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WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT STRATEGY



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**ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT SECTION
UN WOMEN**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With rising economic inequality, rapid demographic and technological changes affecting the world of work, pandemic recovery and challenges related to climate change, conflict and crises, the world needs a fresh approach to women's economic empowerment.

Women's economic participation and paid and unpaid work contribute enormously to sustainable development and are key for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda). Women make major contributions to the economy, directly and indirectly contributing to economic growth and development. The most direct route is via workforce participation, which boosts production and thus income, savings and tax contributions at the household, community and national levels.

And while the world has advanced significantly in ensuring equality in women's and men's rights to and at work and access to economic resources, structural barriers, discriminatory laws, policies and social norms persist in impeding women's full and equal participation in the economy. Additionally, shifts in the global economy and demographics, technological advances and protracted crises are transforming the world of work, which presents both challenges and opportunities for women's economic empowerment.

Addressing the barriers to economic empowerment and unlocking opportunities requires work at multiple scales: from the behaviours and practices of individuals, communities and institutions, including workplaces, community organizations and public services, to economic markets and laws, policies, norms and regulations at

the national and international level. It also requires engagement with and action from diverse stakeholders, from women's movements, civil society organizations, workers' representatives and private sector employers and organizations to multilateral organizations, including international financial institutions (IFIs), and policymakers and decision makers in the public sector.

This Women's Economic Empowerment Strategy has two parts. Part I assesses the global landscape and UN Women's role in realizing the economic rights of women and girls. It aims to: (i) lay out the global context for work on women's economic empowerment, (ii) provide a rights-based and transformative definition of economic empowerment, (iii) identify gaps in current global efforts to achieve women's economic empowerment, (iv) situate UN Women's work on women's economic empowerment within these broader efforts, and (v) point to opportunities for accelerating progress.

Part II of the strategy looks towards action by: (i) articulating a vision and purpose for UN Women's Economic Empowerment work, (ii) defining priority issue areas for UN Women to focus its global efforts, (iii) presenting the pathways through which UN Women will accelerate progress within those issue areas, and (iv) indicating next steps for implementation, monitoring and learning.

The strategy

The Women's Economic Empowerment Strategy articulates UN Women's vision for enabling women's economic agency, autonomy and well-being. Anchored in UN Women's Strategic Plan 2022–2025 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, its objective is to provide a framework that galvanizes internal and external stakeholders to work together at the local,

national and global level through transformative solutions that improve the lives of women and girls with no one left behind. The strategy has been informed by data-driven analysis, extensive consultations and UN Women's Independent Evaluation Service's 2022 corporate evaluation of UN Women's contribution to women's economic empowerment (WEE).¹

UN Women defines economic empowerment as a transformative, collective process through which economic systems become just, equitable and prosperous, and through which all women enjoy their economic and social rights, exercise agency and power in ways that challenge inequalities and level the playing field and gain equal rights and access to ownership of and control over resources, assets, income, time and their own lives. The key elements of economic empowerment are equal rights and access to ownership and control over resources; agency, power and autonomy; and policies, institutions and norms.

Implementation of this strategy is expected to contribute to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda; drive progress on international, regional and national commitments to women's economic empowerment; and contribute to UN Women's Strategic Plan outcomes. The strategy specifically contributes to several SDG targets on reducing time spent on unpaid domestic and care work, women's

land rights, financing for gender equality and women's empowerment, women's employment and social protection. The work on economic empowerment contributes to several outcomes in the UN Women Strategic Plan 2022–2025 including Outcome 1 on global normative frameworks and gender-responsive laws, policies and institutions, Outcome 2 on financing for gender equality, and Outcome 4 on women's equitable access to goods, services and resources.

Recognizing that women's economic empowerment cannot be achieved in isolation, the strategy is aligned to other areas of UN Women, including governance and participation; ending violence against women; women, peace and security and humanitarian action; and research and data. Work on women's economic empowerment is particularly important because it underpins all other UN Women thematic areas. For example, women's economic security protects them from violence and affords a buffer in contexts of conflict and crisis.

Key components

The strategy assesses the global landscape and UN Women's role in realizing the economic rights of women and girls. It lays out the global context for work on women's economic empowerment, provides a rights-based and transformative definition of economic empowerment, identifies gaps in current global efforts to achieve women's economic empowerment, and situates UN Women's work on women's economic empowerment within these broader efforts. Drawing on UN Women's unique mandate and comparative advantage, it then lays out the opportunities for accelerating progress.

The strategy identifies three systemic inequalities that must be addressed to achieve women's economic empowerment: systemic inequality, inequality of opportunity and inequality of outcomes. The strategy

follows a 3 by 3 by 5 framework. It identifies three key priority areas, or Gender Equality Accelerators (GEAs), where UN Women can make the most progress: (i) women and the world of work, (ii) gender-responsive climate action and (iii) transforming care systems. These three priority areas are underpinned by three cross-cutting areas: (i) gender-responsive macroeconomic policies, (ii) addressing discriminatory social norms and (iii) increasing financing for gender equality. The strategy then identifies five key pathways leveraging UN Women's comparative advantage in advancing gender equality: (i) global norms, (ii) public policy and government collaboration at the country level, (iii) partnerships with women's organizations and other diverse stakeholders, (iv) generating and applying gender data and statistics and (v) convening key actors to engage collective action.

Implementation

Putting the Women's Economic Empowerment Strategy into action requires the adaptation and strengthening of key processes and procedures. UN Women will develop and refine its practices to increase efficiency and effectiveness across its priority areas and pathways for

action: (i) UN system coordination, inter-agency work and joint programming, (ii) cross-sectoral collaboration, (iii) communities of practice, (iv) knowledge management, (v) private partnerships and (vi) resource mobilization.





Photo: UN Women/Joë Saade

CONTEXT

ASSESSING THE GLOBAL LANDSCAPE
AND UN WOMEN'S ROLE IN
REALIZING THE ECONOMIC RIGHTS
OF WOMEN AND GIRLS

1. INTRODUCTION

Background

This strategy draws on the UN Women Strategic Plan 2022–2025, which emphasizes the need to address structural barriers, social norms and unequal power relations to change gender inequalities. For women’s economic empowerment, this requires approaches that go beyond capacity-building at the individual, micro-level to focusing on dismantling structural inequalities in economic systems.³ The strategy is informed by an evidence-driven analysis of (i) a global context that requires new ways of thinking about economic empowerment to realize women’s human rights and economic autonomy, (ii) UN Women’s institutional capabilities and comparative advantages, and (iii) the strategic position of UN Women vis-a-vis its triple mandate and financial and human resources.

The UN Women Economic Empowerment Strategy sets forth an institutional agenda encompassing areas of priority issues and a set of pathways guiding the shape of UN Women’s engagement in those areas. The strategy provides key directions for UN Women’s work globally, and in regional and country offices, recognizing that countries will adapt and pivot according to their particular contexts, to ensure the strategy is fit-for-purpose.

Implementation of this strategy is expected to contribute to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as well as progress on international, regional and national commitments to women’s economic empowerment.⁴ The strategy specifically contributes to several SDG targets, including on: social protection (SDG 1.3, 8.3), care work (SDG 5.4), women’s land rights (SDG 5.a.1), financing for gender equality (SDG 5.c.1), decent work (SDG 8.3, 8.5), migration (SDG 10.7), gender-responsive procurement (SDG 12.7) and sustainable development (SDG 6.2, 13.1, 15.C). UN Women’s global engagements in economic empowerment are anchored in 6 regional offices, 1 section at HQ, and 74 country offices.⁵

Women’s Economic Empowerment is one of the four impact areas that guides UN Women’s Strategic Plan 2022–2025, along with Governance and Participation, Ending Violence Against Women, and Women, Peace and Security. It is important to note that these four impact areas are not separate but rather interdependent; gender equality and women’s and girls’ empowerment cannot be realized without progress in all these areas. What makes women’s economic empowerment distinct is its multidisciplinary lens that draws on the other impact areas and analyses of poverty, labour markets, industry, value chains, enterprise growth, sustainable livelihoods, and fiscal, monetary and trade issues, among others.

Women’s economic empowerment is integral to all the impact areas because of the enormous impact of economic systems in perpetuating structural inequality and entrenching patriarchal institutions. For example, lack of equal rights and access to economic assets and markets constrains women’s productivity and traps them in multidimensional and intergenerational poverty, creating gender gaps in income and well-being. Very little can be done without financial means, and women’s economic empowerment, as a lens, focuses on how to create, distribute and manage economic value and create the conditions for women to realize their rights through economic participation, including through decent work and entrepreneurship and paid and unpaid care and domestic work. This is relevant to all aspects of women’s lives, whether they are living in humanitarian, conflict or peaceful conditions, represented in public institutions as leaders, or surviving violence and abuse.

This strategy, in concert with UN Women’s Strategic Plan 2022–2025, maximizes the potential of interdisciplinary approaches to gender equality and women’s and girls’ empowerment as well as the systemic outcomes that rely on interlinkages between all of UN Women’s impact areas.

Trends in women's economic empowerment

With rising economic inequality, rapid demographic and technological changes affecting the world of work, pandemic recovery and challenges related to climate change, conflict and crises, the world needs a fresh approach to women's economic empowerment.

Women's economic participation and paid and unpaid work contribute enormously to sustainable development and are key for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. Women make major contributions to the economy, directly and indirectly, contributing to economic growth and development. The most direct route is via workforce participation, which boosts production, and thus income, savings and tax contributions at the household, community and national levels.

Globally, equality in women's and men's rights to work and at work and access to economic resources has advanced significantly. Rapid progress on expanding women's access to education and greater control over their fertility have both played a part in giving women better opportunities for paid work. But the global gender gap in labour force participation is persistent, hovering at 30 per cent since 1990, with men's and women's

participation at around 80 per cent and 50 per cent, respectively. In five of seven regions, more than half of working-age women participate in the labour market, but a quarter or less do so in South Asia and the Middle East and North Africa.⁶ Women's labour force participation has other benefits as well. A notable increase of 11 per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean was associated with investments in education and care services, declining fertility rates and access to technology, among other factors.⁷

While the main challenge is to increase women's labour force participation to be equal to men, the jobs must be decent jobs that guarantee women's economic power and dignity. Valuing women's work also means recognizing the tremendous contribution that paid care jobs in health, education and domestic work make to the everyday functioning of economies and societies and properly representing and rewarding women for this work. Women perform 75 per cent of the world's unpaid care and domestic work—effectively subsidizing the global economy.⁸ Women's and girls' unpaid care and domestic work is what allows households, communities and economies to function and thrive.

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- Globally, the gender gap in labour force participation has hovered at 30 per cent since 1990, with men's participation at around 80 per cent and women's at 50 per cent.⁹
 - Women in the paid workforce earn 20 per cent less than men on average.¹⁰
 - Globally, nearly 60 per cent of women's employment is in the informal economy and in low-income countries is more than 90 per cent.¹¹
 - On average globally, women spend around three times more time on unpaid care and domestic work than men.¹²
 - Only 26 per cent of countries have established comprehensive systems to monitor gender-budget allocations.¹³
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Global poverty rose in 2020 for the first time in over three decades with an additional 75 to 95 million people falling into extreme poverty in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic coupled with the combined economic, environmental and climate crises,¹⁴ with disproportionate gendered impacts.¹⁵ Inequalities between and within countries increased as rates of recovery between rich and poor countries diverged.¹⁶ Women's share of total income remains below 35 per cent, with a mere 5 per cent increase since 1990, while men continue to earn approximately double what women earn.¹⁷ These persistent disparities are fuelled by gender-blind macroeconomic policies that fail to recognize women as economic actors, and value profit and economic growth over the well-being of people and the environment. These and other unjust development policies also drive inequalities between women by cheapening female labour in lower-income countries and driving worse outcomes in rural and marginalized peri-urban areas. Backlash against women's rights around the world threatens to undo decades of hard-won, albeit slow, progress.

Discriminatory laws, policies and social norms persist in impeding women's full and equal participation in the economy. Due to the prevailing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination to which women and girls are subject—on the basis of sex, age, income, location, marital and head of household status, race/ethnicity, culture, indigenous status, sexual orientation and gender identity, and as widows, women living with and affected by HIV, women with disabilities, and women migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons—they are at greater risk of rising poverty, food insecurity, violence and exclusion.

Women encounter significant challenges in accessing productive resources, finance, education and training, leading to their overrepresentation in low-wage, low-skilled and precarious jobs, particularly in the informal economy with long hours, unsafe conditions and limited access to social protection. Globally, there are 118.5 million girls out of school and women make up nearly two thirds of all adults unable to read; these limits on women's and girls' education cost countries between US\$15 and US\$30 trillion in lifetime productivity and earnings.¹⁸ Women also face significant barriers to accessing and using assets including land, property and financial services, such as savings and credit schemes. Women have only 77 per cent of the legal rights of men in 190 countries,¹⁹ and the level of legal protection for

women's land rights is low in half of reporting countries (34 of 68 countries).²⁰ Less than 15 per cent of agricultural landholders globally are women, although this varies widely across countries.²¹ The gender gap in bank account ownership dropped to 6 per cent in 2021 after stagnating at 9 per cent since 2011.²²

Large-scale demographic changes and cascading and compounding crises are revealing the problems in the social organization of care, while they intensify and increase women's and girls' disproportionate share of paid and unpaid care and domestic work. The world population is rapidly aging, with the number of individuals aged 80 and older projected to skyrocket from 125 million in 2015 to 434 million by 2050.²³ Growing care deficits where the need for care outstrips availability are projected to have severe impacts on women's participation in income-generating opportunities. The insufficiency of current models for organizing care became stark during the COVID-19 pandemic: in 2020, school and preschool closures worldwide prompted 672 billion hours of additional unpaid childcare and women left the workforce at a rate higher than men.²⁴ Preparation for and the response to the care crisis caused by the pandemic were grossly inadequate: 60 per cent of countries and territories failed to implement measures to support the surge in unpaid care work caused by lockdowns.²⁵ Yet the need for new models preceded the pandemic: in 'normal times,' women contributed 76.2 per cent of the total hours dedicated to care and domestic work globally, compared to 38.1 per cent contributed by men.²⁶

Shifts in the global economy and demographics, technological advances and protracted crises are driving a changing world of work, which presents both challenges and opportunities for women's economic empowerment. Growing care deficits could present an opportunity for job growth, professionalization and innovation in care services. However, this requires governments to prioritize a currently underfunded sector rife with gender, economic and racial inequalities. Rising digitization and automation threaten jobs at a wide scale, though there may also be new opportunities for women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields if gender-responsive measures are taken. As it stands, women make up only 35 per cent of STEM students and a mere 3 per cent of students in information and communication technology, indicating gender gaps in technology literacy, access and use.²⁷ Women in rural areas continue to face major obstacles to participate in the digital economy as many lack internet access. Meanwhile, in search of

economic stability and employment opportunities, women and men are migrating at unprecedented rates within and between countries, though many do not have access to decent work and social protection in destination countries and may not benefit from technological advances in the world of work.

The impacts of climate change, biodiversity loss, environmental degradation and conflict also pose threats to women's economic empowerment. Climate and environment disasters disproportionately impact women and girls, as they may increase the time spent on caring responsibilities, which may include fetching water, collecting fuel and provisioning food.²⁸ Climate change is expected to have far-reaching, negative impacts on subsistence farming, an activity in which women predominate. Forced displacement in the context of climate change or conflict can lead to the erosion of social networks and support systems, further impeding women's access to economic opportunities. In conflict and post-conflict settings, women are often forced to rely on informal, low-wage, precarious work.

Patriarchy is a root cause of gender inequalities and economic disempowerment, and historically unequal power relations between women and men have persisted within households and in society more broadly. Concerted efforts are needed to transform discriminatory social norms that reinforce women's oppression and assign

them an inferior position in social and economic life. In addition to the devaluing of care work in economic policies, discriminatory social norms around women's roles in the household and labour market, violence and harassment at home and in the workplace, and limited access to sexual and reproductive health and rights—all discourage their participation in paid work, even if they have high levels of education and training.²⁹

To address these challenges and navigate the complex crises of our times, strategies and initiatives are needed that go beyond "old, failed approaches to women's economic empowerment".³⁰ Previous ways of thinking about women's economic empowerment placed emphasis on increasing women's economic efficiency and effectiveness in markets that were at best gender-blind and at worst exploitative. New ways of thinking are needed—including those that account for how gender and multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and inequalities are intrinsic to and produced by economic systems—that address the local and global impacts of macroeconomic policy, that recognize the value of paid and unpaid care and domestic work, and that seek gender-responsive solutions from the local to global level. Innovative approaches to economic empowerment will seek to transform the structures that perpetuate gender and economic inequalities and the subordination of women in public and private life.



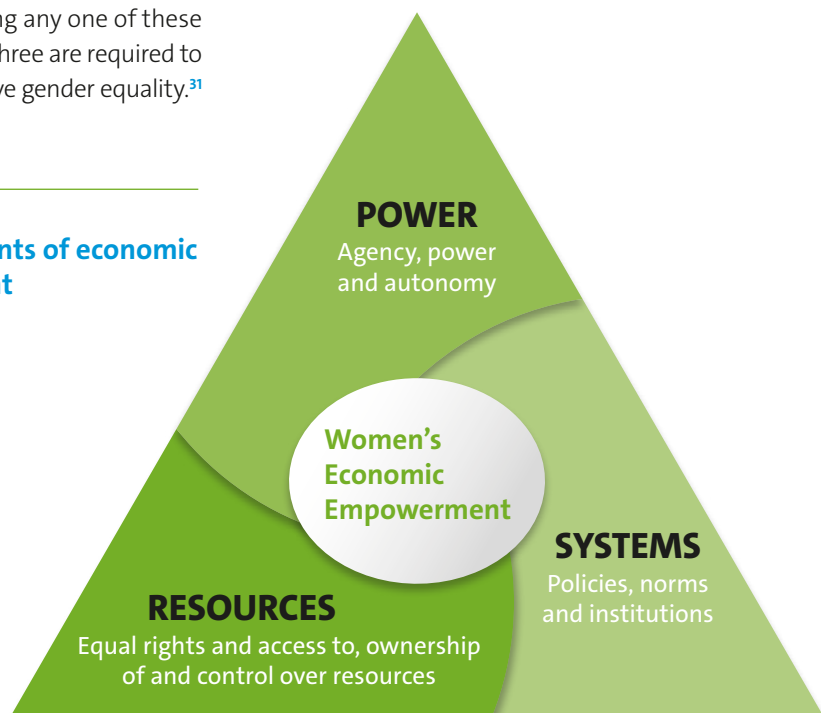
2. CONCEPTUALIZING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Women's economic empowerment is a transformative, collective process through which economic systems become just, equitable and prosperous, and all women enjoy their economic and social rights, exercise agency and power in ways that challenge inequalities and level the playing field, and gain equal rights and access to, ownership of and control over resources, assets, income, time and their own lives.

Economic empowerment builds on several critical elements (Figure 1): i) ensuring women's equal rights and access to, ownership and control over resources (natural and productive), ii) strengthening their ability to make decisions about their own lives, and iii) changing the social, economic and institutional systems in which they operate. While initiatives oriented to achieving any one of these can have some effect, changes to all three are required to transform women's status and achieve gender equality.³¹

Additionally, it is of critical importance to create enabling environments with sufficient resources and support for girls to grow up to be women with economic agency, autonomy and power.

FIGURE 1:
Critical elements of economic empowerment



Various factors enable or constrain women's economic empowerment. Legal and regulatory frameworks, policies, programmes and services that recognize and respond to gender inequalities are needed to ensure that these factors enable rather than constrain women's economic empowerment. Enabling women's economic empowerment and realizing women's economic and social rights and economic and social autonomy has **multiple corollary impacts**—in many contexts, gender-based violence is reduced, sexual and reproductive health and rights are strengthened, political and social participation and leadership are increased, and disaster risk reduction and recovery are facilitated, among others.³²

Recent history illustrates the limits of siloed, single-issue work, and points clearly to the need for a **cross-cutting approach** that recognizes and address linkages between different spheres or 'issue areas'. This includes, for example, initiatives that recognize and address the relationship between access to decent work and macroeconomic policies, labour market outcomes and the distribution of unpaid and underpaid care, and control over economic resources and discriminatory social norms, among others.

Addressing the barriers to economic empowerment requires **work at multiple levels**: from the attitudes, beliefs and practices of individuals and communities to institutions including workplaces, community organizations and public services, to economic markets and laws, policies, norms and regulations at the national and international level. It also requires **engagement with and action from diverse stakeholders**, each of which has a role to play: from women's movements, civil society organizations and workers' representatives to private sector employers and organizations, multilateral organizations including IFIs and public sector policymakers and decision-makers.

UN Women will take a human rights-based approach to economic empowerment that is **universal** in scope, with the aim that all women ultimately experience the full realization of their economic, social and cultural rights. This will require operationalizing the Leave No One Behind (LNOB) principle with attention to **multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and inequalities** that reveal how women's economic oppression can be shaped by other, context-specific systems of difference.³³ Ultimately, the realization of LNOB requires systemic changes within the economic structures that discriminate against women in all their diversity. However, this process is complex and slow, and so additional efforts targeted at and directed towards specific groups of women facing intersecting inequalities are also required.

The complementarity of the Women's Economic Empowerment Strategy with other dedicated thematic strategies within UN Women should be noted. For example, supporting women's livelihoods is a key component of UN Women's Humanitarian Strategy, which has cross-disciplinary linkages with women's economic empowerment, especially pertaining to sustainable development and climate action.

Another important role is UN Women's engagement with the private sector as employers, supply chain actors and investors that shape the global economy and women's opportunities and outcomes. Private sector actors are useful partners, either as funders or as allies who lend their reputation and resources to advocating for women's economic empowerment; this can have benefits for the private sector and for women. While private sector stakeholders, who often see the world in terms of markets and profits, are crucial stakeholders for the implementation of the Women's Economic Empowerment Strategy, the specific modes of engagement and approaches are articulated in UN Women's Private Sector Strategy.

3. GAPS AND OPPORTUNITIES IN GLOBAL EFFORTS FOR WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

This section describes gaps and opportunities in the efforts to achieve women's economic empowerment. It considers progress and setbacks in the current global context, as well as the transformative approach outlined above. First, it identifies where initiatives are urgently needed by a variety of actors. Second, it provides an overview of UN Women's recent work and established strengths. Based on this analysis, it then describes opportunities for UN Women to accelerate progress.

Gaps: Where work is needed in global efforts

Despite global commitments to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, significant gaps persist in efforts to advance women's economic empowerment. These gaps have been identified by robust research and analysis and recognized in normative, intergovernmental resolutions and documents.

1 Getting women into the paid workforce is insufficient

Despite remarkable progress in getting women into the workforce, too many still lack decent work: they work for less pay in low-skilled, informal and precarious jobs with higher risk of gender-based violence and harassment, with limited opportunities to advance to leadership positions. Women, especially migrant and low-income women, are also overrepresented in the informal economy, with inadequate access to social protection.³⁴ Meanwhile, women continue to have a disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care, with a huge amount of unpaid time and effort.

2 Macroeconomic policies are largely gender-blind

The ability to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment is powerfully shaped by the overall macroeconomic environment. Thus, macroeconomic policies need to be gender-responsive to stimulate recovery, sustain job growth and ensure that women benefit from and contribute to development. A deeper understanding of the gendered impact of restrictive monetary and fiscal policy and reductions in social spending made to manage public debt may reveal the policy options that contribute most to eradicating poverty, ending women's economic exclusion and reducing the multiple inequalities that impinge on the rights and agency of women.³⁵

3 Care deficits are growing

Care deficits are growing across world regions.³⁶ Caregivers are often unpaid or poorly paid and the work is not recognized and poorly supported. New actors have turned to strengthening the care economy in recent years, yet additional efforts are required to reorganize care so that unpaid care is recognized, reduced and redistributed, and that paid care is better remunerated, represented and seen as a public good, worthy of investment.³⁷ Gender-responsive care policies must also address in-country inequalities between rural and urban areas and inform national development and migration policies that govern the supply and demand of the mostly female workforce in the care economy.

4 Gender inequalities persist in social protection

Globally, only 26.6 per cent of women had comprehensive coverage compared to 34.3 per cent of men before the COVID-19 pandemic, which then exacerbated inequalities in access to social protection.³⁸ Limited access to social protection is even more pronounced in the informal economy, such as in agriculture, where the majority of the world's women work. Rural women and migrant women are especially lacking social protection coverage, due to discrimination in policies as well as in practice.³⁹ More investment is therefore required to expand coverage of gender-responsive social assistance and increase women's access to more comprehensive social insurance.

5 Single-issue and siloed approaches fall short of transforming women's status

Many approaches do not adequately account for the compounding effects of broader societal issues on women's economic empowerment. While single-issue approaches may move the needle towards gender equality, a more cross-cutting approach is needed to transform unequal structures and realize women's economic empowerment. Linkages with other policy areas including migration, climate and environment, gender-based violence, women's peace and security, and infrastructure and public transportation are needed.

6 Feminist and women's grassroots organizations are constrained from influencing economic policy dialogues and global norms setting at all levels

More coalitions, collaborations and partnerships are needed to bring women's civil society organizations into direct dialogue with macroeconomic and private sector actors, such as IFIs, ministries of finance and businesses. Doing so will increase the influence and decision-making capacities of women's grassroots organizations in norms setting and policymaking, as well as ensuring that vulnerable or marginalized groups of women are not left behind.

7 Rural women are being left behind

Rural women are exposed to multiple challenges, including food insecurity, climate change, informality, migration, conflict and displacement, and a significant amount of unpaid care and domestic work. While development efforts have focused work on climate-resilient agriculture to meet women's immediate and medium-term needs, it is vital to broaden the focus beyond technical capacity-building to advance gender-sensitive macroeconomic policies that address rural women's long-term needs and take into account relevant structural barriers—including unpaid care and domestic work and informality—and improve access to social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure, such as energy, water and sanitation.

8 Discriminatory social norms persist, but it is unclear how to change them

Social norms around women's roles in the household and labour market often discourage or limit their participation in paid work and household decision-making on control over and access to resources, assets and income, even when they have high levels of education and training.⁴⁰ Current funding cycles that reward shorter projects are insufficient to support social norms change, which is typically slow.⁴¹ There is little consensus among development actors on how to effectively change social norms in alignment with feminist approaches that demand changes not only within individuals and communities, but also in national and global governance and policymaking.

9 Data to track progress on the SDGs related to women’s economic empowerment and inform gender-responsive policymaking are incomplete

While efforts to provide data on women’s economic empowerment have increased (such as through UN Women’s flagship programme Women Count), gaps still remain in data on time-use surveys, care, access to social protection, asset ownership, and costing studies, including replacement costs. More studies are needed on ‘what works’ to advance women’s economic empowerment, including analysis of the effectiveness of macroeconomic policies in advancing gender equality in different contexts.

10 Development financing falls short in achieving sustainable progress in women’s economic empowerment

Overseas development assistance (ODA) for gender equality and women’s empowerment since the COVID-19 pandemic has stagnated, with just 4 per cent of ODA designating gender equality a primary objective.⁴² Other development financing and sustainable financing instruments allocate a meagre portion of available capital to SDG 5. The funds provided are frequently for short-term project cycles with rigid road maps that do not fit to the reality of programme implementation, limit holistic engagement across sectors, and risk overlooking subtler opportunities for enduring change. Additionally, projects that self-report progress towards gender equality may not actually be sustainable, as evidenced by the “major gap between self-reported funding and high-quality gender equality projects.”⁴³



Photo: UN Women Asia and the Pacific

Opportunities: Where UN Women can accelerate progress

UN Women has distinctive areas of comparative advantage by which it can accelerate progress on women's economic empowerment, based on its triple mandate, experience and institutional capabilities. Resource constraints, however, make it imperative to be strategic about which areas to prioritize, where to lead and where to play a more supporting role. Opportunities for which UN Women is strategically positioned to accelerate progress include the following:

1 Bridge silos by leveraging UN Women's in-house expertise across multiple issue areas

UN Women is a key actor in promoting a cross-cutting perspective on women's economic empowerment in global discourse and normative frameworks (successive sessions of the UN Commission of the Status of Women (CSW), e.g. CSW61 on women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work, CSW62 on empowering rural women and girls, CSW63 on social protection, public services and infrastructure, CSW66 on climate change, environmental degradation and disaster risk reduction). UN Women's institutional capacity to bridge issue areas, such as peace and security, ending violence against women, leadership and governance, and gender-responsive migration, with economic empowerment distinguishes it from actors which focus on single issues. Its convening mandate enables UN Women to bring public and private sector actors together with civil society organizations and other development actors.

2 Champion and support more coherent and enhanced performance and accountability for gender equality, women's empowerment and gender mainstreaming in the UN system

UN Women is mandated to bring a gender perspective to the UN system. This is an area where UN Women's work complements and supports the work on women's economic empowerment of other UN entities, including UNICEF, UNDP, UNEP, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and others. UN Women's unique triple mandate positions it to help other UN organizations deliver their own mandates with a gender lens.

3 Leverage a strong history of supporting national governments to effect gender-responsive policy change

Harnessing its expertise to engage with national gender equality mechanisms, UN Women offers technical and strategic assistance to governments to promote the design and implementation of gender-responsive

economic policies. To do so, UN Women acts as the interface between national policymakers and various relevant actors, including civil society organizations, women's movements and the private sector. This unique position grants UN Women distinctive entry points and opportunities to advocate for and foster women's empowerment.

4 Convene key economic actors to advance women's economic empowerment and shape global and local discourses

By engaging stakeholders across different sectors and contexts, UN Women promotes effective collaboration while building partnerships and platforms on women's economic empowerment. In doing so, UN Women ensures that the voices and perspectives of multiple actors are heard, resulting in more inclusive and equitable work.

5 Harness in-house capacity for research and development and long-standing relationships with feminist economists and organizations to advance research and data on women's economic empowerment

UN Women has a demonstrated ability to produce high-quality research and data that informs gender-responsive policy dialogues, through in-house expertise and strong relationships with leading external researchers. UN Women can continue to lead in forecasting and assessing the impacts of policy changes on women and girls.

6 Shift discriminatory social norms through collaboration with grassroots organizations as well as policy and legal support

Social norms is a new systemic outcome in UN Women's Strategic Plan 202–2025. UN Women's demonstrated engagement with shifting gender norms enables it to lead and support efforts to change social norms that impede progress on economic empowerment. UN Women has partnered with organizations including the ILO, the World Bank, UNICEF, UNFPA, civil society organizations and others to advance work on social norms.

UN Women’s engagement in economic empowerment

UN Women’s Economic Empowerment section was established in 2010, with the creation of UN Women, to catalyse progress towards gender equality, poverty eradication and inclusive economic growth. UN Women’s global engagements in economic empowerment are anchored in 6 regional offices, 1 section at HQ and 74 country offices.⁴⁴

UN Women has helped to change the landscape of women’s economic empowerment by shaping global discourse on women’s economic empowerment, bringing attention to pressing issues including the care economy and social protection, supporting gender-responsive policy change on women’s economic empowerment, shifting social norms, and convening diverse stakeholders, from civil society organizations to IFIs. UN Women’s triple normative, coordination and operational mandate has been implemented across different contexts and themes (Box 1).

BOX 1:

Examples of UN Women’s work in economic empowerment across the tripartite mandate

1. UN Women’s high-level work shaping global discourse and norms

Intergovernmental norms and processes

UN Women’s Economic Empowerment section contributes to the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), drafting priority and review themes on behalf of the Secretary-General and supporting the Agreed Conclusions, which are the negotiated outcomes that call on governments and other stakeholders to fulfil international obligations and commitments on gender equality, women’s social and economic rights and the empowerment of all women and girls.⁴⁵ UN Women participates in inter-agency mechanisms and alliances with the direct involvement of civil society organizations, and prepares reports on behalf of the Secretary-General on topics including women in development, women and girls in rural areas, and violence against women migrant workers, as mandated by General Assembly resolutions. As an ad hoc member of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) Advisory Group, UN Women has been actively engaged in the intergovernmental and multi-stakeholder processes to develop and implement the Voluntary Guidelines on Gender Equality and Women’s and Girls’ Empowerment in the Context of Food Security and Nutrition.

International norms and standards

UN Women’s Making Migration Safe for Women programme aims to support safe and regular migration for all women migrating from, into and through Niger, and to strengthen international norms and standards protecting and promoting migrant women’s rights, including through [Policies and Practice: A Guide to Gender-Responsive Implementation of the Global Compact on Migration](#). The innovative design of the first phase helped ensure that the emerging issues and specific challenges of migrant women identified in Niger fed into advocacy and policy work at the global level, and vice versa, and will be continued in the second phase in Ethiopia. To address the multiple and intersecting experiences of migrant women as well as gender-diverse migrants, UN Women produced policy briefs on the migration experiences of people with diverse SOGIESC and on racially marginalized migrant women.

2. Coordinating and supporting regional and national priorities

Arab States multidisciplinary portfolio working group on regional women's employment

UN Women's Regional Office for the Arab States created a Regional Programme on Women's Economic Empowerment, the first of its kind. The Office has secured the political commitment of 22 Member States to increase women's employment, conducted extensive research and analysis on how to increase women's employment within the region, advanced national business plans on women's labour force participation for 12 countries, and established the first regional statistics and data platform on gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE) for the transparent monitoring of women's employment in the Arab States.

Building innovative care systems in Latin America and the Caribbean

UN Women's regional plan for Latin America and the Caribbean prioritizes advancing investment and innovation in the care economy. Specific activities include producing gender-responsive costing methodologies for governments, partnering with the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, and providing technical assistance to governments in 12 countries. Other UN Women offices are following suit, including the East and Southern Africa Regional Office and the West and Central Africa Regional Office, which are supporting national governments in the early stages of developing policies on care investment through convening stakeholders and action-oriented research.

3. Operational, inter-agency collaboration and joint programming

Climate-resilient agriculture and food systems policy change

The Joint Programme on Rural Women's Economic Empowerment (JP RWEE), implemented jointly by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), UN Women and the World Food Programme (WFP), seeks to secure rural women's livelihoods, rights and resilience in the context of sustainable development. For example, through its collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Food in Guatemala, the JP RWEE worked on the development and implementation of gender-responsive agricultural policies including the first Institutional Policy for Gender Equality and its Strategy (201–2023). In Rwanda, the JP RWEE supported government efforts to address gaps in gender-responsive policies and legal frameworks by engaging in extensive policy dialogue with the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion and the Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources. These efforts contributed to the adoption of five laws and five strategies to promote and protect women's ownership of and control over assets, including the Law on Matrimonial Regimes and Succession of Property, which codifies women's equal rights to succession and property inheritance in Rwanda.

Gender-responsive procurement, decent work and entrepreneurship

UN Women works with governments, the private sector, civil society and international organizations to promote gender-responsive procurement (GRP) from women's and gender-responsive businesses. UN Women has supported 1,008 governments, companies and international organizations to develop and/or implement policies and practices related to GRP. Through UN Women's leadership, the UN System-wide Strategy on Gender-responsive Procurement was developed and UN Women increased its own spending with women-owned businesses by 88 per cent between 2017 and 2021. UN Women's thought leadership and expertise are highly regarded in this area, enabling policy change at the highest levels, as well as capacity development for individuals. Tools such as the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs), now with more than 8,000 company signatories, are leveraged globally to help companies reduce barriers to entry for women entrepreneurs and workers and improve their internal and external policies and practices. For example, UN Women's regional office in Asia and the Pacific released an assessment tool for companies to practise gender-responsive procurement in alignment with the WEPs. In Europe and Central Asia, companies are mobilized through the Women's Empowerment Principles to create opportunities for entrepreneurs through business expositions.

Innovative approaches to financing gender equality

UN Women coordinates with other UN entities on the topic of sustainable and innovative finance. For example, UN Women co-chairs the United Nations Thematic Bond Community of Practice alongside the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), with secretariat support from the Joint SDG Fund and the Development Coordination Office. A recent collaboration with UNDP led to the development of the [Gender Finance Booklet. Financial Centres for Sustainability Network 2023](#), which operationalizes the adoption of a Gender Finance Charter by committed financial market stakeholders. Together with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Finance Initiative, UN Women has developed resources for the 325 bank signatories to the Principles for Responsible Banking, to help align their core strategy, decision-making, lending and investment with the SDGs on gender equality. UN Women also helped update guidance on gender equality for the Sustainable Stock Exchange Initiative, [How exchanges can advance gender equality: Updated guidance and best practice](#), and incorporated a gender lens approach within the UNDP-led SDG Impact Standards Guidance for Bond Issuers.

UN Women engages and participates actively in several WEE-related bodies and commissions, including serving as the Secretariat to the Commission on the Status of Women and to the Equal Pay International Coalition alongside the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and as permanent co-chair of the Finance in Common (FiCS) Coalition on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Development Banks. UN Women also convenes Generation Equality and its

Action Coalitions, including on Economic Justice and Rights and Feminist Action for Climate Justice; participates in the Social Protection Inter-Agency Cooperation Board (SPIAC-B), Global Alliance for Care, UN Network on Migration and the UN Food Systems Summit Action Coalition on Making Food Systems Work for Women and Girls, among others. UN Women implements a number of global, regional and country programmes, many of them jointly with other UN agencies and partners.



Photo: UN Women/Ryan Brown

THE STRATEGY

ARTICULATING A VISION
AND FOCUS FOR WOMEN'S
ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

4. WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT STRATEGY

UN Women has the ambitious mandate to achieve gender equality, the empowerment of all women and girls, and the full enjoyment of their human rights. In alignment with this vision, the Economic Empowerment Strategy aims to ensure that all women have income security, decent work, and economic power and autonomy as set forth in UN Women's Strategic Plan 2022–2025.

Purpose of the strategy

- 1** To set forth a human rights–based, gender-responsive and multisectoral approach to economic empowerment that responds to patterns of gendered marginalization and discrimination and transforms women's economic and social status to improve their livelihoods, rights and resilience.
- 2** To scale up UN Women's leadership in the field of women's economic empowerment (WEE) and influence global discourse through the development of normative frameworks and coordination with the UN system and other key stakeholders.
- 3** To refine and amplify UN Women's impact in addressing the most pressing challenges related to WEE, including systemic economic inequality, informality, a deepening care crisis, climate change and environmental degradation.
- 4** To strengthen local, national and regional efforts to advance women's economic rights and empowerment through productive multi-stakeholder partnerships.

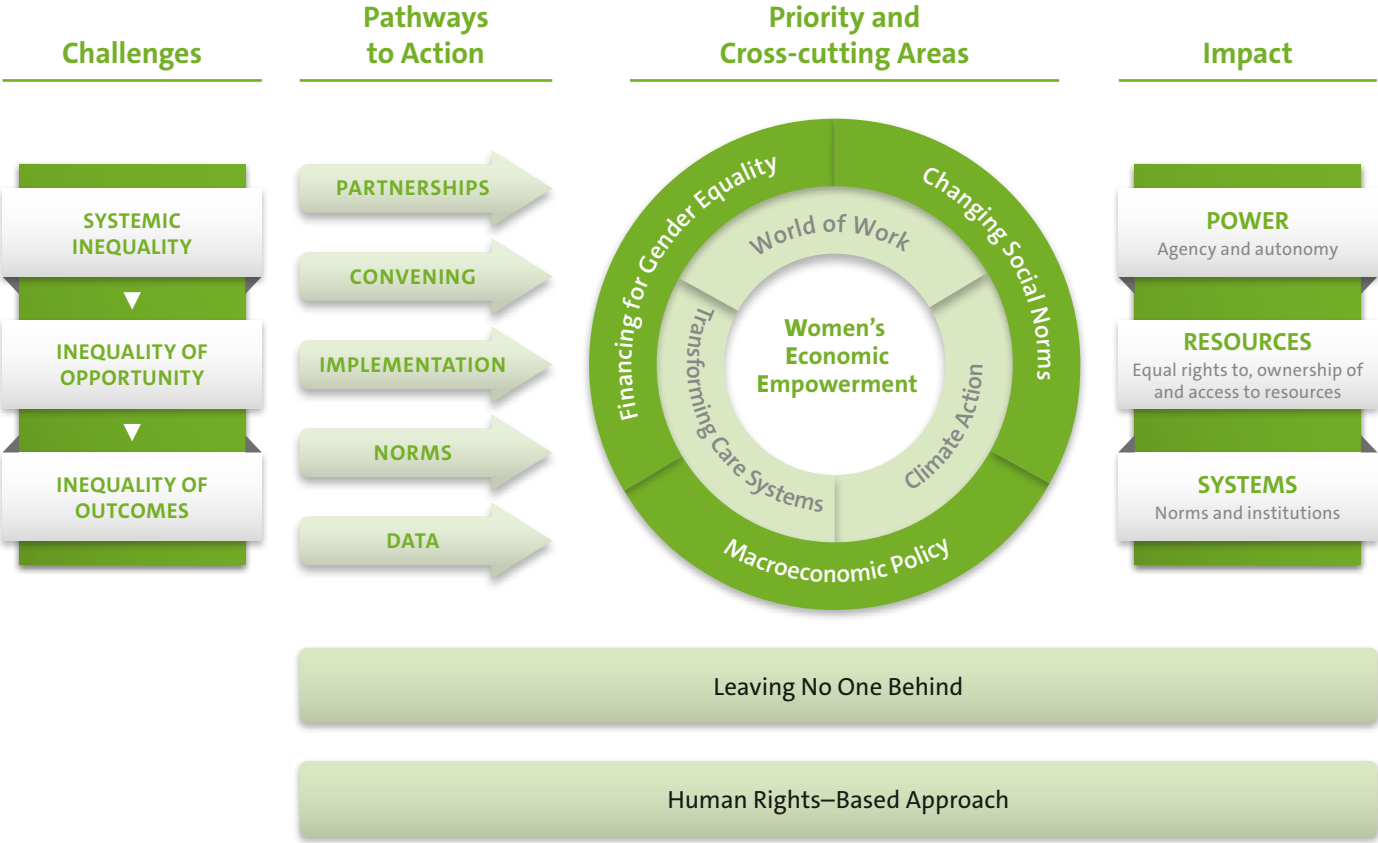


Photo: UN Women/Joe Saade

Priority areas and pathways to accelerate gender equality

UN Women will work in three key priority areas, or ‘Gender Equality Accelerators’ (GEAs); three cross-cutting areas where UN Women is strategically placed to influence transformative change; and five pathways to change (see Figure 2). The strategy identifies three challenges that need to be addressed to achieve women’s economic empowerment: systemic inequality, inequality of opportunity and inequality of outcomes.

FIGURE 2:
Women’s Economic Empowerment Strategy



Three Gender Equality Accelerators

GEA 1: Women and the world of work



Decent work and entrepreneurship are fundamental means to generate sustainable income and wealth for women and societies. When women entrepreneurs thrive, they create jobs and economic opportunities. When women enjoy the right to decent work, the positive spillover effects are many. Entrepreneurship and decent work, which includes social protection, are thus cornerstones of economic empowerment, justice and the realization of human and economic rights, and contribute to multiple SDGs.

Yet women face deeply entrenched constraints to starting a business and getting decent jobs. This limits the realization of their rights, exacerbates poverty and dampens economic prosperity. Globally, over 380 million women and girls live in extreme poverty.⁴⁶ Discriminatory laws, policies, practices and norms and the unequal distribution of unpaid care and domestic work combine to prevent women's full, equal and meaningful participation and leadership in the economy. More than half of all women workers are in the informal economy, often without basic rights and protections. Even women in formal employment lack equal pay, decent working conditions and policies that support empowerment. While one in five women is likely to start a business in the next year, and such enterprises represent a third of all businesses, they fail to grow as fast as firms owned by men. Gender segregation and widespread informality often lock women entrepreneurs out of lucrative sectors; many remain in informal activities.

UN Women will rely on strong partnerships and thought leadership to convene diverse stakeholders at different levels, generate evidence and research, and provide direct technical support to women's enterprises for business development and access to finance. UN Women will work with partners, including ILO and OECD on decent work; UNDP, the International Trade Centre (ITC) and the UN Global Compact on entrepreneurship; and with selected private sector companies that employ large numbers of women. UN Women will also continue to convene partners in this area through the Generation Equality Economic Justice and Rights Action Coalition and the Equal Pay International Coalition.



Under this priority area, UN Women will prioritize the following key actions:

- Pursue transformative solutions to advance women's decent employment, especially in sectors where they are underrepresented, reduce the gender pay gap and facilitate women's access to social protection.
- Support women's entrepreneurship by building enabling environments for women to start and grow businesses and generate and benefit from income and wealth, and increase access to social protection for women in the informal sector.
- Influence how governments and companies do business by leveraging procurement that advances women's economic empowerment, justice and rights, fostering a procurement ecosystem designed to respond to the needs and interests of women-owned and gender-responsive businesses and supporting the creation or reform of legal frameworks, policies and practices towards gender-responsive procurement.
- Work with governments and partners to expand women's financial inclusion and access to relevant technologies.

GEA 2: Transforming care systems



Care work is crucial to societies and economies. The monetary value of women’s unpaid care work globally is at least US\$10.8 trillion annually, three times the size of the world’s tech industry.⁴⁷ Yet care work remains

unrecognized and undervalued, imbued with patriarchal gender norms that view it as a woman’s duty. Around the world, women—with a disproportionate share coming from low-income, migrant and racialized groups—perform more than three quarters of unpaid care and domestic work and make up two thirds of the paid care workforce. Unequal responsibility for unpaid care and domestic work among women and girls is a structural driver of gender inequality. It limits their time, choices and opportunities for decent paid work, education, public life and leisure. It crowds millions of women into low-paid

and insecure jobs, leaving them more likely to toil in poverty without social protection across their lifetime. In low-resource settings and crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, women plug gaps in public services with their unpaid and underpaid care work, further entrenching their time poverty and social and economic exclusion.

The goal is to create millions of decent jobs for women in the care sector and facilitate their economic participation more broadly, including in high-paying, male-dominated sectors. UN Women will work with established and new partners, including ILO, UNDP, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the Office of the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights (OHCHR), regional commissions, the private sector (including signatories of the WEPs) and feminist and women’s rights organizations.

Building on UN Women’s substantial past work, including on costing care systems, supporting countries to develop care policies and systems and—most recently—articulating the care–climate nexus, under this priority area, UN Women will prioritize the following key actions:

- Work with partners and governments to use policy tools to cost investments in care systems and analyse the fiscal space to finance care systems, revenue generation, access to care and potential job creation to address reductions in women’s labour force participation and gender employment gaps.
- Support the development of comprehensive policies and programmes at all levels to recognize, reduce, redistribute, represent and reward paid and unpaid care and domestic work and analyse the impacts of these policies and programmes on access to and quality of care.
- Work with the private sector to assess gaps in provision of care in their supply chains and to promote investments in care policies and infrastructure.
- Work with multiple actors including the private sector, trade unions and civil society to guarantee care services, decent work and representation of care workers.
- Work with women’s organizations, feminist movements and men’s groups, such as the MenEngage Alliances, to change norms and social perceptions of care work.



GEA 3: Gender-responsive climate action and supporting women in the green/blue economies



While climate change, biodiversity loss and environmental degradation affect the entire planet and all peoples, they take a disproportionate toll on those who have contributed the least to the problem, among them marginalized women and girls in least developed countries and Small Island Developing States. Women's unequal access to land and natural resources, finance, technology, decent work, social protection and infrastructure constrains their resilience and ability to cope. Such inequalities are even more acute for indigenous women, Afro-descendent women, older women, lesbian, gay, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ+) people, women with disabilities, migrant women and those living in rural, remote and conflict- and disaster-prone areas. Natural resource depletion and scarcity magnify the threat of sexual and gender-based violence. These interlinked and compounding crises are rooted in an economic system that fails to value, protect, nourish and invest in the rights to life, dignity, development and a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.

Yet the participation and leadership of women and girls in all their diversity are critical for making climate and environmental initiatives more effective. Women, young women and girls are mobilizing climate and environment action everywhere, but their voices, agency and participation are under-supported, under-resourced, under-valued and under-recognized, reinforcing their low representation in governance and decision-making at all levels. Gender-responsive climate and environmental policies, strategies and actions are severely constrained by limited funding and the absence of pertinent gender data, statistics and analysis. The capacity of women and girls to act and build a resilient future depends on removing these structural barriers and gender gaps.

Gender-responsive just transitions put gender equality and care at the centre of policies and programmes to shape economies that advance sustainable development while upholding human rights and the principle of leaving no one behind. An estimated 80 per cent of new jobs created by dismantling fossil fuel dependency is expected to be in sectors dominated by men; it will be critical to eliminate occupational segregation and gender-based discrimination in labour markets. Women must be able to participate in, lead and benefit from gender-responsive just transitions, including through the creation of decent work in care services, energy, transport, agriculture, fisheries and forestry, waste and water management.

UN Women will strengthen global norms and standards on climate, environment and green/blue economies; build the capacities of partners, women and girls to equitably access climate finance, technologies and knowledge, and access and control natural resources for management and protection, including through securing land rights; and strengthen women's climate action and participation in decent work in green/blue economies and climate-resilient agriculture through promoting climate action and participation of women and girls. UN Women will also focus on amplifying the voices of rural, grassroots and indigenous communities, including front-line and women environmental human rights defenders.

Under this priority area, UN Women will deepen partnerships with UNEP, ILO, IFIs and the Rio Convention Secretariats on the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Convention to Combat Desertification (CCD) and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). UN Women will also convene and support the Feminist Action for Climate Justice Action Coalition on a just transition to a green economy.

UN Women will prioritize the following key actions:

- Support the Conferences of Parties to the Rio Conventions, providing technical support to ensure the outcomes of negotiations are gender-responsive and address the needs and priorities of women and girls in all their diversity.
- Leverage long-standing partnerships with women's rights and climate and environmental justice movements, aligning with the Feminist Action for Climate Justice Action Coalition and the Economic Justice and Rights Action Coalition, and including the partners of the Collective Commitment on Women's Land Rights.
- Synthesize and expand UN Women's flagship programme on Women's Empowerment through Climate-Resilient Agriculture, building on several ongoing initiatives, such as joint programmes with FAO, IFAD, WFP, UNEP and the African Development Bank.
- Explore opportunities for increasing finance for gender equality and for women-led climate change organizations.
- Work with partners to ensure a gender-responsive just transition that prioritizes women's jobs and livelihoods.



Photo: UN Women/Joë Saade

Technology, science and innovation are undeniable forces shaping the global economy, and UN Women recognizes the role of financial and digital inclusion for women's economic empowerment. Digital skills are required for many jobs, and technology can be an enabler for enterprises and their access to finance. However, women workers, entrepreneurs and consumers have not equally participated in or benefited from technological

advances. They lack access to digital tools, skills and platforms, and they are underrepresented in the higher-earning segments of the technology industry. Potential areas for collaboration with partners include digital finance, open government data platforms, e-commerce, upskilling for women and an understanding of ethics and artificial intelligence from a gender perspective.

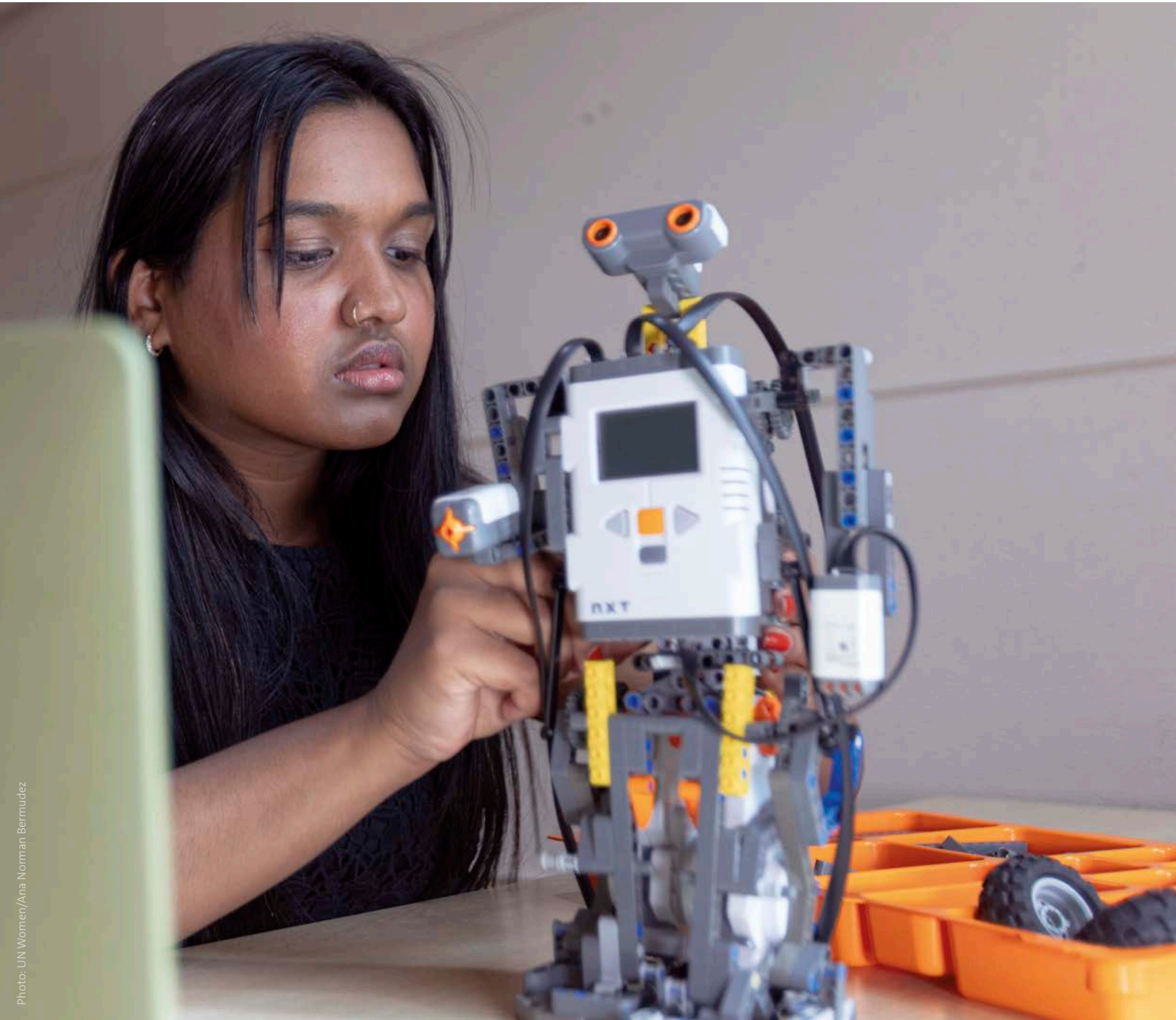


Photo: UN Women/Ana Norman Bermudez

Three cross-cutting areas

Cross-cutting area 1: Gender-responsive macroeconomic policy



Macroeconomic policy choices affect women and men differently because of their different positions in the economy, both market (paid) and non-market (unpaid). Yet macroeconomic policies have given scant attention to these issues and have therefore not been conducive to the achievement of gender equality. This area of work

will therefore involve governments and other partners in pursuing a stable economic environment that promotes robust and sustained economic growth in tandem with gender equality and the economic empowerment of women, while also tracking the impact of macroeconomic policies on achieving women's and girls' empowerment and gender equality.

UN Women will:

- Deepen its focus on expanding the fiscal space for investments on gender equality, including the care economy and social protection, among others.
- Support governments to develop gender-responsive macroeconomic policies, including women's employment creation and improving gender equality.
- Provide evidence on the impacts of macroeconomic trends, including austerity, on gender equality.

UN Women will work with partners to use gender analysis and assessments to influence the formulation of macroeconomic policies, leveraging our convening power with governments and other stakeholders,

including the ILO, UNDP, regional bodies, regional economic commissions and IFIs. UN Women will play a supportive role in areas where other actors hold expertise as appropriate (e.g. UNDP and tax reform policies).



Cross-cutting area 2: Changing harmful and discriminatory social norms



Gender norms can restrict women's economic opportunities by limiting their access to information, networks, jobs and assets. Harmful gender norms are also used to justify gendered occupational segregation that often relegates women to jobs that are deemed less valuable and thus pay lower wages. Social and gender norms are a critical underlying factor in determining whether a woman can work, what kind of work she can do, and what responsibilities she has aside from paid work. Norms can also determine what resources women can and cannot own. Indeed, they may be the most influential

barriers to women's economic empowerment and yet are unspoken. For example, care work remains unrecognized and undervalued, imbued with patriarchal gender norms that view it as a woman's duty.

UN Women will focus on shifting discriminatory social norms that have impacts on women's economic empowerment, including those on unpaid care and domestic work, ownership of resources and women's engagement in paid work. Through collaboration with women's movements, media and advocacy organizations, and men's groups, such as the Men3Engage Alliances, UN Women will seek to:

- Influence shifts in discriminatory social and gender norms to enhance women's economic autonomy and influence policies and standards that facilitate the adoption of positive gender norms.
- Develop tools and approaches to change social and gender norms towards women's economic empowerment in collaboration with existing partnerships, such as HeforShe, Unstereotype Alliance and the MenEngage Alliances.
- Collaborate with the Research and Data section to produce research on social norms change regarding women's economic empowerment with a focus on approaches that have the potential to change discriminatory norms at scale.



Photo: UN Women/Sameh Karim

Cross-cutting area 3: Financing for gender equality



Financing for gender equality is the means to ensure that women’s needs and priorities are met in development planning. UN Women’s Strategic Plan 2022–2025 features financing for gender equality as one of seven cross-cutting systemic outcomes. It positions financing as a

critical driver for transformative change across the four impact areas of governance and participation; ending violence against women; economic empowerment; and peace, security and humanitarian action. It highlights the need to align public and private resources with national priorities for gender equality.

UN Women will continue to:

- Promote financing for gender equality, including women’s access to finance, through technical support and policy guidance to national and local governments, strategic positioning and advocacy within global forums, and the development of standards for gender equality financing.
- Work with other UN agencies and deepen partnerships with IFIs, public development banks, the private sector and others.
- Support governments on gender analysis of public and private financing flows and the integration of relevant data and targets on gender equality.
- Promote responsibility in gender-responsive public–private partnerships by developing standards for and working with the private sector and development finance institutions to promote innovative financing for gender equality.

This cross-cutting area within the section for Economic Empowerment is complemented by the efforts of the Governance and Participation section on gender-

responsive budgeting, which together constitute the Financing for Gender Equality hub.



Photo: UN Women/Ryan Brown

Across the three priority/GEA and three cross-cutting areas, UN Women will integrate the Leave No One Behind (LNOB) principle and take an intersectional approach to

address the multiple and compounding causes of marginalization for women and girls in all their diversity (see Box 2).

BOX 2:

Leave No One Behind in the Women's Economic Empowerment Strategy

Leaving no one behind (LNOB) is a central principle of the 2030 Agenda and UN Women's Strategic Plan 2022–2025. Operationalizing LNOB to achieve economic empowerment for all women entails recognizing and addressing how prevailing economic structures shape unequal outcomes for different groups, resulting in gendered inequalities that intersect with a number of other context-specific systems of difference.

This strategy accounts for UN Women's on-the-ground work across regions and recognizes that some axes of social stratification will be more relevant in one location than another, and to one issue area over another. Each country office should adapt initiatives to LNOB in their specific operating environment.

This strategy **operationalizes** the LNOB principle in several ways:

- UN Women will develop **guidance tools** on appropriate engagement with specific groups most often left behind through WEE efforts.⁴⁸
- UN Women will actively engage in **partnerships** with grassroots, feminist, indigenous, worker's and women's organizations and networks, in order to identify which groups of women are most marginalized in a specific context and which measures are most relevant.
- UN Women will **convene marginalized groups of women** in order to identify priorities for legal, policy and normative change at all levels, and support capacity development for their effective participation in policy dialogues.
- UN Women will continue to promote gender-responsive **laws, frameworks and policies** that address systematic discrimination against women and girls.
- The multi-stakeholder **Generation Equality Action Coalitions** as well as the Global Alliance for Care actively support the leadership and participation of marginalized groups of women.
- UN Women will engage in **joint initiatives and cross-thematic collaborations** that work with and include specific groups of women, e.g. with Humanitarian Action on migrant women.
- UN Women will continue to incorporate the LNOB principle and intersectionality into the **global normative and intergovernmental sphere**.



Five pathways for action

UN Women will amplify its impact across priority areas/ GEAs and cross-cutting areas by concentrating its efforts through five pathways for action, based on UN Women's institutional strengths, strategic position within the UN system and current resources: (i) shaping discourse and normative frameworks; (ii) supporting national and local governments to effect gender-responsive policy change and connect policy to programming; (iii) amplifying the influence of feminist and women's organizations and movements; (iv) catalysing the generation and use of gender data and statistics; and (v) exercising convening power at all levels.

These five pathways align with the systemic outcomes in UN Women's Strategic Plan: to work at the normative and policy levels (Outcome 1), coordinate with the UN system (Outcome 7), address the structural barriers that impede women's economic empowerment (Outcome 4), support social norms change (Outcome 3), women's voice, leadership and agency (Outcome 5) and policies that are resourced and can be monitored to assess their impact on women's lives and livelihoods (Outcome 2), and use improved disaggregated gender data and statistics (Outcome 6).

Pathway 1: Shape the discourse and normative frameworks at global, regional, national and local levels

The corporate evaluation of UN Women's contribution to women's economic empowerment found that "UN Women has a clear and well acknowledged comparative advantage in normative work and facilitating policy dialogues, including through key intergovernmental processes, related to WEE".⁴⁹ The evaluation also noted that "UN Women works effectively to build consensus and facilitate a 'coherent' voice within global policy dialogues on WEE."⁵⁰

UN Women's thought leadership on women's economic empowerment is recognized within the UN system, by Member States and civil society organizations. This includes its convening role, knowledge production and expertise across the organization, as evidenced in key intergovernmental and multi-stakeholder processes,

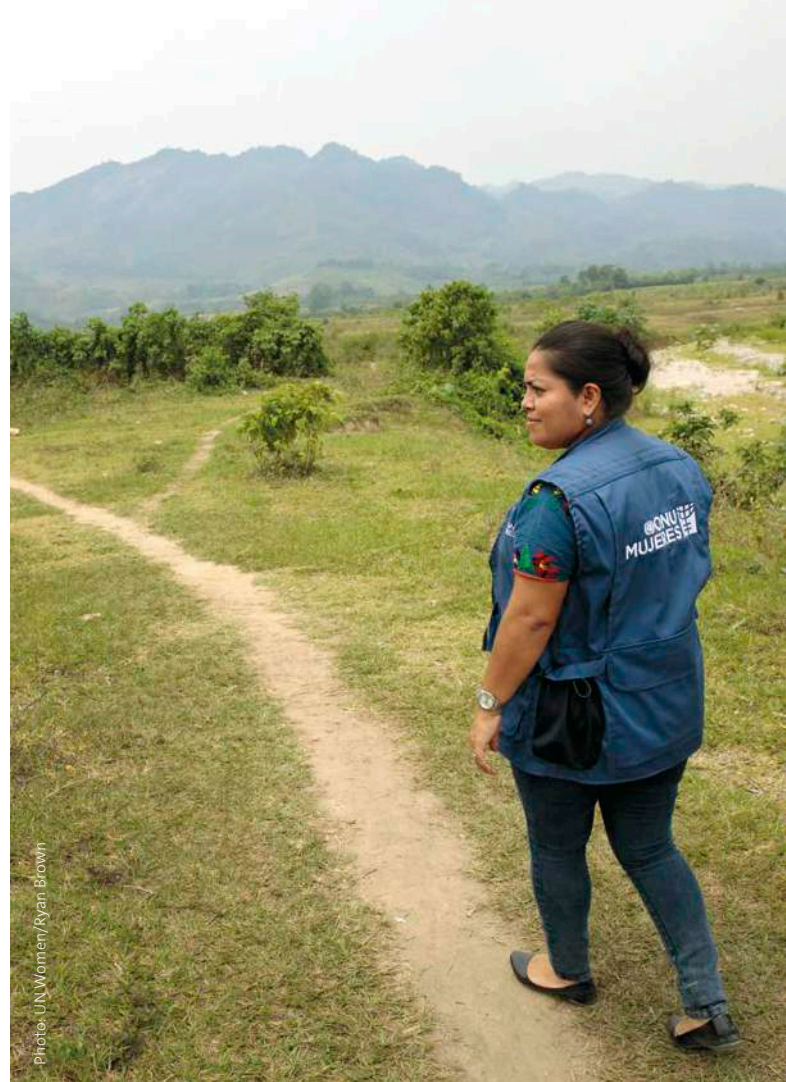


Photo: UN Women/Ryan Brown

such as the Commission on the Status of Women and Generation Equality Forum Action Coalitions on Feminist Action for Climate Justice and Economic Justice and Rights, as well as the aligned Global Alliance for Care, and influence on normative frameworks and policy- and decision-making at global, regional, national and local levels.

UN Women is effectively and well placed to harness its thought leadership and convening power in service of mainstreaming gender in global economic policy discourse and normative frameworks, including by fostering substantive dialogue between actors less frequently in conversation, such as IFIs and the private sector with civil society organizations and grassroots women's movements.

Pathway 2: Support national and local governments for gender-responsive policy change and programming

The corporate evaluation of UN Women's contribution to WEE found that "UN Women's approach ... in supporting the development of and/or strengthening of gender-responsive laws/frameworks/policies is paving the way for commendable nationally owned change."⁵¹ The evaluation highlighted that "the Entity has exceeded, or close to achieve[d] its targets on the strengthening of gender-responsive WEE policies, including on decent work, social protection, care systems, gender-responsive procurement and land tenure systems."⁵² At the regional and country levels, "UN Women has been able to capitalize on strategic opportunities and develop close relationships with governments to facilitate implementation of gender-responsive policies."⁵³

UN Women provides policy guidance, technical advice and capacity strengthening to national and local governments and other stakeholders across world regions on contextually relevant issues around economic empowerment. This includes providing governments

with evidence to "make the case" in favour of increased investment in WEE. UN Women serves as a "connecting agent" to bring governments and other relevant actors, such as the private sector, civil society and women's organizations, together to find key points of entry in gender-responsive policy change and programming.

All three priority areas/Gender Equality Accelerators will be leveraged to facilitate gender-responsive policy change and programming. UN Women will continue to advocate for adequate resource allocations for implementing gender-responsive WEE policies through the Financing for Gender Equality Hub. If resources can be secured, UN Women will address the need for local macroeconomic expertise by creating relevant roles in regional and country offices. Capacity will be increased for staff to focus on addressing policies and fiscal space for investments in the care economy, social protection, women's decent work in the green/blue economies and other institutional and partner priorities.

Pathway 3: Amplify the influence of feminist and women's organizations and movements at all levels through multi-stakeholder partnerships

This approach responds to the corporate evaluation's suggestion that "there is scope to engage with women's movements to monitor, track and report against changes, which may require establishing dedicated platforms, supporting the skills of women's movements and amplifying voices."⁵⁴ It aligns with UN Women's recent evaluation of its policy advocacy work, which recommended leveraging partnerships with feminist movements and women's organizations to support policy change and implementation.⁵⁵

Civil society is one of UN Women's most important constituencies, and UN Women has strong relationships with feminist and women's organizations and movements around the world that goes beyond conventional approaches to capacity-building, and instead seeks to support their priorities, initiatives and networks, thereby grounding the institution's work in the everyday issues of women and girls.

Amplifying the voices and agendas of women's rights activists and organizations on issues that enable women's economic empowerment is key for progress on gender equality and advancing the three Gender Equality Accelerators. Support to civil society organizations that identify and advocate for marginalized groups is also a key pathway to operationalize the principle of Leave No One Behind. UN Women will expand partnerships with feminist and women's organizations to build their capacity and increase their influence with governments, the private sector and financial institutions, providing them with evidence for policy advocacy and financing, and helping them to hold signatories of the Women's Empowerment Principles accountable for the implementation of the WEPs. UN Women will also enhance partnerships with universities and research centres to facilitate evidence-based policy and programming and support the technical training of feminist economists.

Pathway 4: Catalyse the generation and use of gender data and statistics

The corporate evaluation of UN Women's contribution to WEE commends "significant collaboration between WEE efforts and the Research and Data section, including around decent work and entrepreneurship, land access, gender and climate change."⁵⁶ However, the evaluation also emphasizes that "availability of disaggregated data remains a key challenge to UN Women having a comprehensive approach to Leave No One Behind."⁵⁷

UN Women's long-standing relationships with feminist economists and the Research and Data section's in-house capacity have facilitated high-quality research and data to inform policy advocacy, standard-setting and

programming. Provided that resources are secured to enhance staff capacity in data, evidence and knowledge, the Economic Empowerment section, in collaboration with the Research and Data section, will strengthen the generation and use of gender-disaggregated data and statistics and research and knowledge production relating to the three priority areas/Gender Equality Accelerators; evidence-based policy and programming guidance in response to new and emerging trends and crises; and policy tools and rapid assessments, in collaboration with other UN Women sections and external partners, including governments, UN entities, universities and research centres and feminist academics.

Pathway 5: Convene for collective impact

UN Women is well positioned to play a convening role for all stakeholders in the area of women's economic empowerment, bringing together governments, civil society, activists, academics and others for collective action. As a convener, UN Women provides space for diverse actors to coordinate agendas and initiatives for greater reach and impact.

Robust mechanisms are already in place for UN Women to facilitate collaboration, notably through the Generation Equality Action Coalitions on Economic Justice and Rights and the Feminist Action Coalition for Climate Justice. Launched during the Generation Equality Forum in 2021, the purpose of the Action Coalitions is to catalyse commitments, action and accountability from an array of partners for gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment. The priority focus areas of the Action Coalitions are complementary with this Strategy and can therefore be leveraged for its implementation. For example, the Action Coalition on Economic Justice and Rights focuses on transforming the care economy, decent work and employment, and women's access to and control

over resources. Action Coalition partners and allies make commitments that UN Women helps monitor and influence, leading to action throughout the world.

Other promising convening mechanisms are already intrinsic to UN Women's work on economic empowerment. Each of the priority areas/Gender Equality Accelerators and the cross-cutting areas can draw on relevant existing platforms, including the Equal Pay International Coalition, the Sustainable Finance Network, the Gender Coalition of Finance in Common and the Global Alliance for Care.

As part of this strategy, UN Women will continue to support and strengthen the Action Coalitions and other convening mechanisms as avenues to bolster pathways to action, galvanizing partners who are engaged and willing to contribute to the collective project, enabling UN Women to indirectly influence work on economic empowerment across the world. For this reason, this strategy is relevant beyond the work of UN Women itself, extending to the work of all stakeholders who are committed to women's economic empowerment.

5. TAKING ACTION, MONITORING RESULTS

Putting the Women's Economic Empowerment Strategy into practice requires the adaptation and strengthening of key institutional processes and procedures.

Implementation

UN Women will develop and refine institutional practices to increase efficiency and effectiveness across its priority areas and pathways for action: (i) UN system coordination, inter-agency work and joint programming, (ii) cross-

sectoral collaboration, (iii) communities of practice, (iv) knowledge management, (v) private partnerships, and (vi) resource mobilization.

- **UN system coordination, inter-agency work and joint programming:** UN Women's unique triple mandate positions it to mainstream gender in the UN System, including by promoting increased accountability for gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment among other agencies and supporting them to deliver their own mandates from a gender perspective. Joint programming is a valuable tool to advance work on women's economic empowerment and leverage each entity's areas of expertise. For example, through the UN Women–ILO joint programme, 'Promoting decent employment for women through inclusive growth policies and investments in care,' UN Women advocates for the adoption of macroeconomic policy levers that support gender-equitable inclusive growth and more and better jobs for women.
- **Cross-thematic collaboration:** The transformative approach to economic empowerment described in this strategy calls for initiatives that go beyond siloed, single-issue approaches to address multiple factors that enable or constrain women's economic empowerment. UN Women's broad mandate to achieve gender equality means that it has the in-house expertise to implement a cross-sectoral approach.
 - Collaboration with the Ending Violence Against Women section has put UN Women at the forefront of harnessing social protection to address violence against women. Women's economic empowerment can be positioned as an enabling factor for preventing and addressing gender-based violence, with clear points of collaboration between the two sections for research, policy and programming.
 - Governance and Participation is an area in which WEE can engage on the overlap between political empowerment and economic autonomy, or linkages between women in politics and WEE.
 - A strong partnership with Women, Peace and Security will enable UN Women to enhance its leadership role in climate, food and economic security and disaster risk reduction, for example the programme on women's resilience to disasters, across the peace–conflict spectrum.
 - Collaborations with Humanitarian Action will facilitate stronger WEE responses in crisis and emergency settings, by connecting the Economic Empowerment section's expertise in social protection with humanitarian responses and strengthening gender-responsive procurement in emergency settings.

- **Communities of practice:** Since UN Women's inception, HQ, regional and country offices have developed expertise, experience and knowledge in response to different contexts and priorities, which can be leveraged by establishing or strengthening communities of practice across the three GEAs and cross-cutting areas. Communities of practice allow for sharing lessons learned and good practices through webinars, listservs, new and updated knowledge products, tools and guidance.
- **Knowledge management, tools and standards:** Enhanced capacity in knowledge management will enable UN Women to take advantage of its existing expertise and the knowledge gained from innovation and experimentation across world regions and country contexts. Provided that resources are secured, UN Women will establish a new Data, Evidence and Knowledge (DEK) role, which will create a central repository of policy research, guidance, tools, standards and methodologies and successful strategies to support the development and implementation of gender-responsive WEE laws, policies and initiatives in different contexts, supported by communities of practice. In partnership with the Research and Data section, the DEK role will also build a network of gender experts and advocates available to respond to DEK requests from regional and country offices and create knowledge hubs on thematic priorities, pending adequate resources.
- **Private partnerships:** UN Women's Economic Empowerment section will seek to engage in strategic partnerships with private sector organizations, including philanthropic foundations, with the aim of mainstreaming gender equality norms and policies and accelerating progress on women's economic empowerment. Private sector engagement can involve UN Women's provision of technical assistance and policy guidance on accountability mechanisms. UN Women will advise the private sector on issues including care work, gender-responsive procurement, safe workplaces, and innovative financing and partnerships to increase women's access to decent work, markets and livelihoods. Overall, UN Women's private sector engagement will be guided by its Private Sector Strategy.
- **Resource mobilization:** UN Women will mobilize non-core resources to support its WEE policy and programming work to complement its core funding, at HQ in coordination with the Strategic Partnership Division, and in addition to resource mobilization efforts planned in regional and country office strategic notes. This includes an evidence-based case for investment and positioning women's economic empowerment as fundamental to gender equality, especially relevant amidst the global backlash. As part of mobilizing resources, UN Women's Economic Empowerment section will seek to build collaborative relationships with donors for longer engagements of global programmes with clear standards and guidelines.

Monitoring, evaluation and learning

This strategy will be monitored in line with the UN Women Strategic Plan 2022–2025. Progress will be tracked against the indicators in the Integrated Results and Resources Framework (IRRF) and in UN Women's Results Management System (RMS). Results will be tracked through biennial work plans at HQ and in regional and country offices, aggregated at the global level during the annual reporting process and published on the Transparency Portal.

The Independent Evaluation and Audit Service will periodically support the evaluation of tools, processes, guidance and the impact of UN Women Economic Empowerment results. This will be integrated into the Corporate Evaluation Plan 2022–2025 to evaluate UN Women's development results and organizational effectiveness and efficiency.

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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 ensure that the standards are effectively implemented and truly benefit women and girls worldwide. It works globally to make the vision of the Sustainable Development Goals a reality for women and girls and stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on four strategic priorities: Women lead, participate in and benefit equally from governance systems; Women have income security, decent work and economic autonomy; All women and girls live a life free from all forms of violence; Women and girls contribute to and have greater influence in building sustainable peace and resilience, and benefit equally from the prevention of natural disasters and conflicts and humanitarian action. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality.



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