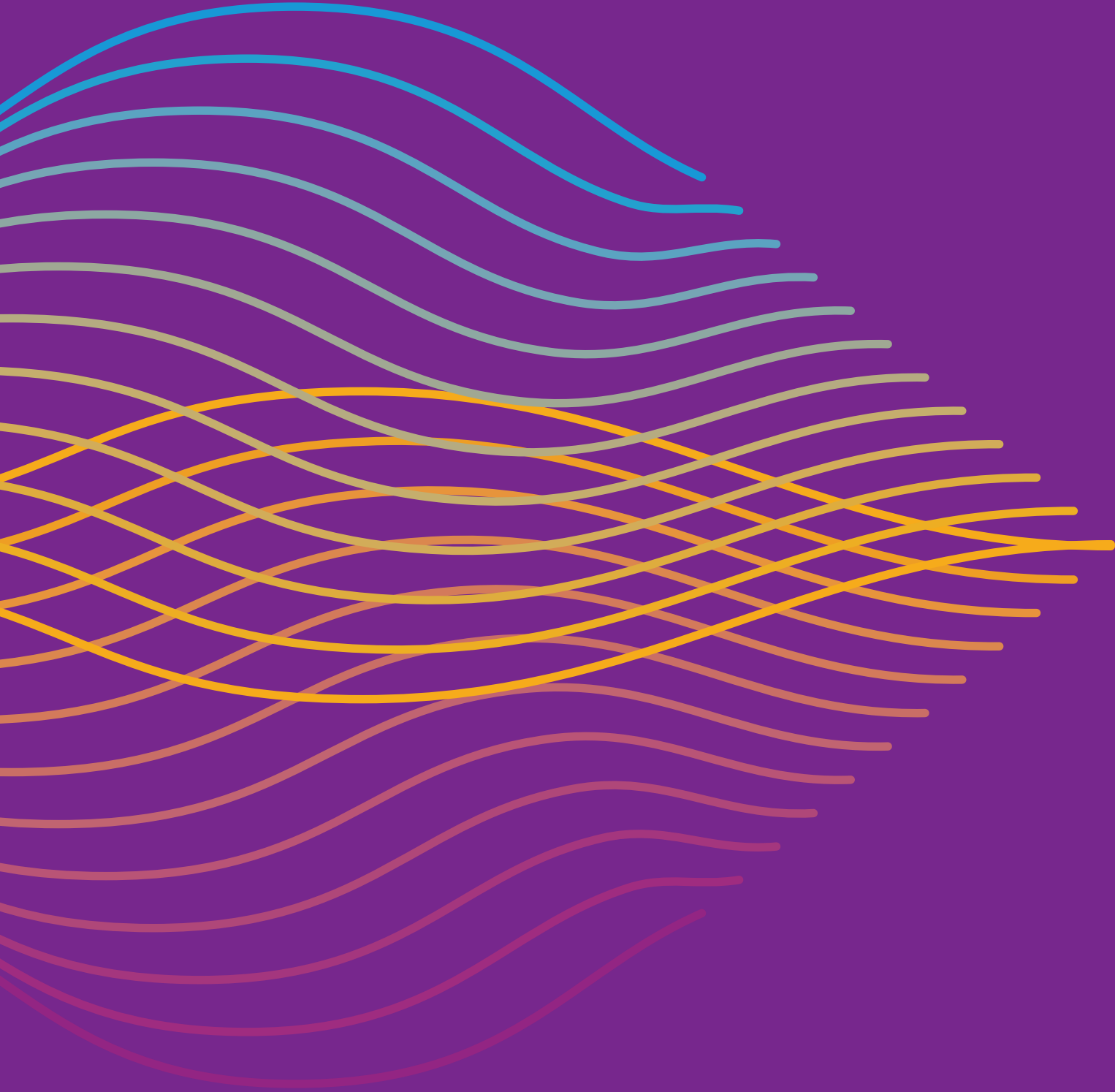


PROGRESS OF THE WORLD'S WOMEN 2015-2016  
SUMMARY



TRANSFORMING  
ECONOMIES,  
REALIZING RIGHTS



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# SUMMARY

PROGRESS OF THE WORLD'S WOMEN 2015-2016

## TRANSFORMING ECONOMIES, REALIZING RIGHTS

# TRANSFORMING ECONOMIES, REALIZING RIGHTS

Twenty years after the landmark Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, and at a time when the global community is defining the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for the post-2015 era, the international consensus on the need to achieve gender equality seems stronger than ever before.<sup>1</sup> Empowering women and girls is among the goals aspired to by all, from grassroots organizations, trade unions and corporations to Member States and intergovernmental bodies. But how far has this consensus been translated into tangible progress on the ground, and what more is needed to bridge the gaps between rhetoric and reality?

Drawing on promising experiences from around the world, this Report proposes a comprehensive agenda for key policy actors—including gender equality advocates, national governments and international agencies—to make human rights a lived reality for all women and girls.

Governments in every region have made legally binding commitments to respect, protect and fulfil women's human rights, recognizing their intrinsic value as well as the synergies between women's rights and wider prosperity. Women's access to decent employment is not only likely to improve their agency and the distributional dynamics within the household but can also lift whole households out of poverty. Improvements in their health and education are key contributors to women's own well-being and life chances and are also linked to better outcomes for their children. In the long term, societies and economies can only thrive if they make full use of women's skills and capacities.

There have been significant achievements since Beijing: more girls are enrolling in school; and more women are working, getting elected and assuming leadership positions. Where once it was regarded as a private matter, preventing and redressing violence against women and girls is at last on the public policy agenda. Women have gained greater legal rights

to access employment, own and inherit property and get married and divorced on the same terms as men. These areas of progress show that gender inequalities can be reduced through public action.

However, while hugely important, these changes have not yet resulted in equal outcomes for women and men. Globally, three quarters of working age men are in the labour force compared to half of working age women.<sup>2</sup> Among those who are employed, women constitute nearly two thirds of 'contributing family workers', who work in family businesses without any direct pay.<sup>3</sup> Everywhere, women continue to be denied equal pay for work of equal value and are less likely than men to receive a pension, which translates into large income inequalities throughout their lives. Globally, women's earnings are 24 per cent less than men's, and even in countries such as Germany—where policies are increasingly supportive of female employment—women on average earn just half as much income as men over their lifetimes.<sup>4</sup> Yet, in all regions women work more than men: they do almost two and a half times as much unpaid care and domestic work as men, and if paid and unpaid work are combined, women in almost all countries work longer hours than men each day.<sup>5</sup>

This Report focuses on the economic and social dimensions of gender equality, including the right of all women to a good job, with fair pay and safe working conditions, to an adequate pension in older age, to health care and to safe water, without discrimination based on factors such as socio-economic status, geographic location and race or ethnicity. In doing so, it aims to unravel some of the challenges and contradictions facing the world today: at a time when women and girls have almost equal opportunities when it comes to education, why are only half of women of working age in the labour force globally, and why do women still earn much less than men? In an era of unprecedented global wealth, why are large numbers of women not able to exercise

their right to even basic levels of health care, water and sanitation?

As the Report shows, these inequalities are not inevitable. Economic and social policies can contribute to the creation of stronger economies, and to more sustainable and more gender-equal societies, if they are designed and implemented with women's rights at their centre.

## **A CHALLENGING GLOBAL CONTEXT FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS**

The world has changed significantly since the Beijing conference in 1995. The rise of extremism, escalating violent conflict, recurrent and deepening economic crises, volatile food and energy prices, food insecurity, natural disasters and the effects of climate change have intensified vulnerability and increased inequalities. Financial globalization, trade liberalization, the ongoing privatization of public services and the ever-expanding role of corporate interests in the development process have shifted power relations in ways that undermine the enjoyment of human rights and the building of sustainable livelihoods. The world is both wealthier and more unequal today than at any point since World War II. The richest 1 per cent of the world's population now owns about 40 per cent of the world's assets, while the bottom half owns no more than 1 per cent.<sup>6</sup>

The gap between rich and poor women remains vast both between and within countries. A woman in Sierra Leone is 100 times more likely to die in childbirth than a woman in Canada.<sup>7</sup> In the least developed countries, a woman living in a rural area is 38 per cent less likely to give birth with a skilled health professional than her counterpart in the city.<sup>8</sup> In Latin America, rates of illiteracy among indigenous women are often more than double those of non-indigenous women.<sup>9</sup> Since 2000, these glaring disparities have narrowed in some countries, but in others they have actually widened.<sup>10</sup> Gender discrimination compounds other forms of disadvantage—on the basis of socio-economic status, geographic location, race, caste and ethnicity, sexuality or disability—to limit women's and girls' opportunities and life chances.

Seven years after the global financial crisis, the world continues to struggle with low growth and high unemployment. Policy makers in rich and poor

countries alike face huge challenges in creating enough decent jobs for all those who need them. And austerity policies in both developed and developing countries are shifting the burden of coping and caring back to families and onto the shoulders of women and girls.<sup>11</sup>

Changes in the global economy have not been beneficial for the majority of men either. For example, in some countries where gender pay gaps have narrowed this has been in the context of falling real wages for *both* women and men, and the gaps have narrowed only because men's wages have fallen more dramatically than women's. This can hardly be considered 'progress', as instead of women catching up with men, there is a levelling down for all.

In response to these challenges, a variety of actors—bilateral and multilateral agencies, governments, civil society organizations and the private sector—have embraced the need for women's economic empowerment. Some see in women a largely untapped market of consumers, while others speak about the opportunity of 'unleashing the economic power and potential of women'<sup>12</sup> as a means to solve the persistent problems caused by the global financial crisis and stalled growth. But while gender equality clearly contributes to broader economic and social goals, not all pathways to economic development advance gender equality.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, some patterns of economic growth are premised on maintaining gender inequalities in conditions of work and earnings and enforcing unequal patterns of unpaid work that consign women to domestic drudgery. Without a monitoring framework solidly anchored in human rights, it is difficult to know whether claims of empowering women stand up to scrutiny. This Report therefore underlines the centrality of women's human rights as both the 'end' and an effective 'means' of development.

## **SUBSTANTIVE EQUALITY: MAKING RIGHTS REAL FOR WOMEN**

Laws that establish that women and men have equal rights provide an important basis for demanding and achieving equality in practice. They can be a central reference point for political and cultural struggles, driving changes in social norms and popular attitudes as well as policy shifts. But making women's rights real requires more than just legal reform.

The translation of equality before the law into equal outcomes is not automatic. Even where gender-equal laws have been put into place, entrenched inequalities, discriminatory social norms, harmful customary practices, as well as dominant patterns of economic development, can undermine their implementation and positive impact.

International human rights treaties—such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)—are legally binding commitments that require States to respect, protect and fulfil women’s rights. As such, they encapsulate a substantive understanding of gender equality that can serve as both a vision and an agenda for action for those seeking to advance women’s rights in today’s challenging context. While formal equality refers to the adoption of laws and policies that treat women and men equally, substantive equality is concerned with the results and outcomes of these: ‘ensuring that they do not maintain, but rather alleviate, the inherent disadvantage that particular groups experience.’<sup>14</sup>

This Report uses international human rights standards to assess laws and policies for their actual effect on women and girls on the ground. From this perspective, the achievement of substantive equality requires action in three interrelated areas: redressing women’s socio-economic disadvantage; addressing stereotyping, stigma and violence; and strengthening women’s agency, voice and participation. Coordinated public action across all three of these dimensions has the potential to trigger the lasting transformations that are necessary to achieve substantive equality for women (see Figure 1).

More of the same will not do. While numerical parity in access to education, employment or social protection is an important goal, it does not mean concrete enjoyment of rights or substantive equality. Rather than simply absorbing more girls into underfunded educational systems, schools must provide quality education and a safe learning environment for girls and boys and should also contribute to the promotion of equality through progressive curricula and well-trained teachers. Rather than incorporating more women into

increasingly precarious and unrewarding forms of employment, labour markets must be transformed in ways that work for both women and men and benefit society at large. Substantive equality requires fundamental transformation of economic and social institutions—including the beliefs, norms and attitudes that shape them—at every level of society, from households to labour markets and from communities to local, national and global governance institutions.

Progress towards substantive equality should be measured against how inclusive it is of the rights of poor and marginalized women and girls. It is therefore important to look beyond ‘averages’ to make sure that all women are able to enjoy their rights. Rights are also indivisible: how can women claim the rights to quality health care, to decent working conditions or to own land on which to grow food without having the right to information about laws, policies and government budget allocations and the right to organize to claim them? The right to organize and scrutinize public budgets often drives efforts to ensure public services meet women’s needs better; and having access to a range of high quality services can in turn support women’s right to work, creating powerful synergies.

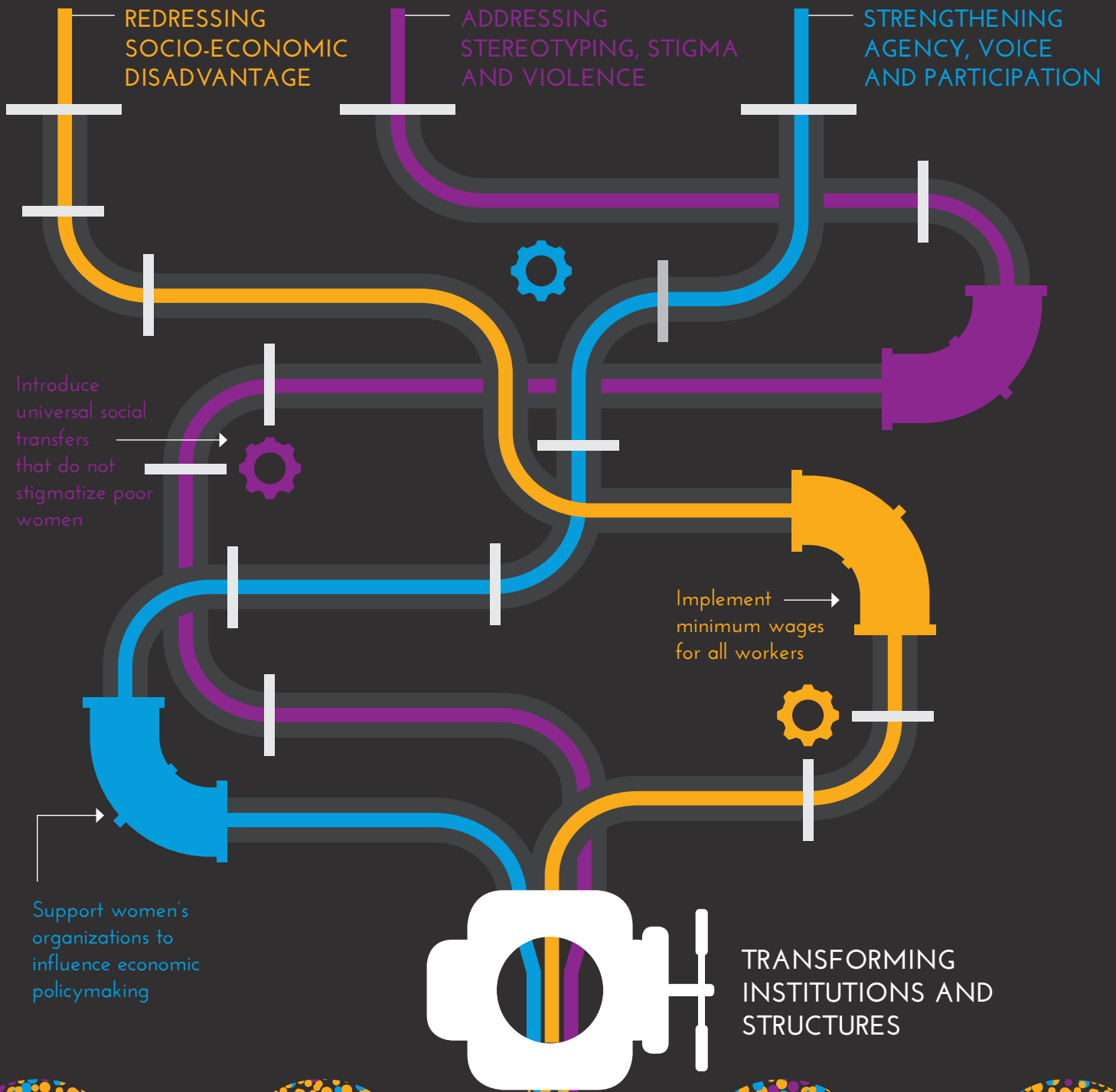
## **TRANSFORMING ECONOMIES, REALIZING RIGHTS: AN AGENDA FOR ACTION**

To support substantive equality, economic and social policies need to work in tandem. Typically, the role of economic policies is seen primarily in terms of promoting economic growth, while social policies are supposed to address its ‘casualties’ by redressing poverty and disadvantage and reducing inequality. But macroeconomic policies can pursue a broader set of goals, including gender equality and social justice. Conversely, well-designed social policies can enhance macroeconomic growth and post-crisis recovery through redistributive measures that increase employment, productivity and aggregate demand.

Ultimately, the aim is to create a virtuous cycle through the generation of decent work and gender-responsive social protection and social services, alongside enabling macroeconomic policies that prioritize investment in human beings and the fulfilment of social objectives. Action is needed in the

Figure 1

# A FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING SUBSTANTIVE EQUALITY



following three priority areas to transform economies and realize women's economic and social rights: decent work for women, gender-responsive social policies and rights-based macroeconomic policies.

### Transforming work for women's rights

Paid work can be a foundation for substantive equality for women, but only when it is compatible with women's and men's shared responsibility for unpaid care work; when it gives women enough time for leisure and learning; when it provides earnings that are sufficient to maintain an adequate standard of living; and when women are treated with respect and dignity at work.

Yet, this type of employment remains scarce, and economic policies in all regions are struggling to generate enough decent jobs for those who need them. Furthermore, the range of opportunities available to women is limited by pervasive gender stereotypes and discriminatory practices within both households and labour markets. As a result, the vast majority of women still work in insecure, informal employment.

Women's heavy responsibilities for unpaid care and domestic work limit the types of work they can undertake, which reinforces their socio-economic disadvantage. Measures to reduce the drudgery of unpaid work through investment in time-saving infrastructure, childcare services and parental leave policies can free up women's time for paid work and expand their choices.

Alongside economic policies that can create decent jobs, measures are needed to challenge the persistent devaluation of 'women's work' that drives occupational segregation and gender pay gaps. Labour rights and social protection need to be extended to those in informal employment, while investments in basic infrastructure—such as safe and secure vending spaces in cities—and efforts to increase rural women's access to markets are also required.

### Making social policy work for women

Social transfers—including family allowances, unemployment benefits and pensions—protect women and men in the face of contingencies such as unemployment or old age. They also help families

shoulder some of the costs involved in raising children or caring for other dependents—challenges that have become more pressing in the face of population ageing and changing family structures. Public services that directly address women's rights are just as important and often have an even greater impact than social transfers in reducing poverty and gender inequality.

A comprehensive approach to social policy that combines universal access to social services with social protection through contributory and non-contributory transfer systems is the best way to realize economic and social rights for all. Currently, only 27 per cent of the world's population enjoy full access to social protection, whereas 73 per cent are covered partially or not at all.<sup>15</sup> Women are often over-represented among those who lack such access.

In order to contribute to substantive equality, social policies have to be designed with women's rights at the centre. Particular care is needed to ensure that policies such as conditional cash transfers, which are often targeted at women, redress recipients' socio-economic disadvantage without either reinforcing gender stereotypes or stigmatizing them for needing support. Investing in more and better services—including health and childcare services, and water and sanitation—is crucial to address women's needs head-on and to bolster their income security in the long term.

### Towards an enabling macroeconomic environment

Because macroeconomic policy is treated as 'gender-neutral' it has, to date, failed to support the achievement of substantive equality for women. From a human rights perspective, macroeconomic policy needs to pursue a broad set of social objectives that would mean expanding the targets of monetary policy to include the creation of decent work, mobilizing resources to enable investments in social services and transfers and creating channels for meaningful participation by civil society organizations, including women's movements, in macroeconomic decision-making.

Conventional monetary policy typically has one target—inflation reduction—and a narrow set of



policy tools for achieving it. However, there are other policy options: in the wake of the 2008 crisis, many central banks changed their approach to monetary policy by stimulating real economic activity to protect jobs rather than focusing exclusively on reducing inflation. In the arena of fiscal policy, countries can raise resources for gender-sensitive social protection and social services by enforcing existing tax obligations, reprioritizing expenditure and expanding the overall tax base, as well as through international borrowing and development assistance.

Global policy coordination is essential to create a macroeconomic environment that is conducive to the realization of women's rights. The growing integration of the world's economies means that actions taken by one government affect the realization of rights elsewhere. Global cooperation for the realization of economic and social rights can only be achieved if institutions of global governance such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the G20 and the World Trade Organization are democratized; and when powerful global players, from national governments to transnational corporations, accept that the obligation to respect, protect and fulfil human rights extends beyond borders.

### **SHARING RESPONSIBILITY AND ACTING COLLECTIVELY FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS**

Human rights emphasize the dignity and freedom of the individual, but their realization depends heavily on solidarity and collective action. Putting in place policies for substantive equality requires collective financing, ideally through progressive taxation. The narrow targeting of social protection to the poorest households may seem to make it more affordable than building universal systems that benefit everyone. However, universal systems can actually expand financing options by increasing the willingness of middle and higher income groups to pay taxes for well-functioning education, health or pension systems that they also use.<sup>16</sup>

Collective action is crucial as well. Women who experience multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination need to first understand and claim their rights—something that often happens when women get together to discuss their grievances

and act collectively to seek solutions. Women's organizing and the strength of their autonomous movements are the strongest predictors of gender equality laws and policies across a range of areas, from family law to violence against women and from non-discrimination in employment to childcare services.<sup>17</sup>

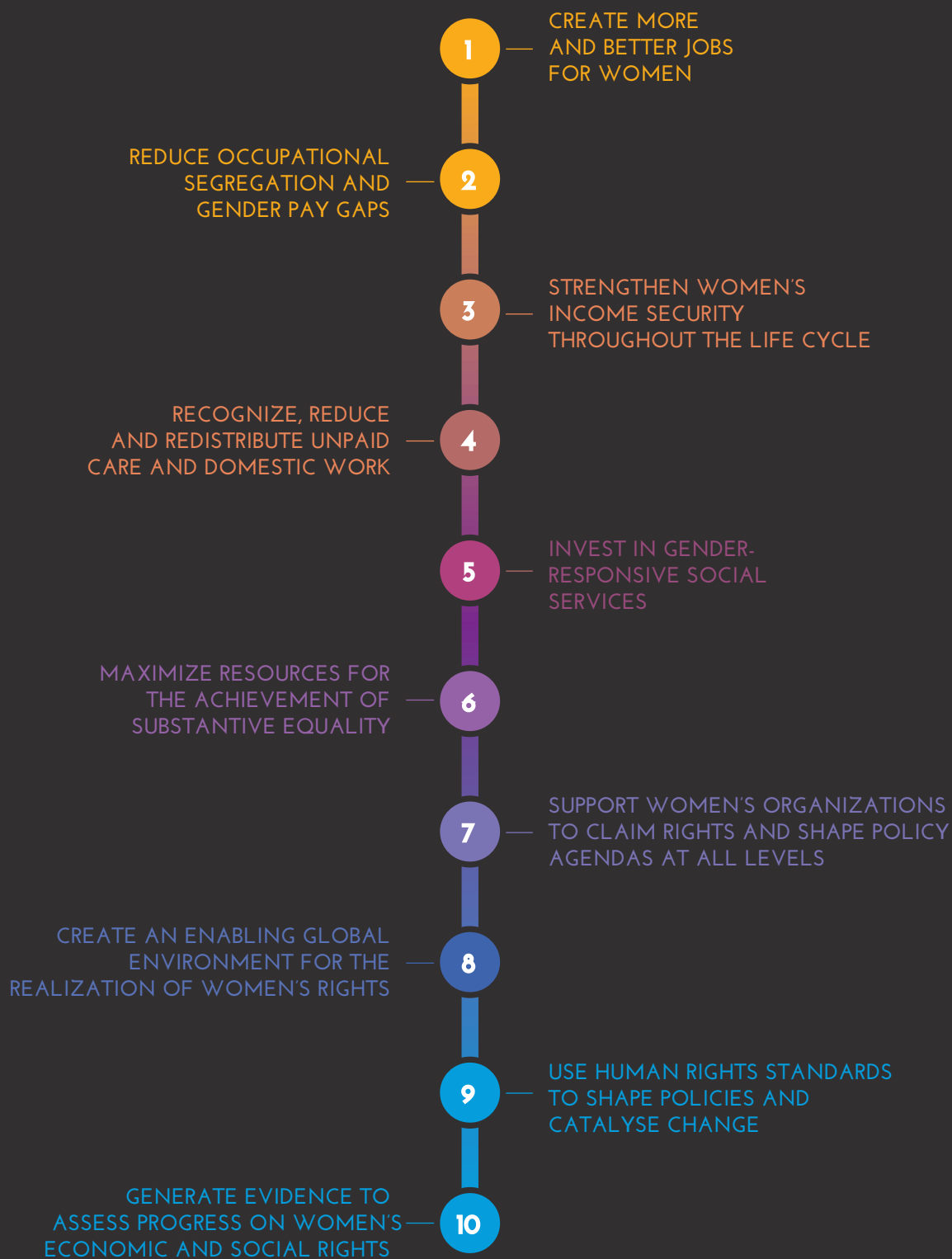
The potential to advance towards substantive equality is greatest when the claims of organized groups of women find openings and receptivity among actors in positions of power, and when there are mechanisms in place such as public consultation and petitioning processes, or parliamentary committees through which women can legitimately articulate their claims and policy demands.

### **MOVING FORWARD: AN AGENDA FOR PUBLIC ACTION**

Ten priorities for public action are set out in the Report. They span the imperatives to create decent work, implement gender-responsive social policies and adopt a rights-based macroeconomic policy framework. They highlight the need for resource mobilization, an enabling global environment, support for women's organizing and an expanded evidence base on women's economic and social rights, in order to achieve substantive equality. They should be deliberated and fine-tuned through open dialogue involving the active participation of civil society organizations representing the interests of women and girls, especially the most disadvantaged.

The capacity of States to advance substantive equality for women differs according to their size and level of development. Human rights treaties make it clear that there are core obligations that States must realize immediately, including non-discrimination and equality in the enjoyment of rights, as well as meeting minimum essential levels of rights. States must also ensure that rights are realized progressively over time and guard against their erosion. But, within this framework, there is scope for countries to identify their own paths and policy choices, adapted to the specificities of their contexts, for achieving substantive equality for women.

# 10 PRIORITIES FOR PUBLIC ACTION



# 1. CREATE MORE AND BETTER JOBS FOR WOMEN

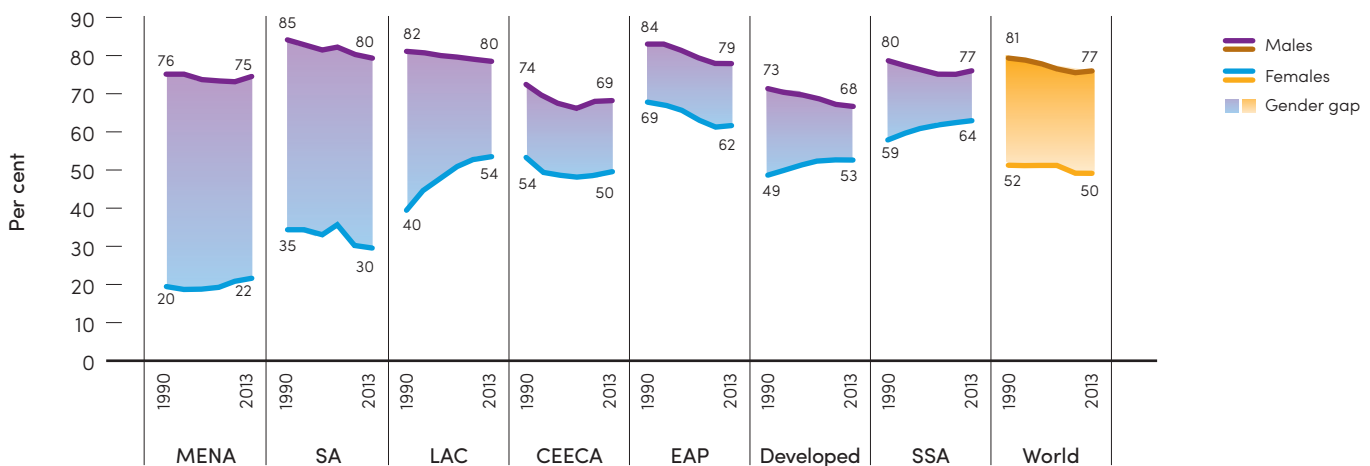
Income from work is a foundation for people’s livelihoods and life chances. However, at global level, women’s labour force participation has stalled (see Figure 2). In addition, economic policies have failed to create enough decent jobs, making it difficult for people to work their way out of poverty. This is particularly true for women, who are over-represented among those in precarious, informal and low-wage employment. With the right economic and social policies, it is possible to reverse this trend (see Box 1).

A number of concrete measures are needed to create more and better jobs for women:

- Designing macroeconomic policies that stimulate economic activity and increase demand for labour, rather than focusing on an overly narrow set of targets such as maintaining inflation at very low levels
- Investing in public services to create decent jobs in health, education, child and elderly care, public administration and agricultural extension services
- Increasing the viability of, and returns to, self-employment by investing in transport and other infrastructure, access to markets, training and subsidized credit
- Involving women informal workers in urban planning and decision-making to ensure that city environments are conducive to their work and provide decent and safe working conditions
- Promoting joint land titling, extension services, input subsidies and measures to increase access to markets for women small-scale farmers.

**Figure 2**  
Labour force participation rate by sex and region, 1990–2013

→ Globally, women’s labour force participation rates have stagnated, albeit with significant regional variation



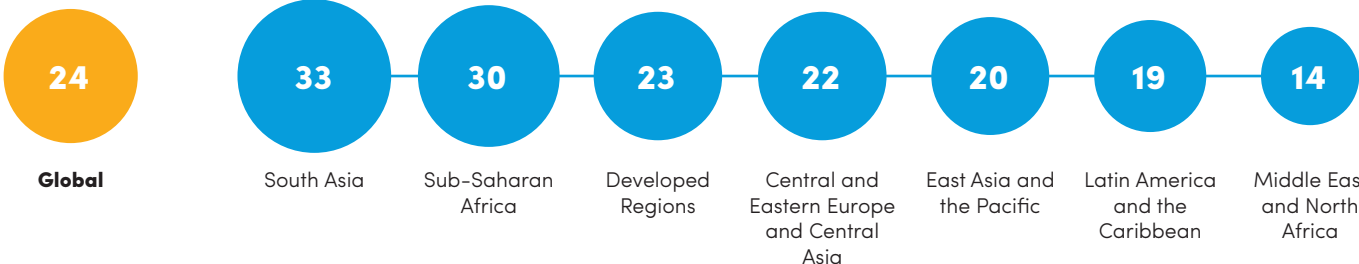
Source: Weighted averages calculated by UN Women using data from International Labour Organization (ILO). 2015. "Key Indicators of the Labour Market (KILM) Database." Accessed January 2015.  
Note: See UN Women’s regional groupings for the list of countries and territories included in each region in Annex 7, *Progress of the World’s Women 2015–2016*.

# 2. REDUCE OCCUPATIONAL SEGREGATION AND GENDER PAY GAPS

Figure 3

Unadjusted gender pay gap, percentage by geographic region

→ Globally, women earn on average 24 per cent less than men, with variation across regions



Note: See Annex 4 in *Progress of the World's Women 2015-2016*, for full list of sources and notes.

Gender-based occupational segregation is pervasive across all regions. Globally, women are over-represented in clerical and support positions (63 per cent) compared to managerial occupations (33 per cent).<sup>18</sup> In addition to occupational segregation, substantial gender pay gaps are a feature of almost all labour markets (see Figure 3).<sup>19</sup>

Without redressing women's socio-economic disadvantage resulting from occupational segregation and unequal earnings, substantive equality will remain out of reach. Public action

must address the root causes of occupational segregation, including differences in education, training and experience, as well as deeply ingrained stereotypes about women's and men's roles in society by:

- Properly valuing female-dominated occupations, including care jobs, so that levels of remuneration are commensurate with workers' skills and the contribution of their work to well-functioning economies and societies more broadly

- Promoting education, including basic literacy for adult women, on-the-job training, including in non-traditional skills, and mentoring to enable women to move up the occupational ladder
- Providing careers advice for young women and encouragement to study science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and other male-dominated subjects, as well as access to technical and vocational education and training, complete with support for unpaid care responsibilities
- Addressing pervasive sexual harassment and violence in the workplace through specific laws, training for staff, adequate grievance procedures and support for women to take their cases through the justice system
- Using targets and quotas to increase women's representation in male-dominated occupations, including in decision-making roles in the public sector.

## BOX 1

### The role of the state in generating decent work in Brazil

Between 2001 and 2009, 17 million new jobs were created in Brazil, of which more than 10 million were those where employees hold social security cards (*Carteira de Trabalho*). This represents a major turnaround from the 1990s, when unemployment doubled, informality rose sharply and real wages declined.<sup>20</sup> It shows that the right government action can yield impressive results, even against a backdrop of increasing flexibility and vulnerability of employment in the global economy.

Women's labour force participation rates rose from 54 to 58 per cent between 2001 and 2009, and the proportion accessing jobs with social security cards increased from 30 to 35 per cent.<sup>21</sup> The doubling of the minimum wage in the 2000s has also had a significant impact on gender pay gaps. Between 1995 and 2007, the gender pay gap declined from 38 to 29 per cent. Importantly, this decline has been achieved through increases in both women's and men's wages rather than because men's wages have fallen.<sup>22</sup>

Brazil's achievements in creating decent jobs are the result of a package of economic and social policies. Macroeconomic policy aimed at inclusive growth has contributed to job creation. Investments in labour inspection, and the simplification of registration costs and tax administration for small and medium-sized firms, have promoted the formalization of jobs and enterprises.<sup>23</sup> The rise in the real value of minimum wages has helped to reduce poverty and has contributed 66 per cent of the decline in inequality between 2000 and 2008. Social protection policies have also had a major impact: a further 16 per cent of the drop in inequality was due to the increase in pension benefits and 12 per cent to the *Bolsa Familia* social welfare programme.<sup>24</sup>

# 3. STRENGTHEN WOMEN'S INCOME SECURITY THROUGHOUT THE LIFE CYCLE

Due to their unequal employment opportunities and predominance in low-paid occupations, women are particularly vulnerable to economic insecurity and financial dependence. Household surveys show that women of working age are more likely than men to live in a poor household in 41 out of 75 countries with data.

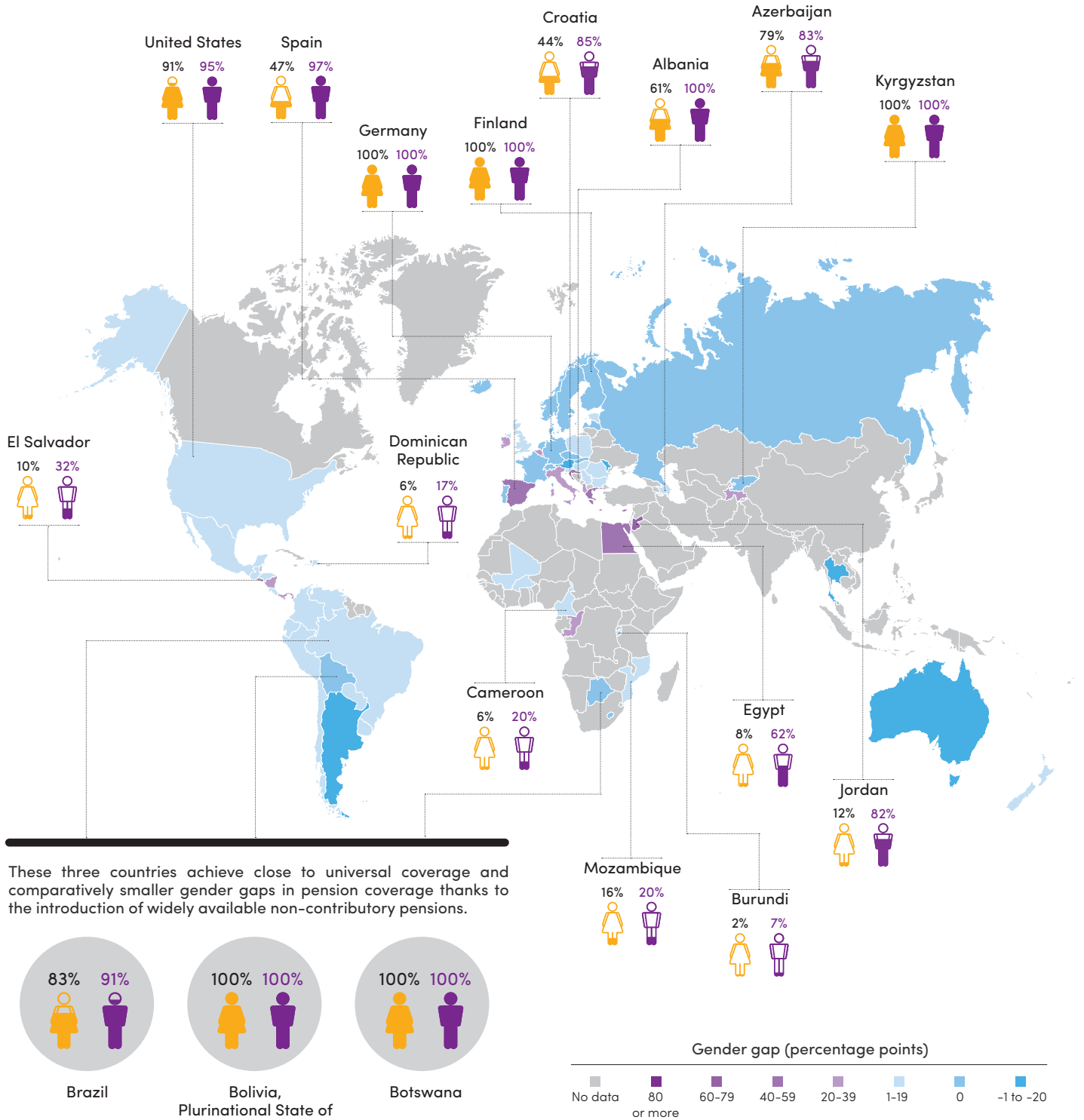
Properly designed fiscal, wage and social protection policies—including minimum wages, family and child allowances and old-age pensions—can be powerful tools to reduce poverty, redress women's socio-economic disadvantage and guarantee their right to an adequate standard of living. These are particularly important in the context of changing demographic, family and household structures and in the face of economic shocks. Concrete steps can be taken to strengthen women's income security by:

- Providing access to unemployment protection, including through public works programmes, and putting a floor under wages through well-designed minimum wage policies, which are also shown to reduce gender pay gaps
- Providing child allowances to support families with the costs of raising children as well as non-contributory pensions to ensure women's income security in old age (see Figure 4)
- Making social transfers unconditional and universal where possible to avoid stigma and stereotyping
- Ensuring cash transfer programmes have women's rights at their heart by involving gender equality advocates in their design and by using them as a mechanism for providing skills training and access to services that enable women's empowerment
- Reforming contributory pension systems to reduce gender gaps in access and benefit levels, including through the introduction of care credits to compensate for contributions 'lost' during periods out of the labour force looking after dependents
- Ensuring that all benefit levels are regularly adjusted to take account of increases in the cost of living.

Figure 4

Proportion of people above statutory pensionable age receiving an old-age pension by sex, selected countries, 2006–2012

—> In most countries, women are less likely to receive an old-age pension than men



Source: International Labour Organization (ILO). 2014. *World Social Protection Report 2014–15: Building Economic Recovery, Inclusive Development and Social Justice*. Geneva: ILO.

Note: Data refer to the most recent available during the period specified. See Annex 5 in *Progress of the World's Women 2015–2016*, for a complete list of countries with data. The amount of pension benefits women and men receive differ widely across and within countries. Even if a relatively large share of women and men receive an old-age pension, there may be large gender gaps in benefit levels; or non-contributory pensions, on which women rely more strongly than men.

# 4. RECOGNIZE, REDUCE AND REDISTRIBUTE UNPAID CARE AND DOMESTIC WORK

Unpaid care and domestic work contribute to economic development and human well-being through nurturing people who are fit, productive and capable of learning and creativity. But the burden of doing this work is unequally distributed. In the absence of adequate support for care services, women’s disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care and domestic work can reinforce their socio-economic disadvantage by constraining their access to education, health care and paid work, as well as their participation in political and cultural life (see Figure 5).

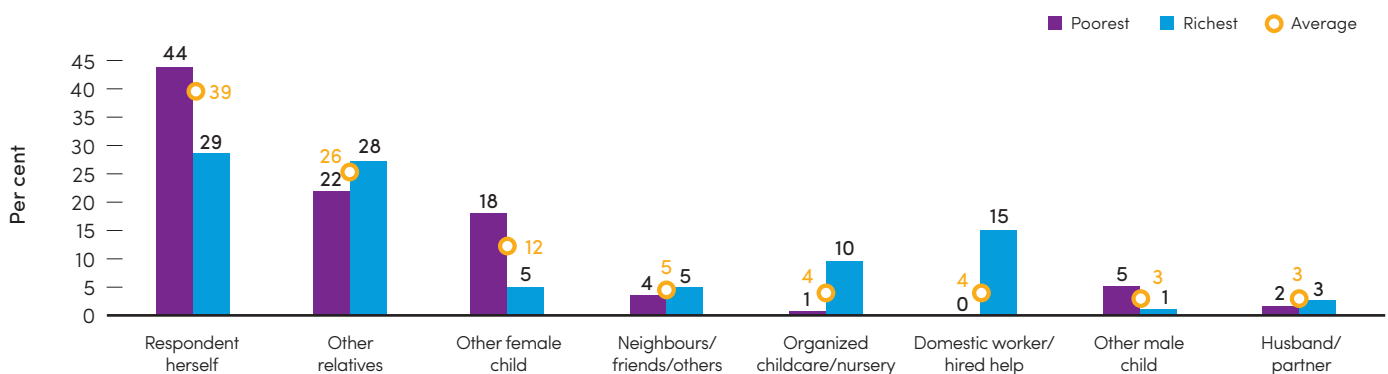
In order to achieve substantive equality for women, unpaid care and domestic work needs to be recognized, reduced and redistributed by:

- Scaling up investments in basic infrastructure, including water and sanitation facilities that are accessible, affordable and meet quality standards
- Strengthening basic social services such as education and health that complement unpaid caregiving and are an important source of employment for women
- Providing support to unpaid caregivers, ensuring that they have a voice in policy-making and recognizing them as part of, but not a substitute for, strong public care systems
- Providing accessible, affordable and quality child and elderly care that is responsive to the needs of working parents and other unpaid caregivers
- Working towards a comprehensive paid leave system, including maternity, paternity and parental leave, available to all workers, including those in informal employment, with special incentives for fathers to take up their share.

Figure 5

Typical childcare arrangement for employed women with children under age 6

—> *Very few employed women in developing countries have access to organized childcare or nurseries*



Source: Unweighted averages calculated by UN Women using data from ICF International. 2015. "The DHS Program Statcompiler." Accessed March 2015.

Notes: N=31 developing countries. Surveys were conducted between 1995 and 2002. This indicator corresponds to the percentage of respondents answering the question 'Who looks after your child(ren) while you are at work?'



# 5. INVEST IN GENDER-RESPONSIVE SOCIAL SERVICES

Public services are essential for the realization of women's rights and the achievement of substantive equality in many areas. Without adequate health services, for example, women and girls struggle to realize their sexual and reproductive rights. And, as previously discussed, without affordable childcare options, women's right to work is constrained. Investment in public services must to be scaled up and their delivery transformed to respond to women's rights (see Box 2). Concrete steps include:

- Substantially increasing investments in public services, including health, water and sanitation and care services, and ensuring their affordability by replacing user fees with collective forms of financing through, for example, social security or general taxation
- Working towards universal access to affordable health care through national health systems or the effective combination of insurance contributions and public funding
- Bringing essential health-care services closer to women through community health workers and mobile clinics
- Providing integrated services to address violence against women as well as comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services, including family planning, information and education
- Scaling up the reach and quality of care services for children and dependent adults, including people with disabilities and the frail elderly
- Promoting positive relations between those using care services and service-providers by creating awareness about women's rights among staff, providing incentives for them to respect women's rights and ensuring the adequacy of their pay and conditions of work.

## BOX 2

### Rwanda's rapid decline in maternal mortality

In 2013, sub-Saharan African countries accounted for an estimated 62 per cent of maternal deaths worldwide.<sup>25</sup> Most of the complications responsible for women's deaths during pregnancy and childbirth can be prevented by enhancing access to family planning, effective antenatal care and skilled birth attendance, including emergency obstetric care. However, take-up of these services is hampered by lack of information, inaccessible facilities and prohibitive costs. And shortcomings in the quality of care result in failures to diagnose and treat pregnancy-related complications.

Rwanda's experience shows that these barriers can be overcome. Following the 1994 genocide, it was among the poorest countries in the world, its health system lay in ruins and maternal mortality rates were well above the regional average. Yet, Rwanda has reduced the number of maternal deaths faster than most other countries in sub-Saharan Africa, from 1,400 deaths per 100,000 live births in 1990 to 310 in 2013. It is one of only four countries in the region that are on track towards meeting the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) target of reducing maternal mortality by three quarters between 1990 and 2015.<sup>26</sup>

A combination of measures lies behind this impressive progress<sup>27</sup>: the rapid roll out of health insurance removed financial barriers to accessing services, in particular for ambulance transfers to higher-level facilities for emergency interventions; the nationwide expansion of adequately equipped public health centres with decentralized management allows for performance-based financing; well-trained community health workers (CHWs) provide antenatal care and delivery services in health centres as well as promoting hygiene, health insurance and family planning; new mobile technologies help CHWs track pregnancies and enable a quick response to pregnancy-related complications and referral for emergency obstetric care if needed; and CHWs and other health-care professionals are given incentives to meet maternal and child health targets and provide quality care, with regular visits to monitor compliance.

## 6. MAXIMIZE RESOURCES FOR THE ACHIEVEMENT OF SUBSTANTIVE EQUALITY

Macroeconomic policies can and should support the realization of women's rights (see Figure 6), by creating dynamic and stable economies, by generating decent work and by mobilizing resources to finance gender-responsive public policies, including social protection. Studies show that basic levels of social protection are affordable even for low-income countries. But funding a comprehensive policy agenda for substantive equality will require further resource mobilization as well as making sure that funds are raised and allocated for the benefit of women and girls. Concrete measures for governments include:

- Reprioritizing expenditure by, for example, redirecting military spending to gender-responsive public services
- Raising additional revenue through general taxation by enforcing existing tax obligations and expanding the overall tax base, being attentive to the distributive consequences: income and property taxes, and taxes on luxury items, are generally more progressive than indirect taxes such as value-added tax (VAT), which can also be made less regressive by exempting basic goods and services
- Borrowing at domestic and international level for social investments in education, health and care services that strengthen human capacities and, just like investments in infrastructure, generate future pay-offs, including a skilled and healthy workforce
- Ensuring revenue is raised from the utilization of natural resources through measures such as royalties and earmarking funds to spend on social protection and social services
- Implementing gender-responsive approaches to budgeting to ensure that policies for mobilizing resources and allocating expenditure are fair in their impact on income distribution and supportive of women's rights.

Figure 6

# A RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH TO MACROECONOMIC POLICY

The divisions between economic and social policy are artificial;  
connecting the two is key to the realization of rights



The full realization of economic and social rights for all

# 7. SUPPORT WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS TO CLAIM RIGHTS AND SHAPE POLICY AGENDAS AT ALL LEVELS

Women's collective action is key to the achievement of substantive equality. It is most effective when women's rights advocates in grassroots and civil society organizations, think tanks and university departments can build strategic alliances with actors in political parties, state bureaucracies and regional and global institutions. This work demands judgment, skill, agility and persistence on the part of advocates, as well as access to information, policy debates and decision-making processes (see story: *Out of the ashes*). Women's agency, voice and participation in these processes can be strengthened by:

- Ensuring a conducive legal framework for women's organizing, including measures to protect space for civil society advocacy on women's rights, and ensuring the right to form and join trade unions
- Scaling up funding for women's organizations to engage in policy advocacy with their governments, including an increase in core and multi-year funding—an area where private and bilateral donors, as well as international organizations, have an important role to play
- Ensuring that women are equally represented in leadership positions in trade unions and other social movements and that women's rights issues are prioritized in collective bargaining processes
- Supporting the creation of feminist knowledge on key policy issues—such as monetary policy, pension system design or health sector reform—that are fundamentally important to women's lives but often require a specialized technical understanding of the field
- Facilitating capacity building among women's organizations to advocate for policy change by, for example, funding training on the gender implications of economic and social policies
- Creating feedback loops from policy implementation through social audits by women's organizations and service users to improve the performance and gender responsiveness of government regulation, social protection and social services.



Photo: UN Women/Saiful huq Omi

→ MAKING PROGRESS/STORIES OF CHANGE

# OUT OF THE ASHES

*Creating positive change from tragedy in Bangladesh's garment sector*

On the morning of 24 April 2013, thousands of factory workers went to work in the eight-storey Rana Plaza commercial building outside of Dhaka. Just hours later the building collapsed, killing 1,137 people and injuring a further 2,500 workers. Most of those who died that morning were women.

Women make up 80 per cent of the 4.2 million strong workforce for the garment export industry and for many, these jobs are the first opportunity for economic independence and a job outside the home. Yet, the Rana Plaza tragedy underlined what a double-edged sword this employment has proved to be. The industry has created tragically unsafe, exploitative and dangerous workplaces where women workers face poor pay, inequality, harassment and violence.

"They are happy to give a woman a job operating a sewing machine, but less happy to see her become a supervisor," says Kalpona Akter, executive director of the Bangladesh Centre for Worker Solidarity, who began her working life on the garment factory floor aged 12. "Many of these women are forced to work in unsafe and unfair work environments because they have no ability to change things," she says.

Rana Plaza proved a turning point. The global outrage following the disaster led the Bangladeshi government to announce a raft of changes to its labour laws, including easing restrictions on workers forming trade unions, hiring additional factory inspectors and increasing the minimum wage for garment workers by 77 per cent.

At the same time, international clothing brands sourcing from Bangladesh joined with trade unions, international worker solidarity movements and non-governmental organizations to create the Bangladesh Accord on Fire and Building Safety. So far over 190 brands from over 20 countries have signed the Accord, covering 1,500 factories employing around 2 million workers. In 2014 its network of 110 independent engineers carried out inspections at hundreds of sites, identifying more than 80,000 safety issues and suspending production at 17 factories.

"The Rana Plaza disaster created a platform for workers to organize themselves," says Kalpona. "In the last two years about 200 new garment workers unions have been registered, where 65 per cent of the leadership and the majority of members are women. The challenge is how we can make these changes sustainable."

These challenges are considerable. Despite the new labour laws, still only 5 per cent of garment workers and fewer than 300 factories are unionized. The United Nations-backed Rana Plaza Donors Fund, set up to provide injured workers and relatives of those who died with US\$40 million of compensation, is still \$9 million short of its target. There is optimism, however, that out of the ashes of Rana Plaza, positive changes can endure.

"The women on the factory floors in Bangladesh are beginning to feel like their voices are finally being heard," Kalpona says. "And this is a real step forward."

# 8. CREATE AN ENABLING GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT FOR THE REALIZATION OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Global economic integration has constrained the ability of governments, to varying degrees, to use macroeconomic policy to create an enabling environment for the realization of economic and social rights. For example, it is difficult for developing countries to mobilize resources when other countries act as tax havens or maintain very low tax regimes.

The current system of global governance reinforces the divide between economic and social policy and the lack of attention to distributive outcomes, including gender inequalities. Investment in human development and gender equality are considered domestic policy issues and are therefore not prioritized in global economic policy forums. Concrete measures to create an enabling global environment for the achievement of substantive equality for women include:

- Promoting economic stability and preventing shocks and crises, which always hit the poorest hardest, through macro-prudential policies that aim to mitigate economic volatility and the risk of financial crisis, as well as capital controls and better regulation of international financial markets
- Improving global coordination to eliminate tax havens and reduce tax avoidance and competition in order to enable countries to mobilize resources more effectively in a globalized context
- Ensuring that international trade and investment agreements do not curtail policy space in a way that undermines the realization of women's rights by, for example, creating barriers to the expansion of public health services or public transportation
- Increasing the accountability of global economic and financial institutions for the distributive impacts of their actions, including on gender equality
- Formally adopting a common approach, based on the Maastricht Principles, to the extraterritorial obligations of States, transnational corporations and international institutions
- Democratizing the institutions of global economic governance by amplifying the voices of poorer countries and civil society organizations in decisions that affect them.

# 9. USE HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS TO SHAPE POLICIES AND CATALYSE CHANGE

It is imperative to bridge the gap between global human rights standards, on the one hand, and policies to advance women’s rights, on the other. By defining substantive equality, the international human rights system has underscored that equality should be understood in relation to outcomes as well as to opportunities, pointing to the structural causes of inequality and setting out the obligations of States to address them.

Almost all countries have ratified CEDAW, but many retain reservations that limit its implementation (see Figure 7). The human rights system, including the Human Rights Council, treaty bodies, special rapporteurs and national and regional human rights bodies can further support governments to formulate and monitor policies to meet their

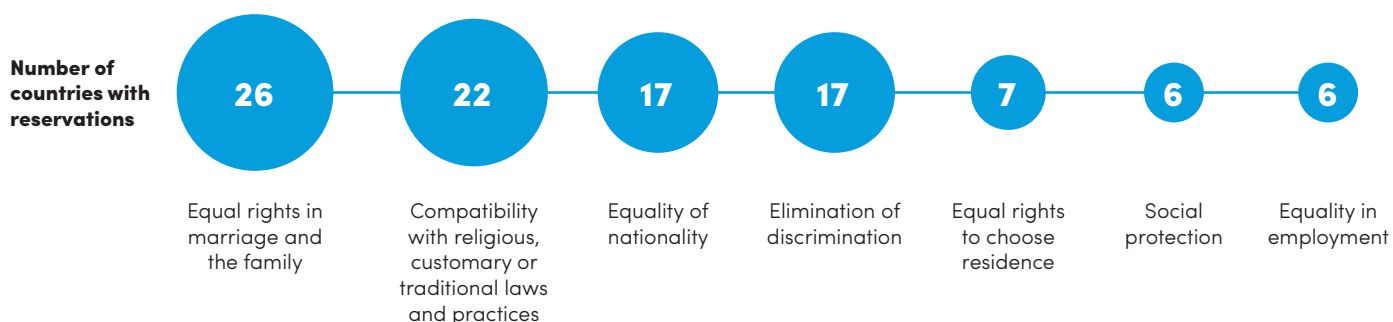
obligations and realize substantive equality for women by:

- Providing guidance on how the recognition, reduction and redistribution of unpaid care work can be advanced through economic and social policies
- Providing clarification and guidance on how macroeconomic policies can support, rather than constrain, women’s enjoyment of their rights
- Proposing concrete steps as to how the implementation of social protection floors at the national level can ensure that women are able to enjoy their right to social security on an equal basis with men.

Figure 7

## Reservations to CEDAW

—> *Almost all countries in the world have ratified CEDAW, but many countries retain reservations which limit its application in practice*



Source: See Annex 6 in *Progress of the World's Women 2015–2016*.

# 10. GENERATE EVIDENCE TO ASSESS PROGRESS ON WOMEN'S ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RIGHTS

Data gaps on women's economic and social rights remain very large. In view of the monitoring requirements for the post-2015 development agenda, there have been calls for a 'data revolution'. This 'data revolution' needs to be engendered, to enable the production of more and better evidence, disaggregated by sex, socio-economic status, geographical location, race and ethnicity, to capture the multiple and intersecting inequalities that women face. There is a need for coordinated support and funding from donors and governments to national statistical offices, especially those in low-income countries, to ensure the consistent and timely production of gender statistics in a wide range of areas. Priorities include:

- Complementing global poverty statistics with measures of women's access to personal income from labour market earnings or social protection, as a proxy for their economic autonomy
- Regularly conducting time-use surveys and ensuring their comparability across countries and over time to assess the impact of public policies, economic shocks and environmental disasters on women's work burdens
- Increasing the number of countries that regularly collect sex-disaggregated statistics on informal employment
- Developing standards for the collection and analysis of statistics on gender pay gaps, including methodologies to capture gender inequalities in earnings from self-employment
- Supporting the ongoing development of new methodologies for the measurement of women's asset ownership and entrepreneurship
- Producing comparable, disaggregated statistics on the benefit levels of child and family allowances, unemployment benefits and old-age pensions
- Developing standards and methods for assessing the quality of social services, including their responsiveness to the rights of women and girls
- Conducting regular surveys on violence against women and girls based on globally agreed standards
- Investing in civil registration and vital systems to ensure that births and deaths are accurately recorded in order to improve the quality and availability of data on maternal and child mortality
- Developing and funding other sources of evidence, including qualitative research, to capture dimensions of inequality that are not easily measurable but crucially shape women's and girls' enjoyment of rights, including stigma and deprivation of voice and agency.



# ENDNOTES

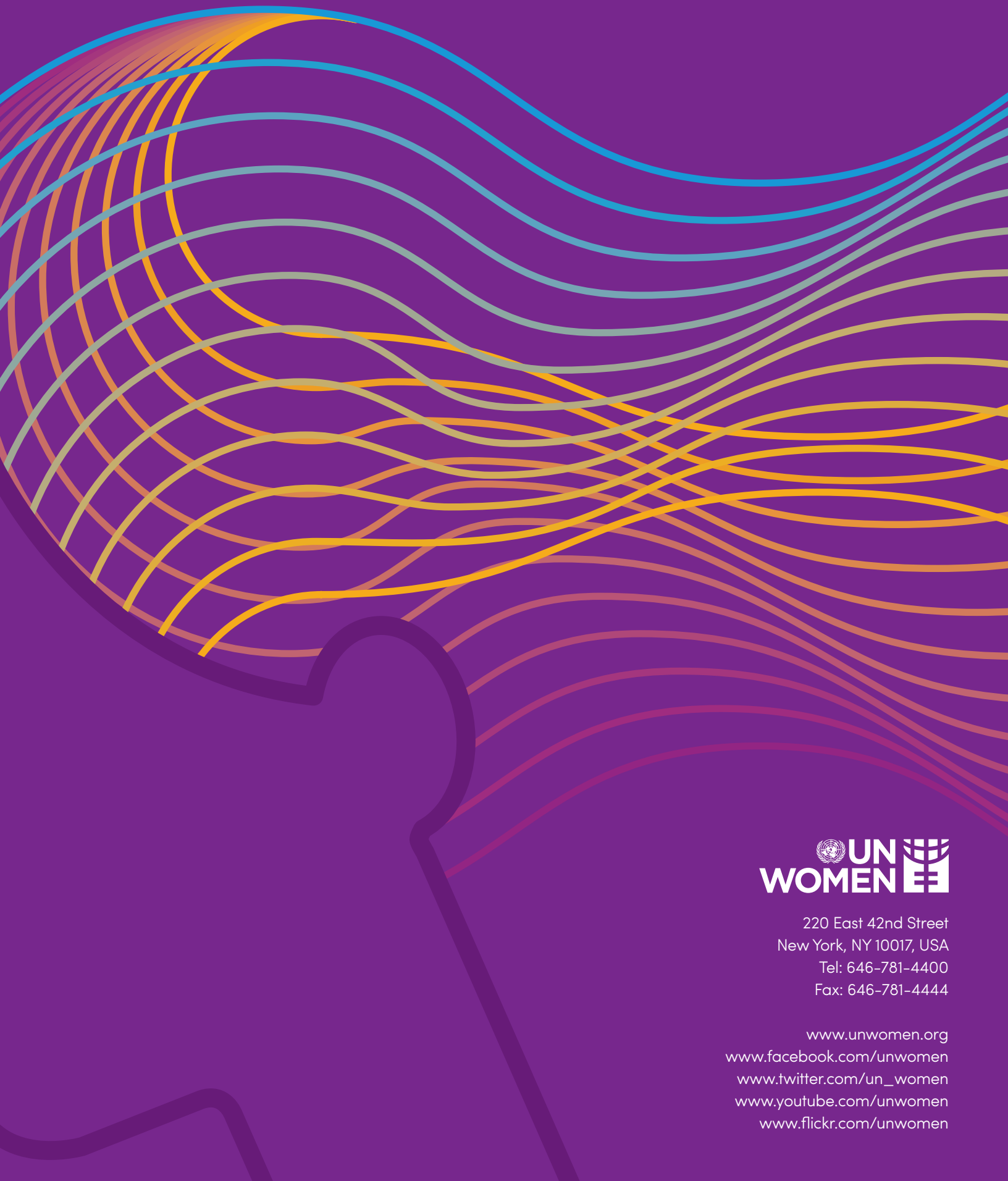
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## UN WOMEN

UN Women is the UN organization dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. A global champion for women and girls, UN Women was established to accelerate progress on meeting their needs worldwide.

UN Women supports UN Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to implement these standards. It stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on five priority areas: increasing women's leadership and participation; ending violence against women; engaging women in all aspects of peace and security processes; enhancing women's economic empowerment; and making gender equality central to national development planning and budgeting. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality.



220 East 42nd Street  
New York, NY 10017, USA  
Tel: 646-781-4400  
Fax: 646-781-4444

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