



# General Assembly

Distr.: General  
3 August 2017

Original: English

---

## Seventy-second session

Item 24 (b) of the provisional agenda\*

### Eradication of poverty and other development issues

## Women in development

### Report of the Secretary-General

#### *Summary*

The focus of the present report, submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution [70/219](#), is on measures taken at the national level to scale up efforts to accelerate the transition of women from informal to formal employment, including access to decent work and social protection, and support the recognition, reduction and redistribution of unpaid care and domestic work by women, including through sustained investments in the care economy. In the report, the Secretary-General discusses financing for those actions and highlights the results achieved, lessons learned and opportunities for upscaling and replication. Recommendations for consideration by the Assembly are also provided.

---

\* [A/72/150](#).



## I. Introduction

1. The year 2015 marked a historic point, with the adoption of General Assembly resolution [70/1](#), entitled “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, in which it is recognized that eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including extreme poverty, is the greatest global challenge and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development sets out a comprehensive set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets that are universal, integrated and indivisible. It is also recognized in the 2030 Agenda that realizing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls will make a crucial contribution to progress across all Goals and targets. Efforts to achieve Goal 5, on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls, together with the gender-responsive implementation of the entire Agenda, are of critical importance for women and girls in development.

2. In the 2030 Agenda, it is emphasized that the achievement of full human potential and sustainable development is not possible if women and girls, who represent half of humanity, continue to be denied their full human rights and opportunities. Rather, it would require, among other things, equal access to economic resources and political participation, equal access to good-quality education, equal pay for work of equal value and equal opportunities with men for employment, leadership and decision-making at all levels. It is also underlined in the 2030 Agenda that the systematic mainstreaming of a gender perspective in its implementation is crucial. For example, targets in the 2030 Agenda are aimed at realizing women’s equal rights to economic resources, equal access to decent work and social protection and equal access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources.

3. Given that the eradication of poverty in all its forms is a central commitment in the 2030 Agenda, ensuring full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men takes on heightened importance. The Commission on the Status of Women, at its sixty-first session, provided a road map of action for women’s economic empowerment in the changing world of work. In it, the Commission elaborated on the linkages between the various dimensions of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls and on how those linkages affect women’s economic empowerment in the changing world of work. Among the areas addressed were gender gaps in labour force participation and structural barriers to women’s economic empowerment, including discriminatory laws and policies, gender stereotypes and negative social norms. As a result of the growing informality of work and mobility of women workers, specific actions, together with social protection, are called for to facilitate women’s transition from informal to formal employment. The Commission also outlined concrete measures to recognize, reduce and redistribute the disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work done by women and girls, thereby reinforcing the 2030 Agenda.

4. The present report, on the implementation of General Assembly resolution [70/219](#), builds on those gains. Its focus is on areas to further enhance women’s capacity as agents of change in national development and poverty eradication. Emphasis is placed on policies to accelerate the transition of women from informal to formal employment, including access to decent work opportunities and social protection. Attention is also given to the recognition, reduction and redistribution of the unpaid care and domestic work performed disproportionately by women, including through sustained investments in the care economy. Based on input

received from 24 Member States and 5 United Nations system entities,<sup>1</sup> the Secretary-General reviews measures taken by Governments and support provided by the United Nations system to address those issues.<sup>2</sup> The report concludes with recommendations for consideration by the Assembly.

## II. Background

5. Women's empowerment and gender equality are at the very heart of human rights as enshrined in international human rights treaties and conventions, inter alia, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

6. Twenty-two years after the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action,<sup>3</sup> considerable progress has been made in closing gender gaps, especially in health and education. Girls born today can expect to live an average of 73 years, about four years longer than in 1995. The global maternal mortality rate has dropped by 42 per cent in 20 years, and the global gender gap among primary school-age children has virtually closed.<sup>4</sup> More women have gained greater legal rights to access employment and to own and inherit property. Yet, there is still much to do to achieve the full and equal participation of women in the economy and in society.

7. Around the world, economies continue to grapple with the lingering effects of the 2007-2009 global financial and economic crises. While there has been modest growth in developed economies, growth in emerging and developing economies has been declining for the past five years, dropping from 5.4 per cent in 2012 to 4.1 per cent in 2016. Recent projections by the International Monetary Fund indicate that growth in those economies is expected to rise only marginally over the next two years.<sup>5</sup> Persistent structural constraints, such as low productivity, wage stagnation and rising income inequality, remain challenges in far too many developing economies and pose a challenge to stronger and sustained recovery.

8. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO),<sup>6</sup> women remain especially affected by the slow pace of global economic recovery, and gender gaps

<sup>1</sup> Contributions were received from Argentina, Australia, Azerbaijan, Barbados, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, El Salvador, Finland, Italy, Jordan, Kenya, Mozambique, Qatar, Romania, Slovenia, Sudan, Togo, Turkey and Zambia. The following United Nations system entities also provided input: the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the International Fund for Agricultural Development, the International Telecommunication Union, the World Health Organization and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women).

<sup>2</sup> The present report also draws considerably on the work of the High-level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment, in particular its first and second reports, entitled "Leave no one behind: a call to action for gender equality and women's economic empowerment" (New York, 2016) and "Leave no one behind: taking action for transformational change on women's economic empowerment" (New York, 2017).

<sup>3</sup> *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women*, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.13), chap. I, resolution 1, annexes I and II.

<sup>4</sup> Clinton Foundation and Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, "No ceilings: the full participation report" (2015).

<sup>5</sup> International Monetary Fund (IMF), *World Economic Outlook: Gaining Momentum?* (Washington, D.C., 2017).

<sup>6</sup> See International Labour Organization (ILO), *Women at Work: Trends 2016* (Geneva, International Labour Office, 2016) and *World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends for Women 2017* (Geneva, International Labour Office, 2017).

in the world of work remain widespread. Globally, the labour force participation rate for women was just over 49.5 per cent in 2016, compared with 76.1 per cent for men. Given current trends, the female labour force participation rate was expected to decline to 49.4 per cent in 2017, with no improvements anticipated for 2018. In 2017, women in emerging economies were expected to face the largest gender gap in participation rates, at nearly 31 per cent, followed by those in developed countries, at just over 16 per cent, and those in developing countries, at 12 per cent.

9. Gender gaps in labour force participation rates will be the highest in the Arab States, Northern Africa and Southern Asia, where they are expected to exceed 50 per cent. Those regions also have the lowest rates of female labour force participation, according to ILO.

10. Even when women do participate in labour markets, they are less likely than their male counterparts to find a job. In 2016, the global unemployment rate for women was 6.3 per cent, up marginally from 6.2 per cent in 2015. By comparison, the unemployment rate for men remained unchanged, at 5.5 per cent, during the same period.

11. According to ILO, pervasive occupational segregation, which exists across all countries and regions, is a major driver of the gender pay gap, which stands at approximately 23 per cent globally. The fact that women and men tend to be employed in different occupations or positions of seniority is a key factor in women's socioeconomic disadvantage. Far too many women remain concentrated in the informal economy, in domestic work and in low-paid, casual work. In 32 of the 41 countries for which data are available, approximately 80 per cent of women were in informal, non-agricultural employment, compared with 70 per cent for men.

12. According to the High-level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment, women are overrepresented in the informal economy for multiple reasons, including inadequate access to education and training. Adverse norms, discriminatory laws, the lack of legal protection and the lack of access to financial, digital and property assets are systemic barriers that undermine women's opportunities in all aspects of work. Adverse norms can limit women's access to work by differentiating the types of work done by women and men and by constraining women's mobility outside the home. They can also devalue women's work through justifications as to why women's and men's rights to equal remuneration, equal respect at work and equal access to land and property are not realized. Ninety per cent of countries have at least one gender-differentiated law. In all, 943 gender-differentiated laws have been documented across 170 countries.

13. In addition, a key driver of women's predominance in the informal economy is their disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care and domestic work. According to the High-level Panel, women do over 75 per cent of all unpaid care and domestic work globally. The extent of women's unpaid care and domestic work means that they are often only able to access informal employment or are excluded from work entirely. Studies show that women working in informal enterprises reported unpaid care and domestic work as the reason they have taken this type of employment.<sup>7</sup>

14. The ability to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment is powerfully shaped by the overall economic environment. The design and implementation of macroeconomic policies are thus significant determinants for accelerating the empowerment of women, especially those who are the most marginalized. Those policies can make a significant contribution towards the

<sup>7</sup> Maria Lopez-Ruiz and others, "Informal employment, unpaid care work, and health status in Spanish-speaking Central American countries: a gender-based approach", *International Journal of Public Health*, vol. 62, No. 2 (March 2017), pp. 209-218.

delivery of the commitments of Member States outlined in the 2030 Agenda, by promoting economic growth that is inclusive, sustainable and capable of creating full and productive employment and by promoting decent work for all women and men.

### **III. Accelerating the transition of women from informal work to productive employment**

15. According to the High-level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment, many of the 1 billion people living in poverty around the world work informally, and a large number of them are women. Although there is no commonly accepted definition of informal employment across countries, there is a broad understanding that informal work includes considerable diversity in terms of workers, enterprises and entrepreneurs. Workers in informal employment can include unregistered workers, own-account workers, casual and seasonal workers, and home-based and domestic workers. Of the 67 million domestic workers employed globally, 54 million are women, accounting for a significant share of all informal workers.

16. Even if informal employment is critical for the livelihoods of a large majority of women, such work fails to meet the criteria of decent work, which is defined as "productive work in which rights are protected, which generates an adequate income, with adequate social protection".<sup>8</sup> Decent work addresses four elements that are key to advancing women's empowerment: the promotion of standards, fundamental principles and rights at work; decent employment creation; the enhancement of social protection; and the strengthening of social dialogue.<sup>9</sup>

17. Among women workers in the non-agricultural sector, more than four out of five in South Asia, and about three out of four in sub-Saharan Africa, are informally employed. The type of informal work varies considerably across regions: most non-agricultural work in sub-Saharan Africa is self-employment, whereas in Central Asia, it is mainly wage employment for both formal and informal businesses, as indicated by the High-level Panel.

18. Workers in informal employment typically encounter decent work deficits, including a lack of access to basic infrastructure and childcare, to education and skills training and to financial and health services, including occupational health and safety. Many of those deficits are more severe for women than for men.

19. According to the High-level Panel, women working in informal employment are also constrained by the lack of voice to exercise influence and bargaining power, the lack of visibility, as reflected in the paucity of data and evidence on informal work, and the lack of legal identity documents or recognition. For such reasons, the contributions of millions of women in informal employment to national economies go unrecognized and undervalued.

#### **A. Legal, regulatory and labour market reforms, including access to decent work**

20. Bringing workers and enterprises in the informal economy under the protection of labour laws and standards would be a major step towards decent work.

<sup>8</sup> International Labour Organization (ILO), *Decent Work: Report of the Director-General*, International Labour Conference, 87th Session (Geneva, International Labour Office, 1999).

<sup>9</sup> ILO, *Decent Work Indicators: Guidelines for Producers and Users of Statistical and Legal Framework Indicators* — *ILO Manual*, 2nd ed. (Geneva, International Labour Office, 2013).

The benefits that workers derive from labour legislation and regulation include greater income security and financial stability, better training, fewer work-related accidents and increased access to health services. Improved labour standards can also be self-financing for employers, when, for instance, complying with legislation on working hours results in higher productivity and less absenteeism.<sup>10</sup>

21. Furthermore, research shows that strengthening collective bargaining rights can play a critical role in addressing low pay, boosting workers' morale and productivity, promoting a safe working environment and improving women's wages, thus reducing gender wage gaps. For instance, in recent years, as reported by ILO in *Women at Work*,<sup>6</sup> trade unions have also engaged in significant national and international campaigns to promote decent work for domestic workers, both before and after the adoption by ILO of the Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189), which sets labour standards for domestic workers.

22. International labour standards often set the framework for the application of rights at the national level. The Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy Recommendation, 2015 (No. 204), the Home Work Convention, 1996 (No. 177) and the aforementioned Domestic Workers Convention are ILO instruments that are especially pertinent for women working in informal employment. Globally, only 10 per cent of the 43.6 million women employed as domestic workers enjoy labour protection to the same extent as other workers, according to the High-level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment. Following the adoption of the Domestic Workers Convention, 30 countries successfully extended labour or social protections to domestic workers. The adoption of such legal reforms and labour legislation are crucial to accelerating the transition of women from informal employment to decent work.

## B. Gender-responsive social protection policies

23. Social protection is one of the key features of decent work. However, evidence shows that 73 per cent of the world's population has no, or only partial, access to social protection. Women are often overrepresented among those who lack access to social protection.<sup>11</sup> Globally, less than 40 per cent of women who are employed are covered under mandatory maternity cash benefit schemes. Owing to the ineffective enforcement and implementation of laws in some regions, the effective coverage is far lower: only 28 per cent of women in employment worldwide are protected through maternity cash benefits that provide some income security during the final stages of pregnancy and after childbirth.<sup>12</sup> Without income security, either from earnings or from social transfers, women and their families risk falling into poverty, depleting their assets in response to shocks and engaging in distress sales of labour to meet immediate subsistence needs.

24. The impact of social protection on reducing poverty by increasing household income is well documented.<sup>13</sup> Many countries, for instance, have facilitated the

<sup>10</sup> ILO, *The Informal Economy and Decent Work: A Policy Resource Guide — Supporting Transitions to Formality* (Geneva, International Labour Office, 2013).

<sup>11</sup> United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), *Progress of the World's Women 2015-2016: Transforming Economies, Realizing Rights* (New York, 2015).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

access of domestic workers and those who work in the informal economy to social security schemes, including unemployment insurance and maternity provisions.<sup>14</sup>

25. Other countries have implemented the Social Protection Floors Initiative, which aims to close gaps in social protection coverage and holds significant promise for women. A social protection floor is defined as a set of minimum guarantees, including basic income security for children, working-age adults, older people and people with disabilities, as well as health care for all, including maternity care.<sup>15</sup> However, the integration of women's specific risks and constraints in the design of social protection floors has been uneven.<sup>16</sup> Differences between women's and men's exposure to labour markets and their unequal distribution of time, responsibilities and power within households are some of the key factors that require consideration when designing gender-responsive social protection systems.

26. Even as many countries in the world are undertaking efforts to expand social protection to a wider proportion of the population, fiscal consolidation in the context of crises means social protection expenditures have generally been declining.<sup>15</sup> That decline comes on top of the already low level of expenditures on social protection, over time. For instance, evidence from 25 countries in the Asia-Pacific region shows that public social spending as a share of gross domestic product (GDP) averages between 3 and 7 per cent, a relatively low ratio in comparison with countries that are members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, which spend, on average, 21 per cent of GDP.<sup>17</sup> However, even in the poorest countries, options exist to expand financing and generate resources to invest in social protection for women and girls.<sup>18</sup> Such measures are essential for realizing the human rights of all women and men, girls and boys, and for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls as envisioned in the 2030 Agenda.

### C. Gender-responsive macroeconomic policies and inclusive growth strategies

27. The transition of women from informal to full and productive employment, including decent work, cannot be accelerated without sustainable job creation. However, in many developing economies, despite moderate to high rates of economic growth, employment growth in the formal economy has been low.<sup>19</sup> For instance, while the economies of the least developed countries expanded annually at

<sup>14</sup> Social Protection Department of ILO, "Social protection for domestic workers: key policy trends and statistics", Social Protection Policy Papers, No. 16 (Geneva, International Labour Office, 2016).

<sup>15</sup> ILO, *World Social Protection Report 2014/2015: Building Economic Recovery, Inclusive Development and Social Justice* (Geneva, International Labour Office, 2014).

<sup>16</sup> UN-Women, "Making national social protection floors work for women", Policy Brief, No. 1 (New York, 2015).

<sup>17</sup> Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), *A Decade of Social Protection Development in Selected Asian Countries* (Paris, OECD Publishing, 2017).

<sup>18</sup> Isabel Ortiz, Matthew Cummins and Kalaivani Karunanethy, "Fiscal space for social protection and the Sustainable Development Goals: options to expand social investments in 187 countries", Extension of Social Security Working Paper, No. 48 (Geneva and New York, International Labour Office, United Nations Children's Fund and UN-Women, 2017).

<sup>19</sup> Rizwanul Islam, "The challenge of jobless growth in developing countries: an analysis with cross-country data", occasional paper, No. 1 (Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, 2010).

a rate of 7.5 per cent during the decade before the 2008 financial crisis, employment growth per annum was just 2.9 per cent between 2002 and 2012.<sup>20</sup>

28. This pattern of jobless growth is incompatible with the conditions necessary for expanding or accelerating the economic empowerment of women.<sup>19</sup> The quantity and quality of employment — a fundamental aspect of women's economic empowerment — must be a key policy objective of economic growth strategies. Policies that promote investments in sectors of the economy that increase labour absorption and industrial policies that support high-productivity and labour-intensive economic activities can expand productive employment opportunities for women.<sup>10</sup>

29. Macroeconomic policies are important instruments in this context. They can create an enabling environment that encourages improvements in the quantity and quality of paid employment for women. Public investments in social care infrastructure, for instance, can be a self-sustaining way of creating more productive employment opportunities for women.<sup>21</sup> Investments in basic physical infrastructure and transport services can enhance the productivity of women's informal enterprises.<sup>22</sup>

30. Monetary and financial sector policies can also expand economic opportunities for women by directing credit to women-owned enterprises and to small and medium-sized enterprises that employ large numbers of women. In some countries, for example, the central bank operates financing programmes, including microfinance, targeting small and medium-sized enterprises, and mandates that a certain share of loans be made to women entrepreneurs.<sup>23</sup> Macroeconomic policies must therefore look beyond economic growth and include a broader set of objectives, including creating productive employment, enhancing informal livelihoods and ensuring basic living standards.

31. In the absence of job-rich economic growth and productive employment opportunities, access to paid work for most women remains anchored in the informal economy. Yet the contribution of the informal economy to economic growth remains largely unacknowledged. Including informal activities in national accounts can provide a more comprehensive assessment of national wealth, which is important for framing policy responses. Accounting for the contribution of the informal economy will reveal the full extent of women's contribution to economic growth.

32. Given the size of the informal economy, and the concentration of women workers in it, its omission from macroeconomic policies means that policy responses can be suboptimal from the perspective of women's empowerment. For instance, since employment in the informal economy typically expands during crises, it is often assumed that workers in informal employment fare relatively well compared to those in the formal economy. Yet the impact of reduced demand, fluctuating prices and exchange rates on informal enterprises and workers has often been neglected.<sup>24</sup> For those reasons, if macroeconomic policies and economic growth strategies are to facilitate women's economic empowerment, it is essential to

<sup>20</sup> World Bank, World Development Indicators database, Washington, D.C.

<sup>21</sup> International Trade Union Confederation, "Investing in the care economy: a gender analysis of employment stimulus in seven OECD countries" (Brussels, 2016).

<sup>22</sup> Martha Alter Chen, *Informal Economy Monitoring Study Sector Report: Home-Based Workers* (Cambridge, Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing, 2014).

<sup>23</sup> Alliance for Financial Inclusion, "Expanding women's financial inclusion in Bangladesh through MSME finance policies", case study, No. 5 (Kuala Lumpur, Alliance for Financial Inclusion SME Finance Working Group, 2017).

<sup>24</sup> Martha A. Chen, "Macroeconomic policy, informal employment and gender", forthcoming.



distinguish between the different types of employment for women workers: formal and informal, wage work and self-employment. Paying inadequate attention to the impact of macroeconomic policy on the informal economy can lead to unforeseen consequences for many women workers.

33. Creating the conditions for decent work and expanding social protection coverage for women will require a scaling-up of public investments. This, in turn, will require maximizing fiscal space, since current budgetary allocations for those purposes are insufficient in many developing countries. It will also require the protection, prioritization and sequencing of public expenditures for such investments. In this context, gender-responsive budgets are important tools for influencing fiscal policy.<sup>25</sup> At present, gender-responsive budgeting initiatives have been introduced in more than 80 countries. The implementation of gender-responsive budgeting has helped to raise government accountability towards women's rights and to increase efficiency and transparency in budget policies and processes to promote women's empowerment and gender equality.<sup>26</sup>

#### **IV. Measures taken by Member States and support provided by United Nations entities to accelerate the transition of women from informal to formal employment**

34. Many Member States and United Nations system entities have prioritized the creation of productive employment and decent work as key policy objectives. While some policies do not directly target women, they focus on the sectors where women are disproportionately represented and face persistent discrimination. Such interventions include: (a) implementing legislative and labour market reforms to raise incomes and promote equal rights for workers in both informal and formal employment; (b) implementing employment programmes to enable the transition from informal to formal employment; (c) increasing women's access to land, digital technology and finance, in order to promote women's entrepreneurship; and (d) expanding access to social protection for all women and men, regardless of employment status.

35. Zambia reported that formal employment had been steadily declining during the past decade, pushing more people to seek employment in the informal economy. In that context, the Employment Act of 2015 increased protection for informal workers by limiting casual contracts to no more than six months and short-term contracts to no more than twelve months and prohibiting employment dismissal on the basis of sex, marital status or pregnancy. In addition to protecting workers' rights, the Government has made efforts to boost labour demand through its national Industrialization and Job Creation Strategy (2012-2016), which was aimed at creating 1 million jobs in the formal economy. Those combined efforts are more likely to benefit women, who represent most of the workers in the informal economy.

36. In Qatar, government efforts have focused on the rights of women in both formal and informal employment. The implementation of the Civil Human Resources Law of 2016 mandates that all employers grant nursing mothers a daily minimum of two hours to breastfeed their children until the age of two. At the same

<sup>25</sup> Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres and UN-Women, "Referentes conceptuales de los presupuestos con perspectiva de género" [Conceptual references for gender-responsive budgeting], policy brief (2014).

<sup>26</sup> Janet Stotsky, "Gender budgeting: fiscal context and current outcomes", IMF Working Paper, No. 16/149 (IMF, 2016).

time, the Qatar Chamber of Commerce and Industry has focused on women's entrepreneurship, by providing women with training in financial literacy, business management and information and communications technology.

37. Cambodia and Jordan have focused their efforts on reforms to raise the incomes of low-income households by increasing the minimum wage for all workers in 2017 by 9 per cent and 15 per cent, respectively. Since women tend to be overrepresented in low-paid work, minimum wage legislation can be a powerful instrument for improving their livelihoods.

38. Cuba continues to enforce legislation to protect workers' rights, including for those in the informal economy. Decree-Law No. 340 of the Cuban Labour Code guarantees access to public spaces for self-employed women workers, women traders and members of non-agricultural cooperatives, women artists and women in other informal occupations. The legislation also guarantees paid sick leave for prenatal and postnatal care, paid maternity leave and flexible working arrangements for parents with young children.

39. Togo focused its efforts on increasing access to finance for women-owned enterprises through the establishment, in 2014, of a national fund for financial inclusion. In addition, the national Youth Employment Project includes incentives such as wage subsidies to encourage private employers to hire young women who have recently graduated from universities and vocational schools.

40. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, under its Gender Action Plan for 2013-2017, a \$3 million fund was established, providing start-up grants to 268 women entrepreneurs in the informal economy and trained 300 women in financial literacy and business management.

41. In the Sudan, efforts to promote women's transition from informal to formal employment focused mainly on increasing women's access to finance. Banking System Law No. 18 of 2007 mandated that 70 per cent of the central bank's funds be allocated to rural finance. At least one third of those funds are earmarked for women-owned enterprises in the informal and formal economies. In 2016, more than 80,000 women entrepreneurs benefited from the initiative.

42. In Barbados, the Community Technology Programme provided information technology training to 55,000 workers in informal enterprises, with women making up 85 per cent of the beneficiaries. The training helped to expand women's employment opportunities beyond the tourism sector and into information and telecommunication services.

43. In 2016, efforts by China to facilitate women's transition from informal to formal employment included business skills training for 4 million women and the establishment of a \$45 billion fund that has provided concessional microcredit loans to 5.76 million women. The country's efforts have also focused on South-South cooperation.

44. In Azerbaijan, government efforts have focused on enhancing skills for women in both informal and formal employment. The establishment of women's resource centres around the country, including in rural areas, is providing women with free access to training in business management, financial literacy and entrepreneurship. The women's resource centres also serve as safe spaces for victims of domestic violence.

45. In Turkey, the continued implementation of the component of its Action Plan (2014-2018) on increasing the participation of women's labour and employment has played a key role in the Government's efforts to expand women's access to decent

employment. Those efforts have focused on strengthening women's skills, including through training in business management and entrepreneurship.

46. Mozambique created its Productive Social Action Programme, a public work programme that provides short-term employment opportunities for many women. Government efforts have also focused on agricultural producers in rural areas. In 2016, 308,686 women farmers benefited from training in agricultural technology, through the integrated programme for the transfer of agricultural technology.

47. In Argentina, the Government has focused on increasing coverage for social security and social insurance as an important mechanism for improving the livelihoods of women in informal employment.

48. United Nations system entities have worked with development partners to support the transition of women from informal to formal employment and decent work in many countries. The International Fund for Agricultural Development has focused its efforts on capacity development for women, including providing training in agricultural extension, value chains and rural finance in sub-Saharan Africa. It is also tackling the issue of high youth unemployment by targeting young women and men from rural areas who are migrating to cities in search of employment opportunities. Such efforts include vocational and technical training.

49. The International Telecommunication Union has worked to bridge the digital gender divide in 138 countries. Since its launch in 2011, 270,000 girls from 166 countries have participated in activities geared towards developing their entrepreneurial skills through workshops that teach coding and mobile application development. The Global Partnership for Gender Equality in the Digital Age is a multi-stakeholder initiative implemented by the Union, together with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), aimed at promoting awareness and building political commitment to achieve digital gender equality at both the global and the national levels.

50. Women's access to decent work and social protection remains a key area of work for UN-Women. In Paraguay, technical and legal support from UN-Women in 2016 led to the adoption of a decree on domestic work by the Ministry of Labour. The decree raised the minimum wage and extended social security, health insurance and retirement benefits to the 16 per cent of women who work as domestic workers, in compliance with the Domestic Workers Convention of ILO. The programmatic efforts of UN-Women have also focused on the decent work agenda. In that context, the entity has developed a flagship programme on promoting decent employment and income security for women through inclusive growth policies and investments in the care economy, which supports Member States with technical and capacity development assistance to formulate and implement gender-responsive macroeconomic policies and programmes for employment, social protection and unpaid care and domestic work.

## **V. Recognition, reduction and redistribution of unpaid care and domestic work by women**

51. Unpaid care and domestic work has emerged as a key issue for women in development because it underpins gender inequality. To a significant extent, women's empowerment will depend on closing the gender gap in unpaid work and investing in good-quality care services and decent care jobs, according to the High-level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment. For those reasons, achieving target 5.4 of the Sustainable Development Goals, to "recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and

social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate”, is critical for accelerating progress.

52. Care work for the family and the community is not only essential to human life but also to the social and economic foundation of all economies. It enables the “productive” economy to function because it supports the well-being of the workforce, children, older persons and people with disabilities.<sup>27</sup> Unpaid care and domestic work thus subsidizes the monetized economy; at a conservative estimate, women’s unpaid work contributes \$10 trillion per year globally, or 13 per cent of global GDP, according to the High-level Panel. But that work remains unaccounted for, including in national income accounts and labour force surveys. Its value and its contribution to the productive economy are largely unrecognized. Because it is rendered invisible, women’s and girls’ essential contribution to economic life in the form of unpaid care and domestic work are grossly undervalued.

53. According to the High-level Panel, women undertake three times more unpaid work than men and spend about half as much time on paid work. This double responsibility of paid and unpaid work contributes to greater time burdens on women and substantially limits their participation in the social, political and economic spheres. When care services are not available or accessible, women can be pushed into the most vulnerable forms of employment to reconcile care needs with the imperative to earn. Poor women face special challenges in accessing care services, especially in low-income countries.

54. Recognizing and resolving care deficits in a given country will require social investments in affordable, good-quality and accessible care services (childcare, disability care and elder care), including for the most marginalized groups.<sup>11</sup> This can create a virtuous cycle of redistribution and reduction of unpaid care and domestic work, as can investments in basic physical infrastructure (water, electricity and safe transport), as well as the more equitable sharing of such work by women and men in the household. Legal reforms and labour market policies can facilitate the reconciliation of unpaid care and domestic work with paid employment to reduce gender discrimination in the labour market.

## **A. Recognition of unpaid care and domestic work**

55. Recognizing and valuing unpaid care and domestic work can be facilitated by conducting time-use surveys, which have become one of the most commonly used methods for collecting data on unpaid work. Time-use surveys are used to report data on how, on average, people spend their time. The objective is to identify, classify and quantify the main types of activity that people are engaged in during a given time period. Time-use survey data can also be used for the valuation of unpaid care and domestic work and, in turn, to estimate its contribution to national income through satellite accounts. Further, time-use survey data can be used to demonstrate the links between unpaid work and poverty, in an expanded definition that goes beyond income poverty to time poverty.

56. The recognition, reduction and redistribution of unpaid care and domestic work can also benefit from strong national legislation. Many countries, for instance, have introduced legislation on paid parental leave policies. Others have introduced labour legislation that requires workplaces to provide childcare services for workers

<sup>27</sup> UN-Women, “Redistributing unpaid care and sustaining quality care services: a prerequisite for gender equality”, Policy Brief, No. 5 (New York, 2016).

with small children or social security provisions that entitle people with disabilities from poor households to institutional care services.

## **B. Reduction and redistribution of unpaid care and domestic work, including through sustained investments in the care economy**

57. The reduction and redistribution of unpaid care and domestic work will require investments from both the public and private sectors. Such investments can have significant benefits, including increasing women's labour force participation and creating paid jobs in the care economy. Investments in key infrastructure — clean water, sanitation, energy and safe roads and transport — can alleviate time poverty and increase the productivity of women who work from home. They also make a significant contribution to reducing the time that women and girls spend performing unpaid care and domestic work, according to the High-level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment.

58. Investing in decent and affordable care services for all families remains the most efficient and direct way to redistribute care responsibilities from households to the State or the community and to encourage more women to participate in employment and other economic or social activities. A social care service infrastructure is therefore required, as it has the potential for triggering an effective transformation of the care economy, while at the same time creating decent jobs and alleviating poverty.<sup>28</sup>

59. Legal reforms and labour market policies can facilitate the reconciliation of unpaid care and domestic work with paid employment to eliminate gender discrimination in the labour market. Legislative reforms for the reconciliation of unpaid care and domestic work with paid employment include parental leave and other forms of care leave. Many countries have introduced parental leave and other care leave legislation to grant people time to spend away from work to care for children and/or for long-term ill and care-dependent family members.<sup>27</sup> Flexible workplace practices for a work-life balance that allows employees to work shorter working hours or negotiate flexible arrangements, such as working part-time, can also support the reduction and redistribution of unpaid care and domestic work.

60. Other policies that support the reduction and redistribution of unpaid care and domestic work include care insurance schemes that serve as an important mechanism for financing care work that may not be covered by legislation or social security insurance, such as elder care.<sup>29</sup> In some countries, public subsidies to care providers or income allowances for childcare and elder care services have proven to be relatively successful.<sup>30</sup> Labour market reforms to eliminate gender discrimination in recruitment and pay and remove horizontal and vertical occupational segregation can also enable the equalization of labour market incentives for women and men in allocating their time between unpaid work and employment.

61. Changing social norms that continue to see caregiving and domestic work as “women's work” is critical in shaping people's perceptions of who is responsible for

<sup>28</sup> Ipek Ilkcaracan, Kijong Kim and Tolga Kaya, *The Impact of Public Investment in Social Care Services on Employment, Gender Equality, and Poverty: The Turkish Case* (Istanbul, Istanbul Technical University Women's Studies Centre in Science, Engineering and Technology and the Levy Economics Institute, 2015).

<sup>29</sup> World Economic Forum, “Realizing human potential in the fourth industrial revolution: an agenda for leaders to shape the future of education, gender and work”, white paper (Cologne, Switzerland, 2017).

<sup>30</sup> Jayoung Yoon, “Counting care work in social policy: valuing unpaid child- and eldercare in Korea”, *Feminist Economics*, vol. 20, No. 2 (2014).

meeting care needs, who needs care and how that care should be delivered. Redistributing unpaid care and domestic work within households and engaging fathers and men in providing care can facilitate the redistribution of responsibilities at home. Supportive policies such as paternity leave and benefits, especially if non-transferable, help to distribute unpaid childcare more evenly between parents while combating gender stereotyping.<sup>31</sup>

## **VI. Measures taken by Member States and support provided by United Nations entities to promote the recognition, reduction and redistribution of unpaid care and domestic work**

62. Member States have adopted a range of policies and programmes to recognize, reduce and redistribute unpaid care and domestic work. In Colombia, the care economy is included in the national accounting system to measure the contribution that women make to the economic and social development of the country. The country has implemented a national time-use survey and developed a satellite account. Costa Rica passed legislation in 2015 aimed at accounting for the contribution of unpaid domestic work and conducted a time-use survey in 2016 to make this work more visible. It is now developing a methodology for the economic valuation of unpaid care and domestic work activities. In El Salvador, the government conducted a time-use survey and is in the process of establishing a satellite account to recognize unpaid care and domestic work. Finland has been conducting time-use surveys since 1979, providing extensive and comparable time series data on unpaid care and domestic work.

63. In Finland, municipalities oversee care for an older, disabled or ill person in a home setting by a family member or a person with a close relationship to the person requiring care. The municipalities have informal care criteria and practices, which include a minimum monthly allowance and statutory leave days. Caregiver fees are taxable and contribute to pensions. New parents are entitled to 158 working days of leave, paid as a parental allowance. The allowances are usually calculated on the basis of income earned for the previous year, as confirmed for tax purposes. If the parent does not earn an income, he or she will receive the allowance at the minimum rate.

64. In Cambodia, the current national strategic plan on gender equality and women's empowerment includes programmes to increase access to day care and community kindergarten facilities. In Romania, the national employment strategy is aimed at stimulating women's participation in the labour market by developing infrastructure to increase access to childcare facilities and support services for the care of dependent family members. Australia grants family and parenting payments that provide help to low-income single- and two-parent families, as well as to people with sole or primary responsibility for the care of a young child. In Turkey, provisions have been introduced that permit working from home or outside the office. Parents can ask to work part-time until their child reaches compulsory school age. Belgium has introduced legislation to make working time more flexible and to regulate the practice of teleworking.

65. In Italy, parental leave has been modified to allow five months of maternity leave for mothers, and monthly vouchers are provided to low-income families to help pay for childcare. To reconcile work and family, the State budget law for 2015

<sup>31</sup> Willem Adema, Chris Clark and Olivier Thévenon, "Background brief on fathers' leave and its use" (OECD, 2016).

allocated resources to provide a monthly allowance of 800 euros per child born to or adopted by families whose annual income is less than 25,000 euros. Moreover, workers in the private or public sector who take care of a severely disabled cohabiting spouse who is not hospitalized may take a continuous or split period of up to two years off from work. If there is no cohabiting spouse, then the right belongs to the parents of the disabled person. The benefit granted during the leave period is the same as the most recent salary earned, up to a maximum of 43,579 euros per year.

66. In Zambia, female employees are entitled to 14 weeks of maternity leave and fathers up to 10 days of paternity leave, with full pay and benefits for each. In Kenya, the Employment Act of 2007 makes provisions for three months of fully paid maternity leave and paternity leave of two weeks. Slovenia supports activities to facilitate a more equal sharing of parental leave and to promote active fathering, including measures that promote part-time work. El Salvador is currently developing a social co-responsibility policy for caregiving to identify and promote public policies to redistribute unpaid care and domestic work between women and men within the family.

67. United Nations system entities have also supported initiatives that recognize, reduce and redistribute women's unpaid care and domestic work. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations focuses its interventions on reducing the time and effort that rural women and girls spend on collecting and using biomass for fuel. It has also introduced labour-saving agricultural technologies and practices to reduce the workload of women farmers.

68. The World Health Organization has focused on advocating changes to transnational policies that recognize female migrant care workers in both country of origin and country of destination. Such efforts include addressing their legal status, labour rights and health coverage.

## VII. Conclusions and recommendations

69. **Gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls are central to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its promise to leave no one behind. Even while there has been progress on many aspects of women's empowerment, those changes have not resulted in equal outcomes for women and men. Everywhere, women continue to be denied equal pay for work of equal value and are less likely than men to receive a pension. That translates into large income inequalities throughout their lives. Women perform a significant proportion of unpaid care and domestic work, which constrains them from taking decent jobs on an equal footing with men.**

70. **Action is needed on many fronts, including facilitating the transition of women working in informal employment to formal employment by creating decent work opportunities. Expanding social protection coverage will be critical to enhancing women's income security. Action will be needed to recognize the contribution of women's paid and unpaid work to economic growth and to recognize, reduce and redistribute unpaid care and domestic work. Action will also be needed to promote women's access to and control over assets, including land, property and financial services. There remains a pressing need to overcome legal barriers and discriminatory legislation that impede gender equality and women's empowerment. This will require a focus on the most marginalized women and those facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, including discrimination on the basis of class and**

work status. It will also require ensuring that their voices are heard and their perspectives respected and acted upon within decision-making processes.

71. Achieving the 2030 Agenda requires mainstreaming gender in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and targets. Without gender equality and women's empowerment, the overarching vision of a world free of poverty in all its forms, everywhere, cannot be realized.

72. In order to scale up efforts to accelerate the transition of women from informal employment to formal employment, including access to decent work and social protection, and effectively support the recognition, reduction and redistribution of unpaid care and domestic work by women, including through sustained investments in the care economy, Member States are encouraged to consider the following policy measures and actions:

(a) Promote gender-responsive macroeconomic policies that support the creation of full and productive employment opportunities and decent work for women by increasing investments in sectors of the economy and thereby increase the demand for their labour;

(b) Adopt policies to expand fiscal space and generate sufficient resources to invest in gender equality and women's empowerment by increasing public investments in physical and social care infrastructure, including water and sanitation infrastructure and renewable energy sources, as well as time- and energy-saving infrastructure and technology;

(c) Expand or reprioritize public expenditures to provide gender-responsive social protection for women and men throughout the life cycle;

(d) Promote policies that strengthen the financial inclusion of women by increasing access to credit for women-owned or women-operated enterprises;

(e) Ensure that national laws contain provisions for core labour standards, including minimum wages and secure labour contracts, worker benefits and labour rights for workers in informal employment, and end workplace discrimination on the basis of gender, ethnic background, migration status or disability;

(f) Adopt laws and regulatory frameworks to reduce and redistribute unpaid care and domestic work for women through measures such as care leave policies, care insurance schemes, flexible workplace practices for work-life balance, decent work hours and cash transfers or child support grants paid to the primary caregiver;

(g) Adopt measures that recognize the contribution of unpaid care and domestic work to the national economy through the implementation of time-use surveys and the adoption of satellite accounts;

(h) Protect the rights to collective bargaining and freedom of association so as to enable women workers, especially informal workers, to organize and to join unions and workers' cooperatives;

(i) Take measures to increase women's access to productive resources and assets, including digital technology, land, property and financial services, including microfinance.

73. United Nations system entities and other international organizations are encouraged to support Member States through the provision of:



- (a) **Technical support, policy advice and capacity development in the areas of gender-responsive economic and social policy that promotes full employment and decent work for women;**
  - (b) **Technical and policy support to formulate and implement legal and regulatory frameworks that recognize the rights of women workers, in all forms of informal employment, to labour legislation, safe working conditions, a minimum wage and other protective measures in the workplace;**
  - (c) **Technical support to design gender-responsive social protection policies for women and men, throughout the life cycle, focusing in particular on workers in the informal economy, including through the sharing of lessons learned and best practices;**
  - (d) **Technical support and capacity-strengthening of national statistical offices and regional statistical commissions for measuring unpaid care and domestic work through regular time-use surveys and establishing satellite accounts to assess the contribution of such work to national income;**
  - (e) **Technical support and capacity-strengthening of national statistical offices so as to facilitate the collection, tabulation, dissemination and use of data on informal employment, disaggregated by sex, income, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability and geographic location.**
-