

# ADDRESSING ECONOMIC

## structural barriers for economic justice

### Lead

Valerie Bichelmeier (Make Mothers Matter) and Gea Meijers (WIDE+)

### Contributors

Prabha Khosla (CRIA), Vicky Smallman (Women's and Human Rights for the Canadian Labour Congress), Oleksandra Kunovska Mondoux (WFUWO), Elizabeth Sclater (OWN Europe), Claudia Thallmayer (WIDE Austria), Liz Nelson (Gender and Tax Justice Coalition), Kathleen Lahey (academic), Elisabeth Klatzer (WIDE Austria), Silke Steinhilber (WIDE+), Tatiana Bozrikova (NGO Panorama), Julia Guenther (WIDE Austria), and Anjum Sultana (YWCA), Marfa Skoryk.

**This factsheet links to other factsheets: Climate, Environment and Women's Rights, Rural Women's Rights, Corporate Accountability and the Beijing process, and Tax Justice**

## Summary statement

We call for a new economic order that prioritizes the well-being of people and the planet. We call for a complete overhaul of the current economic system, moving away from extractive and profit-driven capitalism, an economic model based on a broken indicator – GDP- which does not reflect our needs, and the notion of infinite growth beyond our limited natural resources.

Instead, new indicators should be developed used for a comprehensive approach with 'carrots and sticks' to drive a sustainable and wellbeing-oriented economy that values social progress and the protection of the environment.

### Concretely we need:

- **Accountable governments** that promote socio-economic innovation through policies targeting SMES and other groups; for some this means excluding Transnational companies for innovation subsidies.
- **To stop the impunity** of Transnational companies to exploit women's labour and natural resources.

- **Care services** (child care but also all other care services) should be a basic right, accessible for all. In addition, care leave and working time should be properly adapted to allow for a reasonable private life and work balance.
- **To recognize unpaid care work as "work"** that gives right to social protection. Policies should ensure that women are not penalized for providing work outside the formal productive sphere (In particular, care periods should be taken into account in the calculation of Pensions in order to address the huge pension gaps in most UNECE countries)
- **To connect social protection and taxing systems to individual rights**, moving away from household only based policies.
- **To address Gender Based Violence at work:** all governments should ratify the new ILO Convention No 190 on "Violence and Harassment".

**This summary statement was the result of two rounds of discussion** at the UNECE civil society forum, 28 October 2019 in Geneva. The following people that agreed to be listed: Magda de Meyer (President Women's Council Belgium), Leo Baranes (WIZO)., Kaliu Cornelie (Platform for Gender Equality from Moldova) Gea Meijers (WIDE+), Valerie Bichelmeier (Make Mothers Matter), Julia Guenther (WIDE Austria), Anjum Sultana (YWCA), Sophie Chassot (CARE France), Annelies Pierrot Bults (ECICW and the Netherlands Council of Women), Gisela Duetting, Maggi Brigham, Katrien van der Heyden, Vivian Fankhauser, Sanja Nikolin (Women's Platform for the Development of Serbia), Els van Winckel (Zonta international, UN Committee Geneva).

The recommendations do not represent the opinions of each member but give an overall conclusion.



## Structural barriers and negative trends

- Women of all ages still shoulder the **bulk of unpaid care work**, which remains a major barrier to women's economic empowerment. Women in the UNECE region spend on average 41 minutes per day more on work (paid and unpaid) compared to men. Regional differences are big: in the Nordic Countries women do 25-30% more unpaid work, while the ratio is 6 times in Albania (1).
- In addition to gender-based discrimination, **intersectional discrimination** - linked to ethnicity, race, migratory status, age (older/young), location (e.g. rural/urban), maternity, family status (e.g. widows, single mothers), sexual orientation, gender identity, (dis)ability, etc. - restricts women's full economic participation.
- The average hourly **Gender Pay Gap** remains high at 18% in the region, with large variations across countries - up to 62.4% in Kyrgyzstan (2). But from an intersected perspective, related gaps are much greater, like the **Motherhood Pay Gap**. And the high **pension gaps** in most countries - for example 53% in Germany in 2017 (3) - which

reflects the discriminations and structural gendered economic injustices women face over their lifetime.

- The **'glass ceiling' remains unshattered**: as we move up the corporate ladder, the proportion of women shrinks - with for example less than 6% women CEOs in the EU (4).
- **Precarious work is on the rise**, linked to the erosion of labour rights, levels of income and social/job security; it is a trend that especially affects women.
- **Digitalization and ongoing globalization of production chains** are bringing already many changes to the nature of work, which will have an impact on gender equality and women's working conditions. Current findings suggest that gender equality will be sustained and entrenched if additional measures in the law and policy are not taken (5).
- **The whole economic system doesn't work for women as it values paid work and profit over unpaid work and the well-being of people and the planet.**



## Progress on implementing the Beijing Platform for Action

- **Are uneven across the region, with even regression in some countries**
- **Legislation gaps** remain. When adequate laws exist to support women's rights, they are not always enforced as women are constrained by traditions/power relations or simply not aware of their rights.
- **States should prevent the retreat or regress in the legislative protection of women's labor rights**, as is the case in Ukraine, in connection with the new draft Labor Code, which allows for the easy dismissal of female workers, including pregnant workers, women workers who have recently given birth and those who are breastfeeding (6).
- In spite of laws that prohibits dismissal and discrimination on the basis of pregnancy or maternity, mothers still face specific discrimination and harassment at work and a higher pay gap (the "**motherhood penalty**").
- In central Asia, women have theoretically the same rights as men to own and/or inherit land, but institutional or societal constraints deprive them of their rights.
- **Time use surveys (TUS)** to monitor the value and distribution of unpaid care work are not yet conducted on a regular basis (BPfA 165g) (only 33 UNECE countries have conducted TUS (7)).
- **Macroeconomic policies, especially trade and fiscal policies, fail to comply with the BPfA commitments to protect the labour rights of women** (165c and r) and regulate the activity of (transnational) corporations (165 k and l) so that they do not adversely impact women's economic status. In particular:
  - **Austerity measures in many countries** of the region have had multiple disproportionate impacts on women: 1) as public-sector workers, 2) as service users and 3) as recipients of social protection benefits. As a result, women's vulnerability to poverty has increased, especially that of single female pensioners and lone mothers. E.g. in the UK one in every 55 single-parent families became

homeless in 2017-18 - 92% of them being single mothers. In some countries (e.g. Spain, Greece, Ukraine) austerity has become a permanent reality (8).

- **Global and regional trade agreements and arrangements** have brought new harmful impacts on women. For example, as companies are enabled to outsource their production to countries with lower labour costs, the majority of women working in the textile industry in Eastern Europe and Central Asia work under harsh conditions and do not earn half of what they need for a minimum standard of living (9).



## Recommendations beyond Beijing+25

### We are calling UNECE governments to proactively

- Legislate and implement effective non-discrimination legislation for the world of work and ensure effective access to justice for women. Ensure that the burden of proof for cases of alleged gender-based discrimination in employment is not on the victim.
- **Provide adequately funded social protection infrastructure and services to redistribute unpaid care work** and make sure women of all ages have access to a sustainable livelihood. Especially ensure:
  - Universal high-quality, flexible and **affordable public childcare and other care services**, including for disabled and other dependant people, with choices on the type of childcare catering to the different needs of families.
  - Access to adequately **paid maternity protection**, as well as adequately **paid paternity leave** for fathers and parental leave for all parents, as well as carers' leave for other circumstances.
  - **Pension rights and entitlements** for social protection for all those providing unpaid care work, including "care credit" in the calculation of pensions.
- Develop measures that promote women's employability (including for parents returning from care leave and for part-time and contract work) and **ensure flexibility and choices for women** and men reconciling paid work and family/private life. (examples of practices Norway and UK such as the right to request flexible working arrangements).
- **End austerity policies and the on-going privatization of social services, and invest in care services provided as a matter of individual rights.** Especially increase the level of remuneration of work traditionally performed by women (i.e. care, teaching, social work, etc.).
- Governments have made repeated commitments to **Gender Budgeting**, among others in Beijing and in the context of SDGs (indicator 5.c.1), we call on governments to further develop and fully implement systems to track both gender equality in revenue laws and income from revenue, as well as public budget allocations for gender equality and women's rights. The full and equal participation of women and girls in their diversity shall be ensured in economic and budget policy making. Gender impact assessments of all

economic policies should take into consideration the impacts on women and girls in all their diversity (intersectionality).

- **Promote Feminist Economics:** shift the gendered assumptions and hierarchies in which knowledge about the economy that underpins our policies, is based.
- **Pursue effective policies to ensure that women and men receive equal remuneration for work of equal value.** Further develop and regularly apply methods to evaluate jobs based on gender-neutral criteria, strengthen employment standards, including through higher minimum wages and measures to address the systemic undervaluation of women's work.
- **Ensure decent work for all,** prioritize ratification and effective implementation of the 4 key ILO Gender equality Conventions (10), **Convention 189 on domestic workers, Convention 190 on Violence and Harassment in the World of Work,** and implementation of the measures contained in **Recommendation 204 on formalizing the informal economy** (11).
- Full protection of labour rights should also be **ensured in new kinds of 'services' resulting from the 'digital (platform/sharing) economy' and other nonstandard work arrangements,** such as domestic service providers. As well as examine and address any gendered impacts of climate change, digitalization and automation on women's employment.
- **Address women's occupational segregation, through educational diversification, professional training, and addressing stereotypes** and other barriers. Women must be encouraged to enter Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) jobs, in which there will be more jobs in the future, and men should be encouraged to enter more jobs in the social and care sector.
- Ensure women's **equal participation in management and decision-making** at every level and in every sector.
- **Trade policies should not prioritize business rights over the rights of people,** but respect equally nature and human rights, including women's rights. In particular countries in the region should abandon Investor-State Dispute Settlement mechanisms and strengthen patent rights (12).
- The UNECE member countries of OECD must meet the international target of 0,7% ODA. They should commit to fulfill the **objective of having 85% of programs having gender equality as the primary or important secondary project goal,** as outlined in the EU Gender Action Plan II (2016-20) **with 20 % for gender equality as the primary goal.** They should also promote a Feminist foreign policy (examples: Sweden, Iceland and Canada) that includes funding for women's rights organizations.

## Useful sources

- (1) ILO 2018 Report Care work and Care jobs for the future of decent work
- (2) Difference in hourly earning: UNECE leaflet The Gender Pay Gap across the UNECE region
- (3) [//www.thelocal.de/20171214/women-in-germany-receive-half-the-pension-men-do-study-shows](http://www.thelocal.de/20171214/women-in-germany-receive-half-the-pension-men-do-study-shows)
- (4) EIGE  
[//eige.europa.eu/gender-statistics/dgs/indicator/wmidm\\_bus\\_bus\\_wmid\\_comp\\_compex/bar](http://eige.europa.eu/gender-statistics/dgs/indicator/wmidm_bus_bus_wmid_comp_compex/bar)
- (5) See for example, WTO Public Forum workshops and this recent [webinar](#) (for more information and future briefing on this topic, kindly contact Gea Meijers, [gea.meijers23@gmail.com](mailto:gea.meijers23@gmail.com)).
- (6) [Alternative Report](#) on Ukraine's Implementation of the Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (VIII Periodic Report) (2017).
- (7) ILO 2018 Report Care work and care jobs for the future of decent work
- (8) Source: BBC <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-45800186>.
- (9) <https://cleanclothes.org/file-repository/livingwage-europe-europes-sweatshops/view>
- (10) Especially the Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention (No. 156) and Maternity Protection Convention (No. 183), which both remain under ratified. On the issue of equal pay, a recent example of good practice is the obligatory equal pay certification for employers in Iceland (2018).
- (11) To date, only 7 UNECE countries have ratified this convention (Belgium, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Sweden and Switzerland).
- (12) See for more WIDE+ 2018 briefing 'Gender and EU Trade Agreements'.