



The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) is the primary international legal instrument that focuses on women's rights. State parties – which include all Southeast Asian countries – must submit periodic reports on their progress to the CEDAW Committee, which is a panel of independent experts. The Committee evaluates states' progress in implementing the treaty on the basis of those reports, as well as 'shadow reports' provided by NGOs.

Women as workers in CEDAW

CEDAW covers a broad range of concerns from the elimination of discrimination in political life, to equal access to education and healthcare. Gender equality in the workplace is primarily addressed through Article 11, which prohibits discrimination in employment, deals most directly with women and employment.

However, several other parts of the Convention also establish rights that are related to women and work generally. Most important among these are:

- Article 3, which is concerned with the advancement of women in political, social, economic and cultural fields;
- Article 13, which requires states to ensure non-discrimination in family benefits and loans; and

- Article 14, which requires states to take into account the particular problems faced by rural women, including their participation in the non-monetised sectors of the economy.

Women and work in Myanmar's reports

Myanmar ratified CEDAW in 1997, and has submitted three periodic reports to the CEDAW Committee setting out its progress in implementing the treaty.

There has been a gradual development of CEDAW jurisprudence and shifts in the way women's issues are framed internationally since Myanmar ratified CEDAW. Over the same period the primary focus of the Myanmar government's responses have remained mostly consistent, although there has been slightly more emphasis on concerns relating to women and employment in recent years.

In keeping with this broader trend, the themes raised by the Myanmar government in response to Article 11 have been reasonably consistent over time, to the extent that they have all addressed the issue of workplace rights and conditions in detail. In its most recent report it has also raised the issue of women migrant workers. However, unlike other countries, which have tended to place greater emphasis on International Labour Organisation (ILO) conventions in any of its reports.

Themes in Myanmar's reports to CEDAW

	Article 11			Article 3			Article 13			Article 14		
	1999	2007	2015	1999	2007	2015	1999	2007	2015	1999	2007	2015
Women and work			x		x	x						x
Labour migration			x									
Workplace rights	x	x	x					x				
Entrepreneurship				x	x			x	x			
Economic empowerment												

in their responses to Article 11 in recent years, the Myanmar government makes no reference to the ILO

In addressing its progress in implementing Article 3, Myanmar's three reports have all made passing reference to concerns generally related to women and employment, but mostly in the context of supplementing family income. Two of its reports also raised the theme of women's entrepreneurship.

The Myanmar government's responses to Article 13 were the most consistent, as they closely mirror the article itself, with each addressing social security, access to credit, and access to culture and sport. Two of its reports also emphasised the provision of micro-credit to women in business and its 2007 report discussed the issue of paid maternity leave.

The Myanmar government's responses to Article 14 made the least reference to women and employment-related concerns, with reports instead placing a strong emphasis on development and modernisation. The issue of vocational training for rural women was raised for the first time in the most recent report.

The most obvious pattern in the Myanmar government's responses is its focus on the importance of female entrepreneurship in its responses to Articles 3 and 13. In its response to Article 3, it emphasised the role of the Myanmar Women Entrepreneurs Association in helping women access credit in both its 1999 and 2007 reports. This association was also emphasised in its response to Article 13 in 2007, while its most recent response to this article similarly emphasises the provision of small-scale credit to women entrepreneurs.

However, the Myanmar government has not raised the issue of 'economic empowerment' in any of its reports, whereas other countries have often emphasised this issue in conjunction with female entrepreneurship.

Professor Michele Ford is Professor of Southeast Asian Studies and Director of the Sydney Southeast Asia Centre. Dr Elizabeth Hill is Chair of the Department of Political Economy. This research was supported by the Australian Government through the Investing in Women Initiative, a program of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Sydney Southeast Asia Centre | Professor Michele Ford
T +61 2 9351 7797 | **E** michele.ford@sydney.edu.au
W sydney.edu.au/southeast-asia-centre



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY