

UNCSW

BACKGROUND GUIDE

ASPIRATIONMUN'26

AGENDA

Regulating the impact of beauty filters and AI Generated Imagery on Youth Mental and Body Image Standards

Letter from the executive board

Greetings, Delegates!

In today's era, where days are marked by raging fires in the history of human rights and national security is threatened every second, where youth has become the unstoppable leader and global citizens can no longer be kept in the dark, we must realize the utmost importance of protecting the rights of each and every individual of the globe; and this is what we aim at achieving through this UNCSW simulation.

We want all of you to understand that in the capacity of the Executive Board, we neither wish to intimidate or dominate. This is as much of a learning experience to us as it is to you. Thus, we advise you to not bring any preconceived notions of omniscience about us in the committee room. We will make mistakes as will you. We aim to learn, teach, and create a safe space where each one of us can learn without fear of judgement. This is the true spirit of Model UN- learning without judgement.

We do not expect you to know everything. We expect you to come well-prepared. We expect you to come well-prepared. We do not expect you to pretend we live in a utopian world; we expect realism. The spirit of compromise and mutual agreement is welcome and accepted, but in the real world, it is always secondary to national interests and your actions should be such that they tend towards compromise but always remain within the horizon of your political and diplomatic leanings. All in all, we expect real world diplomacy condensed and mirrored in the committee room. Focus on the solutions you can conceive within the constraints of your

diplomatic policy. Make sure that the same is reflected in your speeches. For this, research is essential. Most importantly, remember that real world problems require real world solutions.

Please consider that this background guide serves only as an introduction to the diverse and wide-spanning agenda that awaits your research; it is meant to serve solely and only as a directing document and is not sufficient in itself to supplement committee discussions. The idea is to direct, not dictate. Our style of moderation will be such that we will only be mute listeners unless interference is absolutely needed. Thus, we intend to leave the flow of debate solely in your hands. We will always maintain verbatim and our marking criteria will be released in the beginning to ensure transparency. Please ensure that you are well-versed with the Rules of Procedure. While we will not be extremely strict with the same, we do expect a certain degree of understanding of committee proceedings. Each one of us brings a different point of view to the committee room but our aim is to moderate without bias and with neutrality. However, we will be more than happy to engage in intellectual discussions with the delegates on a more candid, opinion-centric, and informal note if we are not bound by time constraints. This will ensure a wider and more holistic learning experience for you at MUN. Rest assured that digression from our personal political opinion will not result in disadvantages of any sort to you.

The Executive Board has endeavoured to make this guide as delegate-friendly as possible. Please note that only Reuters, Al Jazeera, and official UN reports will be accepted by the Executive Board for reference and evidence. Paperwork is encouraged.

We wish you the best of luck

Baljinder Singh (Chairperson)

ABOUT THE COMMITTEE

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is the principal global intergovernmental body exclusively dedicated to the promotion of gender equality, the rights and the empowerment of women. A functional commission of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), it was established by ECOSOC resolution 11(II) of 21 June 1946.

The CSW is instrumental in promoting women's and girls' rights, documenting the reality of their lives throughout the world, and shaping global standards on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

In 1996, ECOSOC in resolution 1996/6 expanded the Commission's mandate and decided that it should take a leading role in monitoring and reviewing progress and problems in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and in mainstreaming a gender perspective in UN activities.

During the Commission's annual two-week session, representatives of UN Member States, civil society organizations and UN entities gather at UN headquarters in New York. They discuss progress and gaps in the implementation of the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the key global policy document on gender equality, and the 23rd special session of the General Assembly held in 2000 (Beijing+5), as well as emerging issues that affect gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Member States agree on further actions to accelerate progress and promote women's and girls' enjoyment of their rights in political, economic, and social fields. The outcomes and recommendations of each session are forwarded to ECOSOC for follow-up.

UN Women exists to advance women's rights, gender equality, and the empowerment of all women and girls.

As the lead United Nations entity on gender equality and secretariat of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, we shift laws, institutions, social norms, and services to close the gender gap and build an equal world for all women and girls. Our partnerships with governments, women's movements, and the private sector, coupled with our coordination of the broader United Nations, deliver lasting changes. We make strides in four areas:

- leadership,
- economic empowerment,
- freedom from violence, and
- peace, security and humanitarian action.

UN Women keeps the rights of women and girls at the centre of global progress—always, everywhere. Because gender equality is not just what we do. It is who we are.

Gender equality is not only a basic human right, but its achievement has enormous socio-economic ramifications. Empowering women fuels thriving economies, spurring productivity and growth. Yet gender inequalities remain deeply entrenched in every society. Women lack access to decent work and face occupational segregation and gender wage gaps. They are too often denied access to basic education and health care. Women in all parts of the world suffer violence and discrimination. They are under-represented in political and economic decision-making processes.

Over many decades, the United Nations has made significant 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).

Working for the empowerment and rights of women and girls globally, UN Women's main roles are:

- To support inter-governmental bodies, such as the Commission on the Status of Women, in their formulation of policies, global standards and norms.
- To help Member States implement these standards, standing ready to provide suitable technical and financial support to those countries that request it, and to forge effective partnerships with civil society.
- To lead and coordinate the UN system's work on gender equality, as well as promote accountability, including through regular monitoring of system-wide progress.

Historical perspective

For many years, the United Nations faced serious challenges in its efforts to promote gender equality globally, including inadequate funding and no single recognized driver to direct UN activities on gender equality issues. In July 2010, the United Nations General Assembly created UN Women, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, to address such challenges. In doing so, UN Member States took an historic step in accelerating the Organization's goals on gender equality and the empowerment of women. The creation of UN Women came about as part of the UN reform agenda, bringing together resources and mandates for greater impact. It merges and builds on the important work of four previously distinct parts of the UN system, which focused exclusively on gender equality and women's empowerment:

- Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW)
- International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW)
- Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI)
- United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)

SOCIAL MEDIA AND ITS EFFECTS ON SELF-IMAGE

Over the past decade and a half, social media has evolved into the primary information source for a substantial portion of the global population—impacting their views, decisions, and beliefs on every conceivable subject. In the digital world, children and teenagers are now spending substantial amounts of time on social media platforms that inherently promote image manipulation and social comparisons. Consequently, research has revealed that social media can have a detrimental effect on the well-being of young people while exposing them to unrealistic body standards during a crucial time in the development of their body image.

A. Social Media Consumption by Youth

Internet-connected devices, particularly mobile tablets and smartphones, have become more affordable and widely accessible in recent years. This has led to an increased number of children and teenagers who possess their own devices and the ability to consume an endless amount of content online. In 2021, about seven out of ten (71%) 12-year-olds in the United States owned a smartphone, as did 70% of 13-year-olds.⁸ The percentage of youth owning a smartphone increases dramatically from the age of 14 onwards, with reported rates of ownership at or exceeding 90% for almost every single year of age from 14 through 18.⁹ Overall, the prevalence of teenage smartphone use has grown rapidly over the past few years, as there has been a 22% increase in the share of teens who report having access to a smartphone since 2014 (73% then and 95% now).¹⁰ With smartphone devices in the pockets of nearly every American teenager, the internet has become the primary place for youth media consumption and connectivity. Teenagers are now able to share their lives with others through images, videos, and status updates on social media, enabling them to interact with others instantaneously. Teens themselves regard these platforms as a vital resource for building and sustaining relationships, being creative, and discovering more about the world. As online connections and social media have become an integral part of young people's lives, 46% of teens now say that they are using the internet "almost constantly," which has increased usage by almost a quarter (24%) since 2014. Common Sense Media, a non-profit organization dedicated to educating families on technology and the digital world, conducted a survey in 2021 that revealed, on average, 8 to 12-year-olds are using about five and a half hours of screen media per day (5:33), while 13 to 18-year-olds use about eight and a half hours of screen media per day (8:39). The researchers also found that media use in tweens and teens has grown faster since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic than it had over the four years prior to the pandemic. From 2015 to 2019, media use for tweens grew only 3%, and for teens 11%, but from 2019 to 2021 alone, media use grew by 17% for tweens and teens.

The Inherent Features of Social Media Encourage Comparisons Among Users and Determinations of Self-worth

The advent of social media brought about a “turbocharged, precision instrument for social comparison unlike anything in human history,” and this defining characteristic of social media can be traced to its earliest days. In 2003, Mark Zuckerberg, a second-year student at Harvard, wrote the software for a website called Facemash.²⁶ By leveraging his computer science expertise for questionable purposes, he hacked into Harvard’s security network and copied the student ID photos used by the school’s dormitories to his new website. On Facemash, users would then compare two student images side by side and decide who was the “hotter” person, ultimately to create a ranking of attractiveness within the general Harvard community. In the course of one day, the site had been visited by 450 people, who voted at least 22,000 times. While Facemash was quickly shut down by Harvard administration, Zuckerberg soon launched his new website “TheFacebook” less than four months later. Facebook has since grown to be the largest social media platform in the world with nearly three billion monthly active users, and it continues to retain inherent characteristics that promote comparisons between users. One of the most defining features of Facebook and other popular social media platforms is the “like button,” which seemingly ascribes explicit valuations to a user’s posts and can lead to severe negative consequences for users when equated with one’s self-worth. An immediate juxtaposition of users occurs when one opens a social media app, and the number of Instagram hearts or Facebook likes “that another person garners compared to us can feel like rock-solid proof of position on some imagined ladder.” Research studies have shown that social media users “base comparisons not only on other people’s profile information, but also on indicators for social support other people receive in relation to themselves.” “[O]ne-click tools such as Likes on Facebook or Instagram are of social and affective relevance and work as another mechanism to compare oneself with others, because with Likes social support becomes quantifiable and thus easily accessible for social comparisons.

Social Media Platforms Promote Image Manipulation and Certain Beauty Standards Through “Beauty Filters”

The major tech firms behind the most popular social media platforms continuously integrate new technological advancements into their applications to enhance user

experience. One of the most significant developments in recent years has been the widespread adoption of augmented reality “face filters” in visual-based apps like Instagram, Snapchat, and Tik Tok. Face filters are “essentially automated photo editing tools that use artificial intelligence and computer vision to detect the facial features” of a subject and alter them in real-time. The filters work by using the device’s camera and computer vision to detect a face and then overlay an invisible facial template consisting of dozens of dots, creating a sort of topographic mesh. With this mesh, the augmented reality virtual components are then added to the screen and overlaid to the user’s face and the surrounding area to match the set of rules set by the filters’ creator. The rise of face filters on social media can be traced back to 2015 when Snapchat released its version of augmented reality filters known as Lenses. When Lenses first became available on the app, users mainly applied the filters for entertainment and comedic purposes. One of the first Lenses, for instance, added puppy dog ears to users’ faces, while another filter enabled users to shoot rainbows out of their mouths. The earliest filters that were released had a number of problems that made using them difficult, such as not recognizing faces, remaining on users’ faces as they moved, or having low-quality visuals and glitching. Now the technology behind these filters has rapidly improved in just a few short years, and “the current trend for face filters is no longer fun and quirky transformations, but instead what is referred to as ‘beauty filters.’”

Now, researchers and cosmetic surgeons are reporting that Instagram-inspired plastic surgery is on the rise as patients are hopeful to replicate the features associated with their appearance when using beauty filters. The trend of receiving cosmetic procedures inspired by edited photos posted on sites such as Instagram and Snapchat has been referred to by some health experts as “Snapchat Dysmorphia,” and critics believe that the filters should be subject to scrutiny for potentially perpetuating an unrealistic obsession with correcting subjective flaws. Snapchat dysmorphia is associated with a mental health condition known as body dysmorphic disorder (BDD), in which a person may spend hours of their time obsessing over their perceived or minor physical faults, such as weight or skin imperfections. According to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America, BDD affects one in fifty people and frequently results in emotional anguish and disruptions to daily routines.

Social Media’s Impact on Mental Health and Body Image

Research has demonstrated that social media usage can have a significant impact on the mental health of children and young adults, potentially leading to increased rates of depression and low self-esteem.⁷⁴ This is particularly concerning as children are joining social media at younger ages, exposing them to unrealistic body standards during a formative period in the development of their body image. Body image concerns in general can begin very early during adolescent development. A study in the *British Journal of Health Psychology* found that among children ages six to eight, more than one-half of girls and a third of boys are unhappy with their body weight. Additionally, more than 80% of 10-year-olds are afraid of being “fat.” By the age of seventeen, 78% of U.S. girls report that they are unhappy with their weight. A wide body of research has shown that the use of social media by adolescents and young adults creates a distorted sense of self and the potential for unhealthy coping mechanisms, such as disordered eating. In a randomized study, female participants reported experiencing a more negative mood after just ten minutes of browsing their Facebook account compared to those who browsed an appearance-neutral control website. Furthermore, the participants who ranked higher in appearance comparison tendency reported an increased desire to change the appearance of their face, hair, or skin after spending time on Facebook than those who browsed the control website.

UNCSW and UN Policy Frameworks for the Digital Sphere

Resolving the psychological and societal impacts of beauty filters and AI-generated imagery requires delegates to anchor their arguments in established United Nations mandates. While face-altering filters and deep learning algorithms are relatively new, the UN has steadily developed frameworks to combat digital harms, gender stereotyping, and technological threats to youth well-being.

1. The Core Mandate: CSW67 and the Digital Blueprint

The most direct precedent for this agenda lies in the outcomes of the 67th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW67), which explicitly focused on *“Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.”*

- **Dismantling Digital Harm:** CSW67 recognized that digital spaces are not neutral; they replicate and magnify real-world systemic discrimination. UNCSW policies urge member states to develop regulatory frameworks that prevent technology from fuelling psychological distress and self-objectification among young women and girls.
- **The Global Digital Compact:** Aligned with the UN's broader digital governance goals, this framework seeks to establish global principles for an open, free, and secure digital future. Delegates can leverage this compact to propose cross-border standards for social media safety, data ethics, and youth protection.

2. Addressing the AI Policy Gap and Algorithmic Bias

UN Women has explicitly warned that artificial intelligence is "getting women wrong" because it mirrors and perpetuates historic gender and racial biases.

- **Flawed Data Lifecycle:** Studies cited by UN Women show that 44% of analyzed AI systems demonstrate gender bias. When generative AI and face filters are trained on narrow, historically unequal representations of beauty, they automatically generate and reinforce hyper-idealized, homogeneous, and unattainable body standards.
- **The Governance Deficit:** Current UN evaluations reveal a massive policy gap: out of 138 national AI strategies evaluated worldwide, only 24 explicitly refer to gender, and even fewer mandate protections against digital distortions or tech-enabled mental health crises.
- **Inclusive AI Development:** UN Women demands that gender equality be built into "every stage of the AI lifecycle from development, deployment, and governance". Delegates should focus on diversifying the tech sector (where women make up only 30% of the workforce) to ensure the blueprints of these algorithms are not inherently biased.

3. Ethical Marketing and the Unstereotype Alliance

To curb the commercial incentives driving beauty filters and distorted AI imagery, delegates can look to the Unstereotype Alliance, an industry-led initiative convened by UN Women.

- **Commercial Accountability:** This framework works with global brands and tech firms to eradicate harmful gender stereotypes from advertising, media, and technology interfaces.
- By demonstrating that inclusive, authentic imagery free of digital distortion yields long-term economic and social value, the UN provides a blueprint for how member states can incentivize social media corporations to adjust their algorithms away from destructive "beauty ideals".

Strategic Approaches for Solutions

When drafting working papers and resolutions, delegates should move past vague declarations and focus on actionable, real-world regulatory mechanisms:

- **Mandatory Digital Labeling Frameworks:** Mirroring domestic policies trialed in nations like Norway and France, delegates can propose UN-backed international guidelines requiring social media platforms and commercial advertisers to clearly label any image that uses AI-generated content or face-altering beauty filters.
- **Algorithmic Audits & Safety by Design:** Resolutions should encourage member states to pass legislation requiring tech companies to subject their AI models to independent gender and racial bias audits before deployment. This includes implementing "Safety by Design" principles to limit the aggressive algorithmic promotion of appearance-altering tools to minors.
- **Public Health Frameworks for "Filter Dysmorphia":** Delegates must address the medical reality of body dysmorphic conditions exacerbated by digital spaces. Resolutions can suggest integrating digital literacy and body-image resilience into national school curriculums, alongside investing in public mental health infrastructure specifically tailored to youth navigating tech-enabled psychological distress.

Conclusion

The convergence of artificial intelligence and hyper-visual social media has transformed global beauty standards from passive cultural pressures into active, real-time algorithmic threats. As technology continuously outpaces domestic legislation, youth worldwide are left to navigate "filter dysmorphia" and severe psychological anxieties without adequate institutional safeguards.

The Commission on the Status of Women possesses a unique mandate to bridge this governance deficit. True progress will not come from demanding a complete retreat from the digital age, but from establishing rigorous, gender-responsive guardrails that force tech conglomerates to prioritize systemic human well-being over continuous user engagement. The task before the delegates of this committee is to construct a balanced, realistic regulatory framework that protects the mental and physical sovereignty of the global youth while preserving digital innovation.

Questions to Consider

1. National Legal Jurisdictions: How does your nation currently regulate digital advertising and social media algorithms? Are there existing consumer protection or mental health laws that can be expanded to cover beauty filters and generative AI imagery?
2. Corporate vs. State Responsibility: Where should the line be drawn between state censorship and corporate accountability? How can member states incentivize social media conglomerates to modify features like "beauty filters" without violating digital speech protections?
3. The Data Dilemma: Given that AI models are trained on historical data that naturally favors biased Western and Eurocentric beauty standards, what exact technical or policy mechanisms can your delegation propose to diversify AI training datasets?
4. Enforcement in the Global South: How can developing economies with limited technological infrastructure realistically monitor and enforce digital regulations on multi-billion dollar, foreign-based tech platforms?
5. Mitigating "Filter Dysmorphia": What specific partnerships can be forged between the UN, public health sectors, and civil society organizations to provide immediate psychosocial support to youth suffering from severe body image issues stemming from digital spaces?