

from Women Around the World and Women and Foreign Policy Program

## Women This Week: Iran Bans Women Without Hijabs from Education and Health Services

Welcome to “Women Around the World: This Week,” a series that highlights noteworthy news related to women and U.S. foreign policy. This week’s post covers April 1 to April 7.



Wednesday Fire celebrations in Tehran. Wana News Agency/REUTERS

Blog Post by Noël James and Caroline Kapp, Guest Contributors

April 7, 2023 2:05 pm (EST)

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### Women’s Rights Narrow As Government Reacts to Protests

The Iranian health and education ministries have announced that women will be barred from health and educational services if they fail to comply with compulsory hijab requirements. In a statement, the Ministry of Education explained that the requirement is in line with “creating a positive and constructive discourse among students on the issue of Islamic culture and beliefs” and “creating a correct and positive attitude and beautiful thinking about the culture of chastity and hijab among students.” This announcement is part of an alternative enforcement plan being pursued by the Iranian government after the death of Mahsa Amini triggered protests last September. These new measures include increasing fines—from 5 million to 30 billion rials (around \$100 to \$60,000)—revoking drivers’ licenses and passports, and banning internet access for celebrities and online

influencers. Authorities are also shutting down businesses and stores, including pharmacies, that continue to serve women who violate the hijab rule. Despite these new punishments, acts of civil disobedience continue as women refuse to cover their hair in public.

### **Afghan Women Barred From Working for the United Nations**

The Taliban has signaled that it intends to ban Afghan women from working for the United Nations. On Tuesday, female UN staff in Afghanistan's eastern province of Nangargar were stopped from working. The UN instructed its Afghan staff, including around four hundred women, to stay home until they receive additional information. Sources indicate that this ban will be extended to the rest of the country. This move expands a policy implemented late last year prohibiting Afghan women from working for NGOs. "The people of Afghanistan need more aid, not less," said Sima Bahous, UN under-secretary-general and executive director of UN Women, in a statement. "The removal of skilled women aid workers decreases women and girls access to critical life-saving services, and it increases their risks when they have to seek assistance from men instead."

### **Women's Championship Highlights Double-Standards in College Basketball**

The National College Athletic Association (NCAA) women's basketball championship between Louisiana State University (LSU) and Iowa University was the most viewed NCAA women's basketball final ever, with 12.6 million viewers. LSU beat Iowa, earning the school's first NCAA basketball championship. The record-breaking game was followed by controversy over an interaction on the court between LSU forward, Angel Reese and Iowa Hawkeyes guard, Caitlin Clark. During the final quarter, Reese waved her hand at Clark, using the "You Can't See Me" gesture popularized by wrestler and actor John Cena. Reese has faced intense backlash on social media with critics calling her "classless." However, Clark used the same gesture a week earlier during a game against Louisville University without controversy. Many are defending Reese, pointing out that this is a racist double standard for Reese, a black woman. "If you celebrated Clark for doing this but not Angel Reese you gotta take a long, long look in the mirror," *The Athletic* writer Meg Linehan tweeted.

### **Title IX Under Review Following State Transgender Bans**

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The Biden Administration proposed a rule change to Title IX that would prohibit broad policies that ban transgender students from participating in athletic teams that align with their gender identity, while allowing schools the discretion to impose more limited restrictions on transgender athletics. This announcement came after the Supreme Court denied West Virginia's request to prohibit a twelve-year-old transgender girl from participating in her girls' track and cross-country team. The state was drawing on a 2021 state law that bans transgender athletes from playing on female teams, the middle schooler is now allowed to continue competing while the appellate court considers her case. Nineteen states have enacted similar comprehensive bans on transgender athletes. Most recently, Kansas passed a law that restricts transgender athletes from participating in girls' and women's sports from kindergarten through college. "Every student should be able to have the full experience of attending school in America, including participating in athletics, free from discrimination," said Miguel Cardona, U.S. secretary of education, in a statement.

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## Women This Week: Elderly Women Sue Switzerland Over Climate Change

Welcome to "Women Around the World: This Week," a series that highlights noteworthy news related to women and U.S. foreign policy. This week's post covers March 25 to March 31.



A group from the Senior Women for Climate Protection association hold banners outside the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. Emma Farge/REUTERS

Blog Post by Noël James and Caroline Kapp, Guest Contributors

March 31, 2023 12:01 pm (EST)

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### Activists Claim that Failure to Meet Climate Benchmarks Violates Human Rights

Over two thousand elderly women in Switzerland are suing their government in an attempt to compel action against climate change. The case is being heard in the European Court of Human Rights after being dismissed by two Swiss courts. The Swiss women—who have an average age of seventy-three—are claiming that their country's failure to address climate change violates their human rights. Switzerland is seeing its glaciers melt and is warming at twice the global rate, but its citizens voted down a measure that would have sought to reduce carbon emissions. Citing rising temperatures and increased incidents of heatwaves, the women are arguing that their health and quality of life is being put at risk by Switzerland's inaction. "Some people say, why are you complaining, you're going to die anyway. But we don't want to die just because our Swiss government has not been successful in coming up with a decent climate policy," Elisabeth Stern told the BBC.

### Women Speak Out on Social Media Over Japan's Declining Population

Women in Japan are taking to social media after an article was published noting that Japan has the highest number of women over fifty who have never had children among Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries. Japan's birth rate fell below eight hundred thousand births in 2022, a decline that could lead to a population drop from 125 to 88 million by 2065. "Japan is on the verge of whether we can continue to function as a society," said Prime Minister Fumio Kishida. Women are turning to social media to defend their life choices. "Don't blame women for the low birth rate," tweeted Ayako, a 38-year-old Tokyo resident, who said that Japan's traditional gender roles are a problem. Many women in Japan find it difficult to work and have children due to the inequitable distribution of household responsibilities and other things like high cost of living, limited space, lack of childcare, and push for women to only have children after marriage. While women are finding support and community on social media platforms, many worry that their voices will not be included in efforts to shape government initiatives on childcare services and housing facilities for families with children.

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### Kamala Harris Promotes Women Initiative on Africa Visit

United States Vice President Kamala Harris announced more than \$1 billion in initiatives from the U.S. government, the private sector, and foundations this week to improve women's economic empowerment, nearly half of which will be directed toward supporting women in the digital space and "closing the gender digital divide." The announcement took place in Ghana on the first leg of the Vice President's Africa trip, which also included visits to Tanzania and Zambia. The Vice President made a series of announcements on behalf of the Biden-Harris Administration to foster women's political, economic, and social inclusion in Africa. The U.S. previously announced a \$139 million investment in development and culture assistance for Ghana and a \$100 million investment in stability and peacebuilding for coastal West African nations.

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