



1. Closing the Gender Gap in Social Protection

Introduction

Since the publication of the Background Guide, new United Nations resolutions and policy frameworks have underlined the importance of tackling gendered inequalities in social protection systems.¹ Recent discussions have highlighted unpaid care work as a key barrier to women's economic empowerment and stressed the need to increase and better target financing to strengthen social protection and care systems.² For example, women in the entire healthcare sector worldwide have a pay gap of 24 percentage points compared to men.³

Recent Developments on Redistributing Unpaid Care Work

Member States and United Nations entities have recognized unpaid care work as a fundamental challenge to women's equal access to social protection. The United Nations Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment reaffirmed its call to recognize and redistribute unpaid care work through legislation, policies, and programs that address persistent inequalities faced by women in both formal and informal employment arenas.⁴ In December 2023, the General Assembly adopted *A/RES/78/150*, which says that unpaid care work remains a critical impediment to women's economic and social advancement; it further urges governments to invest in infrastructure and services to alleviate the disproportionate care burdens on women.⁵

In addition to that, *A/RES/77/317* emphasizes the role of social protection systems and public services in effectively redistributing care responsibilities across households, communities, and Member States.⁶ United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women's (UN Women) Policy Brief No. 5 adds that, while many governments have introduced paid family leave and subsidized child care, significantly more effort is needed to ensure those measures are both accessible and adapted to marginalized communities.⁷ United Nations Development Program research further indicates that legislative reforms such as mandating parental leave for both parents or providing tax incentives for care services can multiply a shift in cultural norms,

¹ United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. *Harnessing Social Protection for Gender Equality, Resilience and Transformation: World Survey on the Role of Women in Development*. 2024. pp. 8-7.

² United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. *Harnessing Social Protection for Gender Equality, Resilience and Transformation: World Survey on the Role of Women in Development*. 2024. p. 46.

³ United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. *Recognizing, Reducing and Redistributing Unpaid Work and Care*. 2017. p. 3.

⁴ United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. *Recognizing, Reducing and Redistributing Unpaid Work and Care*. 2017. p. 3.

⁵ United Nations, General Assembly. *Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (A/RES/74/128)*. 2023.

⁶ United Nations, General Assembly. *Intensification of efforts to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls: sexual harassment (A/RES/77/317)*. 2023.

⁷ United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. *Policy Brief No. 5: Redistributing Unpaid Care and Sustaining Quality Care Services*. 2016. p. 5.



as a result relieving women's disproportionate care burden and increasing their participation in the labor market.⁸

Recent Developments on Financing Social Protection and Care Systems

Several United Nations reports and initiatives have underscored the economic and social benefits of increasing funding for social protection schemes.⁹ The United Nations Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions published its Roadmap Financing Social Protection, urging Member States to scale up national commitments and coordinate international financing to establish universal, gender-responsive social protection floors. In addition, effective delivery systems further strengthen the impact of social protection by removing barriers and fostering dignity and agency for women. Simplified enrollment, fair benefit distribution, and a rights-based approach enhance access while improving the working conditions of women employed in the social sector.¹⁰ This global push emphasizes that well-financed care systems, encompassing healthcare, childcare, eldercare, and disability services, improve women's employment prospects and can help close the gender gap in access to social insurance.¹¹

Concurrently, the UN Women's *World Survey on the Role of Women in Development* highlights that austerity measures disproportionately undermine investments in social protection, with long-term repercussions for women and marginalized groups.¹² Feminist economic analyses have also emerged, advocating for alternatives to austerity, including progressive taxation and reallocation of military or fossil-fuel subsidies toward robust care systems, thus ensuring that women's unpaid labor does not substitute for public services.¹³ Strengthening policy coherence across line ministries and partnering with international financial institutions have been cited as critical next steps to sustainably finance and expand social protection programs that promote women's rights and gender equality.¹⁴

Going forward, delegates should note that effective redistribution of unpaid care work relies on legislative and cultural changes, while sustained financing of care systems is essential for equitable social protection. Upcoming reviews at the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) will likely explore more nuanced approaches to integrating care work into economic policy, providing an opportunity to advance momentum in closing the gender gap in social protection.

⁸ United Nations Development Programme. *Now is the time! Reduce and Redistribute Unpaid Domestic and Care Work*. 2022. p. 8.

⁹ Herman. United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *What next for Financing Social Protection and Health Services*. 2024. p. 3.

¹⁰ International Labour Organization. *Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions: Financing Social Protection*. 2023. p. 4.

¹¹ International Labour Organization. *Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions: Financing Social Protection*. 2023. p. 4.

¹² United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. *Harnessing Social Protection for Gender Equality, Resilience and Transformation: World Survey on the Role of Women in Development*. 2024. p. 7.

¹³ Rodríguez Enríquez. United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. *Financing Social Protection: Feminist Alternatives to Austerity*. 2024. p. 4.

¹⁴ Rodríguez Enríquez. United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. *Financing Social Protection: Feminist Alternatives to Austerity*. 2024. p. 4.



Bibliography

Herman. United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *What next for Financing Social Protection and Health Services*. 2024. Retrieved 11 January 2025 from: <https://financing.desa.un.org/sites/default/files/2024-11/What%20next%20for%20Social%20protection%20and%20health%20financing%203%20Nov.pdf>

International Labour Organization. *Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions: Financing Social Protection*. 2023. Retrieved 11 January 2025 from: https://www.unglobalaccelerator.org/sites/default/files/2023-05/Roadmap_Financing%20Social%20Protection.pdf

Rodríguez Enríquez. United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. *Financing Social Protection: Feminist Alternatives to Austerity*. 2024. Retrieved 11 January 2025 from: https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-01/financing_social_protection_en.pdf

United Nations Development Programme. *Now is the time! Reduce and Redistribute Unpaid Domestic and Care Work*. 2022. Retrieved 11 January 2025 from: <https://www.undp.org/asia-pacific/publications/now-time-reduce-and-redistribute-unpaid-domestic-and-care-work-burden-women-sustainable-development>

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment Women. *Policy Brief No. 5: Redistributing Unpaid Care and Sustaining Quality Care Services*. 2016. Retrieved 11 January 2025 from: <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2016/UN-Women-Policy-brief-05-Redistributing-unpaid-care-en.pdf>

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment Women. *Recognizing, Reducing and Redistributing Unpaid Work and Care*. 2017. Retrieved 11 January 2025 from: <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-01/hlp-wee-working-group-paper-driver-3-en.pdf>

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. *Harnessing Social Protection for Gender Equality, Resilience and Transformation: World Survey on the Role of Women in Development*. 2024. Retrieved 11 January 2025 from: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2024/10/world-survey-on-the-role-of-women-in-development-2024>

United Nations, General Assembly. *Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (A/RES/74/128)*. 2023. Retrieved 11 January 2025 from: <https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/74/128>

United Nations, General Assembly. *Intensification of efforts to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls: sexual harassment (A/RES/77/317)*. 2023. Retrieved 11 January 2025 from: <https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/77/317>



2. Realizing the Rights of Women in the World of Work

Introduction and Recent Achievements

According to *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023*, “the world is not on track to achieve gender equality by 2030”.¹⁵ On the same note, UN Women highlighted in their statement for the International Equal Pay Day 2024 that “women globally still earn on average 20 percent less than men”.¹⁶ As the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* approaches its 30th anniversary next year, UN Women calls on governments and employers to prioritize their implementation and to enforce equal pay legislations.¹⁷ Likewise, there is still a long way to go to achieve Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 (gender equality) which emphasizes the importance of achieving gender equality and empowering women. Especially SDG 5, target 5.4 and 5.5 are crucial for the world of work for women. Target 5.4 calls for recognizing and valuing unpaid care work because women still spend 2.5 times more hours on unpaid domestic and care work compared to men. Target 5.5 urges women’s full and effective participation in decision-making and leadership at all levels. While women represented nearly 40% of global employment they held only 27.5% of management positions.¹⁸ These gaps underscore the urgency of addressing occupational segregation and promoting equality in care work, as highlighted in General Assembly resolutions 78/150 (2023) and 77/317 (2023).¹⁹

Ending Gender-Based Occupational Segregation

Occupational segregation can be described as the unequal distribution of female and male workers across and within job types. The World Bank differentiates between horizontal and vertical segregation. The concentration of men and women in different sectors or industries is described as horizontal segregation, while vertical segregation highlights disparities in status, managerial responsibilities, and promotion opportunities.²⁰ In order to tackle gender-based occupational segregation the root causes must be addressed including structural barriers, discriminatory practices, and societal norms. On the one side there is a gender gap in skills, capital, domestic and care responsibilities. On the other side there can be difficulties in the recruitment process, and workplace culture and criteria for promotion for women. Furthermore, the low presence of women in leadership positions limits the role model function for women. Apart from barriers occurring from the firms, government policies can further foster segregation, like tax rates that affect secondary earners, female-specific policies, such as maternity laws, or no quotas for women in leadership.²¹

¹⁵ United Nations Statistics Division. *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023: Special Edition*. 2023.

¹⁶ United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *Equal pay for work of equal value*. N.d.

¹⁷ United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *Equal pay for work of equal value*. N.d.

¹⁸ United Nations Statistics Division. *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023: Special Edition*. 2023.

¹⁹ United Nations, General Assembly. *Achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls for realizing all Sustainable Development Goals (A/RES/78/150)*. 2023; United Nations, General Assembly. *International Day of Care and Support (A/RES/77/317)*. 2023.

²⁰ World Bank. *Gender-Based Employment Segregation: Understanding Causes and Policy Interventions*. 2023.

²¹ World Bank. *Gender-Based Employment Segregation: Understanding Causes and Policy Interventions*. 2023.



The International Labour Organization highlights that enterprises, where at least 30% to 39% of employees are female, are 18.5% more likely to achieve improved business outcomes. Additionally, limited female participation in leadership and management positions weakens the innovation and growth that can arise from diversity.²² In addition to business and economy, a gender gap can also be seen in politics. In 2024 women's representation in politics remained limited since just 26.9% of seats in national parliaments were occupied by women.²³ The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023: Special Edition found that at the current rate it will take 140 years to achieve equality in leadership.²⁴ Therefore implementing measures to overcome gender-based occupational segregation is crucial. First steps could be to implement recruitment and promotion procedures with gender-balanced selection panels, to blind evaluation of candidates' application form or to raise awareness and coach employees on gender bias. Furthermore, introducing work-life balance measures for both men and women, such as flexible working arrangements or supporting and preparing qualified women to senior and executive positions may help to close the existing gap.²⁵

Overcoming the Gender Digital Divide

In many ways the digitalization of the world has offered new ways of development and progress however, unchecked it also allows for further discrimination and inequality. Like Sima Bahous, the UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women said in the opening statement of the 67th Session of CSW: "The digital revolution presents unprecedented opportunities for women [...], it has also given rise to profound new challenges, compounding gender inequalities in severe ways."²⁶ The 67th session stood under the priority theme "Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls" which included a strong focus on overcoming the Gender Digital Divide, which emphasizes the disproportionate effect of the Digital Divide on women and girls.²⁷ This can be seen by the lack of access to communication technologies and digital literacy and the underrepresentation of women and girls in education, innovation and leadership in science, technology, engineering and mathematics.²⁸

As part of overcoming the Gender Digital Divide, UN Women, along with a coalition of the willing has founded the Action Coalition on Technology and Innovation for Gender Equality, which has four main goals such as increasing investment towards feminist technology or reducing the Gender Digital Divide by accelerating meaningful access to digital technologies and universal

²² International Labour Organization. *Overcoming gender segregation*. 2020.

²³ United Nations Statistics Division. *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023: Special Edition*. 2023.

²⁴ United Nations Statistics Division. *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023: Special Edition*. 2023.

²⁵ International Labour Organization. *Overcoming gender segregation*. 2020.

²⁶ United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. *CSW67 opening statement: Digital rights are women's rights*. 2023.

²⁷ United Nations, Commission on the Status of Women. *Innovation and technological change and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, Agreed conclusions (E/CN/2023/L.3)*. 2023.

²⁸ United Nations, Commission on the Status of Women. *Innovation and technological change and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, Agreed conclusions (E/CN/2023/L.3)*. 2023.



digital literacy.²⁹ The Coalition is based on a multi stakeholder approach in order to foster private and public cooperation for gender equality. When it comes to global frameworks the most comprehensive approach governing digital technologies and artificial intelligence was adopted in 2024, as one of the outcomes of the Summit of the Future. The *Global Digital Compact* (Compact) (2024) was the result of efforts to “to reassert human agency over technology and explore new avenues to adopt a human-centric approach to digitalization, with the feminist principles of inclusion, intersectionality and systemic change at its core”.³⁰ The Compact includes a gendered approach to include the disproportionate effect the Gender Digital Divide has on women and girls, based on the recommendations made by the CSW. It also includes a high level review to be held in 2027 in order to assess its progress as well as new opportunities and challenges.

This high level review will come in the wake of the Beijing +30 high level review held by the CSW in order to assess the progress made on the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action 30 years after its initial conception, offering a moment of reflection as well as an opportunity to reinvent and reinvest in a ways for a equal and just future.

²⁹ United Nations, Commission on the Status of Women. *Action Coalitions Global Acceleration Plan*. 2021.

³⁰ United Nations, General Assembly. *The Pact for the Future (A/RES/79/1)*. 2024; United Nations, Commission on the Status of Women. *Report of the Secretary General: Innovation and technological change and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls (E/CN.6/2023/3)*. 2023.



Bibliography

International Labour Organization. *Overcoming gender segregation*. 2020. Retrieved 11 January 2025 from: <https://www.ilo.org/publications/overcoming-gender-segregation>

United Nations, Commission on the Status of Women. *Action Coalitions Global Acceleration Plan*. 2021. Retrieved 12 January 2025 from: <https://commitments.generationequality.org/sites/default/files/2022-09/UNW-GAP-Report-EN-web.pdf>

United Nations, Commission on the Status of Women. *Innovation and technological change and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, Agreed conclusions (E/CN/2023/L.3)*. 2023. Retrieved 12 January 2025 from: <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/ltd/n23/081/71/pdf/n2308171.pdf>

United Nations, Commission on the Status of Women. *Report of the Secretary General: Innovation and technological change and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls (E/CN.6/2023/3)*. 2023. Retrieved 12 January 2025 from: <https://undocs.org/en/E/CN.6/2023/3>

United Nations, Department of Global Communications. *Equal pay for work of equal value*. N.d. Retrieved 12 January 2025 from: <https://www.un.org/en/observances/equal-pay-day>

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. *CSW67 opening statement: Digital rights are women's rights*. 2023. Retrieved 12 January 2025 from: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/statement/2023/03/csw67-opening-statement-digital-rights-are-womens-rights>

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. *Advancing gender equality in the world of work*. 2024. Retrieved 11 January 2025 from: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/statement/2024/09/advancing-gender-equality-in-the-world-of-work>

United Nations, General Assembly. *Achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls for realizing all Sustainable Development Goals (A/RES/78/150)*. 2023. Retrieved 11 January 2025 from: <https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/78/150>

United Nations, General Assembly. *International Day of Care and Support (A/RES/77/317)*. 2023. Retrieved 11 January 2025 from: <https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/77/317>

United Nations, General Assembly. *The Pact for the Future (A/RES/79/1)*. 2024. Retrieved 12 January 2025 from: <https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/79/1>

United Nations Statistics Division. *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023: Special Edition*. 2023. Retrieved 11 January 2025 from: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2023/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2023.pdf>

World Bank. *Gender-Based Employment Segregation: Understanding Causes and Policy Interventions*. 2023. Retrieved 11 January 2025 from:



<https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/483621554129720460/pdf/Gender-Based-Employment-Segregation-Understanding-Causes-and-Policy-Interventions.pdf>