethnic minorities are significantly underrepresented in leadership roles worldwide.[[24]](#footnote-23) In the United States, Black workers are statistically less likely to be promoted and are twice as likely to be unemployed as white workers, according to the Center for Economic Policy Research.[[25]](#footnote-24)

In Europe, reports from the European Network Against Racism (ENAR) show that people of African descent frequently face unequal pay, workplace exclusion, and verbal harassment.[[26]](#footnote-25) In the Gulf region, the *kafala* system — a sponsorship-based employment system for migrant workers — has come under international criticism for enabling exploitative labor practices with little to no legal protection.

#### Discrimination Against LGBTQ+ Individuals

Legal protections for LGBTQ+ workers vary widely between countries. According to the UN Free & Equal campaign, less than half of UN member states have comprehensive workplace protections for LGBTQ+ individuals.[[27]](#footnote-26) In many places, discrimination is still legal — and even where it isn’t, enforcement is often weak.

Data from ILGA World shows that over one-third of LGBTQ+ employees have faced workplace discrimination in hiring, promotions, or treatment on the job.[[28]](#footnote-27) Transgender workers are particularly vulnerable. In Latin America, unemployment rates among trans people often exceed 80%, according to a 2022 report by Human Rights Watch.[[29]](#footnote-28) In Japan, fewer than 15% of LGBTQ+ workers say they feel safe being open about their identities in the workplace.[[30]](#footnote-29)

#### Disability Discrimination

Despite international frameworks like the CRPD, people with disabilities continue to face enormous obstacles in the labor market. Globally, fewer than half of individuals with disabilities are employed.[[31]](#footnote-30) The reasons vary — lack of accessible infrastructure, inadequate accommodations, negative stereotypes — but the outcome is the same: many capable individuals are shut out of employment opportunities. The World Health Organization has also found that when disabled people do find work, they are often paid less and overlooked for promotions.[[32]](#footnote-31)

#### The Role of the Human Rights Council

The Human Rights Council (HRC) plays a vital role in promoting equality in the workplace. It supports and monitors the implementation of major international treaties, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 23), the CRPD, and key International Labour Organization conventions like No. 100 (equal pay), No. 111 (anti-discrimination in employment), and No. 190 (violence and harassment).

By encouraging stronger enforcement, pushing for legislative reform, funding awareness campaigns, and holding states accountable, the HRC can help make the workplace more inclusive, fair, and respectful for everyone.

**MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED**

**United States of America** In the U.S., workplace protections rest on major laws such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. [[33]](#footnote-32) The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) handles complaints and investigates discrimination. Even with these strong measures, racial wage gaps and the lack of diversity in higher leadership roles remain persistent issues.

**Federal Republic of Germany** Germany addresses inequality through the General Equal Treatment Act (AGG)[[34]](#footnote-33), which covers discrimination linked to race, gender, religion, disability, age, and sexual orientation. Employers must also make accommodations for disabled workers. Still, many migrants and ethnic minorities experience barriers in the job market despite these legal protections.

**Republic of India** India’s legal framework includes the Equal Remuneration Act of 1976 and Article 15 of the Constitution, both of which prohibit unfair treatment[[35]](#footnote-34). Yet, caste and gender continue to strongly influence access to jobs, especially in informal employment. Since 2018, homosexuality is no longer criminalized, but full workplace rights for LGBTQ+ people are still limited.

**Republic of South Africa**After apartheid, South Africa introduced measures such as the Employment Equity Act of 1998 and Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE). The Human Rights Commission monitors cases of workplace inequality. However, wage gaps and unequal representation persist for groups historically excluded from opportunity.

**European Union** Across the EU, directives ensure a common standard on equal pay, anti-discrimination, and inclusion at work. Agencies like the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) and the European Labour Authority (ELA) provide oversight. The real impact of these policies, however, often depends on how seriously each member state enforces them.

**International Labour Organization (ILO)** The ILO, part of the United Nations system, develops international standards and keeps track of compliance. Its conventions on equal remuneration (No. 100) and on discrimination (No. 111) remain key references. Beyond treaties, it also offers training, advice, and practical support to countries trying to strengthen worker protections.

**United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC)** The UNHRC reviews human rights practices worldwide and promotes stronger protections against workplace inequality. Through the Universal Periodic Review process, each member state’s record is assessed. The Council often recommends that governments adopt laws more closely aligned with international standards.

**UN Women** UN Women focuses on gender equality and women’s empowerment. It designs programs to reduce the gender pay gap, fight harassment, and support fair treatment in the workplace. Partnerships with both governments and businesses are central to its strategy of making workplaces more inclusive.

**BLOCS EXPECTED**

#### Progressive Equality Bloc

**Includes:** Canada, Sweden, Germany, New Zealand, France, the Netherlands, South Africa, and members of the European Union
**Policy Stance:** This bloc strongly supports comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation, wage transparency, inclusive hiring practices, and intersectional equality frameworks. These countries tend to ratify ILO conventions, enforce diversity quotas, and promote global standards on gender, racial, and LGBTQ+ workplace equality.
They often fund UN bodies like UN Women and support Human Rights Council resolutions expanding labor protections. Expect them to advocate for binding international guidelines and accountability mechanisms.

**Pragmatic Sovereignty and Reform Bloc**

**Includes:** Brazil, India, Mexico, Indonesia, Chile, Ghana, the Philippines, South Korea, Russian Federation, People’s Republic of China, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Egypt

**Policy Stance:**
 This bloc acknowledges the existence of systemic discrimination and labor rights challenges but takes a cautious and sovereignty-focused approach to international obligations. While some members emphasize gradual reform through economic growth, education, and capacity-building, others stress cultural autonomy and the rejection of what they perceive as externally imposed social or labor norms.

**TIMELINE OF EVENTS**

| **Date** | **Description of event** |
| --- | --- |
| 1948  | Adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Article 23 of the UDHR declares the right to equal pay for equal work and protection against unemployment, laying the global foundation for workplace equality. |
| 1951  | Adoption of ILO Convention No. 100 (Equal Remuneration Convention). The International Labour Organization set the first global standard for equal pay between men and women for work of equal value. |
| 1964  | Passage of the Civil Rights Act in the United States. Title VII outlaws workplace discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin—one of the most influential anti-discrimination laws worldwide. |
| 1990 | Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was passed. The U.S. law becomes a model for disability rights globally, mandating equal employment opportunities and workplace accessibility. |
| 2006 | Adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). This treaty affirms the right of people with disabilities to work in inclusive environments and prohibits discrimination in employment. |
| 2011 | UN Human Rights Council passes first resolution on LGBTQ+ rights. This resolution marks the first time the UN formally recognizes LGBTQ+ rights, including protection against discrimination in employment. |
| 2019 | Adoption of ILO Convention No. 190 (Violence and Harassment Convention).[[36]](#footnote-35) The first global treaty to address violence and harassment in the workplace, including gender-based violence. |
| 2020 | The Supreme Court of the United States rules in Bostock v. Clayton County. This decision extends Title VII protections to LGBTQ+ employees, confirming that workplace discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity is unlawful. |
| 2023 | Global Gender Gap Report highlights slow progress. The World Economic Forum finds that, at the current pace, it will take over 130 years to achieve global gender parity in the workplace. |

**RELEVANT RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES, AND EVENTS**

**Universal Declaration of Human Rights** — *1948, UN General Assembly Resolution 217 A (III)*Article 23 declares the right to equal pay for equal work, the right to just conditions of employment, and protection against unemployment. It laid the ideological foundation for future international labor standards.

**ILO Convention No. 100: Equal Remuneration Convention** — *1951, International Labour Organization*A legally binding international treaty mandating equal pay for men and women for work of equal value. This is one of the most widely ratified ILO conventions.

**ILO Convention No. 111: Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention** — *1958, International Labour Organization*Prohibits workplace discrimination based on race, color, sex, religion, political opinion, national extraction, or social origin.

**UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)** — *1979, UN General Assembly Resolution 34/180*Often referred to as the "international bill of rights for women," this treaty obliges signatories to eliminate discrimination in all areas, including employment.

**UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)** — *2006, UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/61/106*Recognizes the right of persons with disabilities to work on an equal basis with others, including access to inclusive and accessible workplaces.

**UNHRC Resolution on Human Rights, Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity** — *2011, Human Rights Council Resolution 17/19*First UN resolution affirming the rights of LGBTQ+ persons, including protections against workplace discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

**ILO Convention No. 190: Violence and Harassment Convention** — *2019, International Labour Conference*First international treaty recognizing the right of everyone to a world of work free from violence and harassment, including gender-based violence.

**Sustainable Development Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth** — *2015, UN Agenda 2030*A global commitment to promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment, and decent work for all. It emphasizes the need to eliminate discrimination and ensure equal opportunities in employment.

**PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE**

#### European Union: EQUAL Community Initiative (2001–2007)[[37]](#footnote-36)

An EU-wide experiment co-financed by the European Social Fund, EQUAL, tested innovative strategies to combat labor market discrimination (for example, gender, race, and disability). It involved transnational collaboration and aimed to mainstream successful models via national programs.
**Advantages:** Fostered cross-border learning and pilot-tested progressive policies in diverse contexts.
**Disadvantages:** Discontinued in 2007; limited long-term impact due to lack of sustained funding and fragmented follow-up integration[[38]](#footnote-37).

#### European Union: EU Anti‑Racism Action Plan (2020–2025)[[39]](#footnote-38)

Launched in response to global pro‑racial justice movements, this plan coordinates annual anti-racism summits, funds national action plans, and encourages member states to enact domestic programs.
**Advantages:** Clear commitment, institutional follow‑through, and coordination across states.
**Disadvantages:** Early indicators suggest self-reporting of discrimination rose from 24% to 34% due to better awareness, not reduced bias; implementation uneven across countries[[40]](#footnote-39).

#### United Kingdom and EU: Equal Pay Transparency Measures[[41]](#footnote-40)

Since 2017, UK firms with 250+ employees must publish gender pay-gap reports. EU pay-transparency rules (starting 2026) will require broader disclosures, including on race and disability gaps and mandatory action plans.
**Advantages:** Drives corporate accountability and public pressure.
**Disadvantages:** Self-reported audits are subject to freedom-of-information disclosures, potentially deterring candid reporting[[42]](#footnote-41).

#### Arab States: “For Her” Marital Discrimination Campaign (2022)[[43]](#footnote-42)

A grassroots Arab initiative advocating protection for married women facing termination or harassment due to marital status. They established complaint hotlines, lobbied labor ministries, and launched public awareness campaigns.
**Advantages:** Ground-up mobilization with culturally relevant messaging.
**Disadvantages:** Still in pilot stages; lacks formal institutional backing in most states.

#### Gulf Region Saudi Arabia: Employment Law Reforms (2023)[[44]](#footnote-43)

Saudi authorities updated labor regulations to define workplace discrimination clearly and create pathways for marginalized groups, including women and expat workers.
**Advantages:** Significant policy modernization aligned with Vision 2030 economic goals.
**Disadvantages:** Disconnect between legislative intent and enforcement, especially in informal sectors.

#### Arab Labor Organization (ALO) / League of Arab States Initiatives[[45]](#footnote-44)

Founded in 1965, the ALO fosters policy dialogue and labor standards among 21 Arab states, including tripartite worker-employer-government forums. It has attempted to mainstream non-discrimination norms regionally.
**Advantages:** Regional reach and institutional structure for labor policy alignment.
**Disadvantages:** Limited enforcement power; progress is incremental and uneven among member states.

#### U.S. NGOs: Anti‑Discrimination Advocacy (e.g. ADL, CAIR)[[46]](#footnote-45)

Civil society groups like the Anti‑Defamation League (ADL) and the Council on American‑Islamic Relations (CAIR) conduct research, file legal complaints, and initiate awareness campaigns for marginalized communities (e.g., anti‑Arab and anti‑Jewish employment bias).
**Advantages:** Provides credible data and legal support; fills gaps where policy is weak.
**Disadvantages:** Influence limited to national context; not a substitute for systemic legislative frameworks.

**POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS**

#### Strengthening legislation and enforcement

Mandate universal anti-discrimination laws that cover all protected characteristics, including race, gender, disability, and sexual orientation. Establish independent enforcement bodies with the authority to investigate and sanction non-compliant employers. Promote ratification and implementation of key ILO conventions (No. 100, 111, 190) and ensure their enforcement.

#### Transparency and accountability measures

Require mandatory pay gap reporting disaggregated by gender, race, and disability. Introduce third-party auditing systems to monitor compliance with equality standards. Create public employer rating systems to incentivize inclusive workplace practices.

#### Education and bias reduction

Provide mandatory workplace training on unconscious bias, diversity, and inclusion. Develop school curricula that introduce anti-discrimination principles early in education systems. Encourage media and public awareness campaigns to shift societal attitudes and challenge harmful stereotypes.

#### Inclusive hiring and career advancement

Introduce targeted hiring programs for underrepresented groups. Promote mentorship and leadership initiatives to help marginalized individuals access career advancement. Implement diversity quotas in corporate leadership and boardrooms.

#### International cooperation and funding

Mobilize UN development funds to support national equality strategies in low- and middle-income countries. Encourage regional cooperation (e.g., through the EU, AU, ASEAN) to share best practices and develop joint policy models. Expand support for civil society organizations and grassroots movements focused on workplace justice.

These solutions aim to address not only the symptoms but also the root causes of workplace discrimination—creating fairer, more inclusive labor markets globally.

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