



NHSMUN

Background Guide | *CSW*

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Hello Delegates!

Welcome to the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)!

My name is Giovanna, and I will be your Director for Session I of NHSMUN 2026. This is my second year being a part of the NHSMUN staff and my third year attending the conference. During high school, I participated in various committees, including ECOSOC and SOCHUM. Last year I was the Assistant Director for CCPCJ, so I'm very excited to join the CSW family. Other than NHSMUN, I've competed at eight conferences, and have been on the dias for UofU MUN for the past two years.

I am from a small mountain town outside of Salt Lake Utah, (Yes, I have met some of the Real Housewives & Secret Lives of Mormon Wives cast members). I'm a huge fan of the outdoors, and spent many years of my life hiking, kayaking, and snowboarding, thanks to the proximity to the mountains.

I am currently a second-year student at Westminster University in Sugarhouse. There I am studying Literature Media and Writing major with an emphasis in Literary Analysis. I love living in the mountains & am always looking for a new adventure. When I'm not in class or at work, I'm either on a hike, at the movies, or trying to reduce my never-ending 'to be read' list. I am also the biggest Gilmore Girls fan on the planet (team Jess).

Joining MUN in high school was quite literally the best decision I've ever made. As someone who's more introverted, learning public speaking and research skills has helped me tremendously with both my college and professional career. MUN helped me make lifelong friends and break out of my shell, and I'm excited to be on the other side of the conference.

The two topics being addressed by our committee are extremely important and all of us at CSW have done so much to help you succeed during the conference. As we get closer to the session, please keep updating yourselves on anything that can help further expand your knowledge on the topics. If any of you have questions about the topics or just want to make a friend before the conference feel free to contact me. I'm always here to help. I know that the conferences can be a bit intimidating, so I understand what it's like and am here to support you. Good luck and I can't wait to meet all of you in March!

Best,

Giovanna Grant

Commission on the Status of Women, Director

Session I

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Dear Delegates,

I am beyond happy to welcome you to the Commission on the Status of Women at NHSMUN 2026!

My name is Luisa and I am from São Paulo, Brazil. I am in my fourth year of Law School, and I work with International Tax Planning at Embraer Brazil. For the past two years of my life, I have been working full time in corporate, and I love it. This is a challenge and privilege that was only possible thanks to the incredible things I learned during my high school years and my time as a Delegate at NHSMUN.

As I believe many of you are, I am very passionate about many different things. I have always wanted to be an actress, which I personally believe helps me when doing MUN. I also love reading and writing, especially as a tool to process my thoughts and feelings. Sports are a big part of my life as well, when I was younger, I used to practice Olympic gymnastics, and now I do calisthenics and pilates. Lately I have been wanting to start pottery and painting but have not yet had the time to start. My favorite artists are the boys from One Direction and Olivia Rodrigo, but I love to hear song recommendations.

My first contact with Model United Nations was during high school, and I fell in love with it. As the talkative and energetic student, I was, doing this made me feel like I had finally found my place. Eventually, I had the opportunity to organize and participate in other conferences. My first and only time as a delegate at NHSMUN was in 2020. There are not enough words to describe all the impacts it had in my life. In summary, I would like to share with you that the entire NHSMUN experience taught me things that I still use in my everyday life and in every new chapter of my life.

As you read through this document, I hope you keep in mind the importance of discussing the topics we covered. This is more than just a simulation, it is an opportunity to learn new things, find new perspectives and, most importantly, build one more part of who you are in today's society. Although we had an amazing team to support us, preparing this document was not easy. However, throughout the entire process, I have kept you all in my mind. That is why I am incredibly excited to meet you, hear your thoughts, ideas and see how you will conduct the committee during our short, but memorable days in New York.

Lastly, I would like to let you know that we are at your disposal. If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out and contact us. We will be happy to answer and assist you in any way we can. I look forward to seeing you all soon!

Kindest regards,

Luisa Ferreira

Commission on the Status of Women, Director

Session II

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A NOTE ON RESEARCH AND PREPARATION

Delegate research and preparation is a critical element of attending NHSMUN and enjoying the debate experience. We have provided this Background Guide to introduce the topics that will be discussed in your committee. We encourage and expect each of you to critically explore the selected topics and be able to identify and analyze their intricacies upon arrival to the conference.

The task of preparing for the conference can be challenging, but to assist delegates, we have updated our [Beginner Delegate Guide](#), [Advanced Delegate Guide](#), [Research Guide](#), and [Rules of Procedure Guide](#). In particular, these guides contain more detailed instructions on how to prepare a position paper and excellent sources that delegates can use for research. Use these resources to your advantage. They can help transform a sometimes overwhelming task into what it should be: an engaging, interesting, and rewarding experience.

To accurately represent a country, delegates must be able to articulate its policies. Accordingly, NHSMUN requires each delegation (the one or two delegates representing a country in a committee) to write a position paper for each topic on the committee's agenda. In delegations with two students, we strongly encourage each student to research each topic to ensure that they are both prepared to debate throughout the committee. More information about how to write and format position papers can be found in the Research Guide. To summarize, position papers should be structured into three sections.

I: Topic Background – This section should describe the history of the topic as it would be described by the delegate's country. Delegates do not need to give an exhaustive account of the topic. It is best to focus on the details that are most important to the delegation's policy and proposed solutions.

II: Country Policy – This section should discuss the delegation's policy regarding the topic. Each paper should state the policy in plain terms and include the relevant statements, statistics, and research that support the effectiveness of the policy. Comparisons with other global issues are also appropriate.

III. Proposed Solutions – This section should detail the delegation's proposed solutions to address the topic. Descriptions of each solution should be thorough. Each idea should clearly connect to the specific problem it aims to solve and identify potential obstacles to implementation and how they can be avoided. The solution should be a natural extension of the country's policy.

Each topic's position paper should be **no more than 10 pages** long double-spaced with standard margins and 12 point font size. This is a maximum; **3–5 pages per topic is often a suitable length**. The paper must be written from the perspective of your assigned country and should articulate the policies you will espouse at the conference.

Each delegation is responsible for submitting position papers on or before **February 20, 2026**. If a delegate wishes to receive detailed feedback from the committee's dais, a position must be submitted on or before **January 30, 2026**. The papers received by this earlier deadline will be reviewed by the dais of each committee and returned prior to your arrival at the conference. Instructions on how to submit position papers will be shared directly with faculty advisors.

Complete instructions for how to submit position papers will be sent to faculty advisers via email. If delegations are unable to submit their position papers on time, please contact us at nhsmun@imuna.org.

Delegations that do not submit position papers will be ineligible for awards.

COMMITTEE HISTORY

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is one of the eight bodies of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).¹ The CSW recommends policies and strategies to increase women's participation in economic, social, civil, and political life. It cannot make or enforce laws, but it works with governments and civil society to set global standards and reach agreements. Using reports and reviews, it finds new ways to fight discrimination. From this work, the Beijing+30 Action Agenda was created. This agenda has six key actions to speed up progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the promises of the Beijing Declaration.²

As women's rights gained attention, and with support from Eleanor Roosevelt, ECOSOC created a Sub-Commission on the Status of Women in 1946.³ By June, the CSW became one of ECOSOC's bodies.⁴ In February 1947, the commission held its first meeting in Lake Success, New York. Fifteen women represented their governments as delegates.⁵ From the start, the CSW addressed issues not previously discussed globally. This included legal protections for women and raising awareness of their status.⁶ Today, the CSW has 45 member states who are elected every four years from all regions of the world.

The CSW helped to create the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which sets out key rights for women and girls. It covers equal work opportunities, political participation, ending violence against women, and protecting their freedoms.⁷ The commission believes that this declaration and regular reviews help achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and achieve gender equality.⁸

The CSW holds an annual conference at the UN headquarters in New York.⁹ The event lasts two weeks in March. It brings together representatives from the 45 member states, NGOs, and UN entities from the CSW Forum, elected by ECOSOC.¹⁰ During the conference, participants discuss current challenges women face. They work to create standards and norms to promote equality and empowerment. Member States and treaty-monitoring bodies ensure that the conference agreements are followed and that the committee's goals are met.

The main outcome of the CSW is the set of agreed-upon conclusions on the priority theme of each annual session. The CSW has a multi-year program of work. It was established in 1987 and renewed every four years. This program sets the themes and topics for the sessions through negotiation.¹¹ Each session also has a specific priority and review theme. For example, CSW 70 (2026) will focus on access to justice for women and girls, promoting fair legal systems, and removing discriminatory laws. These sessions provide shared analysis and clear recommendations for governments, civil society, and other groups at all levels.¹² Overall, the CSW plays a vital role in the UN. It defends women's rights worldwide and promotes their dignity, regardless of gender.

1 "How We Work," *Commission on the Status of Women*, 23 August 2025, www.unwomen.org/en/how-we-work/commission-on-the-status-of-women.

2 "The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action at 30, and why that matters for gender equality," *UN Sustainable Development Group*, 07 March 2025, unsdg.un.org/latest/stories/beijing-declaration-and-platform-action-30-and-why-matters-gender-equality

3 "Commission on the Status of Women," *Soroptimistinternational*.

4 "Everything you need to know about CSW," *United Nations*, 23 August 2025, www.un.org/en/delegate/everything-you-need-know-about-csw

5 "A brief history of the Commission on the Status of Women," *UN Women*, 23 August 2025, www.unwomen.org/en/csw/brief-history

6 "The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women," *United Nations*, 23 August 2025, www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/CSW60YRS/index.htm

7 Commission on the status of women, *Women's Economic Empowerment in the Changing World of Work*, Sixty-first session, Page 213-24 March 2017, www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/CSW/UNW_CSW61_Brochure_EN.pdf

8 "The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action at 30, and why that matters for gender equality," *Un Woman*, 24 January 2025, www.unwomen.org/en/articles/explainer/the-beijing-declaration-and-platform-for-action-at-30-and-why-that-matters-for-gender-equality

9 "The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women," *United Nations*.

10 Commission on the status of women, *Women's Economic Empowerment in the Changing World of Work*, Sixty-first session, Page 213-24 March 2017, www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/CSW/UNW_CSW61_Brochure_EN.pdf

11 "About the Commission on the Status of Women," *UN Women*, 6 September 2025, www.unwomen.org/en/how-we-work/commission-on-the-status-of-women/about-the-commission-on-the-status-of-women

12 "Gender and the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW): A Quick Guide," *Research UN*, 26 August 2025, research.un.org/en/CSW



Women in the Informal Economy

The informal economy is defined as all the economic activities that are not taxed, monitored, or regulated by any form of government.¹ This can include street vendors, domestic workers, and other forms of unregistered labor. Informal work is not always illegal, but these activities are not registered nor protected.² This lack of rules causes many problems. Workers often face unsafe environments and labor violations. This is a significant issue, with a large percentage of the world's workers within the informal economy. Over two billion people work in this economy worldwide, with 740 million of them women.³ Women are most often employed in the informal sector in lower and lower-middle income economies.⁴ This often exposes them to the most vulnerable, at-risk situations. The informal economy and the women

within it need to be addressed to protect their rights.

Despite the challenges, the informal economy is important worldwide. It gives income to a large share of people. It also supports growth and helps reduce poverty in many places. For many low-income or at-risk groups, it is the main source of work.⁵ In developing countries, it acts as a safety net, since it requires little formal education. There is a clear link between lower GDP and high levels of informal work. This means the informal sector often grows worse in times of crisis. For example, during COVID-19, informal workers lost about 60 percent of their income.⁶

As it is a global issue, the informal economy directly affects governments and their management. It links to money,

growth, and law. At the same time, it creates unsafe jobs. Many poor and minority groups depend on this work. This dependence keeps poverty and inequality alive. It also hurts the health and future of these groups.

Gender gaps make the situation worse. Women, who already face social and economic barriers, often end up in unsafe, low-paid jobs to meet basic needs. Most of these women also face problems like poor access to education, financial exclusion, and gender-based violence.⁷ Weak institutions and limited resources further worsen the situation. Each country has its own challenges, but many solutions need global cooperation. Protecting women in informal work requires cooperation between local governments and international organizations to create safer and more inclusive work systems.

TOPIC BACKGROUND

The Informal Economy

There are many ways to define the informal economy. The

International Monetary Fund (IMF) calls it “activities that have market value and would add to tax revenue and GDP if they

were recorded.”⁸ The women's group WIEGO describes it as “a diversified set of economic activities, enterprises, jobs and

1 Francis Duffy, “Informal Economy | EBSCO,” EBSCO Information Services, Inc, 2021, www.ebsco.com/research-starters/economics/informal-economy.

2 Simon Torkington, “What Is the Informal Economy and How Many People Work in It?” World Economic Forum, June 4, 2024, www.weforum.org/stories/2024/06/what-is-the-informal-economy/.

3 Barbara Harvey, “Building Back Better for Women: Women's Dire Position in the Informal Economy,” September 2020, www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_protect/@protrav/@travail/documents/publication/wcms_755348.pdf.

4 International Labor Organization, “More than 60 percent of the world's employed population are in the informal economy,” ILO News, April 30, 2018, www.ilo.org/resource/news/more-60-cent-world%E2%80%99s-employed-population-are-informal-economy.

5 Santiago Dassen, “The Invisible Workforce: Women in the Informal Economy,” The Ludwig Institute for Shared Economic Prosperity, November 29, 2023, www.lisep.org/content/the-invisible-workforce-women-in-the-informal-economy.

6 *Three Emergency Social Protection Measures to Support Women in the Informal Economy in the COVID19 Crisis*, (Africa: UN Women, 2020), africa.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20Africa/Attachments/Publications/2020/Advocacy-brief-Social-protection-measures-to-support-women-in-informal-economy-in-COVID-19-crisis-en.pdf

7 “Women in Informal Economy,” UN Women – Headquarters, 2024, www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/csw61/women-in-informal-economy?utm_source.

8 Corinne Deléchat, and Leandro Medina, “What Is the Informal Economy?”



Outdoor Vendor Market (Credit: Wilfredor)

workers that are not regulated or protected by the state.”⁹ In simple terms, it includes any work that is not taxed or overseen by the government. Because these jobs fall outside labor laws, workers do not have the protections that come with regular employment.

Over 60 percent of workers worldwide have informal jobs. In some developing countries, the share is above 80 percent.¹⁰ This happens for many reasons, such as poverty, weak education systems, and a lack of access to formal jobs. These barriers leave people with few choices, so informal work often becomes their main source of

income. In low and middle-income countries, women are especially affected. On average, 92.1 percent of women in these regions work informally, compared to 86.7 percent of men.¹¹

The United Nations has studied the informal economy for many years. The International Labour Organization (ILO) has been central in this work. In 1975, the ILO released the Declaration on Equality of Opportunity and Treatment of Women Workers. This was one of the first global documents to address the challenges faced by women in both formal and informal jobs.¹² It focused on wage

gaps, limited access to education, and the lack of female voices in policymaking. The declaration was adopted by all 146 ILO member states. It showed that gender equality is not only a human right but also needed for economic growth. Even today, this document is used as a guide for international labor standards.¹³

The 1975 declaration also demanded action. It called for an end to gender discrimination and pushed for equal access to opportunities. A key point was the rule of equal pay for work of equal value. This meant women in part-time jobs or in female-dominated industries should still be paid the same as men for work of similar worth. This idea shaped many later reforms. During the later 20th century, countries such as the United States, Russia, and the United Kingdom passed equal pay acts and strengthened labor rights. These reforms built the foundation for how gender equality and informal work are viewed today. They also continue to shape global debates on fair treatment at work.¹⁴

In the 1980s and 1990s, the world economy changed fast. New technology and business practices reshaped global markets. At the same time, the IMF and World Bank created programs called Structural Adjustment Programs

⁹ “Understanding the Informal Economy,” WIEGO, November 28, 2024. www.wiego.org/informal-economy/.

¹⁰ “Women and Men in the Informal Economy: A Statistical Update,” International Labour Organization, March 7, 2023, www.ilo.org/publications/women-and-men-informal-economy-statistical-update.

¹¹ International Labour Organization, “Women and Men in the Informal Economy: A Statistical Update.”

¹² *Declaration on Equality of Opportunity and Treatment for Women Workers* (Geneva: International Labour Office and International Labour Conference, 1975), [webapps.ilo.org/public/libdoc/ilo/P/09604/09604\(1975-58-series-A\)96-100.pdf](http://webapps.ilo.org/public/libdoc/ilo/P/09604/09604(1975-58-series-A)96-100.pdf)

¹³ Edith Sandler, “Research Guides: American Women: Resources from the Manuscript Collections: Labor & Progressive Reform,” Library of Congress, accessed Jun 25, 2025, guides.loc.gov/american-women-manuscript/reform/labor-and-progressive-reform.

¹⁴ Sandler, “Research Guides: American Women: Resources from the Manuscript Collections: Labor & Progressive Reform.”

(SAPs). These were designed to help countries in debt.¹⁵ They privatized services, cut social spending, and reduced the size of the public sector. While some results were positive, these programs also eliminated many formal jobs that had employed women. Women were disproportionately in public services (teaching, nursing, clerical) and low-margin manufacturing (garments, food processing) that were first to be cut, outsourced, or squeezed out by imports. Additionally, when public services were cut, families had to do more care work, which mostly fell to women doing unpaid care and left less time to keep full-time jobs. As a result, millions of women were forced into informal jobs without protection.¹⁶

The problems grew worse during economic crises. In Latin America in the 1980s and in Asia in the 1990s, many people lost stable jobs in large numbers. Informal work became their only option. By the late 1980s, global leaders saw that this was a serious issue.¹⁷ Wealthier economies were also changing. Large companies broke down into

smaller, more flexible units. This weakened formal work structures and pushed even more people into informal work, which for many became a matter of survival.¹⁸

In the early 2010s, the ILO created Recommendation No. 204. It was called “Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy.”¹⁹ This was the first global recommendation that focused on the rights of informal workers. It asked all governments to protect and support these workers, especially women.²⁰ It stressed the need to pay attention to those in the hardest and least safe jobs, and to those who need urgent help.²¹ The recommendation opened the way for more inclusive laws and social protections. It was a key step. For the first time, informal work was seen and recognized as labor which deserves rights.

Women’s informal work looks different around the world, but patterns repeat. In Sub-Saharan Africa, around 92 percent of women work informally.²² Most of them are in farming, street vending, and domestic services. In South Asia, women often work from home

in garments or food processing.²³ In Latin America, informal jobs are common in domestic work and services. Indigenous and Afro-descent women are more likely to work in the informal sector.²⁴ In North Africa and the Middle East, few women work due to cultural barriers. But when they do, most end up in informal jobs.²⁵ Women are often stuck in the hardest, least paid, and least protected jobs. Women also face extra burdens as they often suffer more from a lack of schooling, financial exclusion, gender-based violence, and many other forms of discrimination.²⁶ In developing countries like India, Brazil, and Indonesia, digital platforms create new jobs in delivery, domestic services, and content work. However, digital spaces remain unequal. Access to smartphones and digital literacy is lower for women, especially in rural areas.²⁷

Most women work informally because of barriers within their communities. These challenges limit their ability to find work opportunities. Poverty, early marriage, or cultural beliefs often

15 United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, “Structural Adjustment Programmes.”

16 Santiago Dassen, “The Invisible Workforce: Women in the Informal Economy.”

17 United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, “Structural Adjustment Programmes.”

18 “History & Debates,” WIEGO, August 5, 2024. www.wiego.org/informal-economy/history-debates/.

19 *Recommendation No. 204 Concerning the Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy* (Geneva: International Labour Organization, 2015), www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/%40ed_norm/%40relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_377774.pdf

20 International Labour Organization, *Recommendation No. 204*.

21 International Labour Organization, *Recommendation No. 204*.

22 UN Women – Africa, *Three Emergency Social Protection Measures to Support Women in the Informal Economy*.

23 “Understanding the Impact of Digital Assets on Women in the Informal Service Sector,” UN Women – Asia-Pacific, May 30, 2024, asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/10/in-understanding-the-impact-of-digital-assets-on-women-in-the-informal-service-sector.

24 UN Women – Africa, *Three Emergency Social Protection Measures to Support Women in the Informal Economy*.

25 *Women’s Economic Empowerment Strategy* (New York: UN Women, 2024), www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-03/un-women-womens-economic-empowerment-strategy-en.pdf.

26 UN Women – Headquarters, “Women in Informal Economy.”

27 “Women in Informal Economy,” UN Women – Headquarters, 2024, www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/csw61/women-in-informal-economy?utm_source.

block access to school. This limits their chances for formal jobs.²⁸ In many societies, women's work is seen as less valuable than men's. This affects hiring, paying, and leadership. Women who try to formalize their work often face disapproval from their community. These ideals are even more strict in conservative societies. In these cultures, women's financial independence is discouraged.²⁹

Financial barriers worsen this issue. Women are less likely to own land or open a bank account. This prevents them from even starting a business. Social norms around gender roles make things worse, especially in male-dominated spaces. These barriers keep women stuck in low-paid and unprotected work, unless policies change.³⁰

Women also struggle to balance paid and unpaid labor.³¹ Unpaid or reproductive work focuses on tasks that sustain life, which tend to be unpaid. Many women carry the weight of caregiving at home. This includes raising children, cooking, and cleaning. This makes it hard to work long hours or travel for jobs.³² Women do about 3.2 times

more unpaid work than men.³³ This "invisible" work keeps them from full-time and stable jobs. Without public support like affordable childcare and elder support, then women remain trapped in informal work that fits around their domestic responsibilities.³⁴

The gendering of the informal economy is supported by the invisibility of traditionally "feminine" labor.³⁵ Domestic work, caregiving, and small-scale production have always been excluded from the economy. This is because these jobs are usually done within private homes. These jobs have been seen as "natural" roles for women, and often remain excluded from economic and legal protections. Women's informal labor is important to household survival and regional economies, but it is often overlooked by those with power.

Despite these challenges, several countries have begun to adopt gender-sensitive strategies to protect informal workers. In Uruguay, domestic workers now benefit from formal labor protections. This includes contracts, pensions,

and paid leave, due to strong labor union advocacy and simplified registration systems.³⁶ This success in formalizing domestic work was due to them being the first country to adopt Convention 189 of the ILO.³⁷ This plan guarantees domestic workers the same core labor protections as other workers. This model demonstrates how targeted reforms can bring large portions of the female informal workforce into the protection of the state.

In Thailand, the Social Security Office has created a voluntary insurance scheme for informal workers, allowing women in caregiving, street vending, and agricultural roles to access healthcare, maternity benefits, and pensions.³⁸ This program targets self-employed workers but is completely optional. Workers can choose from three monthly contribution levels: THB 70, THB 100, and THB 300.³⁹ This approach recognizes that informal workers cannot be treated with the same formalization expectations as corporations or registered small businesses. Instead, informal

28 "Women in Informal Economy," UN Women, 2019, www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/csw61/women-in-informal-economy.

29 International Labour Organization, "Engendering Informality Statistics: Gaps and Opportunities."

30 UN Women – Headquarters, "Women in the Informal Economy."

31 "Reproductive Work," European Institute for Gender Equality, November 29, 2023, eige.europa.eu/publications-resources/thesaurus/terms/1151?language_content_entity=en.

32 Jessica Gardner, Kieran Walsh, and Michael Frosch, "Engendering Informality Statistics: Gaps and Opportunities," International Labour Organization, accessed July 8, 2025, webapps.ilo.org/static/english/intserv/working-papers/wp084/index.html.

33 International Labour Organization, "Women and Men in the Informal Economy: A Statistical Update."

34 Santiago Dassen, "The Invisible Workforce: Women in the Informal Economy."

35 Santiago Dassen, "The Invisible Workforce: Women in the Informal Economy."

36 "Legal Reforms for Domestic Workers in Uruguay," *Alternative Policy Solutions*, 28 Jun, 2022 aps.aucegypt.edu/en/articles/796/legal-reforms-for-domestic-workers-in-uruguay.

37 "Why is it important to know about ILO Convention 189?" *Organization of American States*, Accessed 07 August 2025. www.oas.org/en/cim/domestic-work/pages/convenios.html

38 "Inclusive Rights Sought for Exploited Informal Workers." *Nation Thailand*, December 19, 2023. www.nationthailand.com/thailand/general/40033927.

39 "Financing Social Protection through General Tax Revenues, Social Security Contributions and Formalisation in Thailand" OECD, 24 July 2025, www.oecd.org/en/publications/financing-social-protection-through-general-tax-revenues-social-security-contributions-and-formalisation-in-thailand_b5cc1443-en/full-report/promoting-formalisation-in-thailand_cf007ca0.html

businesses need flexibility, outreach, and supportive infrastructure. Since this is a relatively new program, there haven't been many established success evaluations so far. However, the Thai government believes that this program is widely successful.

Rwanda has adopted a more community-centered approach, combining financial inclusion programs with digital literacy training for women in rural areas.⁴⁰ These programs address disparities by giving more educational opportunities for women. By integrating microfinance with skill development, women are better equipped to transition from subsistence farming or domestic work into market-based enterprises with access to savings, credit, and insurance. Financial independence for these women is extremely important, because it helps them break the cycle of poverty. Similar frameworks are encouraged globally, to continue to break these cycles around the world.

Gender and Structural Barriers

The Beijing Declaration of 1995 is an important advancement for women's rights in the informal economy.⁴¹ It states that millions of women work in informal



Domestic laborer cleaning a home (Credit: ValeriaK1313)

jobs, without legal protections or social benefits. The declaration calls for improving women's access to resources, training, and better work conditions. It also urges governments to recognize and formalize informal labor. As previously discussed, care work is unrecognized with the labor sector. This declaration shows the importance of unpaid care work. It also addresses the barriers that cause women to be pushed into informal jobs.⁴² At the global level, the ILO has revised its standards through the ICLS 21 framework to better capture informal and

unpaid care work, particularly by women.⁴³ These new standards include gender specific data on employment status, working time, and labor earnings. With this new information, the ILO can continue to help governments develop more informed, gender equity-focused policies.

Despite commitments, women in informal work often face discrimination and abuse.⁴⁴ In home-based jobs, they may suffer physical, sexual, or emotional harm from employers. Yet, these cases are rarely reported. Many women lack legal aid or knowledge of

⁴⁰ "Digital Literacy Training Is Not Only Put in Place to Empower Teachers to Use Technology Effectively in the Classroom" *Rwanda Basic Education Board*. 2024. www.reb.gov.rw/news-detail/digital-literacy-training-is-not-only-put-in-place-to-empower-teachers-to-use-technology-effectively-in-the-classroom-but-also-enables-teachers-to-proficiently-use-the-microsoft-products-at-their-disposal-mrsdiane-sengati-says.

⁴¹ "Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Beijing Political Declaration and Outcome," UN Women, 2015, www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2015/01/beijing-declaration.

⁴² UN Women, "Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Beijing Political Declaration and Outcome."

⁴³ Frosch, Michael. "Revealing the Unseen: The 21st ICLS Statistical Standards on the Informal Economy." *Statistical Journal of the IAOS*, 1 November 2024, 1–21. doi.org/10.3233/sji-240058.

⁴⁴ "Understanding Gender Gaps in the Informal Sector," World Bank Blogs, accessed July 27, 2025, blogs.worldbank.org/en/developmenttalk/understanding-gender-gaps-informal-sector.

their rights. They also fear losing their only source of income if they speak out.⁴⁵ Street vendors face another set of risks. Many report harassment by police, local officials, or even male coworkers. Without legal protection, it is hard to hold abusers accountable. Fear, disbelief, and bias often keep women from reporting abuse. This silence allows mistreatment to continue and deepens women's economic dependence.⁴⁶

Another overlooked issue is the criminalization of certain informal work, which often harms women.⁴⁷ In cities, women may work as street vendors, sex workers, or waste pickers. They face harassment, eviction, and even arrest from authorities. Instead of recognizing these types of informal jobs as a way to survive, governments treat them as crimes.⁴⁸ Sex work shows this problem clearly. It is illegal in 102 countries, which leaves women without legal protection and vulnerable to abuse.⁴⁹ Studies show

that between 45 to 75 percent of sex workers experience violence within a single year.⁵⁰ Criminalization not only prevents women from accessing rights and formal jobs but also exposes them to cycles of risk and poverty. Efforts to formalize work must include both decriminalization and protection against gender-based violence.

Another barrier is the challenge of formalizing informal work. Registering a business often requires licenses, taxes, and approved locations. Yet many women work from home, in public spaces, or in private households, where requirements are impossible to meet.⁵¹ In many cases, labor codes do not recognize the types of informal work women perform. A street vendor may face harassment under local laws, while a domestic worker may lack a contract. As a result, the first step toward formalization is often out of reach.⁵² Legal and financial barriers add to the problem. For example, in

Kenya, women cannot register small businesses easily because land ownership documents are required. Most women do not have these documents.⁵³ In India, repeated police harassment to female street vendors led to the 2014 Street Vendors Act, which granted vendors legal rights.⁵⁴ However, enforcement remains weak, and women still have very little protection. These examples show how laws may exist but fail in practice, and how they can even reinforce barriers that keep women trapped in informality.

The informal economy is full of instability and risks. Since it works outside official rules, workers have no strong legal or financial support.⁵⁵ These challenges also tend to repeat across generations.⁵⁶ Many women who grew up in poverty, marry early, or are denied school often end up in the same informal jobs as their mothers.⁵⁷ Global crises, weak government policies, and market changes worsen the situation. For example, during

45 "Sexual Harassment in the Informal Economy: Farmworkers and Domestic Workers," UN Women – Headquarters, July 28, 2022, www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/09/discussion-paper-sexual-harassment-in-the-informal-economy-farmworkers-and-domestic-workers?utm_source=

46 "Tackling Vulnerability in the Informal Economy," International Labour Organization, accessed July 27, 2025, www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_protect/@protrav/@travail/documents/publication/wcms_711804.pdf.

47 "CSW Declaration: A Landmark Victory for Gender Equality and Decent Work," International Trade Union Confederation, March 12, 2025, www.ituc-csi.org/csw-declaration-a-landmark-victory.

48 Corinne Deléchat, and Leandro Medina, "What Is the Informal Economy?"

49 "When Prostitution (Sex Work) Is Legalized, What Happens to Crime Rates?" A-Mark Foundation, May 31, 2023, amarkfoundation.org/reports/when-prostitution-sex-work-is-legalized-what-happens-to-crime-rates/.

50 Kathleen N. Deering, Avni Amin, and Kate Shannon, "A Systematic Review of the Correlates of Violence against Sex Workers," *American Journal of Public Health*, 104, no. 5 (May 1, 2014): 42–54, [pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC3987574/](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC3987574/).

51 "Engendering Informality Statistics: Gaps and Opportunities," International Labour Organization, accessed July 15, 2025, webapps.ilo.org/static/english/intserv/working-papers/wp084/index.html.

52 "Informal Workers and the Law," WIEGO, July 24, 2024, www.wiego.org/informal-economy/articles/informal-workers-and-law/.

53 "Thanks to My Smartphone, Business Is Booming," International Finance Corporation, June 11, 2024, www.ifc.org/en/stories/2024/bridging-the-finance-gap-for-women-entrepreneurs-in-kenya.

54 Roopa Madhav, "India's Street Vendor Protection Act: Good on Paper but Is It Working?" WIEGO, June 13, 2022, www.wiego.org/blog/indias-street-vendor-protection-act-good-paper-it-working/4.

55 "Recommendation R204 - Transition from the Informal to the Formal" International Labour Organization, June 12, 2015, normlex.ilo.org/dyn/nrmlx_en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::N0O::P12100_ILO_CODE:R204&utm_source=

56 "The Long Shadow of Informality: Challenges and Policies," World Bank, accessed June 25, 2025, www.worldbank.org/en/research/publication/informal-economy.

57 Jennifer J. Griffin, Kalyan Bhaskar, and Verena Radulovic, "Challenges and Opportunities of Partnering with the Informal Sector," Brookings, June 20, 2024, www.brookings.edu/articles/challenges-and-opportunities-of-partnering-with-the-informal-sector/.

the COVID-19 pandemic, women in domestic work lost their jobs at a larger rate than men.⁵⁸ According to the ILO, 72 percent of female domestic workers worldwide lost their jobs in 2020.⁵⁹ Women are hit especially hard due to the concentration in low-paying, insecure jobs, where informal work is their only option.⁶⁰

Economic instability also disrupts this type of work. Informal work is the first to be affected when prices rise, supply chains break, or the economy slows. Women working as vendors, domestic laborers, or in home-based production often earn very little and have no savings.⁶¹ Access to small business loans, bank accounts, or credit could help them, but these tools are often out of reach. Even sudden price increases for transportation or materials can reduce their income and make their businesses fail. Without contracts or insurance, informal workers have no safety net and cannot plan for the future.⁶²

Another structural barrier is women's limited voice in decision-making. They are rarely included in discussions about labor laws, aid programs, or economic plans.⁶³ Most women do not reach positions where they could influence rules. This leaves their needs ignored.



Woman Selling Textiles (Credit: Montserrat Espinosa Flores)

Many women also do not belong to unions. Some do not even see themselves as workers.⁶⁴ Domestic laborers, for example, often view their work as part of household duties.⁶⁵ This invisibility also affects statistics, as women's work is often missing from national reports. Governments often do not collect data on gender, location, or type of informal work. This data is needed to spot problems and improve policies. Without ways to participate, women in informal work remain excluded and unprotected.

Even where laws exist to protect workers, most exclude informal work and enforcement is often weak. In many countries, female informal workers are not legally considered as "employees."⁶⁶ This definition changes depending on the law, culture, and type of work. Factors such as hours, benefits, taxes, and the employer's relationship with the worker shape this definition. Because informal work is often hidden, governments fail to count these workers or extend protections to them. Due to this, women cannot claim basic

58 "COVID-19 and Its Economic Toll on Women: The Story behind the Numbers," UN Women, September 16, 2020, www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/9/feature-covid-19-economic-impacts-on-women.

59 UN Women, "COVID-19 and Its Economic Toll on Women: The Story behind the Numbers."

60 UN Women, "Women in Informal Economy."

61 UN Women, "Women in Informal Economy."

62 Tendai Chimucheka, "Obstacles to Accessing Finance by Small Business Operators in the Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality," *The East Asian Journal of Business Management*, 3 no. 1 (March, 2013): 17-22, 10.13106/eajbm.2013.vol3.no2.23.

63 Darren Walker, and Sally Roever, "It's Time for a New Progressive Era, with Informal Workers at the Center," *TIME*, November 25, 2021, time.com/6124016/informal-workers-labor-ilo/?utm_source=

64 "Challenges of Organizing Informal Workers," WIEGO, July 24, 2024, www.wiego.org/informal-economy/articles/challenges-organizing-informal-workers/.

65 "The Informal Economy," GSDRC, 2016, gsdrc.org/topic-guides/urban-governance/key-policy-challenges/the-informal-economy/.

66 "Informal Employment," European Labour Authority, 2024, www.ela.europa.eu/en/glossary/informal-employment.



Female Street Vendors (Credit: Adam Jones)

rights such as minimum wage, workplace safety, regulated hours, or social security.⁶⁷ These gaps are even wider for women in rural areas, where oversight is weaker and women face additional barriers.⁶⁸

Still, efforts are being made. In South Africa, for example, the Simunye Workers Forum, a network of informal workers, proposed legislation in 2024 to register informal workers under a trade union.⁶⁹ This aimed to extend protections for both formal and informal employees. Initiatives like this show how communities can unite to create tangible change for

groups that are often overlooked by authorities and governments.

Legal pluralism can also provide additional support. Legal pluralism means that multiple legal systems can exist and work together in the same region.⁷⁰ These systems may include customary, religious, or civil laws. Using more than one legal system can help women access justice. This is especially important in cases of abuse or workplace injury. It allows women to make claims in court, which is often hard for informal workers. However, there are some downsides. Some legal systems may be stronger than others. This can lead to unequal

treatment and marginalization.⁷¹ Addressing these barriers requires not only laws and policies but also active enforcement, community engagement, and recognition.

Addressing these issues overall demands gender-specific policies, simplified registration systems, legal recognition of all forms of work, access to digital tools, and investment in social protections. If left unaddressed, gendered informality will continue to limit global gender development. Access to social protection and legal recognition is a fundamental human right and a cornerstone of economic security. However, for millions of women in the informal economy, these rights remain largely out of reach. Despite playing essential roles in local and national economies, women in the informal sector often operate in legal blind spots. But with strategic reforms and inclusive systems, the world can build an economy that values and protects all forms of labor, especially the ones that have been undervalued for too long.

Health, Safety, & Legal Protection

Health and safety are major concerns for informal workers. Women in the current economy are often overlooked when it comes to

⁶⁷ "Informal Workers and the Law," WIEGO, July 24, 2024, www.wiego.org/informal-economy/articles/informal-workers-and-law/.

⁶⁸ WIEGO, "Informal Workers and the Law."

⁶⁹ *Simunye Workers Forum v Registrar of Labour Relations* (Johannesburg: The Labour Court of South Africa, 2023), www.saflii.org/za/cases/ZALCJHB/2023/191.pdf; "Casual Workers Advice Office," CWAO, 2024, www.cwao.org.za/about-swf.asp.

⁷⁰ S E Merry, "Legal Pluralism," *Law and Society Review* 22, no. 5 (1988): 869-896, www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/legal-pluralism.

⁷¹ S E Merry, "Legal Pluralism," 869-896.

workplace safety.⁷² Their exclusion from formal legal protections make this worse. Unlike formal workers, informal workers do not have regulated working conditions. They lack labor inspections, safety equipment, and grievance systems. Women face additional risks. They may face gender-based violence, reproductive hazards, high physical and psychological stress, extreme heat and sun exposure, repetitive strain, heavy loads, toxic smoke/chemicals, and unsafe transport to and from work.⁷³

Informal work often happens in places with few rules and weak enforcement, leaving many women exposed to labor violations and unsafe conditions. Workplaces rarely meet safety standards. Home workers may face toxic chemicals, strain injuries, or abusive bosses.⁷⁴ Market workers face long hours and hazards like air pollution, noise, extreme heat, and limited access to water or toilets.⁷⁵ For domestic workers, risks include long hours, isolation, and violence in private homes. Some countries, like India and Brazil, have attempted to address these issues. They made

programs to support unions and give legal protections.⁷⁶ Safety inspections could also help, but they should be adapted to informal settings. Market inspectors could focus on safety (not evictions), home-workers could have workplace safety checklists, and there could be hotlines or legal aid for domestic workers. Still, challenges remain of balancing different labor needs, adapting to technology, and making sure rules are followed.⁷⁷

Another large health concern is the lack of access to healthcare and social protection, especially with maternal health.⁷⁸ Because informal workers are typically not enrolled in health insurance, they must rely on out-of-pocket payments for medical care.⁷⁹ This is especially difficult for pregnant women and new mothers. These women are often forced to work through pregnancy or return to work immediately after childbirth. Women need time to heal post-birth but are often not allowed the time to do so. Working through pregnancy, especially in risky, informal jobs, can negatively impact children's health and

development. Factors such as exposure to hazards, reduced access to prenatal care, and increased stress on the mother impacts health outcomes. Without paid maternity leave or childcare support, many are forced to choose between earning income and paying for healthcare. This lack of protection violates human rights and exposes women to long-term physical harm and financial insecurity.

There are some maternity protections for informal workers, including cash maternity benefits, health coverage before and after birth, job protection where feasible, and childcare. An example is a “creche” in Brazil.⁸⁰ This childcare facility is community or workplace-based and has extended hours, trained staff, supplies basic nutrition, and offers a breastfeeding space. This caters to both parents, rather than just the mother, and services can be delivered on-site or through accredited community centers and voucher or fee-waiver schemes. The Social Protection Programme has also created a more international version, with the Child Care Initiative in 2014,

72 “Responding to Work-Related Health Needs of Informal Sector Workers,” *National Academies Press* (US), 6 June 2016, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK373407/.

73 *Towards inclusive cities for all: how to protect the rights of women in informal self-employment* (New York: UN Women, 2018), www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2018/UN-Women-Policy-Brief-10-Rights-of-women-in-informal-self-employment-en.pdf

74 Amanda Emma Aronsson, and Pilar Vidaurre-Teixidó, “The Health Consequences of Informal Employment among Female Workers and Their Children: A Systematic Review,” *Globalization and Health*, 19, no. 1 (August 2023), doi.org/10.1186/s12992-023-00958-1.

75 Amanda Emma Aronsson, and Pilar Vidaurre-Teixidó, “The Health Consequences of Informal Employment among Female Workers and Their Children: A Systematic Review.”

76 Elena Zotova, “Transition to Formal Employment in the BRICS Countries: Challenges and Perspectives,” *BRICS Journal of Economics*, vol. 3, no. 2 (July 2022): 51–74, doi.org/10.3897/brics-econ.3.e85847.

77 Gordon Betcherman, “The Challenges of Regulating the Labor Market in Developing Countries,” World Bank Blogs, August 21, 2021, blogs.worldbank.org/en/jobs/challenges-regulating-labor-market-developing-countries.

78 Gautam Bhan, Aditi Surie, and Christine Horwood, “Informal work and maternal and child health: a blind spot in public health and research,” *Bulletin of the World Health Organization* 98, no. 3 (March 2020): 219–221, doi:10.2471/BLT.19.231258

79 Poulomi Chowdhury, and Srinivas Goli, “Informal Employment and High Burden of Out-of-Pocket Healthcare Payments among Older Workers: Evidence from the Longitudinal Ageing Study in India,” *Health Policy and Planning* 40, no. 2 (August 2024): 123–139, doi.org/10.1093/heapol/czae074.

80 Rachel Moussié, *Women Informal Workers Mobilizing for Child Care* (WIEGO, 2019), www.wiego.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Moussi%C3%A9-Mobilizing-for-Child-Care.pdf.

which encouraged countries to treat public childcare as part of the social protection floor and to design access rules that explicitly include informal workers.⁸¹ This program was created with the aim to prioritize public child care as a social protection measure that will reduce inequality by freeing caregivers' time, improving maternal and infant health, and supporting women's earnings and re-entry into work.

Many efforts have highlighted the need for health, safety, and legal protection for women in informal work. The ILO's Convention No. 189 on Domestic Workers says that all workers have the right to a safe and healthy workplace and ILO Convention 190 is on violence and harassment to address abuse in markets, transport, and private homes.⁸² This includes domestic workers and other informal jobs. Recommendation No. 204 (R204) on the Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy gives guidance to help workers move into formal jobs.⁸³ It aims to give workers decent work and steady income. However, these recommendations are not legally binding, and many countries have yet to regulate informal

work fully.⁸⁴ They only encourage governments to include informal workers in laws, but some countries have made progress. South Africa operationalized R204 by having cities make fair permits and support for street vendors and waste pickers, and by giving domestic workers full protections like unemployment pay, injury insurance, and the full minimum wage. The idea was to set clear rules where people are actually working, and to support them with national rights so that informal jobs become safer and more secure.⁸⁵

Informal work is closely linked to generational poverty. Many women in informal jobs lack a stable income, savings, healthcare, and legal protection.⁸⁶ This is because informal work is often not a secure way of receiving income, which causes women to live paycheck to paycheck. The lack of social security measures can also leave women in the informal sector with no safety net during times of economic hardships. This makes them vulnerable to illness, abuse, and unexpected expenses. Their income is often too low to support their families; therefore it is hard to overcome the poverty line. Their job instability makes planning ahead

very hard. Their lack of formal contracts limits their ability to be part of unions to defend their rights.⁸⁷ The lack of organization makes them more vulnerable to wage theft and abuse.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality plays a key role in how women experience informal work. Intersectionality, a term coined by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, means people can face overlapping forms of discrimination at the same time.⁸⁸ Race, class, age, disability, and migrant status shape the risks and opportunities they face.⁸⁹ One's location (rural, urban, conflict or climate affected areas), language, marital status, and legal ID status also matter. Different identities can overlap and compound difficulties one faces. This is essential when analyzing the informal economy. Women face different problems based on where they live and who they are. One single policy is not enough to address all these intersecting factors. Many of these women are single mothers or belong to excluded ethnic groups. This makes their situation harder because many hold

81 "Child Care and Informal Workers," WIEGO, July 24, 2024, www.wiego.org/project/child-care-and-informal-workers/.

82 "Convention C189 - Domestic Workers Convention, (No. 189)," International Labour Organisation, 2011, normlex.ilo.org/dyn/nrmlx_en/?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C189.

83 International Labour Organization, *Recommendation No. 204*.

84 Frederic L. Kirgis, "Treaties as Binding International Obligation," ASIL, May 14, 1997, www.asil.org/insights/volume/2/issue/4/treaties-binding-international-obligation.

85 Pat Horn, "Implementing ILO R204 on the Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy: Lessons from South Africa's Experience," WIEGO, December 11, 2024, www.wiego.org/research-library-publications/implementing-ilo-r204-transition-informal-formal-economy-lessons-south-africa/.

86 *Ensuring Legal Protections and Reforming Discriminatory Laws and Regulations* (UN Secretary General, 2016), www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-01/hlp-wee-working-group-paper-driver-2-en.pdf.

87 UN Secretary General, *Ensuring Legal Protections and Reforming Discriminatory Laws and Regulations*.

88 UN Women, "Intersectional Feminism: What It Means and Why It Matters Right Now," July 1, 2020, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/articles/explainer/intersectional-feminism-what-it-means-and-why-it-matters-right-now>.

89 "Intersectionality Explained | Our Work," UN Women Australia, June 24, 2022, unwomen.org.au/our-work/focus-area/intersectionality-explained/.

more than one at-risk identity, and those risks stack up. Delegates in CSW should keep in mind that effective policies should be designed with women from many backgrounds in mind.

Many women in Sub-Saharan Africa engage in trade, market vending, farming, and care work.⁹⁰ Race, class, and whether one lives in a city or rural area further shapes inequalities. In South Africa, black women are concentrated in informal work, while white and upper-class women are more likely to occupy formal or leadership roles.⁹¹ These disparities are reflected in hiring practices, wage gaps, and exposure to abuse. Although apartheid, a system of systematic racial oppression, has officially ended, its legacy continues to shape economic and social inequalities in the country.⁹² This demonstrates how historical injustices have long-lasting effects, as well as how multiple forms of disadvantage intersect to limit rights and opportunities for women.

Religion also plays a role in increasing these gaps. For instance, Muslim women in India are often limited to hazardous jobs.⁹³ These include manual scavenging or rag-picking. These jobs carry strong social shame and health risks. They have a social impact, because



Ikhlas, who contracted polio when young, is still an active community member in North Darfur (Credit: Elitre)

many of these women are not allowed to work in metropolitan areas out of fear of violence.⁹⁴ This is because Muslim people in India are a marginalized group. In comparison to other communities in India, Muslims have been excluded from much of the socio-economic development due to religious persecution and cultural beliefs. Barriers can come from discrimination, safety risks during travel, and exclusion from skills training and finance. Therefore, safe transportation, scholarships, and rights-based protection regardless

of religion could help women more broadly.

Migrant women face even more problems. In the Middle East and Gulf States, many women work as live-in maids. These women often work under the kafala system, which gives their boss total control over their employee.⁹⁵ Many women in the kafala system are threatened or even harmed if they try to leave. A 23-year-old Ghanaian woman said that after she left her employers, they accused her of stealing and had her arrested. She wasn't allowed to collect her belongings and was still owed four

⁹⁰ UN Women, "Women in Informal Economy."

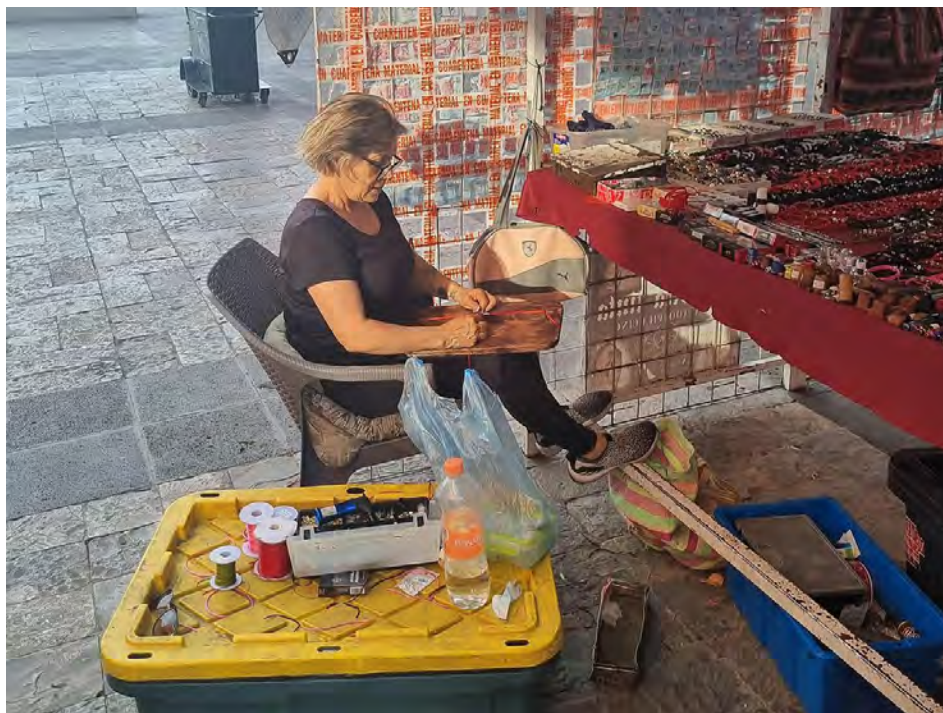
⁹¹ "Informal Economy in Africa: Which Way Forward? Making Policy Responsive, Inclusive and Sustainable" International Labour Organization, April 19, 2022, www.ilo.org/meetings-and-events/informal-economy-africa-which-way-forward-making-policy-responsive.

⁹² John Dugard, "United Nations Audiovisual Library of International Law," United Nations, November 30, 1973, legal.un.org/avl/ha/cspca/cspca.html.

⁹³ Debojit Dutta, and Jasmine Bal, "Muslim Women Workers in India: What the Data Doesn't Tell Us," India Development Review, April 21, 2023, idronline.org/article/social-justice/muslim-women-workers-in-india-what-the-data-doesnt-tell-us/.

⁹⁴ Dutta and Bal, "Muslim Women Workers in India: What the Data Doesn't Tell Us."

⁹⁵ Kali Robinson, "What Is the Kafala System?" Council on Foreign Relations, last updated November 18, 2022, www.cfr.org/backgrounder/what-kafala-system.



Female artisan working at a stand (Credit: AshleyCCR)

months' pay, so she returned empty-handed.⁹⁶ As this example shows, women's labor can be unprotected, even if legal contracts exist on paper, because many women are excluded from official labor laws and union protections.⁹⁷ Worker abuses and predatory practices, such as binding workers to one employer, exist worldwide. However, some countries have announced reforms, but the main problem is uneven enforcement. Many governments

and organizations have attempted to "call out" these countries for their unlawful practices, but without monitoring, shelters, and real complaint systems, change is limited.⁹⁸ Migrant women are especially vulnerable to low pay and deep isolation, made worse by language barriers and their legal status.

Indigenous women also face many disadvantages.⁹⁹ In Latin America, they often work in

farming, crafts or domestic jobs. These jobs are often exploitative.¹⁰⁰ However, informal work may help them preserve cultural practices but makes formalization difficult.¹⁰¹ Programs such as the National Indigenous Economic Strategy (NIES) support Indigenous leaders, entrepreneurs, and aids in making rules and programs that benefit their communities.¹⁰²

Age and disability also lead to exclusion. Older women and women with disabilities are often shut out of both formal and informal employment due to stigmas. People may wrongly see them as weak or unable to work.¹⁰³ They end up doing the most dangerous jobs, like waste picking or begging. This occurs primarily when state pension systems are weak or inaccessible.¹⁰⁴ Since these women rarely have access to pensions or social security, they work until their age prohibits them. Additionally, marketplaces and physical spaces without ramps, seating, and toilets could automatically exclude some women from accessing certain spaces.

The United Nations found that not all women benefit equally from

96 "Life under the Kafala System," Walk Free, accessed August 20, 2025, www.walkfree.org/global-slavery-index/findings/spotlights/life-under-the-kafala-system/.

97 Robinson, "What Is the Kafala System?"

98 Robinson, "What Is the Kafala System?"

99 "Urgent Action Needed to Tackle Poverty and Inequalities Facing Indigenous Peoples," International Labour Organization, February 3, 2020, www.ilo.org/resource/news/urgent-action-needed-tackle-poverty-and-inequalities-facing-indigenous

100 "Low Levels of Social Protection and Statistical Invisibility Increases the Vulnerability of 55 Million Indigenous People," International Labour Organization, December 15, 2022, www.ilo.org/resource/news/low-levels-social-protection-and-statistical-invisibility-increases.

101 International Labour Organization, "Low Levels of Social Protection and Statistical Invisibility Increases the Vulnerability of 55 Million Indigenous People."

102 "Linking Indigenous Communities with Regional Development in Canada," *OECD Rural Policy Reviews*, OECD, January 21, 2020, www.oecd.org/en/publications/linking-indigenous-communities-with-regional-development-in-canada_fa0f60c6-en.html.

103 Laili Rahayuwati, Syahmida Arsyad, Rindang Ekawati, Muhammad Dawam, Rahmadewi Rahmadewi, Septi Nurhayati, Ikhsan Fahmi, and Sherllina Rizqi Fauziah, "Factors That Influence the High Number of Elderly People Working in the Informal Sector," *Journal of Multidisciplinary Healthcare* 17 (April 23, 2024): 1827–37. doi.org/10.2147/jmdh.s450047.

104 Rahayuwati, Arsyad, Ekawati, Dawam, Rahmadewi, Nurhayati, Fahmi, and Fauziah, "Factors That Influence the High Number of Elderly People Working in the Informal Sector," 1827–37.

programs for informal workers.¹⁰⁵ Many programs focus on women business owners or women traders. These policies mostly help educated, able-bodied women in cities. To work well, policies must include

the voices of women from all groups. CSW delegates can help set these standards, center the most affected voices, and require honest measurements of progress. Intersectionality is not just an idea.

It is important for making fair and effective economic plans. Vulnerable women can be protected first and then formalization can happen steadily.

CURRENT STATUS

Case Study: Colombia

In Colombia, women's workplace rights are progressing quickly. Nearly all Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) discussing women or violence against women are at the forefront.¹⁰⁶ Additionally, almost one-third of seats held in Colombian parliament are occupied by women.¹⁰⁷ These legal changes have improved the lives of women across the country in recent years. However, gender equality still has not been met. Various societal boundaries continue to hold back women. These include stigma, poverty, harassment, and accessibility. Moreover, Colombia's tax and labor codes create barriers. They do not allow flexible, easy entry into the formal workplace

sector.¹⁰⁸ Without reforms that account for the realities of how women work, the goal of formalization will remain out of reach.

The COVID-19 pandemic had many effects on systems worldwide. One effect was rising inequality in labor markets. Countries with many informal workers were hit hardest.¹⁰⁹ In Colombia, over half of the workforce worked informally.¹¹⁰ Women in these jobs were especially affected.¹¹¹ According to the IMF, women made up 52 percent of all job losses and 58 percent of the informal job losses.¹¹² Lockdowns made informal work impossible, and millions of women lost income. They had no unemployment insurance or social protections. Women were also often left out of

social aid because it went to "heads of households," who were usually men.

Many women are still trying to recover financially. This is especially hard in rural areas, where the informal employment rate is 83.1 percent.¹¹³ Women there work in the lowest-paying and least secure jobs. They often do not have access to digital tools used in cities. Many women previously worked in domestic labor, street vending, caregiving, or home-based businesses.¹¹⁴ When COVID-19 hit, these jobs disappeared overnight. Households cut services, public spaces closed, and caregiving increased at home. This made it harder for women to return to paid work. This left women marginalized both socially and economically.

105 "Facts and Figures: Economic Empowerment," UN Women, February, 2024, www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/economic-empowerment/facts-and-figures.

106 United Nations Women, "Fact Sheet; Colombia," accessed August 22, 2025, data.unwomen.org/country/colombia.

107 United Nations Women, "Fact Sheet; Colombia,"

108 "Gender Inequality Index," *Human Development Reports*. 2022.

109 "COVID-19: How Business Can Support Women in Times of Crisis" *UN Global Compact*. April 2020. unglobalcompact.org/academy/how-business-can-support-women-in-times-of-crisis. africa.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/04/advocacy-brief-social-protection-measures-to-support-women-in-informal-economy-in-covid-19-crisis?utm_source=

110 Oviedo, Daniel, Luis A. Guzmán, and Nicolás Oviedo-Dávila. "Productive Exclusion: Accessibility Inequalities and Informal Employment in Bogotá." *Geoforum*, January 2025. doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2025.104208.

111 Cuesta, Jose, and Julieth Pico. "The Gendered Poverty Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic in Colombia." *The European Journal of Development Research* 32 (5): 1558–91. 02 November 2020. doi.org/10.1057/s41287-020-00328-2.

112 Jorge A Alvarez and Carlo Pizzinelli, "COVID-19 and the Informality-driven Recovery: The Case of Colombia's Labor Market," International Monetary Fund 2021 no. 235 (September, 2021), doi.org/10.5089/9781513597805.001

113 Natalia Falah, "Half of Colombia's Workforce Still in Informal Employment, Despite Slight Drop," *Colombia News*, Colombia One, September 12, 2025, colombiaone.com/2025/09/12/colombia-informal-employment

114 "The Gendered Poverty Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic in Colombia." *The European Journal of Development Research*



Woman wearing a surgical mask while outside in 2020 (Credit: Jules Verne Times Two)

One of the most notable policy innovations in Colombia's pandemic recovery efforts has been Bogotá's "Care Blocks" initiative, launched by the city's Secretary of Women.¹¹⁵ This program was launched in October of 2020 and still is widely used today.¹¹⁶ This was created to improve mothers' well-being and to reduce the time women dedicate to unpaid jobs or tasks. These care hubs are designed to redistribute unpaid care work. They provide caregivers with services such as health care, job

training, psychological support, and opportunities to complete basic education.¹¹⁷ This program was designed on the idea that caregiving should be supported by the state, and not something that the mothers had to handle alone.¹¹⁸ By the end of 2023, the program had supported nearly 400,000 women and expanded across the city.¹¹⁹ These blocs are typically in high-demand areas, or areas that have a higher need for child care. Women who previously lacked time or access to public services can now

take courses and apply for jobs. With this organization, women's informal labor started to decrease.

Another effort was the Ingreso Solidario program during the pandemic.¹²⁰ It started in April 2020, soon after COVID-19 began. The program gave money to people in need. Its goal was to reduce poverty and help families with low income. It focused on people left out of other social programs. The program paid over 166 million people in Latin America and the Caribbean.¹²¹ People were chosen based on what they could earn, not what they already had.¹²² Most of the people helped were women. The program used digital wallets and easy sign-up steps. This helped more people access money safely. It also gave families steady income during hard times. However, these benefits lasted only a short time. When the pandemic cash payments ended, many women lost help. This was worse for women in informal jobs.¹²³ No new program took its place. Many people now had financial insecurity. They could not get pensions, health insurance, or maternity leave. Even after the emergency aid, these women are still at risk.

115 "Bogotá's Manzanas de Cuidado: A Local Commitment to Health, Well-Being, and Equity." *Pan American Health Organization*, September 2023. www.paho.org/en/stories/bogotas-manzanas-cuidado-local-commitment-health-well-being-and-equity.

116 "Bogotá Care Blocks." *Observatory of Public Sector Innovation*

117 "Colombia: Manzanas Del Cuidado, El Pionero Plan de Bogotá Para Atender a Mujeres Que Cuidan de Otros" *BBC News Mundo*, October 20, 2023. www.bbc.com/mundo/articles/cqeq38je3qro.

118 "Colombia: Manzanas Del Cuidado, El Pionero Plan de Bogotá Para Atender a Mujeres Que Cuidan de Otros" *BBC News Mundo*

119 Chatterjee, Ritu. "How Bogotá Cares for Its Family Caregivers: From Dance Classes to Job Training." *NPR*, October 16, 2023. www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2023/10/16/1205218707/how-bogota-cares-for-its-family-caregivers-from-dance-classes-to-job-training.

120 Stampini, Marco, Nadin Medellín, and Pablo Ibararán. "Cash Transfers, Poverty and Inequality in Latin America and the Caribbean." *Oxford Open Economics*, 03 March 2025, pg 481–509. doi.org/10.1093/ooec/odae033.

121 "Cash Transfers, Poverty and Inequality in Latin America and the Caribbean." *Oxford Open Economics*

122 "Chosen by a Secret Algorithm: Colombia's top-down pandemic payments" Center for Human Rights and Global Justice, Accessed 08 August 2025, chrgj.org/2021-12-14-transformer-states-colombia/

123 "Cash Transfers, Poverty and Inequality in Latin America and the Caribbean." *Oxford Open Economics*

Despite these programs, recovery remained unequal. While GDP growth was strong in 2022 and 2023, it has not translated into secure jobs or reduced informality for women.¹²⁴ Approximately 53 percent of working women in Colombia remain in informal employment.¹²⁵ Women continue to earn less, work more hours and face higher barriers to labor market reentry than men. This amount of work doesn't account for the countless hours women spend in unpaid care labor.

Recent data shows the problem persists. As of July 2025, 55 percent of workers are still informal. In June 2025, women's unemployment stood at 10.8 percent, compared to 6.9 percent of men. Still, in July 2025, Colombia granted domestic workers formal collective bargaining rights. This means that household employees can negotiate wages, hours, and working conditions through a legally binding committee.¹²⁶ This gave voice to workers who were usually excluded from laws.

Colombia's experience shows both progress and limits. Care

Blocks are a new model to share unpaid work. Ingreso Solidario proved how aid can be expanded. Yet these programs are not enough. Informal female workers must have a voice in making policies. Without their input, laws can leave them out instead of helping them. Post-pandemic recovery is a chance not just to rebuild, but to rebuild better.

Digitalization of Informal Work

The rise of digital tools has changed informal work and opened new ways to earn. Apps such as Uber, DoorDash, and others help people find clients, deliver services, or sell goods.¹²⁷ Online gig or "platform" work now involves an estimated 154-435 million people worldwide, and the demand for online gigs has grown about 41 percent from 2016 to early 2023.¹²⁸ While this digitalization of work is often portrayed as empowering or innovative, it also deepens the informality of labor by creating new zones of deregulation and inequality. A UNDP Accelerator Labs study found that over 60 percent of small businesses are not

registered and more than 80 percent report using digital tools such as Facebook Marketplace.¹²⁹

Women, often balancing care work or working from home, are more likely to use digital markets because of their flexibility. Tasks like grocery shopping, food preparation, or crafts can now be monetized online, enabling women to integrate work into their daily life. Home-based digital businesses, like selling cakes, clothes, or beauty services allow women to access markets and create small businesses that were previously unavailable.¹³⁰ Yet, these gains come with risks. Rapidly evolving technologies require continuous adaptation, which may not be sustainable for some women.

One of the biggest hurdles is unequal access to education and digital skills. In many regions, girls complete fewer years of schooling due to cost, early marriage, or norms that prioritize boys.¹³¹ That feeds lower overall literacy and weaker digital literacy. Even when educated, women are steered into lower-paid fields, while men are pushed toward STEM (science, technology, engineering, math),

124 "Gender Inequality Index." *Human Development Reports*. 2022.

125 "Colombia | The Gender of Informality" *BBVA Research*, 12 July 2024 www.bbva.com/en/publicaciones/colombia-the-gender-of-informality/

126 "Unprecedented Victory in Colombia! Domestic Workers Secure Collective Bargaining Rights," *News*, IDWFED, accessed September 23, 2025, idwfed.org/news/unprecedented-victory-in-colombiadomestic-workers-secure-collective-bargaining-rights

127 "Breaking out of the Informal Economy: Does New Technology Hold the Key?" International Labour Organization, April 10, 2024, www.ilo.org/resource/other/breaking-out-informal-economy-does-new-technology-hold-key.

128 Namita Datta, Chen Rong, Sunamika Singh, Clara Stinshoff, Nadina Jacob, Natnael Simachew Nigatu, Mpumelelo Nxumalo, and Luka Klimaviciute, "Working Without Borders: Online Gig Work," World Bank (Brief, October 2, 2023), thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/072814bbbbb56aebd4db387154c3df3a5-0460012023/overview-english-working-without-borders-online-gig-work.

129 "Informal Businesses and the Shift to Digital: What We Learned from Small Enterprises Joining the Digital Economy," UNDP Accelerator Labs, August 30, 2023, accclabs.medium.com/informal-businesses-and-the-shift-to-digital-what-we-learned-from-small-enterprises-joining-the-ff684b9c37c5.

130 "Expanding the Economic Potential of Women Informal Workers," Harvard, December, 2016, www.hks.harvard.edu/publications/expanding-economic-potential-women-informal-workers.

131 "Global Gender Gap Report 2023," World Economic Forum, June 20, 2023. www.weforum.org/publications/global-gender-gap-report-2023/in-full/gender-gaps-in-the-workforce/.



Woman online at an internet cafe (Credit: Sgroey)

which ties to fast-growing jobs.¹³² A Harvard Kennedy School study found that across 91 countries, women aged 25-34 were 40 percent less likely than men to even see STEM ads on Facebook.¹³³ There are additional device and connectivity gaps, as women in low-income countries are 20-30 percent less likely to use mobile internet.¹³⁴ Thus, many women are locked out of e-commerce, online training, and digital finance.

Even when women do access digital platforms, they may face algorithmic bias. Algorithmic bias can make women's work less visible and they may lack the capital to advertise and scale their online ventures.¹³⁵ Digital gigs also often lack worker protections. Women working on these sites are often categorized as independent contractors. This means they don't get basic rights like minimum wage, health care, or paid maternity leave. Algorithms and user ratings

serve as management tools that can also create gender bias.¹³⁶ These forms of algorithmic control mimic traditional employer hierarchies but are less accountable.¹³⁷ Poor reviews, sometimes based on appearance or behavior, can block workers from platforms without explanation. Additionally, in a study of over 1 million US Uber drivers, men earned about 7 percent more per hour than women.¹³⁸ Without transparency, appeal rights, and baseline protections, the gig economy risks continuing inequalities and leaving women's work undervalued, underpaid, and unprotected.

Additionally, privacy and safety concerns arise with gig work. In a 2025 Human Rights Watch report, of 127 gig workers surveyed, 54 said that they had experienced verbal abuse while working, 34 said that they experienced racial discrimination, and 16 said they had experienced sexual harassment or assault.¹³⁹ Additionally, workers often must share personal information or enable location tracking. This can leave them vulnerable to data breaches, harassment, or stalking.¹⁴⁰ Digital

132 Tessa E. S. Charlesworth, and Mahzarin R. Banaji, "Gender in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics: Issues, Causes, Solutions," *Journal of Neuroscience* 39, no. 37 (September 11, 2019): 7228–43. doi.org/10.1523/JNEUROSCI.0475-18.2019.

133 Anja Lambrecht, Catherine Tucker, "Algorithmic Bias? An Empirical Study into Apparent Gender-Based Discrimination in the Display of STEM Career Ads | Gender Action Portal," *Social Science Research Network* (October 2016), <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2852260>

134 International Monetary Fund, *Chapter 39: (2025 SNA)/Chapter 18 (BPM7) Informal Economy*, (IMF), unstats.un.org/unsd/nationalaccount/snaupdate/2025/2025SNA_CH39_V11.pdf.

135 International Monetary Fund, *Chapter 39: (2025 SNA)/Chapter 18 (BPM7) Informal Economy*.

136 UN Women – Asia-Pacific "Understanding the Impact of Digital Assets on Women in the Informal Service Sector."

137 Harvard, "Expanding the Economic Potential of Women Informal Workers."

138 Cody Cook, Rebecca Diamond, Jonathan Hall, John A. List, and Paul Oyer, "The Gender Earnings Gap in the Gig Economy: Evidence from over a Million Rideshare Drivers," NBER Working Paper No. 24732 (June 2018), www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w24732/w24732.pdf.

139 Human Rights Watch, *The Gig Trap: Algorithmic, Wage and Labor Exploitation in Platform Work in the US*, May 12, 2025, www.hrw.org/report/2025/05/12/the-gig-trap/algorithmic-wage-and-labor-exploitation-in-platform-work-in-the-us.

140 Ng'onga Alfors, "What the Digitalization of Formalization Efforts Means for Workers in Informal Employment," WIEGO, December 4, 2024, www.wiego.org/blog/what-the-digitalization-of-formalization-efforts-means-for-workers-in-informal-employment/. ; Alfors,

work is new, so many people do not fully understand the risks of data leaks. The European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) is one model for stronger data rights, but enforcement is uneven; newer rules like the Digital Services Act aim to add transparency and user-safety duties as they roll out.¹⁴¹

Training in digital tools could help close this gap, but women are frequently left behind in such education. The UN's 2025 updates to the System of National Accounts (SNA) and the Balance of Payments Manual (BPM7) give countries step-by-step guidance to measure the digital economy, including platform work and small online businesses common in informal sectors.¹⁴² They explain how to classify platform workers, capture cross-border digital services, and use practical data sources, so governments get credible numbers to design fair social protection and taxation.

Even when regulations exist, enforcement remains inconsistent. The ILO has called for "universal labor guarantees." These should apply, regardless of employment classification, to all workers.¹⁴³ The Organisation for Economic

Co-operation and Development (OECD) has called for a similar theme.¹⁴⁴ They emphasize the need for a "new social contract." This means focusing on formalizing the economy and providing better protection for informal workers.¹⁴⁵ This includes fair pay and safer working conditions for those within this sector. However, implementation remains difficult, due to the decentralized and evolving nature of digital work. In addition, the lack of data on platform-based informal work is a barrier on policy making and enforcement.¹⁴⁶

With rapid technological change, tools like automation, online shopping, and AI are displacing specific jobs within the informal economy.¹⁴⁷ For physical media, streaming is replacing DVDs and CDs, so street stalls and small shops selling discs will lose customers and may shut down. In agriculture, the sector doesn't disappear, but tasks like weeding and spraying are automated, and produce is sold on digital marketplaces not physical stalls, which reduces the demand for labor.¹⁴⁸ Women, already facing digital access gaps, are increasingly vulnerable to displacement without compensation. Ensuring equitable access to training, digital tools, and

social protections is essential to prevent women's marginalization.

Digitalization has created new possibilities for informal work, particularly for women balancing domestic responsibilities. Yet barriers such as limited education, digital literacy, and lack of protection continue to reinforce inequality. As technology reshapes opportunities, countries must act on targeted policies and legal protections that ensure women in the digital informal economy are taken into account.

Sustainable Development Goals

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are guidelines that were created by the United Nations. There are 17 goals in total. Their purpose is to help fix many global issues by 2030 and create a better future.¹⁴⁹ These goals are small steps that should be taken to ensure the health, safety and growth of every country worldwide. The SDGs are tracked through a set of global indicators. Progress is reported annually by the UN Secretary-General. Many countries also choose to conduct Voluntary National Reviews. However, only

¹⁴¹ "What the Digitalization of Formalization Efforts Means for Workers in Informal Employment."

¹⁴¹ Ben Wolford, "What Is GDPR, the EU's New Data Protection Law?" GDPR EU, 2025, gdpr.eu/what-is-gdpr/.

¹⁴² International Monetary Fund, *Chapter 39: (2025 SNA)/Chapter 18 (BPM7) Informal Economy*.

¹⁴³ "Work for a Brighter Future Global Commission on the Future of Work," *International Labour Organization*, 2019. www.ilo.org/media/410956/download.

¹⁴⁴ "Informality and Globalisation in Search of a New Social Contract." *Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development*, 2023. www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2023/04/informality-and-globalisation_d7548f2e/c945c24f-en.pdf.

¹⁴⁵ "Informality and Globalisation in Search of a New Social Contract." *Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development*.

¹⁴⁶ Alfes, Ng'onga "What the Digitalization of Formalization Efforts Means for Workers in Informal Employment."

¹⁴⁷ "New Technologies, E-Government and Informality". *International Labour Organization*

¹⁴⁸ "Digital Transformation and Disruption - IEEE Digital Reality." n.d. [Digitalreality.ieee.org/publications/digital-transformation-and-disruption1](https://digitalreality.ieee.org/publications/digital-transformation-and-disruption1).

¹⁴⁹ "The 17 Sustainable Development Goals." *United Nations*.

a small percentage of SDG targets are on track. Many of these goals are facing various challenges in their implementation. Countries that do not meet the goals will face various consequences, including slower economic growth, increased poverty, and potential instability.

Addressing women in the informal economy is important to achieving three particular SDGs. First, SDG 5 (Gender Equality) aims to empower women and girls and achieve gender equality.¹⁵⁰ This goal emphasizes ending gender-based discrimination, leadership opportunities, and universal rights. This SDG has nine targets and 14 indicators.¹⁵¹ SDG 5.4 (unpaid care) matters because unpaid caregiving is a main reason why women enter or stay in informal jobs. Thus, meeting target 5.4 means offering public childcare and elder care so women can move into safer, better paid, and formal work. SDG 5.5 (leadership/participation) means women in the informal economy must have seats where rules are made, in market committees, vendor and domestic-worker unions, city boards, and more.¹⁵² This is so permits, safety, and benefits are designed around women's realities rather than excluding them.

SDG 8 (Sustainable Economic Growth) aims to promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all. This goal emphasizes increasing job opportunities, reducing informal employment, and improving labor rights and working conditions. This specifically targets vulnerable groups. This SDG has 12 targets and 17 indicators.¹⁵³ Targets 8.5 and 8.8 specifically

Of 127 gig workers surveyed, 54 said that they had experienced verbal abuse while working, 34 said that they experienced racial discrimination, and 16 said they had experienced sexual harassment or assault.

address equal pay and promote safe working environments. This goal is directly linked to women in the informal economy, who often face low pay, unsafe working conditions, and no access to social protections. Advancing SDG 8 requires

addressing gendered barriers that keep women in informal, unprotected jobs. Without targeted measures, women risk being left behind. Achieving SDG 8 depends on dismantling gendered constraints and ensuring that informal women workers are recognized as central to sustainable, inclusive economies. Target 8.8 has encouraged the development of programs to work towards SDG 8, such as Podruga, supported by UN Women.¹⁵⁴ This program's goal is to end violence against women and assist women subjected to trafficking.

SDG 10 (Reducing Inequality) aims to reduce inequality within and among countries.¹⁵⁵ This includes addressing income disparities, discriminatory laws and practices, unequal access to resources, and structural barriers that marginalize certain groups. Some targets for this SDG that directly relate to women are 10.1, 10.2, 10.3, and 10.4. All of these targets relate to helping economic inclusion, and equal opportunity.¹⁵⁶ In the economic sector, women earn less and lack protections. In the social sector, women face systemic gender and class discrimination. SDG 10 is especially critical for women, migrants, and workers in precarious labor. Policies under this goal call for empowerment of underrepresented voices in decision-

¹⁵⁰ "Goal 5: Achieve Gender Equality and Empower All Women and Girls." *The Global Goals*. 2025. globalgoals.org/goals/5-gender-equality/

¹⁵¹ "Goal 5: Achieve Gender Equality and Empower All Women and Girls." *The Global Goals*.

¹⁵² "Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth." *The Global Goals*.

¹⁵³ "Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth." *The Global Goals*. globalgoals.org/goals/8-decent-work-and-economic-growth/.

¹⁵⁴ "SDG 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all," *UN Women - Europe and Central Asia*, Accessed 07 August 2025, eca.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/women-and-the-sdgs/sdg-8-decent-work-economic-growth-0.

¹⁵⁵ "Goal 10: Reduced Inequalities." *The Global Goals*. 2025. globalgoals.org/goals/10-reduced-inequalities/.

¹⁵⁶ "Goal 10: Reduced Inequalities." *The Global Goals*.

making. It is hard for women, especially informal workers, to access these kinds of positions in policy making.

It is especially important to rethink how economies value informal labor for feminized work

like caregiving and street vending. These workers should not be left out of reforms. Efforts to implement SDG 10 must tackle intersectional inequalities, such as those based on gender, race, ethnicity, migration status, or disability, all of which

affect women's experiences in informal economies.¹⁵⁷ Achieving this goal is essential to building a more equal system where women informal workers are no longer excluded from rights, recognition, or upward mobility.

BLOC ANALYSIS

Points of Division

These blocs are separated by the results of two indexes: the Gender Inequality Index (GII) and Informal Economy Size as a Percentage of GDP Index. The GII was created by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 2010 to show the development of various countries. It measures gender disparities in health, education, and economic participation. The Informal Economy GDP Index was created by various organizations. These include the World Bank, the IMF, the ILO, and academics specializing in the informal economy.¹⁵⁸ This index was created in the early 1990s to showcase the growth of the informal economy during the digital age.¹⁵⁹

Lower GII scores mean less gender inequality. A higher informal-economy share means more work happens outside legal

protections. These measures help compare patterns: places with more informality often have fewer protections, but that's not universal. It is driven by broader, changing, and complex conditions.¹⁶⁰

High Informality x Low Gender Equality

Countries in this bloc have low gender equality and lots of informal work. Gender inequality can push more women into informal jobs. Lower schooling level for women and girls, heavy unpaid care at home, unfair laws, and hiring bias can contribute to this. Many women do domestic work and street vending. These jobs are often chosen because they are flexible and close to home, but they usually lack contracts and protections. Countries that may be in this bloc include Bolivia, El Salvador, and Zimbabwe.¹⁶¹

This bloc might realistically support a few small, city-level steps first. This may include stopping crackdowns and issuing simple, low-fee permits for street vending and waste picking, plus basic market upgrades like clean water, toilets, lights, and lockers. These upgrades could be funded through permit fees or market rents, so cities see revenue too. Other steps could include allowing business registrations and small loans without property papers and ensuring domestic and home-based workers get at least minimum wage and basic safety protections. However, countries of this bloc would shy away from complex and binding new laws.

Nigeria is also an example country of this bloc. It has a score of 0.677 out of 1.0 on the Gender Inequality Index (GII) and 57.4 percent on the Informal Economy Size as a Percentage of GDP Index.¹⁶² In

¹⁵⁷ "Goal 10: Reduced Inequalities." *The Global Goals*.

¹⁵⁸ "An evaluation of the UNDP gender inequality index and a proposal" UN Women, November 2022, www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-11/Discussion-paper-Towards-improved-measures-of-gender-inequality-en.pdf

¹⁵⁹ Elgin, C., M. A. Kose, F. Ohnsorge, and S. Yu, "Understanding Informality," CERP Discussion Paper 16497 (London: Centre for Economic Policy Research, 2021), www.worldbank.org/en/research/brief/informal-economy-database.

¹⁶⁰ "Gender Inequality Index." *Human Development Reports*, 2022. hdr.undp.org/data-center/thematic-composite-indices/gender-inequality-index#/indicies/GII.

¹⁶¹ United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, "Structural Adjustment Programmes."

¹⁶² "Gender Inequality Index." *Human Development Reports*

Nigeria, women face poverty, low literacy, and not enough decent jobs. These problems can pass from parents to children. Nigeria has tried to improve its GII rank, but progress is slow (it moved from 139th out of 156 countries in 2021 to 125th out of 146 in 2024).¹⁶³ This shows how fixing gender gaps and informal work all together matters.

This bloc represents many of those working in the informal economy. An immediate priority of this bloc could be to make work safer and fairer right away. Partnerships and small, practical programs are urgently needed.

High Informality x High Gender Equality

These countries tend to have stronger gender-equality laws and services for women but still have sizable pockets of informal work. This includes domestic work, home-based services, and platform gigs. This bloc's focus would likely be closing practical gaps for women entering and staying in formal jobs and tightening platform/gig rules where they're unfair to workers. This bloc might use government power and city programs to set basic rules. If a company wants to sell to the city, like for school lunches or hospital supplies, then this bloc

might ensure the company pays fair wages, gives real contracts, and keeps workers safe.¹⁶⁴

An example of a country with high informality and high gender equality would be Slovenia. This country has a score of 0.042 on the Gender Inequality Index (GII) and 24.1 percent on the Informal Economy Size as a Percentage of GDP Index.¹⁶⁵ In Slovenia, the economic struggles faced by women include sector-specific pay gaps, patchy enforcement for domestic and home-based workers, and limited, non-portable social benefits for platform/gig workers and migrants.¹⁶⁶ Portable benefits would be benefits tied to a person, not a position. Slovenia has maintained a consistent ranking on the GII. Countries like Slovenia show readiness to update labor rules, but platform transparency, existing labor laws, and benefits are still uneven.

These countries could lead by example. Some other countries that may fit into this bloc would be Armenia, and Belarus. However, the index scores may change over time and are only a suggestion for how countries may align. These countries may focus on practical upgrades that directly improve working conditions for women in informal work with greater benefits for informal workers, improved safety checks, and fairer practices like clear

pay and anti-bias checks on ratings. This bloc might even advocate for initiatives that directly support women-led informal enterprises. Overall, they can also commit to publishing sex-disaggregated data on platform and home-based work, using updated UN/ILO methods, to track real progress.

Low Informality x Low Gender Equality

In this bloc, informality looks “low” not always because jobs are better, but because many women are blocked from working at all. This bloc reflects how low gender equality impacts the amount of people working in the informal economy. Some factors in this bloc include lower levels of education and more opportunities in the formal job market for men. Key factors include lower levels of girls' education, legal and social limits on women's work, mobility and safety barriers, and weak enforcement of women's rights. Countries in this bloc may include Saudi Arabia or Oman.

For example, Saudi Arabia's informal economy share is below the global average at about 15 percent of GDP, while gender gaps remain in the country despite reforms.¹⁶⁷ The country's female labor force participation reached

¹⁶³ “Gender Inequality Index.” *Human Development Reports*

¹⁶⁴ “Global Gender Gap Report 2025” International Monetary Fund, 11 June 2025, www.weforum.org/publications/global-gender-gap-report-2025/

¹⁶⁵ “Informal / Shadow Economy Size by Country Data.” *World Economics*. 2022 www.worldeconomics.com/Informal-Economy/;

“Gender Inequality Index.” *Human Development Reports*

¹⁶⁶ “Gender Inequality Index.” *Human Development Reports*

¹⁶⁷ GlobalEconomy, “Saudi Arabia — Shadow Economy (% of GDP),” accessed September 6, 2025, https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/Saudi-Arabia/shadow_economy/.

about 35 percent in 2024, and the GII value has improved to 0.228 in 2023. This shows improvement, but the country is still behind high-equality benchmarks. Low informality does not equal inclusion, as many women have only recently been able to enter paid work.

In countries with lower gender equality, women in the informal sector often have fewer chances to work at all. This is because many of them have lower educational opportunities, and higher domestic responsibilities.¹⁶⁸ In many of these countries, women are not allowed to work, therefore lowering the score of informal work. In some places, laws or norms restrict women's paid work, which keeps both formal and informal employment numbers low. Enforcement of equality is uneven, and some leaders of this bloc usually choose small pilot programs and administrative tweaks, instead of big rights changes all at once.

Low Informality x High Gender Equality

Countries in this bloc tend to have more developed economies. This includes Switzerland, Luxembourg, Sweden, Norway, Netherlands, Germany, Austria, and the UK. Here, low informality and strong gender laws exist, but pockets of “invisible” informal work remain, like home-based beauty

services, domestic work, and gigs through an app. This bloc reflects how high gender equality impacts the amount of people working in the informal economy. Some factors in this bloc include higher levels of education, more opportunities in the formal job market, and stronger anti-discrimination rules. However, gaps persist in platform regulation and migrant or domestic worker protections.

Switzerland ranks among top performers on gender equality, and its informal economy is comparatively small for Europe. This country has a score of 0.010 on the Gender Inequality Index (GII) and 7.9 percent on the Informal Economy Size as a Percentage of GDP Index.¹⁶⁹ Switzerland has maintained a consistent ranking on the GII.¹⁷⁰ Switzerland is an example of how high gender equality and low informality directly affects the women working within the informal economy, and why these topics should be addressed together. Similarly, Luxembourg scored 0.044 on the GII and 9.1 percent on the Informal Economy/GDP Index.¹⁷¹

Denmark scored 0.003 on the GII and 16.1 percent on the Informal Economy/GDP Index.¹⁷² Denmark's indicators are some of the bests in Europe, because a lower GII score means less inequality. Even though Denmark is extremely strong on the GII, informal and

platform work still exists in home services, care, and delivery. In countries with greater gender equality, women in the informal sector often have better working conditions due to stronger safety nets and inspections, but gaps remain in platform transparency, protections for domestic workers employed by households, and rights for migrants.¹⁷³

However, statistics and enforcement often overlook the “informal” work that many women do in these countries. This includes hairdressing, nail techs, other home-based services, domestic workers hired by households, platform delivery and care gigs, and undocumented or temporary migrant workers. Thus, this bloc might require benefits for workers across jobs and apps, enforcement of minimum wage, safety, and injury prevention in household and platform work. They may also mandate transparent pay and fair appeal rights on app platforms, fund city childcare near shift-work hubs, and finance CSW toolkits and pilot programs to help countries with high informality and low equality.

¹⁶⁸ “International Equal Pay Day” *United Nations*, 18 September 2024, www.un.org/en/observances/equal-pay-day

¹⁶⁹ “Gender Inequality Index.” *Human Development Reports*; “Informal / Shadow Economy Size by Country Data.” *World Economics*

¹⁷⁰ “Gender Inequality Index.” *Human Development Reports*

¹⁷¹ “Gender Inequality Index.” *Human Development Reports*; “Informal / Shadow Economy Size by Country Data.” *World Economics*

¹⁷² “Gender Inequality Index.” *Human Development Reports*; “Informal / Shadow Economy Size by Country Data.” *World Economics*.

¹⁷³ “International Equal Pay Day” *United Nations*, 18 September 2024, www.un.org/en/observances/equal-pay-day

COMMITTEE MISSION

This committee was created to promote the rights of women and girls, show the reality of their experiences, and shape global standards on gender equality.¹⁷⁴ Since its creation, CSW has helped to progress the quality of life for women globally by bettering the standards for universal rights. Delegates are called upon to question, defend, and protect the status of women around the world. In practice, CSW delivers conclusions each March and a multi-year program of work; these set themes, indicators, and voluntary targets that member states can adopt.

It is crucial for CSW to address women within the informal economy because it has significant socio-economic impacts, with large disparities between the economy and the people it serves. Despite its importance, CSW faces great challenges and limitations on the topic. So far, the biggest challenge has been applying general guidelines for how countries need to formalize their economy, and how to protect the women working within the informal sector.¹⁷⁵ Another challenge that the informal economy presents to CSW is the differences between each country's gender equality. Therefore, international cooperation is crucial. Delegates in CSW may wish to

protect women first, and then steadily formalize the economy. This may also include ending the criminalization of survival livelihoods, setting basic market safety standards, and promoting care services. Organizations of informal women workers should also have seats in consultations and negotiations.

CSW does not have the power to create legally binding policies. Instead, the CSW makes recommendations and develops policy frameworks that can be adopted by member states.¹⁷⁶ This committee can establish basic standards and legal frameworks to protect women within the informal economy. The committee can work on factors that directly affect women working within this sector. Finally, the Commission on Status of Women promotes and understands the importance of international cooperation due to the great impact of the issue on women's rights development.¹⁷⁷ Therefore, cooperation during this committee is highly encouraged, especially when delegates brainstorm solutions under the CSW framework.

The informal economy needs to be addressed, as it puts women's livelihoods at risk. When citizens do not trust economic institutions, they refuse to work within them,

even in vulnerable situations. Delegates must analyze different factors from various perspectives to achieve a strong informal economic system. It is essential to discuss this topic, as the informal economy is the main source of income for millions worldwide. CSW delegates should aim for future plans to protect all women, including migrants, Indigenous women, women of color, and women with disabilities. This includes no tolerance for gender-based violence, giving domestic workers full rights, and setting clear steps to move informal jobs into safe, legal work.

¹⁷⁴ "68th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women." *UN Women – Headquarters*. 2024. www.unwomen.org/en/how-we-work/commission-on-the-status-of-women.

¹⁷⁵ "Women in Informal Economy." *UN Women – Headquarters*.

¹⁷⁶ "Everything You Need to Know about CSW" *United Nations*. 2025, www.un.org/en/delegate/everything-you-need-know-about-csw.

¹⁷⁷ "Women in Informal Economy." *UN Women – Headquarters*.



Role of Women in Leadership and Governance

Photo Credit: Gage Skidmore

Patriarchal ideas have influenced many of society's beliefs, often limiting women's participation in leadership and governance. But some early societies had women who took part in public life and helped guide the community.¹ In many societies today, leadership is still seen as a job primarily for men. Many women still do not have equal access to leadership roles or important resources like education, networks, and mentorship.²

Women around the world have not yet achieved full equality in politics, business, elected jobs, civil service, and schools. Women do not have enough representation in decisions at all levels. The problem is more extreme for women who belong to minority groups. They face more than one type of discrimination. These extra barriers make it even harder for them to reach leadership roles.³ These biases

still exist, even though women have shown they can lead well and bring change.

In public life, some progress has happened, but many problems remain. It will take an estimated 130 years to reach gender equality in all leadership roles. Few countries have cabinets where half or more members are women.⁴ While most countries now have at least some women in legislative bodies, a few still report no women in parliament. At this pace, gender balance in parliaments will not happen until 2063.

In the private sector, gender equality in management is still far away. In G20 and OECD countries, women hold only one-third of management jobs. They are less likely to be CEOs or sit on company boards.⁵ This male dominance limits women's voices in key decisions. It also can stop young

women from aiming for leadership roles because they lack role models. This causes wage gaps, economic inequality, and less financial security for women.

This problem harms everyone, not just women. Treating people unfairly based on gender, race, income, or other reasons slows progress for communities, companies, and economies. Research in India found that areas with women-led councils had 62 percent more drinking water projects than those run by men.⁶ In Norway, having more women in local councils improved childcare. Globally, women ministers lead in initiatives for Gender Equality, Family and Children's Affairs, Social Inclusion, Social Protection, and Culture. Female leaders work on many social concerns. Thus, gender equality is essential for the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

TOPIC BACKGROUND

Historical & Social Perceptions on Gender

Historically, leadership was viewed as a personal quality. Traits

linked to strong leadership, such as ambition, confidence, and independence, were often seen as male qualities. Women, on the other hand, were expected to be

caring, cooperative, demure, and nurturing.⁷ This idea was spread through books, plays, TV, and religion, shaping who societies accepted as leaders.

1 Alexios Zorbas, "The Power of Women in Minoan Civilization," Knossos, May 23, 2023, knossos-palace.gr/2023/05/23/power-of-woman/.

2 "Women's leadership and political participation," *What do we do: Leadership and political participation*, UN Women, accessed August 8, 2025, www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation.

3 Ganna Pogrebna et al., "The impact of intersectional racial and gender biases on minority female leadership over two centuries," *Scientific Reports*, volume 14 (2024): doi.org/10.1038/s41598-023-50392-x.

4 "Facts and figures: Women's leadership and political participation," *Facts and figures*, UN Women, June 12, 2025, www.unwomen.org/en/articles/facts-and-figures/facts-and-figures-womens-leadership-and-political-participation.

5 OECD, *Policies and Practices to promote leadership roles in the private sector* (OECD, 2020), 5-7, www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2020/12/policies-and-practices-to-promote-women-in-leadership-roles-in-the-private-sector_27543052/60bb6113-en.pdf.

6 "Facts and figures: Women's leadership and political participation."

7 "The Influence of Gender on Leadership Styles: Exploring Research and Theories," *The Economic Times*, last modified October 31, 2023, economictimes.indiatimes.com/jobs/c-suite/the-influence-of-gender-on-leadership-styles-exploring-research-and-theories/

In early modern Europe, women rulers faced harsh criticism. For example, Elizabeth I of England faced attacks because she was a woman without a husband. Men were thought to be the only fit rulers. John Knox even wrote a harsh book called “The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women,” saying that female rulers were against nature.⁸ Catherine the Great of Russia was called unnatural and masculine for wanting power. These show how gender stereotypes shaped ideas about leadership.⁹

But not all societies thought only men should lead. In Africa, the Kingdom of Kush had queens called “Kandake” who were powerful rulers.¹⁰ Many pre-colonial African societies had female monarchs in matrilineal cultures, where leadership passed through the mother’s side.¹¹ Queen Nzinga of Ndongo and Matamba (now Angola) was a smart diplomat and military leader who fought Portuguese rule and defended her people. These examples show that culture, not biology, limits women’s power.¹²



Portrait of Elizabeth I, who was criticized for ruling without a husband.
(Credit: George Gower)

By the 1800s, women had little access to formal leadership in many societies. They were expected to stay at home and were denied higher education and politics. Social reform movements, like the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention in the US, fought hard for women’s rights.¹³ Other instances, like the 1975 Iceland women’s strike, demanded equal pay and labor rights.¹⁴ This

started to break the idea that women could not lead.

Religion also maintained many gender barriers. Most major religions are rooted in patriarchal structures, with men as leaders and women as subordinates. In the Abrahamic faiths (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), women’s power was limited.¹⁵ For example, the Talmud says a man must

articleshow/104859200.cms?from=mdr

8 “Young, Female and Powerful: Was Elizabeth I a Feminist?” *Royal Museums Greenwich*, 16 Nov. 2017, www.rmg.co.uk/stories/royal-history/young-female-powerful-was-elizabeth-i-feminist.

9 Brenda Meehan-Waters, “Catherine the Great and the Problem of Female Rule,” *The Russian Review* volume 34, no. 3, (July, 1975): 293-307, www.jstor.org/stable/127976.

10 Lundin, Elizabeth. “Where Women Rule: 4 of History’s Ancient Matriarchies.” *History Things*, 11 Dec. 2020, historythings.com/women-rule-4-historys-ancient-matriarchies/.

11 “The Role of Women in Pre-Colonial Africa,” *History Rise*, December 14, 2024, historyrise.com/role-of-women-in-pre-colonial-africa/#queen-mothers-and-female-monarchs; Oyindamola Depo Oyedokun, “Matrilineal and Matriarchal Societies in Africa Today,” *Africa Rebirth*, August 9, 2025, www.africarebirth.com/matrilineal-and-matriarchal-societies-in-africa-today/.

12 Alexander Ives Bortolot, “Women Leaders in African History: Ana Nzinga, Queen of Ndongo,” *Timeline of Art History*, MET Museum, October 1, 2003, www.metmuseum.org/essays/ana-nzinga-queen-of-ndongo.

13 “Reform Movements in 19th Century America: AP” *US History Review*, Albert Resources, accessed August 21, 2025, www.albert.io/blog/reform-movements-in-19th-century-america-ap-us-history-review/.

14 Kirstie Brewer, “The day Iceland’s women went on strike,” *BBC*, October 23, 2015, www.bbc.com/news/magazine-34602822; “The Seneca Falls Convention,” *Today in History* - July 19, Library of the Congress, Accessed August 11, 2025, www.loc.gov/item/today-in-history/july-19/.

15 Victoria S. Harrison, “Modern Women, Traditional Abrahamic Religions and Interpreting Sacred Texts,” *Sage Journals*, 15, no. 2 (January 2007) doi.org/10.1177/0966735007072020

teach his son the Torah but not his daughter.¹⁶ The Qur'an says men protect and provide for women.¹⁷ In contrast, Buddhism recognized women's potential for spiritual authority and allowed women spiritual leadership.¹⁸ These religious views shaped laws and communities.

The Pew Research Center says Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism cover over 70 percent of the world's people.¹⁹ In 44 countries with an official religion, many laws promote gender inequality. For example, in Yemen, Islam restricts women's freedom of movement.²⁰ Even secular states feel religious influence. In Brazil, Evangelical Caucus blocks laws like abortion rights and gender recognition, which would allow women more freedoms.²¹ In the US, the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision expanded women's reproductive rights by separating religion from law, but in 2022 it was overturned.²²

Beyond religion, sexism and patriarchy also shape women's chances. Sexism is prejudice based on sex. It is a form of prejudice and discrimination caused by behaviors and attitudes that reinforce stereotypes and social expectations based on sex.²³ Max Weber, a German sociologist, called patriarchy a system where men dominate public and private life.²⁴ Patriarchy creates gender bias, fewer women leaders, and wage gaps. Women also face the "double burden" of work and home duties. Men focus more solely on their careers, but women juggle many roles at home and at work. Because of this extra burden, women often work under harder conditions. One in four working women in North America think about slowing down or quitting their careers because of this strain.²⁵

Institutions and media still reinforce gender bias in subtle ways. Many workplaces were originally designed around men's needs and habits, and remnants of that

design persist today. For instance, research continues to show that office temperatures are often set for men's comfort, leaving women less comfortable and productive in overcooled environments.²⁶ Leadership traits and workplace behaviors, such as assertiveness or ambition, are still judged differently by gender, with women more likely to face penalties for the same actions that earn men praise.²⁷

Beyond offices, gender bias appears in algorithms and media. Studies of AI-generated images and of news coverage reveal that women are still portrayed less often in leadership roles and more frequently in caregiving or emotional ones. Even digital systems trained on "neutral" data can reproduce and amplify these stereotypes. Similarly, toys, ads, and laws also pushed gender roles from childhood.²⁸ Social media can make it worse. A 2024 study found platforms like TikTok show more misogynistic videos to young men, rising from

16 Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom, "Talmud Torah 1:03," Torah.org, accessed August 18, 2025, torah.org/learning/rambam-talmudtorah-tt1-3/

17 "Understanding a Difficult Verse, Qur'an 4:34," Brandeis University, accessed August 18, 2025, www.brandeis.edu/projects/fse/muslim/translation.html

18 Mindy Zlotnick and Donna McCarthy, "A History of the Bhikkhuni Order," A 2600 Year Journey, Alliance for Bhikkhuni, Accessed August 11, 2025, present.bhikkhuni.net/2600-year-journey/.

19 Conrad Hackett et al., *How the Global Religious Landscape Changed From 2010 to 2020*, (Kraków: Pew Research Center, June 2025), www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2025/06/PR_2025.06.09_global-religious-change_report.pdf.

20 "Yemen: Warring Parties Restrict Women's Movement," Human Rights Watch, March 4, 2024, www.hrw.org/news/2024/03/04/yemen-warring-parties-restrict-womens-movement.

21 Andrea Bassi, Mario Aquino Alves and Carolyn Cordery, *The Future of Third Sector Research*, (Bologna: Springer, 2024): 211-220, link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-031-67896-7_18; Pedro A. G. Dos Santos and Linsey Modellmog, *Brazil's Evangelical Caucus*, Oxford University Press, August 28, 2019, doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.687.

22 "Roe v. Wade," Center for Reproductive Rights, accessed August 11, 2025, reproductiverights.org/roe-v-wade/

23 Medica Mondiale, "Sexism: Discrimination against women and girls," accessed August 20, 2025, medicamondiale.org/en/violence-against-women/womens-rights-are-human-rights/sexism-discrimination-against-women-and-girls

24 Bob Pierik, "Patriarchal power as a conceptual tool for gender history," *Rethinking History*, 26, no.1 (June 2019): 71-92, doi.org/10.1080/013642529.2022.2037864

25 Sally Helgesen, "The Evolution of Women's Leadership," *Strategy+Business*, 28 July 2020, www.strategy-business.com/article/The-evolution-of-womens-leadership? Accessed 3 July 2025.

26 Lydgate, Anthony. "The Sexist History of Room Temperature - the New Yorker." *The New Yorker*, August 3, 2015. www.newyorker.com/tech/annals-of-technology/is-your-thermostat-sexist?

27 Helgesen, Sally. "The Evolution of Women's Leadership."

28 Lin Manwei, "Content Analysis of Gender Representation in Advertising in China," (China: UNICEF, 2021), www.unicef.org/china/en/media/29041/file/Content

13 percent to 56 percent by the study's end.²⁹

Today, women leaders face harsh treatment in both politics and business. Voters have greater uncertainty about women candidates, leading to closer scrutiny and higher performance expectations. Thus, women have to work harder to convince voters of their competence.³⁰ Across contexts, women in politics face higher expectations of integrity and loyalty. Brazil's Dilma Rousseff was removed from office during a financial scandal, while male leaders implicated in more serious corruption often remained. Similar double standards have appeared in countries from South Korea to Iceland, where women leaders faced intense personal criticism and calls to resign, even when their male predecessors or peers were treated with more leniency.³¹ This happens in similar ways with business leadership. In 2021, a BBC survey showed only 38 percent of Japanese people feel okay with a female CEO.³² In 2019, OECD countries had only 25 percent women on company boards.³³

Still, progress is happening with laws, global agreements, and policies. A Canadian company set



Algerian women fighters of the War of Independence (Credit: Tacfarinasxxi)

gender diversity goals to track pay equity and leadership balance.³⁴

In Latin America, the Montevideo Strategy helps countries make gender equality policies, stressing law changes and funding for women's rights.³⁵ History, religion, patriarchy, and culture all built barriers for women leaders. Though social movements, laws, and culture shifts made progress, sexism still holds on. To get equal leadership for women, societies must keep fighting these structures.

Women During Periods of Crisis & Conflict

Throughout history, periods of crisis and conflict have reshaped gender roles. When men were sent to the front lines, women had to step into leadership roles usually reserved for men. This was not always by choice, but by necessity. For example, in 1914 at the start of World War I, 3.3 million women worked in paid employment in Britain. By 1917 when the war was raging, the number went up

29 "Social media algorithms amplify misogynistic content to teens," University College London, February 5, 2024, www.ucl.ac.uk/news/2024/feb/social-media-algorithms-amplify-misogynistic-content-teens.

30 "Study finds women politicians are judged more harshly than men," *News & Events*, Durham University, July 23, 2025, www.durham.ac.uk/news-events/latest-news/2025/07/study-finds-women-politicians-are-judged-more-harshly-than-men/.

31 Ryan E Carlin, Miguel Carreras and Gregory J Love, "Presidents' Sex and Popularity: Baselines, Dynamics and Policy Performance," *British Journal of Political Science* volume 50 issue 4, (January 30, 2019): 1359–1379, doi.org/10.1017/S0007123418000364. ; Ryan E Carlin, Miguel Carreras and Gregory J Love, "Presidents' Sex and Popularity: Baselines, Dynamics and Policy Performance," *British Journal of Political Science* volume 50 issue 4, (January 30, 2019): 1359–1379, doi.org/10.1017/S0007123418000364.

32 Christine Ro, "Why do we still distrust women leaders?," BBC, January 19, 2021, www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20210108-why-do-we-still-distrust-women-leaders.

33 *Policies and Practices to promote leadership roles in the private sector*, 5-7.

34 *Policies and Practices to promote leadership roles in the private sector*, 4-13.

35 "Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls," *2030 Agenda in Latin America and the Caribbean*, Agenda 2030, accessed August 19, 2025, agenda2030lac.org/en/sdg/5-gender-equality



Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern (Credit: Ministry of Justice of New Zealand)

by 4.7 million.³⁶ Similarly, during World War II, nearly 350,000 women took office and clerical jobs in the armed forces. They became active decision-makers in their communities, showing that they could lead effectively under necessary conditions. By the end of the war, many of these women reportedly wanted to keep their job, but were forced out by men returning home and deeming them unsuitable.³⁷ This reinforced the idea that women's leadership was not as strong.

In other cases, women's leadership during periods of crisis shaped the

course of whole countries. During Algeria's war for independence, women fought alongside men on the front lines and led networks that sustained the resistance, organizing supplies, intelligence, and care for displaced families.³⁸ In Liberia, women also transformed the trajectory of conflict. The Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace movement, led by activist Leymah Gbowee, united Christian and Muslim women in nonviolent protest to demand an end to the Second Liberian Civil War in 2003.³⁹ Through marches, sit-ins, and persistent public pressure,

the movement compelled warring leaders to sign a peace agreement and paved the way for postwar elections. These were the first in Africa to elect a woman president, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. Gbowee later received the Nobel Peace Prize for her role in mobilizing women as agents of peace and reconciliation. Across contexts, women have often stood at the front lines of negotiation, governance, and rebuilding, using inclusive leadership to restore fractured societies.

At the international level, women have also influenced post-conflict governance. Their participation has been shown to make peace agreements more durable and inclusive, with studies finding that peace deals involving women are 35 percent more likely to last at least fifteen years.⁴⁰ The UN recognized this with Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, passed in 2000. The resolution highlights how women are critical in peacebuilding and conflict resolution.⁴¹ It also calls on all member states to ensure women's full participation in peace processes and to protect them from gender-based violence during and after conflict.

³⁶ "Women in WWI," *Social Shifts U.S History*, The National WWI Museum and Memorial, accessed September 10, 2025, www.theworldwar.org/learn/women

³⁷ "History At a Glance: Women in World War II," The National WWII Museum, New Orleans, accessed September 10, 2025, www.nationalww2museum.org/students-teachers/student-resources/research-starters/women-wwii

³⁸ Amar Diwakar, "The role of women in the Algerian independence movement," TRT Global, July 5, 2020, trt.global/world/article/12875200

³⁹ "Celebrating two Phenomenal African women: President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and Leymah Gbowee," African Women's Development Fund, December 17, 2021, awdf.org/celebrating-two-phenomenal-african-women-president-ellen-johnson-sirleaf-and-leymah-gbowee

⁴⁰ Marie O'Reilly, Inclusive Security, *Why Women? Inclusive Security Brief* (October 12, 2015), <https://www.inclusivesecurity.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Why-Women-Brief-10.12.15.pdf>

⁴¹ United Nations Security Council, *Resolution 1325, S/RES/1325*, (October 13, 2000), documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n00/720/18/pdf/n0072018.pdf

Yet, women remain underrepresented in negotiations and transitional governments. Since 1992, fewer than 15 percent of peace negotiators and under 10 percent of mediators worldwide have been women. For example, in Afghanistan's 2020 peace talks, women made up only about 10 percent of negotiators, even though Afghan women's organizations had been leading community-level peacebuilding and humanitarian work for decades.⁴² No woman was present on the Taliban side. Similar gaps have appeared elsewhere; women peacebuilders have often been invited only in consultative roles, not as decision-makers.

During the COVID-19 crisis, some studies suggested that countries led by women fared better in the early stages of the pandemic. A 2020 analysis found that female-led governments tended to impose restrictions sooner and had fewer deaths per capita in the first wave.⁴³ For example, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern of New Zealand implemented strict lockdown measures early, resulting in fewer than 3,000 COVID-related deaths out of a population of five million by 2023. In contrast, countries such as the United States under President Donald Trump and Brazil under President Jair Bolsonaro experienced delayed responses and some of the world's highest death

tolls, over one million and 700,000 respectively.⁴⁴ While leadership style, governance capacity, and public trust all played major roles, these examples suggest that women leaders often demonstrated greater caution and collaborative decision-making during crises.

Still, women face serious risks during crises. They are often exposed to higher levels of violence, political exclusion, and erasure from official accounts of recovery and resistance. In many cases, their contributions, essential to holding families and communities together, are forgotten once the crisis passes. A striking example is the Six Triple Eight, an all-Black battalion of women in the U.S. Army who served in England and France during World War II.⁴⁵ Tasked with solving a massive postal backlog, they sorted more than 17 million letters and packages in just three months, restoring communication and morale for troops who had lost contact with home. Despite their achievement, the women of the Six Triple Eight returned to a country that offered no public recognition, ceremonies, or honors for their work. Their story reflects a wider pattern in which women, especially women of color, play indispensable roles in times of war and crisis. However, their leadership and labor remain undervalued in historical memory.

These key historical moments show that women can lead societies and show beneficial results, if given the opportunity. Women take charge, look for solutions, and engage in creating communities that work together toward a common goal when needed. Without women, societies would not have rebuilt as completely as they have after periods of conflict or prioritized national reconciliation and reconstruction as much. It is imperative to take these examples and keep in mind the contributions women have made to entire countries when the situation allowed them to.

The Lack of Safety and Autonomy Caused by the Leadership Gap

Despite global progress in workplace equality, a large gap remains in leadership roles. A 2022 World Economic Forum report using LinkedIn data from 155 countries showed that women do not hold more than half of leadership jobs in any sector. In contrast, men hold between 53 percent and 84 percent of these jobs.⁴⁶ Women tend to stay in low-paying roles and are still far from equal in high-paying decision-making jobs. The gap is even wider for Black women. In 2021, white women held 32.6 percent

42 "Afghanistan Case Study," *Peace Efforts*, Council on Foreign Relationships, accessed September 10, 2025, [tps://www.cfr.org/womens-participation-in-peace-processes/afghanistan/](https://www.cfr.org/womens-participation-in-peace-processes/afghanistan/)

43 Supriya Garikipati and Uma Kambhampati, "Leading the Fight Against the Pandemic: Does Gender Really Matter?," *Feminist Economics* 27, no. 1-2 (March 2021): 401-418, doi.org/10.1080/13545701.2021.1874614

44 "COVID-19 cases | World," World Health Organization, accessed September 10, 2025, data.who.int/dashboards/covid19/cases?n=c

45 Oprah Flash and Amy Johnston, "Six Triple Eight: The battalion of black women erased from history," BBC News, July 4, 2023, www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-birmingham-66045635

46 World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Report 2022*, 36-38.

of managerial positions in the US, compared to just 4.3 percent for Black women.⁴⁷

Leadership positions matter because leaders shape workplace rules, culture, strategy, and policies. When women are excluded, those systems can unintentionally sustain inequality.⁴⁸ For instance, jobs may require experience in sectors where women are underrepresented or demand long hours that disadvantage caregivers, indirectly limiting women's access. This creates a cycle: without women in leadership, existing norms go unchallenged, and inequality persists. Addressing this requires reforming HR policies, setting targets or quotas for leadership roles, and securing active support from current leaders who can model inclusion.

Without women in politics, policies that support reproductive health, education, and vulnerable groups are less common.⁴⁹ Programs like Colombia's Manzanas del Cuidado help by offering childcare, laundry, education, and emotional support to caregivers. These programs help women balance care

roles with careers and leadership. Without women leaders, programs like this would be less likely to exist.⁵⁰

The leadership gap is also linked to women lacking financial independence. Women stuck in low-paying jobs often depend on partners or family. This limits their freedom, from buying food and healthcare to escaping abuse.⁵¹ Leadership jobs pay more and give power to shape economies and industries. However, in 2022, women had higher poverty rates worldwide than men, according to UN Women, UNDP, and the Pardee Center.⁵² The 2025 Fortune 500 list also shows only 55 women CEOs, compared to 445 men.⁵³ According to the International Labour Organization, in 2023 women's global labor force participation rate was about 50.1 percent, compared with 76.5 percent for men. Women accounted for roughly 40 percent of total employment worldwide, and held only about 35.4 percent of management positions.⁵⁴ This gap forces many women into low-paid or informal jobs, increasing

dependence on others and reducing chances for leadership.

The International Monetary Fund says the informal economy includes income-making activities that are not recorded for taxes. The women's group WIEGO calls it a mix of unregulated jobs without state protection.⁵⁵ In many low and middle-income countries, more women than men work informal jobs. Also, the World Economic Forum's 2023 Global Gender Gap Report found that four of every five new jobs for women are informal (about 80 percent), compared with two of every three for men (about 67 percent).⁵⁶ Informal work often has poor conditions and little legal protection. Expanding women's access to secure, fairly paid work not only helps to close the pay gaps, but also strengthens their economic independence, an important factor in reducing vulnerability to gender-based violence.

Research by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and UN Women shows that countries with higher numbers of women in government tend to pass stronger laws on women's rights and social

47 Ganna Pogrebna et al., "The impact of intersectional racial and gender biases on minority female leadership over two centuries," *Scientific reports* volume 14 (January 2, 2024), 1-3, doi.org/10.1038/s41598-023-50392-x.

48 Cailin S Stamarski and Leanne S Son Hing, "Gender inequalities in the workplace: the effects of organizational structures, processes, practices, and decision makers' sexism," *Frontiers in Psychology* (September 16, 2015), doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2015.01400.

49 University of Pittsburgh, *Gender Equality in Public Administration* (Pittsburgh: United Nations Development Programme, 2021), www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2021-12/UNDP-UPitt-2021-Gender-Equality-in-Public-Administration-Executive-Summary-EN2.pdf

50 "Manzanas del Cuidado de Bogotá," Alcaldía Mayor de Bogotá, accessed August 11, 2025, manzanasdelcuidado.gov.co/donde-encontrarlas/.

51 Dana Harrington Conner, "Financial Freedom: Women, Money, and Domestic Abuse," *William & Mary Journal of Race, Gender, and Social Justice*, 20, no. 2 (February 2014), scholarship.law.wm.edu/wmjowl/vol20/iss2/4/

52 "Poverty deepens for women and girls, according to latest projections," *Women Count Data Hub*, UN Women, February 1, 2022, data.unwomen.org/features/poverty-deepens-women-and-girls-according-latest-projections.

53 Nina Ajemian, "Women run 11% of Fortune 500 companies in 2025—but progress is still slow," *Fortune*, June 2, 2025, fortune.com/2025/06/02/fortune-500-companies-run-by-female-ceos-women-2025/

54 "Statistics on women," International Labour Organization, accessed August 11, 2025, ilo-stat.ilo.org/topics/women/.

55 "What is the informal economy and how many people work in it?" *Economic Growth*, World Economic Forum, June 4, 2024, www.weforum.org/stories/2024/06/what-is-the-informal-economy/.

56 Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing, "Counting the World's Informal Workers: Key Facts,"

protection.⁵⁷ These institutional shifts demonstrate how women's representation can translate into policy reform. Similar strategies have proven effective elsewhere. For example, Sweden and other Nordic countries introduced gender quotas and family-friendly policies that increased women's participation in politics and the workforce. Their experience suggests that balanced representation leads to more inclusive decision-making and greater progress toward gender equality in areas such as healthcare, parental leave, and workplace rights.⁵⁸



Woman balancing both her child and household tasks (Credit: National Cancer Institute)

Barriers to Gender-Inclusive Leadership in the Public & Private Sector

Even though nearly all women have the right to vote, they still find it hard to enter political spaces. In 2024, women had only 27 percent of parliamentary seats, 23.3 percent of minister positions, and 35.5 percent of local government roles.⁵⁹ Although these numbers are better than before, progress is slow. Almost half the world thinks men make better leaders.⁶⁰ Women are even less represented in powerful local roles like mayors. They appear more

often in local councils where less power is held.⁶¹

Many barriers continue to prevent women from reaching or remaining in leadership positions across the public and private sectors. These obstacles often begin with subtle but persistent bias—small acts of unfairness, favoritism, and informal networking that favor men. Men often form networks that help them access mentorship and promotions, while women are left outside circles of influence where key decisions are made. Leaders frequently promote people they already know or feel

comfortable with, which reinforces a cycle of male-dominated leadership.

In workplaces, women's ideas are often ignored, interrupted, or credited to others, limiting their visibility and advancement. For minority women, the barriers are multiplied by racial and cultural prejudice, which can make professional environments feel unsafe or exclusionary. The justice system and law enforcement illustrate how these invisible struggles affect leadership potential: female police officers in the United

⁵⁷ Republic of Rwanda, *BEIJING +25 RWANDA COUNTRY REPORT (2019)*: www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/CSW/64/National-reviews/Rwanda.pdf.

⁵⁸ Frida Larsson, "Effect of Gender Quotas on Political Representation in Scandinavian Countries in Sweden," *International Journal of Gender Studies* volume 9, issue 3, no. 4 (July 16, 2024):42-53, www.iprj.org/journals/index.php/IJGS/article/view/2879/3367.

⁵⁹ UN Women, *Transforming Patriarchal Masculinities: Learning From Practice* (New York: UN Women, 2024), 36-40, www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-10/transforming-patriarchal-masculinities-learning-from-practice-en.pdf.

⁶⁰ "We must dismantle barriers to women's political participation. Here's why," *UNDP Blog*, United Nations Development Programme, July 5, 2023, www.undp.org/blog/we-must-dismantle-barriers-womens-political-participation-heres-why.

⁶¹ Ionica Berevoescu and Julie Ballington, *WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT: A GLOBAL ANALYSIS* (New York: UN Women, 2021), 5-12, www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-01/Womens-representation-in-local-government-en.pdf.

States experience higher burnout rates than men despite maintaining healthier lifestyles, signaling deeper structural inequities in support and recognition.⁶² In public life, gender-based harassment further limits participation. About 55 percent of women politicians report facing violence or intimidation while working, and female journalists are frequent targets of online threats and sexualized abuse. These digital attacks can silence women's voices, deter them from leadership roles, and erode the diversity of perspectives in media and governance. The online environment has made such violence harder to trace or stop, widening the gap between formal equality and lived experience.⁶³

Barriers to gender-inclusive leadership in the public and private sectors often begin long before women reach decision-making levels. Besides gender-based violence, the lack of childcare and family support systems remains one of the biggest obstacles to women's advancement. Many societies still assume caregiving is solely women's work, limiting women's availability for demanding careers in politics and business. Without shared caregiving responsibilities, women face a "time poverty" that constrains their leadership potential.

Expanding public childcare, paid parental leave, and flexible work arrangements can ease this burden. When men and women share care responsibilities equally, both become equally free to pursue leadership roles.

Structural barriers in political systems also shape who gains power. Countries with proportional or mixed electoral systems tend to elect more women because parties can submit gender-balanced candidate lists.⁶⁴ However, in systems dominated by male-led parties or

For minority women, the barriers are multiplied by racial and cultural prejudice, which can make professional environments feel unsafe or exclusionary.

winner-takes-all voting, women struggle to break through. Although 44 percent of countries with local elected bodies now have gender quotas, weak enforcement and lack of political will keep women underrepresented. Quotas are most effective when backed by strong accountability measures and real

penalties for noncompliance. Spain's approach of rejecting electoral lists that fail to meet gender requirements helped it reach 44.3 percent women in parliament and an equal share of women cabinet ministers by 2025.⁶⁵

Cultural barriers remain just as powerful. Even when formal equality exists, patriarchal workplace norms, gender stereotypes, and biased mentorship networks hold women back from top roles. To foster genuine inclusion, organizations and governments must challenge cultural hierarchies and create environments where leadership is not defined by traditionally male behaviors. Women leaders are essential to building more representative systems; they strengthen laws on health, social protection, and gender-based violence.⁶⁶ Transforming policies, institutions, and workplace cultures together is key to removing the invisible walls that still block women's leadership.

In the private sector, men continue to hold most senior leadership roles worldwide. According to the International Labour Organization, women occupy only about 35 percent of management positions and less than 10 percent of chief executive

62 Diane Elliot L, "Why Are Women Law Enforcement Officers More Burned-Out and What Might Help Them?," *Occupational Medicine & Health Affairs* (June, 2015), www.omicsonline.org/open-access/why-are-women-law-enforcement-officers-more-burnedout-and-what-might-help-them-2329-6879-1000204.php?aid=55086.

63 National Democratic Institute, *NO PARTY TO VIOLENCE: ANALYZING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICAL PARTIES* (National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, March 2018), 7-9, www.ndi.org/publications/no-party-violence-analyzing-violence-against-women-political-parties#downloads.

64 Ionica Berevoescu and Julie Ballington, *Women's Representation in Local Government: A GLOBAL ANALYSIS*, 5-12.

65 Thea Ridley-Castle, "Pursuing Parity: Examining Gender Quotas Across Electoral Systems," Electoral Reform Society, March 8, 2024, electoral-reform.org.uk/latest-news-and-research/publications/pursuing-parity-examining-gender-quotas-across-electoral-systems/.

66 Davila, Maria Zambrano, "How to Create Feminist Policy: The 2021-2022 Chilean constitutional rewrite," *Araneum: Richmond Journal of American & Global Affairs*, Vol. 1, Iss. 1, 4-9.

roles globally.⁶⁷ This leadership gap shapes women's daily work experiences and career trajectories. Gender pay gaps remain significant, particularly in high-paying fields such as finance, insurance, and real estate, where women often earn 20 to 30 percent less than men in comparable roles.⁶⁸ Women also receive fewer promotion opportunities and advance more slowly through corporate hierarchies.

Beyond structural barriers, subtle forms of bias and workplace microaggressions, such as being interrupted in meetings, overlooked for mentorship, or held to higher performance standards, erode women's confidence and reduce retention rates. These effects are even more pronounced for women facing multiple forms of discrimination. Black and Hispanic women in the United States, for example, earn roughly 66 and 51 cents, respectively, for every dollar earned by white men.⁶⁹ Women with disabilities experience one of the largest wage gaps of all. The cumulative impact of these inequalities limits women's access to leadership, reduces lifetime earnings, and weakens overall economic inclusion. These tough conditions make workplaces feel hostile for many women. This hurts

their ambition and willingness to stay in their careers. Women may blame themselves instead of the hidden barriers. The mix of low pay, little help, extra emotional work, and unfair treatment creates an unfair system that is much harder for women than men.⁷⁰

Today, many companies recognize that greater gender diversity in leadership is linked to stronger performance and public trust. Firms with more women in executive roles often report higher profitability, stronger innovation, and better employee engagement.⁷¹ Female leadership is increasingly seen as a marker of credible and socially responsible governance. Diverse leadership teams tend to make more balanced decisions, manage risk better, and foster inclusive workplace cultures that raise overall productivity. Addressing deep structural issues like sexism and bias remains challenging, but progress is possible. Beyond gender quotas, many organizations now tie executive bonuses or public rankings to gender-equality targets. This approach is used in countries such as France and the United Kingdom.⁷² Others invest in mentorship programs, flexible work options, and transparent promotion systems to ensure women can advance on equal terms.

Such measures make equality not just a moral goal but a strategic advantage.

The Importance of Representation

Representation is the inclusion and visibility of diverse groups of people in public life- in politics, media, or other institutions- so that all parts of society have a voice.⁷³ Ensuring equality of representation strengthens democracy by broadening whose experiences and priorities shape public policy. Different groups within a society face distinct needs and challenges. A representative system is essential to design policies that serve everyone fairly. When those voices are missing, democracy itself is weakened. Decisions made without inclusive participation risk overlooking or even deepening inequality. In that sense, the absence of representation is not just a gap, it undermines the legitimacy and effectiveness of democratic governance.

Disparities between the percentage of women in the world and the percentage of women in certain areas should prompt more scrutiny. In the workforce, women are underrepresented.⁷⁴ This is

67 "Statistics on women," International Labour Organization, accessed August 11, 2025, ilostat.ilo.org/topics/women/.

68 Cailin S Stamarski and Leanne S Son Hing, "Gender inequalities in the workplace."

69 Amina Khalique, "What You Should Know About the 2023 Gender Wage Gap," *Center for American Progress*, October 22, 2024, <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/what-you-should-know-about-the-2023-gender-wage-gap/>.

70 "Masterclass on Why the Gender Gap in Leadership Aspirations Continues," HEC Paris, October 25, 2024, www.hec.edu/en/masterclass-why-gender-gap-leadership-aspirations-continues.

71 "Great Place To Work Frequently Asked Questions," *About Us*, Great Place To Work, accessed August 11, 2025, greatplacetowork.me/faqs/.

72 HEC Paris, "Masterclass on Why the Gender Gap in Leadership Aspirations Continues."

73 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract* (Harlow: Penguin Books, 2004).

74 "Desafios da mulher no mercado de trabalho: desigualdade de gênero e racismo persistem," Ministério do Trabalho e Emprego, last updated March 14, 2025, www.gov.br/trabalho-e-emprego/pt-br/noticias-e-conteudo/2025/marco/desafios-da-mulher-no-mercado-



US Senator Debbie Stabenow meets with two young Girl Scouts (Credit: Senator Stabenow)

largely a result of minimal access to education and opportunities. According to the UN, only 63 percent of women aged 25 to 54 are employed, compared to 91 percent of men.⁷⁵ These gaps worsens when racial factors are considered, as Black women face higher rates of unemployment and underutilization in the workforce.

The term “glass ceiling” has been coined as cultural barriers faced by women to climb the career ladder. It refers to invisible barriers that stop women from moving up in jobs. These barriers are subtle and manifest in small, everyday ways.⁷⁶ This has been challenged, with some saying the glass ceiling term

is not the best fitting way to refer to these challenges. They propose that viewing it as a labyrinth was better, since this better considers the complexity and different challenges to achieving the end goal, just like a labyrinth. In this context, women breaking barriers requires persistence and careful consideration of puzzles along the way. It suggests that women often face a series of challenges that require them to work harder and prove themselves more than men in order to reach the same levels of success.⁷⁷

Social barriers remain one of the strongest challenges to gender-inclusive leadership. In many

cultures, women are taught not to pursue power or display traits such as firmness or ambition, qualities often celebrated in men. This double standard forces women to navigate conflicting expectations: they must appear competent but also agreeable. Comments about appearance, tone, or demeanor, like being told to “smile more,” reinforce these stereotypes and erode authority.⁷⁸ Female leadership styles are sometimes dismissed as weak, and the lack of visible female role models makes it even harder for women to imagine themselves in top positions. This is where representation becomes crucial. Seeing women in leadership not only inspires others but also reshapes what society views as normal or possible. When young women see others who look like them holding positions of power, it broadens their sense of what they can achieve and provides a living example of how to get there. Representation thus acts as both a mirror and a map, reflecting women’s potential and guiding others toward it.

However, the importance of representation extends beyond inspiration. Including women in leadership brings tangible benefits for organizations and societies alike. Female leaders often draw on different experiences and communication styles, which can make institutions more responsive,

de-trabalho-desigualdade-de-genero-e-racismo-persistem.

⁷⁵ “Desafios da mulher no mercado de trabalho.” Ministério do Trabalho e Emprego.

⁷⁶ Julia Kagan, “The Glass Ceiling: Definition, History, Effects, and Examples,” Investopedia, last updated January 27, 2025, www.investopedia.com/terms/g/glass-ceiling.asp.

⁷⁷ Alice H Eagly and Linda Carli, “Women and the labyrinth of leadership,”

⁷⁸ Virginia Schein, “A Global Look at Psychological Barriers to Women’s Progress in Management,” *Journal of Social Issues* volume 57 (January 2001): 675-688, doi.org/10.1111/0022-4537.00235.

empathetic, and effective.⁷⁹ In this sense, representation is structural. It challenges stereotypes, widens opportunity, and strengthens the systems that govern public and private life.

Every area of society is affected by the lack of female leadership and could benefit more from it. According to UN Women, women and girls are extremely affected by conflict, instability and violence. They are often the first targets in dangerous situations.

Since they are one of the groups most affected by it, it is important to have representation in the peacebuilding processes as well. As noted in Subtopic 2, women's participation in peace processes is still limited, yet linked to more durable and implementable agreements. Despite this evidence, women continue to be excluded and largely underrepresented in this field. In local peace efforts, women demonstrate their effectiveness and are essential to local negotiations.

Having more women in charge is not just fair, it is a strategic path toward sustainable development. Overcoming the "leadership labyrinth" requires a collective effort to dismantle stereotypes, combat unconscious biases, create public policies that promote equal opportunities, and foster a culture that values diversity in all its forms. Ensuring that women are fully represented where decisions are made opens new possibilities for realizing a future where everyone's potential is truly recognized.

CURRENT STATUS

Case Study: Rwanda

Rwanda was the first country in the world to achieve the majority of women in parliament, with 63.8 percent of the Chamber of Deputies and 53.8 percent of the Senate held by women, as of January 2025.⁸⁰ This places Rwanda at the top globally for women's political representation. It shares the position alongside Cuba, Nicaragua, Mexico, Andorra, and the United Arab Emirates.⁸¹ However, the achievement has its roots in tragedy. In 1994, the genocide against the

Tutsis killed more than 800,000 Rwandans. Most of the victims were men.⁸² Before the genocide, the male population was about 50 percent of the population. After the tragedy, the number of men dropped by about 2 percent and women were over 50 percent of the population.⁸³ This shift laid the groundwork for women to rise as ministers, judges and heads of major corporations.

Before the 1994 genocide, Rwanda remained a strongly patriarchal society in which women were commonly treated as

dependents of male relatives and steered toward domestic roles. Boys' education and claims to property were generally prioritized.⁸⁴ Legal capacity and economic rights for women were limited, as daughters and widows typically could not inherit land or other family property and until reforms in the late 1990s, women did not enjoy equal rights to open bank accounts or make contracts.⁸⁵ While divorce was legally available before 1994, statutory protection against gender-based violence arrived only with the 2008 Gender Based Violence law.⁸⁶

⁷⁹ Alice H Eagly and Linda Carli, "Women and the labyrinth of leadership," 62-71.

⁸⁰ "Women representation," *Parliament*, Government of the Republic of Rwanda, accessed August 11, 2025, www.parliament.gov.rw/women-representation.

⁸¹ UN Women and Inter-Parliamentary Union, Women in Politics: 2025 (UN Women, January, 2025), www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2025-03/women-in-politics-2025-en.pdf.

⁸² "Rwanda genocide: 100 days of slaughter," BBC, April 4, 2019.

⁸³ Population, male - Rwanda," *Data*, World Bank Group, accessed August 11, 2025, data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL.MA.IN?locations=RW.

⁸⁴ Nelson Kalberer, "Tracking Women's Rights in Rwanda: A History of Progress?," Human Rights Research Center, March 25, 2025, www.humanrightsresearch.org/post/tracking-women-s-rights-in-rwanda-a-history-of-progress.

⁸⁵ Nelson Kalberer, "Tracking Women's Rights in Rwanda: A History of Progress?," s.

⁸⁶ Nelson Kalberer, "Tracking Women's Rights in Rwanda: A History of Progress?," s.



Leaders and community organizers at Rwanda's OpenStreetMap 10 year anniversary (Credit: Iganze)

After the genocide, Rwanda adopted a new constitution in 2003. It guaranteed equal gender access to land, education, financial services, and health. It also introduced a 30 percent gender quota for women in all state decision-making bodies and created a National Council for Women. The country also committed to reducing sexual violence, which had been used as a weapon of war.⁸⁷ Between 1998 and 1999, Rwanda underwent a national consultative process in which key areas were identified to

shape its Vision 2020 plan.⁸⁸ The process ensured the participation of all levels in the business community, government, academia and civil society. The topics were diverse, ranging from poverty reduction, healthcare, human rights, to gender-related issues. They acknowledged that a large part of the difficulties in advancing women's rights in the country stemmed from traditional society and stereotypes.⁸⁹ Recognizing those flaws and challenges while setting clear goals and a path forward was

crucial for Rwanda to improve and sustain gender equality.

Since then, Rwanda has made significant progress. Most goals in the Vision 2020 plan were achieved.⁹⁰ Today, over 91.7 percent of its legal frameworks advance gender equality, with a strong focus on eliminating violence against women.⁹¹ Rwanda ranks sixth worldwide in the Global Gender Gap Index, compared to the United States at 27th. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have also grown since 2006, including the Rwanda Women's Network, which aims to expand access to gender-based violence support, healthcare, and financial education.⁹² The adolescent birth rate has also declined, with fewer than 35 per 1,000 women aged 15-19. Women's representation in the parliament also increased from 61.3 percent in 2024 to 63.8 percent in 2025.⁹³ After the success of the Vision 2020 plan, Rwanda decided to launch Vision 2050, inspired to continue promoting gender equality and female empowerment. This plan was shaped by diverse stakeholders, including youth, women, private sector, political parties, civil society, faith-based organizations, and academia.⁹⁴

87 Ritwick Dutta, "Rwanda's 30 percent gender quota led to the world's largest share of women in government," *Political Reservations for Women in Parliament: Rwanda*, sdg16, June 6, 2023, www.sdg16.plus/policies/rwandas-30-percent-gender-quota-led-to-the-worlds-largest-share-of-women-in-government/

88 Republic of Rwanda, *RWANDA VISION 2020* (Republic of Rwanda, 2012): 3-7, climatechange.gov.rw/fileadmin/user_upload/Documents/Report/RwandaVision2020.pdf.

89 Nelson Kalberer, "Tracking Women's Rights in Rwanda: A History of Progress?,"

90 Nelson Kalberer, "Tracking Women's Rights in Rwanda: A History of Progress?,"

91 Nelson Kalberer, "Tracking Women's Rights in Rwanda: A History of Progress?,"

92 Nelson Kalberer, "Tracking Women's Rights in Rwanda: A History of Progress?,"

93 "Rwanda," *Country Fact Sheet - UN Women Data Hub*, UN Women,

94 Republic of Rwanda, *VISION 2050*, (Republic of Rwanda, December 2020): 5-10, www.minecofin.gov.rw/fileadmin/user_upload/Minecofin/Publications/REPORTS/National_Development_Planning_and_Research/Vision_2050/English-Vision_2050_Abridged_version_WEB_Final.pdf.

Despite the progress, much work remains to meet all gender equality indicators. Rwanda leads the percentage of women in parliament worldwide, yet it ranks 71st for women as cabinet ministers, with only 26.3 percent in that role.⁹⁵ The Global Gender Gap Index places Rwanda 39th, with a score of 0.762 on gender parity, where 1 represents full parity.⁹⁶ In the private sector, fewer than 30 percent of senior or middle management positions are held by women. Traditional norms still dominate, with most women confined to rural and domestic work.⁹⁷ The greatest challenge today is dismantling social norms, which still hold strong, especially in rural areas. Rwanda's 2050 Vision plan acknowledges these obstacles and seeks to address them through public policies, private sector incentives, and national commitment, building on the progress already achieved.

Although Rwanda is a strong example of the effects of gender equality in politics, it is not the only country advancing toward gender parity worldwide. According to the Global Gender Gap Index, Iceland is the only country who has closed more than 90 percent of

its gender gap, leading the Index for 16 consecutive years.⁹⁸ While Rwanda is recognized for leading in the share of women in parliament, Iceland consistently ranks at the top across all indicators on the Women in Politics Map, as well as in the Index.⁹⁹ Like Rwanda, Iceland also increased women's political participation, not only at the parliamentary level but also within municipal governments, according to the Government of Iceland. The efforts toward a more equal society are translated into legislation concerned with increasing women's leadership and ending gender based violence. In the private sector, Iceland has gone even further, reducing the wage gap and achieving the highest rate of women's labor force participation in Europe.¹⁰⁰ Its commitment to political inclusion, education, and equal access to health care has secured Iceland's place as the leader of the Global Gender Gap Index. However, much work remains to be done, as no economy has yet achieved full gender parity.

Difference in Pay

The gender pay gap remains a clear indicator of persistent inequalities between men and women in the workplace. The difference in average gross hourly earnings between women and men was first revealed in 1957 by the Treaty of Rome.¹⁰¹ This trend continues today. As of 2024, women globally earned approximately 83 cents for every dollar earned by men, indicating a gender pay gap of 17 percent.¹⁰² In Europe, the average gender pay gap was 12 percent in 2023, though this varied widely by country. Latvia, Austria, Czechia, Hungary, and Germany had gaps above 17, while Belgium, Italy, Romania, Malta, and Slovenia reported gaps below six percent.¹⁰³ In the United States, women earned 85 percent of what men earned in 2024, representing a 15 percent disparity.¹⁰⁴ In 2023, Korea demonstrated the highest gender wage gap across the Organization for Economic and Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, with 29.3 percent, alongside Japan and Estonia, which reported averages above 20 percent.¹⁰⁵ The pay gap

95 UN Women and Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Women in Politics*: 2025.

96 World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Report 2025*, 33-41.

97 Marie de Vergès, "In Rwanda, women occupy high positions."

98 World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Report 2025*, 5-9.

99 UN Women and Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Women in Politics*: 2025.

100 "About Gender Equality," Government of Iceland, accessed September 20, 2025, www.government.is/topics/human-rights-and-equality/equality/about-gender-equality/

101 "Treaty of Rome," *About Parliament*, European Parliament, accessed August 11, 2025, www.europarl.europa.eu/about-parliament/en/in-the-past/the-parliament-and-the-treaties/treaty-of-rome.

102 Michael Holder, "Gender Pay Gap Statistics 2025: A Comprehensive Analysis," *Equal Pay Today*, March 18, 2025, www.equalpaytoday.org/gender-pay-gap-statistics/.

103 "Understanding the gender pay gap: definition, facts and causes," *Topics*, European Parliament, last updated March 18, 2025, www.europarl.europa.eu/topics/en/article/20200109STO69925/understanding-the-gender-pay-gap-definition-facts-and-causes.

104 Michael Holder, "Gender Pay Gap Statistics 2025: A Comprehensive Analysis," *Equal Pay Today*.

105 "Gender wage gap," *Indicators*, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2023, www.oecd.org/en/data/indicators/gender-wage-gap.html.



Women at the United Nations event at the Foreign & Commonwealth Office in London (Credit: Foreign and Commonwealth Office)

tends to widen in senior positions. In Brazil, women earn 19.4 percent less than men.¹⁰⁶ The disparity rises to 25.2 percent for directors and managers.¹⁰⁷ Senior roles often determine promotions, mentorship, and access to influential networks. Underrepresentation in these roles limits women's opportunities for advancement, reinforcing gender inequality across all leadership levels.

The International Labour Organization's Equal Remuneration Convention establishes that all workers should receive equal

pay for work of equal value.¹⁰⁸ Despite this, only 35 of 98 countries have adopted effective pay-transparency measures or enforcement mechanisms to address the pay gap.¹⁰⁹ Implementing these measures requires a strong legal framework, enforcement systems, and tracking mechanisms. This is not an easy task. It depends on each country's legislative process and the time needed to understand all relevant variables.¹¹⁰ In Togo, for example, women have access to 77 percent of men's legal rights on paper, yet only 27 percent of the systems necessary to implement

those rights are in place.¹¹¹ This highlights the importance of effective systems to ensure that initiatives are properly executed. While challenges remain and women's rights are still limited, Togo has begun to address these issues. Through a series of reforms, the country established a legislative framework needed to improve gender equality, including laws on women's social protection, inheritance, and criminal law.¹¹²

Legislation alone is not enough. Private sector policies also play a key role in reducing the gender pay gap and preventing sex discrimination, unfair treatment based on sex, pregnancy, childbirth, gender identity, sexual orientation, or caregiving status. Discrimination can be direct, as in paying a woman less than a man for the same role, or indirect, with neutral-seeming rules like 24/7 availability or "salary history" requirements that disproportionately disadvantage women.¹¹³ It also includes harassment, pregnancy and lactation discrimination, retaliation for reporting, and biased performance evaluations that penalize assertiveness in women while rewarding it in men. Because these patterns are often subtle, many women internalize the obstacles and mistake structural

¹⁰⁶ "Countries report priority in their policies to end wage inequality," *G20 English*, Ministério do Trabalho e Emprego, April 11, 2024, www.gov.br/trabalho-e-emprego/en/countries-report-priority-in-their-policies-to-end-wage-inequality.

¹⁰⁷ Ministério do Trabalho e Emprego, "Countries report priority in their policies to end wage inequality," *G20 English*.

¹⁰⁸ "Everything you need to know about pushing for pay equity," UN Women, July 15, 2024, www.unwomen.org/en/articles/explainer/everything-you-need-to-know-about-pushing-for-pay-equity.

¹⁰⁹ "New Data Show Massive, Wider-than-Expected Global Gender Gap," *Women, Business and the Law 2024*, World Bank Group, March 4, 2024, www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2024/03/04/new-data-show-massive-wider-than-expected-global-gender-gap.

¹¹⁰ World Bank Group, "New Data Show Massive, Wider-than-Expected Global Gender Gap."

¹¹¹ World Bank Group, "New Data Show Massive, Wider-than-Expected Global Gender Gap."

¹¹² Laetitia Pettinotti, Sherilyn Raga, "Gender equality in Togo," ODI Global, accessed August 11, 2025.

¹¹³ European Parliament, "Understanding the gender pay gap: definition, facts and causes."

barriers for personal shortcomings. This erodes confidence, depresses retention, and widens the leadership gap.

Several countries have adopted measurements to address the gap. In 2023, Brazil approved a regulation of the Equal Pay Law, requiring private companies with over 100 employees to produce transparency reports on gender pay disparities.¹¹⁴ The European Union (EU) introduced new rules on binding pay-transparency measures.¹¹⁵ If a pay report shows a gender pay gap of five percent or more, employers must conduct joint assessments with worker representatives and face penalties, such as fines, for employers that infringe the rules.¹¹⁶ Unlike Brazil, EU regulation requires the employer to disclose everything and send a report directly to the employees, without state mediation.

Another similar example is Canada, who has pay equity requirements that vary according to the employer's jurisdiction and which economic sector the employer is part of, public or private. Large private sector employers were required to produce their first transparency reports by November 1, 2024, detailing gender categories, pay differences

and reporting periods.¹¹⁷ Japan is another example of a country with efforts to close the pay gap. Its Act on the Promotion of Women's Participation and Career Advancement in the Workplace mandates organizations with more than 300 employees to report on gender pay gaps across the organization and by employment type (full-time, part-time, fixed-term).¹¹⁸

Other countries such as Spain, England, Scotland, Ireland, France, Germany, and Italy have direct obligations for employers to monitor and report pay gaps. They have specific steps to close the gender gap. In contrast, other countries, like Argentina, only provide indirect legal measures. Argentine labor law establishes the general principle of equal pay and requires employers to pay those performing equivalent work the same amount.¹¹⁹ The law does not require companies to report salaries, track disparities, or face penalties. As a result, the country lacks reinforcement mechanisms, which often prevents these laws from being fully implemented.

The global gender gap reflects an actual and pressing issue that affects both individuals and societies. Addressing it requires reinforcement

mechanisms, comprehensive legislation, and strong commitment from both the public and private sectors. Evidence from places with established pay-transparency and enforcement like Canada and parts of Europe suggests that regulation with accountability can help narrow gaps. Economic and financial empowerment allows women to engage in political and social-decision making, ensuring that gender equality progresses across both private and public sectors.

Sustainable Development Goals

The UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These goals serve as a shared blueprint to achieve "peace and prosperity for people and the planet," guiding countries towards a more sustainable and equal world. Each goal addresses specific areas where action is needed.¹²⁰ The idea behind the goals is that sustainable development requires progress across many different areas. By addressing poverty, inequalities, education, health, and human rights, countries can create conditions for stability, peace, and prosperity.¹²¹ The CSW focuses

114 "Brazil Amends Labor Code to Require Gender Pay Equity," Pay Analytics, January 17, 2024, www.payanalytics.com/resources/articles/brazil-equal-pay-law-requirements-reporting.

115 European Parliament, "Understanding the gender pay gap: definition, facts and causes."

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117 "Pay Equity," Government of Canada, accessed September 20, 2025, www.canada.ca/en/treasury-board-secretariat/topics/pay/pay-equity.html

118 Tagami Kota, "What Causes the Gender Wage Gap in Japan?," *Japan Labor Issues* 7, no. 42 (April, 2023).

119 "Gender pay reporting obligations around the world," *Gender Pay Gap Map*, Global HR Lawyers Ius Laboris, February 5, 2025, iuslaboris.com/insights/gender-pay-gap-map/.

120 "THE 17 GOALS," United Nations Department of Social Affairs, accessed on August 11, 2025, sdgs.un.org/goals.

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Women advocate for SDG 10 (Credit: Happiraphael)

on SDGs that cover inequalities, gender issues, and access to decent work. SDGs five, eight, and 10 are especially prevalent with regards to the role of women in leadership and governance.

Goal five is especially relevant to CSW and the topic. This focuses on gender equality and empowering women and girls. Achieving this goal includes working on the different aspects that can be affected by gender inequality.¹²² These include ending all forms of discrimination, eliminating violence, and ensuring

women's participation and equal opportunities in leadership.

Target 5.5 specifically calls for women's full and effective participation in decision-making in political, economical, and public-life.¹²³ Increasing their participation in parliaments and leadership roles, both in the private and public sector, not only provides evidence of progress but also ensures that women are heard and their perspectives shape society. Without meaningful representation, other targets, such as 5.3, which focuses on eliminating harmful practices, and 5.c, which enforces policies

for equality, become difficult to achieve. As of January 1, 2025, women held 27.2 percent of the seats in national parliaments. While this is an increase compared to 10 years ago (4.9 percentage points higher), progress continues to be slow, with only a 0.3 point rise from 2024.¹²⁴ These numbers highlight the need for a deeper societal and cultural change to advance in gender equality.

Following is SDG 8: decent work and economic growth. Women's leadership in governance is directly tied to this area. Targets such as 8.3, which encourages entrepreneurship and access to financial services and 8.5, which calls for equal pay for work of equal value, cannot be achieved without women in leadership roles.¹²⁵ The gender pay gap and higher unemployment rates remain important challenges that must be addressed.¹²⁶ According to the 2025 UN SDG report, 93.8 percent of women in least developed countries, and 91.4 percent in Sub-Saharan Africa were informally employed, limiting their safety.

When women are present in decision-making positions, they are more likely to favor policies that support decent work conditions, just pay, and protection for women

¹²² "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls," *Goal 5 Targets and Indicators*, United Nations Department of Social Affairs, accessed on August 11, 2025, sdgs.un.org/goals/goal5#targets_and_indicators.

¹²³ United Nations Department of Social Affairs, "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls"

¹²⁴ United Nations, *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2025* (United Nations, 2025), 18-19, unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2025/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2025.pdf.

¹²⁵ "Goal 8 - Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all," *Goal 8 Targets and Indicators*, United Nations Department of Social Affairs, accessed on August 11, 2025, sdgs.un.org/goals/goal8#targets_and_indicators.

¹²⁶ "Goal 8 - Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all," *Goal 8 Progress and Info*, United Nations Department of Social Affairs, accessed on August 11, 2025, sdgs.un.org/goals/goal8#progress_and_info.

in informal jobs.¹²⁷ An example of this happens in Rwanda, where women are leading initiatives that are reaching thousands of unbanked women in rural areas.¹²⁸ Ensuring women's voices in leadership roles is essential for creating policies that drive the need to create decent work and ensure economic growth.

Finally, SDG 10 is to reduce inequality. While this SDG refers

to a wide variety of inequalities, women are a vulnerable group that faces many challenges. Targets such as 10.2, which aims to promote social, political, and economic inclusion for all are advanced when women are equally represented in leadership. Persistent underrepresentation hinders progress. When women are better represented, governments adopt stronger policies to protect

marginalized groups.¹²⁹ This not only addresses gender inequality but also other forms of social and economic exclusion.

It is imperative to include these SDGs when talking about resolutions to the topic. Advancing women's participation is not only a matter of fairness, but also a necessity for achieving a sustainable, just, and peaceful development.

BLOC ANALYSIS

Point of Division

The points and division for this bloc are based on the Monthly Ranking of Women in National Parliaments. It is a monthly report posted by Inter-Parliamentary Union on rankings and percentage of women in national parliaments and covers up to 193 countries.¹³⁰ This report has information since 1945 up to the most recent as of 1st August 2025.¹³¹ The importance of this study lies in the fact that it allows us to analyze how countries have historically behaved in terms of women's access to high political positions.

The index shows the percentage of seats occupied by women

in the legislative organ of each country. This means that the higher the percentage, the greater the participation of women in the respective parliament. Additionally, the table is organized according to ranking. The first country is the one with the greatest gender equality in its parliament. This simulation blocs for solutions will be based according to the historical behavior of women in the legislative branch of the powers. Therefore, a historical average percentage of 40 and above implies that they achieved gender equality in representative positions and continue to work towards it. Then, countries with a percentage between 20 and 40 are those that have made little progress in gender equity in parliamentary

representation and are stagnant. Countries below 20 percent are those who present great barriers to achieving gender equality and also make no efforts for it. Blocs are just guides, not strict groups. Delegates can collaborate across blocs and should also use the UNDP Gender Inequality Index (GII) as well, which measures health, empowerment, and work participation, when grouping countries and drafting solutions.

It is important to keep these conditions in mind when searching for groups and developing solutions. The approach to solutions will vary depending on the group countries belong to and the ability to help other countries on the issue.

¹²⁷ World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Report 2025*, 5-9.

¹²⁸ "How Inclusive Leadership Contributes to Women's Financial Inclusion," *Leadership & Diversity Programs, Policy Brief*, Women's World Banking, June 10, 2025, www.womensworldbanking.org/insights/how-inclusive-leadership-contributes-to-womens-financial-inclusion/.

¹²⁹ "Facts and figures: Women's leadership and political participation," UN Women, June 12, 2025, www.unwomen.org/en/articles/facts-and-figures/facts-and-figures-womens-leadership-and-political-participation

¹³⁰ "Monthly ranking of women in national parliaments," IPU Parline - Global Data on Parliaments, accessed August 16, 2025, data.ipu.org/women-ranking/?date_month=8&date_year=2025.

¹³¹ "Compare data on Parliaments - Percentage of Women," IPU Parline - Global Data on Parliaments, accessed August 16, 2025, data.ipu.org/compare/?field=current_women_percent®ion=0&structure=any_lower_chamber&chart=map&year_to=2025#.

States with Historical Gender Equality on Parliament

Countries in this bloc are those who have a percentage above 40 on the study made by IPU Parline.¹³² Many reached this through gender quota policies (reserved seats or candidate-list quotas) or strong voluntary party quotas, often with enforcement features.¹³³ In countries that have imposed legal candidate quotas, women hold about five percent more seats in parliaments and seven percent more in local governments than in countries without quotas.¹³⁴

By June, 2025, only six countries have achieved 50 percent or more women in parliament.¹³⁵ In addition, 21 countries have reached or surpassed 40 percent.¹³⁶ More than two-thirds of countries have some sort of quota.¹³⁷ Countries in this bloc often accompany and strengthen the quotas with other projects, such as mentorship

programs to strengthen the participation of women in parliament through role models.¹³⁸ Thus, delegates in this bloc may specifically support the onboarding for first-time legislators and family-friendly hours and childcare at legislatures. They would be more inclined to create zero-tolerance frameworks for violence against women in politics, including rapid reporting channels and penalties for parties that enable abuse.

For example, Argentina has a historical percentage of women in the Chamber of Deputies of 42.4 percent.¹³⁹ Currently, 109 out of the 257 seats are occupied by women in the lower house.¹⁴⁰ In addition, 33 out of the 72 seats are occupied by women, translating into a 45.8 percent of participation.¹⁴¹ In 1991, Argentina became the first country in the world to adopt a significant candidate quota with a requirement of 30 percent.¹⁴² Argentina's candidate quota set the trend in Latin America. Today, nearly

all countries in the region have adopted some candidate quotas.

Other countries in this bloc include Mexico, which currently has 50 percent of women in both chambers.¹⁴³ In addition, in 2024, Claudia Sheinbaum became Mexico's first female president.¹⁴⁴ Also, the United Arab Emirates had no women in 2006 as part of the Federal National Council, but achieved gender parity in 2019.¹⁴⁵

States with Moderate Gender Representation on Parliament

Countries on this bloc are those who have a percentage between 20 and 40 on the study made by IPU Parline. By the end of 2022, women held at least 30 percent of seats in 64 countries, up from 61 in 2021.¹⁴⁶ Even if these countries have implemented measures to promote gender equality, they still face structural barriers like gender-based violence. For example, during elections in Fiji, most candidates

132 Strategies and good practices in promoting gender equality outcomes in parliaments (New York: United Nations Development Programme, May, 2016, www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/GUIDANCE%20NOTE%20Strategies%20and%20good%20practices%20in%20promoting%20gender%20equality%20outcomes%20in%20parliaments_web.pdf).

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134 "Facts and figures: Women's leadership and political participation," UN Women, accessed August 16, 2025, www.unwomen.org/en/articles/facts-and-figures/facts-and-figures-womens-leadership-and-political-participation.

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137 Emma Batha, "Which countries have the most gender-equal parliaments?," World Economic Forum, last modified February 16, 2023, www.weforum.org/stories/2023/02/countries-gender-equal-parliaments-women-tunisia/.

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139 IPU Parline - Global Data on Parliaments, "Compare data on Parliaments - Percentage of Women."

140 IPU Parline - Global Data on Parliaments, "Monthly ranking of women in national parliaments."

141 IPU Parline - Global Data on Parliaments, "Monthly ranking of women in national parliaments."

142 Hughes, Paxton, Krook, "Gender Quotas for Legislatures and Corporate Boards."

143 Women in Politics: 2025 (New York: UN Women, 2025), <http://unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2025-03/women-in-politics-2025-en.pdf>.

144 Shamma Al Qutbah, "Claudia Sheinbaum, Mexico's First Female President Takes Office: A Historic Milestone Amid Deep Challenges and Uncertainty," Trends Research & Advisory, last edited November 17, 2024, trendsresearch.org/insight/claudia-sheinbaum-mexicos-first-female-president-takes-office-a-historic-milestone-amid-deep-challenges-and-uncertainty/.

145 Emma Batha, "Which countries have the most gender-equal parliaments?"

146 "Women in parliament: Which countries are making progress?," Eco-Business, September 26, 2023, www.eco-business.com/news/women-in-parliament-which-countries-are-making-progress/.

stated that they faced gender-based violence while campaigning.¹⁴⁷ Therefore, this bloc may also implement complaint mechanisms and look out for gender-based violence in politics, including online abuse.

Some of these barriers can be tied to regional issues. For example, only two Caribbean countries meet the 30 percent gender quota for women parliamentarians. Only Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago meet the threshold.¹⁴⁸ Jamaica was close to meeting this threshold with 29 percent. Historically, institutions in the Caribbean have privileged men over women, and women's care burdens remain high. Regionally, women still face barriers like the burden of the domestic sphere.¹⁴⁹ Women, especially single mothers, face higher disaster risk and slower recovery, heightening poverty vulnerability.¹⁵⁰ Therefore, this bloc may also implement gender concerns into disaster risk reductions and advocate for protections on female-headed households.

For example, in Barbados by 2024, 26.7 percent of seats in

parliament were held by women.¹⁵¹ In addition, Barbados elected their first female Head of government in 2018.¹⁵² Another example is Trinidad and Tobago, who in 2018 implemented the National Policy and Gender Development Action Plan.¹⁵³ Here, they recognized international agreements like the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) as goals that need to be met. This policy touches main barriers that affect women's access to leadership. For example, the first chapter is focused on Transformational Leadership and the fifth chapter talks about Governance, Domestic and Family Life.¹⁵⁴ Despite the efforts of these countries, they must continue working to achieve greater gender equality.

States with Minimal Gender Representation on Parliament

Countries in this bloc have a percentage between 0-20 percent on the study made by IPU Parlaine. These countries show the lowest

levels of women's participation in their respective governments. In many cases, gender quotas are absent or not enforced. Low women's representation shows not only obstacles for how candidates are chosen and elected, but also wider social and legal barriers.

For example, Brazil has only 18.1 percent of women in parliament. The unequal distribution of funding for female candidates by parties and the ongoing bias against women affects the participant number.¹⁵⁵ Russia has about 16.4 percent of women in parliament. In Russia's case, women are affected by a lack of specific policies that address these issues.¹⁵⁶ In Algeria, women hold only 7.9 percent of seats, a decline after the 2021 reforms. These reforms saw a new open-list system that, combined with legal loopholes, made it easier for parties and voters to ignore women as candidates.¹⁵⁷ In Iran, only 4.9 percent of seats in parliament are occupied by women. This underrepresentation is rooted in systemic legal and cultural barriers, including laws and social norms that restrict women's involvement

147 Why Gender Equality Matters?, "Gender Parity in Parliament In Numbers."

148 "Only Two Caribbean Countries Meet 30% Gender Quota for Women Parliamentarians: Region Cannot Reach Full Potential Without Including Women in Leadership Roles," UN Women Caribbean, last edited November, 2023, caribbean.unwomen.org/en/stories/news/2023/11/only-two-caribbean-countries-meet-30-gender-quota-for-women-parliamentarians.

149 Lilia Burunciuc, "Five trends in gender (in)equality in the Caribbean," World Bank, last edited March 8, 2023, blogs.worldbank.org/en/latinamerica/five-trends-gender-inequality-caribbean.

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152 "Profile: The Honourable Mia Mottley," Nelson Mandela Foundation, accessed August 16, 2025, www.nelsonmandela.org/profile-the-honourable-mia-mottley.

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156 Marianna Muravyeva, "Women's Rights and the Russian Constitution," *Verfassungsblog*, Global Constitutionalism WZB, February 9, 2024, verfassungsblog.de/womens-rights-and-the-russian-constitution/.

157 Ahmed Marwane, "Women and Politics in Algeria: One Step Forward, Two Steps Back," *Fikra Forum*, Washington Institute, September 15, 2021, www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/women-and-politics-algeria-one-step-forward-two-steps-back

in political life.¹⁵⁸ The same is true for Yemen, with 0 percent of seats occupied by women and affected by not only legal barriers, but also armed conflicts that have worsened their situation. After Yemen's armed conflict arose, so did attacks and abuse against women.¹⁵⁹

Countries in this bloc may aim to propose solutions that are rooted

in changing laws and enforcing women participation in their respective governments. However, Reforms should be nationally led and paced to local context. This bloc may to some extent enforce candidate quotas, give financial and institutional support to female candidates, tackle social and cultural barriers, and protect

women from political and domestic violence. Without specific steps that tackle these issues, gender inequality will continue to be a barrier for women to be part of decision-making positions. Overall, the goal is to expand participation while respecting national laws and resources.

COMMITTEE MISSION

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is an intergovernmental body dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and the rights and the empowerment of women, established by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).¹⁶⁰ It is responsible for shaping global standards on gender equality. The goal of this committee is to discuss the barriers to achieving gender equality, as well as possible feasible solutions to demolish these barriers. The discussion around the role of women in leadership and governance is crucial for this committee, as it helps organize and encourage practical actions to be taken by states. Delegates are called upon to actively participate in this discussion to improve the lives of women around the world.

Policies, laws, and private encouragement for women to have the same opportunities and rights in all spheres of life as men can help address this issue.¹⁶¹ However, CSW can only make recommendations and work with partner organizations to achieve this. Gender quotas, specific laws, policies for institutions and private companies, as well as government incentives that encourage the increase of the participation of women may also be necessary for the current reality to change. Breaking from social norms is not an easy task, but it becomes easier when the states are willing to focus and identify the roots of any inequalities in leadership, contributing to finding a solution that will properly address the problem. This is essential to

improve the rights of women in governance.

Achieving gender equality is a foundation for a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable world.¹⁶² That is why it is also one of the goals for 2030. It is therefore urgent that all states make a genuine commitment to women's representation, uphold women's right to participate in public life, and actively work to facilitate their inclusion.

158 "Factsheet · Women and Girls' Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran," Impact Iran, December 2, 2024, impactiran.org/2024/12/02/upr2025-women-and-girls-rights-in-the-islamic-republic-of-iran/

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RESEARCH AND PREPARATION QUESTIONS

The following research and preparation questions are meant to help you begin your research on your country's policy. These questions should be carefully considered, as they embody some of the main critical thought and learning objectives surrounding your topic.

Topic A

1. What is the current percentage of women in your country that work in the informal sector? Does it have any relation with their economic status? How has this changed in recent years?
2. What laws, protections or social programs does your country have around the informal economy for women? How could these be adapted through international cooperation to assist states facing challenges in implementation?
3. Does your country have any restrictions for women's employment in the formal economy? How are they being addressed?
4. Has your country participated in international efforts to address women in the informal economy? Who have they partnered with?
5. What were the latest policies your country has made regarding women in the informal economy? What were the results? Was it successful?
6. Considering the geographical, socioeconomic and cultural circumstances of your country, what are the main factors impacting women's employment?

Topic B

1. Does your country have quotas or targets regarding the shares of women in politics? What measures has your country previously taken to meet these thresholds? What possible measures could your country take?
2. Does your country have any specific legislation regarding gender equality in public campaign funding?
3. What strategies has your country implemented to empower women?
4. Is your country taking any actions regarding the presence of other minority groups in leadership and governance positions? Have they been successful? Can they be applied to women or to other countries?
5. Does your country have any specific legislation on guaranteeing or encouraging women's security or financial independence?
6. Does your country provide any kind of encouragement to private companies to fulfill quotas and targets for women in decision making positions? Are there any sanctions for the private sector for non compliance with specific targets related to gender equality?

IMPORTANT DOCUMENTS

Topic A

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