

Beijing+30 Action 2: Freedom from Poverty



FREEDOM FROM POVERTY

Address women's poverty by investing national budgets in social protection and high-quality public services, including in women's health, girls' education, and care.

I. Introduction

The series of crises over the past five years, beginning with the COVID-19 pandemic, has significantly impacted women's economic well-being globally. Advances in women's labour market participation have halted, and other indicators of women's economic empowerment have either slowed or declined. Even before the pandemic, progress in closing the global gender gap in labour force participation had stalled, occupational segregation and gender wage gaps remained pervasive, and most of the world's working women were stuck in informal and precarious jobs with few rights and protections.

Today, more than 1 in 10 women live in extreme poverty.¹ At the current rate of progress, as many as 342 million women (8 per cent) will still be living in extreme poverty by 2030.² Women and girls' persistent poverty is directly related to their pervasive exclusion from and discrimination in labour markets, their lack of choice and autonomy over how they spend their time, their lack of access to economic resources, including credit and land, and their lack of access to quality public services and social protection.

Globally, 63 per cent of women aged 25 to 54 participated in the labour market in 2022, compared to 91 per cent of men.³ Gender gaps in women's labour market participation are particularly pronounced in Northern Africa and Western Asia, and in Central and South Asia, at around 57 per cent in both regions. In East and Southern Africa, over 40 per cent of women aged 20–24 are neither employed nor in education or training, largely due to their unpaid care work responsibilities.⁴ Globally, far too many women remain concentrated in the informal economy, in domestic labour and in low-paid, insecure work. The highest prevalence of informality is in sub-Saharan Africa, where nearly 90 per cent of women are in informal employment, compared to 84 per cent of men. Women's overrepresentation in informal employment is a key driver of lifetime poverty and economic insecurity.

Care is vital for the well-being of society and economies, yet the undervaluation and unequal social organization of care work is a systemic driver of women's lifetime poverty. Globally, women provide nearly three times as much unpaid care work as men,⁵ limiting their time, choices and opportunities for education, decent paid work and political participation—a reality that is especially true for women and girls in low-income and rural households, migrant women and those who are racially marginalized.⁶ Women of working age with caring

1. UN Women, Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The gender snapshot 2023 (New York, UN Women, 2023), <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2023/09/progress-on-the-sustainable-development-goals-the-gender-snapshot-2023>.
2. Ibid.
3. S. Staab, L. Williams, C. Tabbush and L. Turquet, World Survey on the Role of Women in Development: Harnessing Social Protection for Gender Equality, Resilience and Transformation, (New York, UN Women, 2024), <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-10/World-survey-on-the-role-of-women-in-development-2024-en.pdf>.
4. UN Women and Government of Canada, The Care Agenda: A Regional Perspective for East and Southern Africa (New York, UN Women, and Ottawa, Government of Canada, 2024), https://africa.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-01/esa_care_framing_final_2b_3.pdf.
5. T. Hanna, C. Meisel, J. Moyer, G. Azcona, A. Bhatt and S. Duerto Valero, "Forecasting Time Spent in Unpaid Care and Domestic Work", Technical Brief (Denver, Colorado, Frederick S. Pardee Center for International Futures, and New York, UN Women, 2023), <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-10/technical-brief-forecasting-time-spent-in-unpaid-care-and-domestic-work-en.pdf>.
6. UN Women, "Putting Care for People at the Centre of a Sustainable and Just Economy", Expert Group Meeting Report (New York, UN Women, 2020), <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2021/EGM-report-Putting-care-for-people-at-the-centre-en.pdf>.

responsibilities are more likely than men to experience both a gender pay gap and a job quality gap; they are also up to seven times more likely than men to be out of the labour market.⁷ Globally 45 per cent of women are outside the labour market due to their unpaid care responsibilities, compared to just 5 per cent of men.⁸

A staggering 2 billion women and girls worldwide lack access to any form of social protection,⁹ in part linked to their employment status. Women are lagging behind on measures such as unemployment benefits, pensions and healthcare worldwide. Women and girls in extremely fragile contexts¹⁰ are more than five times more likely to live in households under the poverty line than women and girls in non-fragile contexts.

In an increasingly unstable and unequal world, gender responsive social protection and care systems play a key role in protecting women and girls against poverty during times of crisis and strengthen their ability to cope with important life course events such as losing their jobs, having a child or entering old age. Combined with gender responsive-employment policies and access to public services, such as education, health, child and long-term care and services to support persons with disabilities social protection can provide women with sustainable pathways out of poverty and help transform societies towards sustainability, equality and social justice.

II. Actions

This Action aims to increase economic prosperity and well-being by addressing the structural causes of poverty and economic inequality for women. It supports comprehensive social protection and quality, accessible public services to provide women and girls with the economic security, education, healthcare and decent employment needed to create sustainable pathways out of poverty and help transform societies towards sustainability, equality and social justice.

The Action requires a multisectoral effort that utilizes multiple levers of change and considers women's poverty and social and economic inequality from a systemic perspective. Critical actors include governments and institutions, which hold the primary responsibility for normative frameworks and sectoral



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policies (health, education, social protection), care systems, data collection; businesses, which are responsible for adopting standards, certifications, qualifications and training to ensure the provision of decent employment; and rights holders, including those represented by women's organizations, civil society, cooperatives and unions), which underpin social dialogue and policymaking processes.

Achieving comprehensive, gender-responsive social protection and care systems will require long-term investments in fiscal, administrative and technical capacity. This entails an expansion of fiscal space, while assessing and transforming current macroeconomic policies to make them gender-responsive. At the same time, in the short term, there is an urgent need to adapt existing policies and programmes to respond better to gender-specific risks and vulnerabilities in both sudden-onset and protracted crises.

To act on both fronts, the following actions should be advanced¹¹:

- **Invest in universal, gender responsive social protection and care systems**, including social protection floors,

7. Trades Union Congress, "Women 7 times more likely than men to be out of work due to caring commitments", TUC, 8 March 2023, <https://www.tuc.org.uk/news/women-7-times-more-likely-men-be-out-work-due-caring-commitments>.

8. International Labour Organization, "Unpaid care work prevents 708 million women from participating in the labour market", ILO, 29 October 2024, <https://www.ilo.org/resource/news/unpaid-care-work-prevents-708-million-women-participating-labour-market>.

9. S. Staab, L. Williams, C. Tabbush and L. Turquet, World Survey on the Role of Women in Development: Harnessing Social Protection for Gender Equality, Resilience and Transformation, (New York, UN Women, 2024), <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-10/World-survey-on-the-role-of-women-in-development-2024-en.pdf>.

10. Ibid.

11. A detailed list of policy options to support the transformation of care systems can be found at UN, Transforming Care Systems: UN System Policy Paper. UN 2024" <https://unsdg.un.org/resources/transforming-care-systems-un-system-policy-paper>

and expand the coverage and adequacy of non-contributory social protection programmes, such as universal child, maternity/parental and pension benefits.

- **Extend social protection to informal workers**, with special attention to female-dominated sectors and occupational categories such as domestic workers and other care workers, using combined contributory and non-contributory mechanisms
- **Invest in quality, affordable and accessible public care services and care-supporting infrastructure**, including education, health, childcare, long-term care and services to support persons with disabilities.
- **Introduce laws and policies**, that support workers with caring responsibilities and improve the quality and conditions of women's paid work, including addressing occupational segregation.
- **Involve women's and workers' rights organizations** in the design, implementation and monitoring of public services expansion and social protection and care systems, policies and programmes, and adequately recognize their contributions.
- **Integrate social protection, employment and care policies** to broaden women's access to new green jobs and create decent care jobs as part of just transitions to sustainable economies and societies.
- **Engender macroeconomic policies and expand fiscal space** to reduce poverty and inequality, as well as to enhance government capacity to finance gender equality policies, social protection and care systems. **Forge broad-based fiscal pacts** to boost domestic resource mobilization for quality public services and gender-responsive social protection.
- **Undertake macro and micro analyses and simulations** to identify gaps in the coverage of care services, estimate the cost of investments to close those gaps, and estimate the social and economic returns of those investments.¹²

III. Normative Roots

This Action is grounded in a long history of normative frameworks and political advancements. The **Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BDPfA)** includes commitments to reduce poverty for women by addressing structural causes of poverty. It includes a call to make women's care work visible through data and evidence. This Action also cuts across multiple **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, particularly Goals 1 on ending poverty and 1.3 on social protection, 3 on health, 4 on education, 5 on gender equality and 5.4 on unpaid care work, 8 on decent work, and 16.6.2 on public services.

Beyond its value in accelerating sustainable development, social protection is a human right, first recognized as such in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Since then, the conventions and recommendations of the International Labour Organization (ILO), such as the **Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention**, 1952 (No. 102) and the **Social Protection Floors Recommendation**, 2012 (No. 202) have provided further guidance on the core principles of rights-based, universal social protection systems.

Since the BDPfA, the need to value and invest in care work (unpaid and paid) as a social and gender co-responsibility has increasingly been recognized as a critical enabler of social and economic well-being and prosperity, and a precondition for gender equality. This includes several ILO conventions and recommendations, including conventions on **workers with family responsibilities** (No. 156), **maternity protection** (No.183), **domestic workers** (No.189) and **violence and harassment in the workplace** (No. 190), among others. More recently, several normative frameworks on care work have been advanced. At the global level, these include **Resolution A/RES/77/317** on the International Day of Care and Support,¹³ **Resolution A/HRC/RES54/6** on the centrality of care and support from a human rights perspective,¹⁴ **Resolution E/RES/2024/4** on promoting care and support systems for social development and **Resolution ILC.112/V** concerning care work and the care economy.

12. For example, using the UN Women–ILO Care Services Policy Tool. See UN Women, A guide to public investments in the care economy: Policy support tool for estimating care deficits, investment costs, and economic returns (New York, UN Women, 2021), <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2021/04/policy-tool-care-economy>.

13. United Nations General Assembly, Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 24 July 2023, A/RES/77/317 (New York, United Nations, 2023), <https://docs.un.org/en/A/RES/77/317>.

14. United Nations Human Rights Council, Resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council on 11 October 2023, A/HRC/RES/54/6 (Geneva, United Nations, 2023), <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/RES/54/6>.

IV. Impact at scale

In the final push to achieve the SDGs by 2030, gender-responsive social protection and care systems, policies and services combined with labour market interventions can make a critical difference in ending poverty and reducing multiple intersecting inequalities.

A substantial expansion of social safety nets could lead to a decrease in extreme poverty by around 36 per cent, effectively lifting a significant proportion of the poorest population, including women and girls, out of poverty.¹⁵

Macrosimulations show that funding high-quality universal care services and infrastructure results in long-term and broader benefits beyond their direct users. Together with an increased provision of paid care leave, such investment has gender-equalizing effects on employment and care roles.¹⁶ For example, it is estimated that closing existing care policy gaps and expanding care services with decent care work could create almost 300 million jobs by 2035, thereby contributing to reducing gender inequalities in employment and yielding significant economic and social returns.¹⁷ Further studies show that investment in the care sector could create almost three times as many jobs as the same investment in construction and produce 30 per cent fewer greenhouse gas emissions.¹⁸

V. Proof of concept

Growing numbers of countries and regions are demonstrating that change is possible and serve as a model for others.

In **Brazil**, the SIMPLES scheme covers small and micro companies. Through SIMPLES, registered micro-entrepreneurs have access to a basic pension, disability and survivors' benefits, and health and maternity protections. Workers in small and microenterprises are entitled to the regular social security benefit package. Between 2008 and 2016, the number of firms registered with SIMPLES increased from around 3 million to



Photo: UN Women

12 million, making it an effective mechanism for formalizing self-employment and small and micro-businesses. The programme for individual micro-entrepreneurs has particularly benefited women and Afro-Brazilians.

In **Mongolia**, maternity cash benefits have been extended to all women, independent of their employment status and nationality, including to herders, the self-employed and informal workers. Paternity leave has also been extended.

In **Bogota, Colombia**, the *Manzanas del Cuidado* ('Care Blocks') initiative provides a variety of services to alleviate women's unpaid care responsibilities and free up their time, including through free or low-cost public care infrastructure such as laundry services.

15. World Bank, *The State of Social Safety Nets* (Washington, D.C., World Bank, 2018).

16. J. De Henau, "Costs and benefits of investing in transformative care policy packages: A macrosimulation study in 82 countries", ILO Working Paper 55 (Geneva, ILO, 2022), https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@gender/documents/publication/wcms_839252.pdf.

17. International Labour Organization, "ILO Global Care Policy Portal", <https://webapps.ilo.org/globalcare/>.

18. J. De Henau and S. Himmelweit, *A Care-Led Recovery from Coronavirus* (London, UK Women's Budget Group, 2020), <https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Care-led-recovery-final.pdf>.

VI. Existing platforms and alliances to connect to and leverage

There are several global platforms and alliances this Action can leverage, including the Global Alliance for Care, the Generation Equality Economic Justice and Rights Action Coalition, the Social Protection Inter-Agency Cooperation Board (SPIAC-B), the Global Coalition for Social Justice, and the Third United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (2018–2027), among others.

VII. Impact: What can we achieve by 2030?

By 2030, this Action expects to contribute to the following high-level results:

- **Increased** access to quality public care services
- **Gender responsive social protection policies and care systems** adopted and implemented
- **Reduced poverty and extreme poverty** among women and girls
- **Women's increased access to employment and decent jobs**, and the elimination of discrimination in the workplace
- **One billion hours** of women and girls' time released
- **Forty million** low-carbon decent jobs created, especially benefiting women.



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THE BEIJING+30 ACTION AGENDA

This Action is part of the [Beijing+30 Action Agenda](#): a voluntary, action-oriented platform to accelerate the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2030 Agenda. Grounded in stronger financing for gender equality and better gender data, and centering adolescent girls and young women, the Action Agenda invites Member States to identify one or two national priority actions and announce these at the High-Level Meeting on Beijing+30 on 22 September 2025.