



BEIJING +30: TRADE UNIONS MOBILISE FOR GENDER EQUALITY

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INTRODUCTION

Working women – in every region, in every sector and at every level – are under attack. As workers, women are facing eroding labour rights, rising unemployment, falling wages and a historic global cost-of-living crisis, all of which are compounded by the current trajectory of technological advancements. As women, half of the world’s population is enduring a vicious ‘gender backlash’, an unprecedented attempt to roll back on hard-won rights in every sphere, from legal protections to reproductive health and bodily autonomy, all underpinned by a post-pandemic surge in violence against women and girls.

Multiple economic, political, social, climate and environmental crises are interlocking to create an outlook more unstable than at any time since the 1930s. As women workers specifically, women are disproportionately impacted by all of these interconnected crises, in addition to the added pressures caused by structural gendered barriers to entering, remaining and progressing in the world of work, unequal pay, and completely imbalanced care responsibilities. Through freedom of association, collective bargaining, social dialogue and the power of collective action, trade unions offer working women the first and last line of defence against these challenges.

This year, as the world marks the 30th anniversary of the landmark Beijing

Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA), trade unions will continue to play a critical role to ensure that efforts to deliver on BPfA’s promise of gender justice are aligned with workers’ demands for a New Social Contract and the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development.

30 YEARS OF THE BEIJING DECLARATION AND PLATFORM FOR ACTION

Even now three decades on, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action¹ remains “the most comprehensive global policy framework and blueprint for action” as well as a “source of guidance and inspiration to realize gender equality and the human rights of women and girls, everywhere”². Adopted on 15th September 1995 at the Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women in Beijing, it followed years of groundwork at the three previous World Conferences and considerable debate, exchange and collaboration between governments, international institutions, feminist groups, trade unions and other members of civil society.

The BPfA is considered a watershed moment in the fight for gender equality. It provides an ambitious and comprehensive roadmap to deliver the human rights of women and girls across all civil, social, economic, political and environmental domains; it also contains a global framework, concrete targets in 12 areas of critical concern³, strategic objectives and actions, and guidance on the necessary action at every level.

¹ Although they are nearly always referred to in tandem, the ‘Beijing Declaration’ refers to the goals while the ‘Platform for Action’ provides the roadmap on how it can be achieved. You can read the full text of the Declaration [here](#); and you can read the full details of how they can be achieved via the [Platform for Action](#)

² UN Women, [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action: Beijing+5 Political Declaration and Outcome](#), 1995

³ The 12 areas of critical concern are: women and poverty; education and training of women; women and health; violence against women; women and armed conflict; women and the economy; women in power and decision-making; institutional mechanisms; human rights of women; women and the media; women and the environment; the girl child

In countless ways, the BPfA has transformed the landscape for women's rights: it has changed social norms, pollinated new, powerful feminist movements, paved the way for gender-transformative policies and institutions, and has resulted in life-changing legislation. For example, before 1995, only 12 countries had legal sanctions against domestic violence; today there are more than 1,500 pieces of legislation in place across 193 countries, including 354 targeting domestic violence specifically⁴.

Still, despite the huge advancements made since the BPfA was adopted 30 years ago, not one single indicator under Sustainable Development Goal 5 on gender equality has been met. The UN's own 25-year review of the BPfA in 2020⁵ found that progress has been uneven, with a dearth of action, funding and accountability hindering momentum.

At the same time, the fight for gender equality has been massively derailed by recent attacks on democracy and international law, rising conflict, authoritarianism and fundamentalism, the pervasiveness of misogynistic figures, language and ideas, the lingering social and economic impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic and shrinking financial resources. Crucially, there has also been a virulent and structural attack on the rights of women and girls in every realm and region, orchestrated by “nationalist, fundamentalist and conservative political, cultural and religious movements, encompassing governmental, religious and civil society actors,” according to the UN Working Group on discrimination against women and girls⁶. These forces, which often work together in national and transnational alliances, see the rights of women and girls as a key fronts in their so-called ‘culture wars’, a threat to ‘traditional

family values’ – and most importantly, to their power and influence⁷.

2025: A CRITICAL YEAR

The 69th session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW69), which takes place in New York between 10 and 21 March 2025, will not only review and appraise the implementation of the BPfA on its 30th anniversary (B+30) but crucially, it will also assess the challenges impeding the full realisation of both the BPfA and the 2030 Agenda.

Moreover, CSW69 takes place during a critical year for the United Nations development agenda, as 2025 will see a number of key UN processes aimed at boosting policy coherence and adequate financing for sustainable development. The Fourth International Financing for Development Conference will take place in June and the Second World Summit for Social Development in November, both of which are geared towards overseeing reforms to international finance architecture and inspiring a final push on the 2030 Agenda. In addition, the UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in July will review SDG 5 on gender equality and SDG 8⁸ on decent work and economic growth. This year also marks the 25th anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security and the tenth anniversary of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. These tools, together with International Labour Organization (ILO) standards, offer governments a compass to steer humanity away from its current path to destruction towards a collective future rooted in social justice, equality and rights for all.

⁴ UN Women, *International Women's Day 2025 – For ALL women and girls: Rights. Equality. Empower*, 20 December 2024:

⁵ United Nations Economic and Social Council, *Review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly: Report of the Secretary-General*, December 2019:

⁶ United Nations Human Rights Council, *Escalating backlash against gender equality and urgency of reaffirming substantive equality and the human rights of women and girls*, 15 May 2024

⁷ UNRISD, *The International Anti-Gender Movement: Understanding the Rise of Anti-Gender Discourses in the Context of Development, Human Rights and Social Protection*, May 2023

⁸ UN, *High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development*, 2025

REALISING THE BEIJING DECLARATION AND PLATFORM FOR ACTION: THE CRITICAL ROLE OF TRADE UNIONS

Across the world, trade unions are fighting to safeguard democracy for women at work and in society by: guaranteeing the fundamental right to freedom of association, collective bargaining and the right to strike; upholding the right to freedom of expression; realising equal pay for work of equal value; working to end discrimination and gender-based violence and harassment in the world of work; and various other areas of focus, which will be explored throughout this report.

By taking lead from the 12 critical areas of concern outlined in the BPfA and the six key demands of workers – decent work, fair wages, a respect for workers’ rights, social protection, equality and inclusion – as articulated by the New Social Contract⁹ adopted at the International Trade Union Confederation’s (ITUC) Fifth World Congress in Melbourne, Australia in 2022, governments still have time to deliver on the promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In this regard, trade unions have been focusing their efforts on five specific areas:

1. gender equality for social justice, democracy and peace;
2. women’s labour rights as human rights;
3. decent work for women;
4. equal pay for work of equal value;
5. a world of work free from gender-based violence and harassment.

1. GENDER EQUALITY FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE, DEMOCRACY AND PEACE

► DEMOCRACY

Across the world, the erosion of **democracy** and the expansion of authoritarian rule is having a devastating impact on gender equality. In **Afghanistan**, women and girls have been deprived of nearly all of their basic rights since the Taliban returned to power in 2021, from the ability to complete their education or work freely, to being denied protection from gender-based violence. Like in Afghanistan, the neighbouring Islamic **Republic of Iran** is also in the throes of ‘gender apartheid’¹⁰, as the repression of women and girls is codified in law. However, decades of anger at this enforced gender-based discrimination erupted in protests in 2022, triggered by the unlawful death of a 22-year-old woman who died at the hands of morality police for wearing her hijab improperly. The protests resulted in a brutal crackdown which saw hundreds killed, thousands arrested and the further suppression of civil society.

Over in the **United States**, women in the world’s largest democracy have withstood an onslaught of legislative attacks on their rights since the first presidency of Donald Trump (2017-2021). This is most chillingly illustrated by the reintroduction of the ‘global gag rule’

⁹ ITUC, *A New Social Contract: Congress Statement*, November 2022

¹⁰ Since the end of 2023, there has been a campaign by human rights activists and backed by UN experts, see [gender hierarchies included in the official definition of ‘apartheid’ under international law](#)

(first enacted by President Ronald Reagan in 1985) and the reversal of *Roe vs Wade* in 2022, the former of which prohibited foreign NGOs in receipt of US funding from providing abortion services, while the latter effectively ended the constitutional right of millions of American women to access an abortion. As well as impacting the poorest and most marginalised women in the US, these decisions (President Trump reintroduced the global gag rule almost immediately upon commencing his second term this year) are likely to have far-reaching consequences for abortion laws in other countries. The grim direction of travel of Trump's second term – for example, signing executive orders to suspend foreign aid via USAID, banning gender transitions for people under the age of 19, ending birthright citizenship, withdrawing the US from the World Health Organization, the UN Human Rights Council and the Paris Climate Agreement, and ending all diversity, equity and inclusion programmes within the federal government – suggest that human rights, women's rights and labour rights will all face profound threats during his presidency.

Despite the global shrinking of democratic space, as the world's largest democratic movement, trade unions have an essential role to play in ensuring democracy's survival. In 2024, in a year when more people around the world voted in elections than any year before, the ITUC launched its ***For Democracy* campaign** to rally support for democracy at work, in society and at the global level¹¹.

There are countless examples of trade union action in defence of democracy and human rights at the national level. In countries like **Myanmar**¹², **Belarus**¹³ and **Haiti**¹⁴, despite

operating under severe restrictions and often facing grave danger, independent trade unions still strive to protect workers' rights. In **South Korea**, a brazen attempt by President Yoon Suk-yeol to impose martial law in December 2024 was thwarted by spontaneous mass protests led by young Korean women – who have been politicised by rampant misogyny in politics, pervasive sexual harassment in society and the worst gender pay gap of any developed nation – coupled with an indefinite general strike led by the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU). These actions helped result in the arrest and subsequent impeachment of Yoon, marking a powerful convergence of South Korea's grassroots feminist movement with the labour movement¹⁵. Likewise, in response to the extreme assault on human rights taking place in **Afghanistan**, in 2022 the ITUC and three French trade union confederations – the Confédération française et démocratique du Travail (CFDT), the Confédération générale du Travail (CGT) and Force Ouvrière (FO) – convened an international conference in support of democracy, freedom and equality in Afghanistan.

Unfortunately, **Hong Kong** offers a glaring example of how the dismantling of trade union rights and democratic rights in general can adversely affect women workers, trade union leaders and activists. Since the implementation of the draconian National Security Law in June 2020, independent trade unions have been totally suppressed, with at least 13 trade unionists arrested and/or imprisoned, including women trade union leaders like the former secretary general of the International Domestic Workers' Federation (IDWF) Elizabeth Tang, chair of the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions (HKCTU) Caroline NG, and Winnie Yu,

¹¹ Read more about the ITUC's *For Democracy* campaign, 2025

¹² Equal Times, Khaing Zar Aung, *Burmese trade unionist in exile: "Workers are now in slavery-like conditions, but factory owners know that foreign brands won't leave"*, 22 November 2024

¹³ Equal Times, *Under threat and unable to work, Belarusian trade unionists have taken refuge in Germany to escape prison*, 15 February 2023

¹⁴ Equal Times, Jean Bonald G. Fatal, Jacques Belzin: *"You can't eradicate the problem of armed gangs in Haiti with weapons alone. Our young people need jobs"*, 19 April 2024

¹⁵ The Diplomat, *South Korean Women's Resistance at the Heart of Yoon Suk-yeol's Impeachment*, 31 December 2024

president of the Hospital Authority Employees Alliance (HAEA). The collapse of the union movement in Hong Kong has impacted the most vulnerable workers, such as the legions of mostly female, migrant domestic and care workers who now have even fewer avenues to sound the alarm on poor working conditions, labour violations or serious abuse.

► NON-DISCRIMINATION

Equality and inclusion are at the heart of a world with sustainable peace, democracy and social justice. Trade unions are calling for the B+30 Declaration to include concrete commitments to build a world free of all forms of discrimination, by dismantling persistent structural barriers faced by women at the intersections of class, gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, and migrant, Indigenous and disability status, and to address the needs of those who have already been left behind.

In many areas, trade unions are taking a lead in this work, be it in the protection of the rights of migrant workers, disabled workers or other equity-seeking groups. In countries like **New Zealand, Chile and Finland**, Indigenous trade union leaders¹⁶ – many of whom are women – are bringing their particular sensibilities, culture and experiences to vital trade union work on just transition, social justice, labour and human rights. In the **UK**, the Trades Union Congress' (TUC) Anti-Racism Taskforce has been bringing together trade unions, community groups and anti-racism organisations to develop new strategies to advance racial justice and equality in the world of work and in society.

At the international level, the **Council of Global Unions (CGU)** LGBTI Coordinating Committee coordinates trade union advocacy and actions

in support of LGBTQI+ rights at work, including through running the www.lgbtiworkers.org resource page, which provides up-to-date information on what trade unions are doing to make the labour movement stronger, more inclusive and to defend the rights of LGBTQI+ workers around the world. Moreover, locally¹⁷ and globally¹⁸, trade unions are pushing for a rights-based governance of migration and are working to build inclusive societies and economies, where migrants and their families can work and live with dignity.

► PEACE

The rise in violence, conflict and insecurity around the world is having a disproportionate and devastating impact on women and children, with violence exacerbating structural inequalities and discrimination. The situation in Gaza offers one of the most shocking examples, where approximately 70 per cent of the nearly 47,000 Palestinians killed by the Israeli military during 15 months of devastating war have been women and children¹⁹. Currently in Sudan – like in neighbouring Ethiopia during the 2020-2022 Tigray War and nearby eastern Democratic Republic of Congo during decades of recurring violent conflict – women and girls are experiencing surging sexual violence, sexual exploitation and abuse linked to the brutal civil war that has raged on since April 2023. In the Caribbean nation of Haiti, women and girls are facing unprecedented levels of insecurity and sexual violence in the wake of extraordinary gang violence, which killed over 5,600 people in 2024. And in Ukraine, as well as an increase in sexual and gender-based violence, the war with Russia has resulted in rising poverty levels, particularly in female-headed households, and an increase in trafficking victims.

¹⁶ Equal Times, *Indigenous trade unionists from around the world call for more inclusion and solidarity: "We are not just there to sing the songs and do the opening prayer"*, 9 August 2023

¹⁷ The ITUC has produced various reports to showcase the efforts of trade unions supporting the labour rights of migrant workers. *Various countries*; in [Nepal](#); in [South Korea](#); in [Senegal](#); and in [Nigeria](#)

¹⁸ Find out more about the ITUC's work supporting the labour rights of migrant workers at the international level. *ITUC Policy Brief: a new social contract for migrant workers*; the ITUC's video for [International Migrants Day 2024](#); *Decent Work at the Nexus Between Climate Change and Migration*; a [statement from the global labour movement on the biennial report of the United Nations Secretary General on the implementation of the Global Compact for Migration](#), December 2024

¹⁹ BBC News, *Nearly 70% of Gaza war dead verified by UN are women and children*, 8 November 2024

Around the world trade unions are engaged in **peace, disarmament and reconstruction processes**: examples include the trade union delegation to the third Meeting of States Parties to the **Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons** in March 2025, the involvement of the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU) in the ILO crisis response programme for **Palestine**, and the engagement of Ukrainian trade unions in the Ukraine Recovery Conference 2025, the Council of Europe action plan on **Ukraine** and the World Bank Ukraine Recovery Needs Assessment.

Even in the context of armed conflict, trade unions operate at the intersection between gender equality and sustainable peace, and promote decent economic opportunities for women in post-conflict reconstruction. For example, in post-conflict states like **Sierra Leone** and in **Burkina Faso**, where jihadist insurgents are causing widespread insecurity and displacement, trade unions have initiated peace forums to nurture social dialogue and promote peaceful coexistence²⁰. This invaluable work holds special significance in 2025, which marks the 25th anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.

► LEADERSHIP

A world where women have the same opportunities and rights as men can only exist when, as Target 5.5 of SDG 5 on gender equality states, we see “women’s **full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership** at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life”. Women’s participation in trade union leadership has never been so urgent and we are beginning to see the fruits of many years of organising in this area. Following the **ITUC’s Women in Leadership training programme**, campaigns such as *Count Us In!* and *Decisions for Life*,

there are currently record numbers of not just women leaders in top decision-making positions in the global labour movement, but importantly, women who embody democratic and feminist leadership principles.

There are examples in every region and sector of women trade unionists heading some of the world’s biggest national trade union centres such as the AFL-CIO in the **United States**, CGT **France**, RENGO **Japan**, COSATU **South Africa** and DGB **Germany**. In **Ukraine**, amidst the ongoing war, young women trade unionists have become particularly active in leading union activities, with many of their male counterparts redirected to the frontlines of the conflict.

At the global level, the ITUC has set a target of ensuring that 50 per cent of union leadership roles in the top decision-making bodies of ITUC affiliates will be held by women by the next ITUC Congress in 2027, following the example of trade unions where gender parity has already been achieved, such as CUT Brazil²¹, and the forthcoming *Women in Leadership* campaign (its official launch is scheduled on 8 March 2025) aims to accelerate progress towards meeting that target. Inclusive leadership structures are not only about equality and fairness; they are essential to drive change on gender equality and women’s rights and to guarantee that the issues that specifically affect women workers are addressed.

2. WOMEN’S LABOUR RIGHTS AS HUMAN RIGHTS

► RIGHTS AT WORK

The BPfA contains multiple references to labour rights, including calls for governments to (under point 165-r): “Reform laws or enact national policies that support the establishment

²⁰ Equal Times, *Trade unions as catalysts for sustainable peace and development: Lessons from Burkina Faso and Sierra Leone*, 29 November 2023

²¹ Equal Times, *Count Us In! Women Leading Change*, 2017

of labour laws to ensure the protection of all women workers, including safe work practices, the right to organize and access to justice.” The conclusions of CSW65 in 2021 agreed to respect the rights to freedom of association, peaceful assembly and collective bargaining²². The existence, implementation and application of a robust legal framework for labour rights is the basis for all workers’ rights, which is why trade unions are calling on the B+30 Declaration to include a bold commitment to upholding the ILO’s fundamental principles and rights at work for all women workers, as well as the ratification and effective implementation of international labour standards. Freedom of association and the recognition of the right to collective bargaining are essential to achieving the Decent Work Agenda for women workers, in all their diversity, including at all levels of supply chains, for all informal workers, rural workers and workers with migrant status.

The **ITUC’s Global Rights Index**²³, which comprehensively tracks the violation of workers’ rights around the world, offers a significant contribution to the global defence of labour rights. At the national level, there are countless examples of trade unions upholding fundamental principles and rights at work for all women. Examples include: the fight for **Cambodian unions** to organise and exist, as demonstrated by the ongoing fight to reinstate sacked union members working for the country’s biggest casino²⁴; the battle to secure gender-transformative occupational health and safety in the world of work as exemplified by the 2018 legal victory won by **Spanish unions** to recognise the occupational diseases affecting hotel housekeepers²⁵; and the struggle to guarantee an level playing field for sportspeople, as displayed by a new collective bargaining agreement signed by the NWSL

Players Union in the **United States** – described as “radical by American sports standards”²⁶ and a possible watershed moment in the race to secure labour rights for all athletes and sportspeople.

► SOCIAL PROTECTION

In 2019, CSW63 focused on ‘social protection systems, access to public services and sustainable infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls’. As a fundamental component of the ILO’s Decent Work Agenda, **social protection** is not only a key tool for reducing poverty and inequality. Establishing universal and gender-transformative social protection systems, with adequate and sustainable funding, is essential for women’s full enjoyment of human rights.

A strong example of this is the **Netherlands**, where a universal basic pension is provided to all residents, regardless of occupational or contributory history, to address gender inequalities in pension coverage and to protect women from old age poverty. Meanwhile, in **Mexico**, a programme covering up to 90 per cent of childcare costs – by subsidising both low-income parents and the supply of childcare – has improved labour market access for women.

Trade unions have a vital role to play in helping to establish and extend social protection, particularly to the most vulnerable workers. Examples include the visionary work of the Self Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) in **India**, which has established pension, insurance, childcare and even housing schemes for millions of informal women workers; the **Argentinian unions’** assistance to people made redundant, distributing food and clothing

²² UN, *Outcome of the 65th session of the Commission on the status of Women, 2021*

²³ ITUC, *Global Rights Index*

²⁴ Equal Times, *Cambodian trade union leader Chhim Sithar, released from prison: “We must keep speaking out and uniting for our rights”*, 11 October 2024

²⁵ IUF, September 2018

²⁶ ESPN, *Inside the NWSL’s new CBA: Free agency, revenue sharing, more*, 24 September 2024

and supporting health services with trade union funds in the wake of a brutal structural adjustment programme being rolled out by President Javier Milei; and **Senegal**, where the Union Nationale des Syndicats Autonomes du Sénégal (UNSAS) with the support of French union CFDT is working to improve the incomes, social security and health protection of women who are informally employed in the fish processing sector.

► PUBLIC SERVICES

Quality and affordable **public services** play a critical role in advancing women’s human rights and addressing gender inequality. In particular, frontline services – such as public healthcare, education, transport and water and sanitation – “provide the material base upon which women, within an intersectional framework, can effectively and sustainably transform power relations and livelihoods”²⁷. Trade unions, led by **Public Services International (PSI)** and its affiliates, are calling for these services to be gender-transformative, accessible to women in all their diversity and to be protected from privatisation, which all too often results in higher costs to states, reduced access to and quality of essential services, heightened inequality, low wages, poor working conditions and precarious work. Likewise, **Education International (EI)** leads trade union work globally on free, quality, publicly funded education.

Trade unions are also calling for the sustainable financing of public services based on progressive national tax systems, tax reforms measures (including a global minimum corporate tax rate, financial transaction taxes, wealth taxes and measures to combat illicit financial flows and tax avoidance by corporations and the wealthy), and debt relief.

Around the world, trade unions are also undertaking important work to advance sexual and reproductive rights at work. Since the Covid-19 outbreak, for example, community healthcare workers in India have unionised and staged protests to demand better working conditions, including support for menopausal workers, particularly as climate change is increasing their exposure to higher (sometimes dangerously high) weather temperatures²⁸. In 2024, **Australia’s** Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees’ Association (SDA), which represents retail, warehousing and fast-food workers, conducted quantitative research on the effects of heat (a common health and safety hazards for members) on menopausal and premenopausal women²⁹.

3. DECENT WORK FOR WOMEN

► CARE

Achieving gender equality at work, in our societies and economies heavily depends on ensuring women’s equal opportunities to access, remain and progress in decent work. Still, globally, women spend 2.5 times as many hours a day on unpaid care and domestic work as men³⁰. National comprehensive **care systems** are crucial to advancing women’s effective participation in the labour market and building a fairer, more inclusive society³¹.

At the global level, trade unions have achieved several milestones in this field: since 2023, the UN has recognised 29 October as the International Day for Care and Support, a day initiated by trade unions in 2019 which raises awareness of the importance of care and the need to invest in a resilient and inclusive care economy. In 2024, the International Labour

²⁷ Public Services International, *Advancing women’s human rights through gender responsive, quality public services*, 2018

²⁸ Equal Times, *In India, some community health workers are trying to navigate climate change and menopause*, 18 January 2024

²⁹ SDA, March 2024

³⁰ UN Women, *Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals*, 2024

³¹ See more information on ITUC work on care systems

Conference adopted for the first time, a landmark ILO Resolution on decent work and the care economy³².

The call for investments in care is also increasingly visible on the UN development agenda. For example, since 2021 the UN Commission on Social Development has acknowledged the need for the recognition, reduction and redistribution of unpaid care³³. Furthermore, the targets of the *Global Accelerator for Jobs and Social Protection and Just Transitions*, launched by the UN Secretary-General António Guterres in September 2021, puts strong emphasis on investing in the care economy³⁴.

Globally trade unions are calling for the recognition of care as a human right – which includes the right to provide care, receive care and to self-care – and a public good³⁵. At the national level, there are many examples of trade unions working to secure increased public investments in care as a means to advance decent work for women and gender equality as well as to improve access to and the quality of care available. In **Chile**, trade unions are playing a crucial role in a new bill which seeks to establish a National Care and Support System. If successful, it would establish care a fundamental right and provide better quality care services and support the work of carers, including unpaid carers, the majority of whom are women³⁶. Meanwhile, **South African unions** are successfully negotiating and pressing the government for legislative rights and benefits for informal workers – such as minimum wage, employment standards, unemployment insurance (including maternity, paternity and parental leave) as well as compensation for injury on duty (including sexual assault or harassment) – and making a push to organise

domestic workers and home care workers, while advocating for system-wide investment in the care economy.

► JUST TRANSITION

The 2015 Paris Agreement calls for “a **just transition** of the workforce and the creation of decent work and quality jobs” for all workers, while in 2022, the 66th session of the Commission on the Status of Women focused on the priority theme of ‘Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies’³⁷.

Around the world, trade unions are leading action on gender-responsive just transition towards low-carbon economies with quality, decent jobs for women and men. At the international level, trade unions were part of discussions to compel governments to raise ambition in advancing gender equality and just transition at COP29 in Baku in 2024. This resulted in the extension of the Lima Work Programme on Gender (LWPG) for another 10 years and introduced the development of a new Gender Action Plan (GAP), with a view to recommending a draft decision for consideration by COP30.

At the national level, examples of trade union work on a gender-responsive just transition include the **Pakistan** United Workers Federation’s grassroots work to upskill young women working in sectors heavily affected by climate-induced job losses, such as home-based work, domestic work, platform and agriculture. In **India**, SEWA recently collaborated with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and one of the country’s

³² ILO, *Resolution concerning decent work and the care economy*, June 2024

³³ ITUC, *UN Commission on Social Development: trade unions’ demands reflected in final resolution*, March 2024

³⁴ ITUC, *Trade unions support the implementation of the UN Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions*, September 2022

³⁵ ITUC, *International Day for Care and Support*, October 2024

³⁶ Equal Times, *‘Chile Cuida’ and the challenge of integrated care*, 1 October 2024

³⁷ UN Women, *CSW66 Climate change - Environment disaster risk reduction*, March 2022

leading renewable energy companies (ReNew Power) to retrain low-income women working as salt harvesters in Gujarat to become renewable energy technicians³⁸. In 2019, the **Spanish parliament** approved a world-leading Just Transition Strategy³⁹, which sets out plans for the decarbonisation of the Spanish economy. Social dialogue, with the active participation of trade union organisations, is one of the central elements of the process, as is a focus on equality. And in 2022, the Confederation of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) developed a *Just Transition Blueprint for Workers*⁴⁰ which not only discusses the gendered and racial impacts of climate change in **South Africa** but offers support to trade unions in designing policies and using collective bargaining to promote a radical transformation of sectors such as agriculture and mining, while avoiding some of the structural failings of the current carbon economy.

► FORMALISATION

With women disproportionately represented in the most vulnerable categories of **informal work**⁴¹ (such as domestic work, agriculture and low-paid home-based work), empowering informal women workers is essential to accelerating gender equality and decent work. The adoption in 2015 of Recommendation No.204, an ILO standard on how to help half of the world's labour force (nearly 2.5 billion people) transition from the informal to the formal economy, is key to these aims.

In the **Democratic Republic of Congo**, where informal work represents an astonishing 97.5 per cent of all work, Confédération syndicale congolaise (CSC) has successfully organised mostly women market traders into loans and

saving cooperatives, as well as teaming up with municipal authorities in the capital Kinshasa to ensure a cleaner trading environment for stallholders⁴². In **Rwanda**, a new union is in the early stages organising legions of young, informal, predominantly female hairdressers, often in small work spaces with exploitative employers and facing issues such as poor wages and third-party violence and harassment.

► DIGITALISATION

Advances in **technology**, particularly in artificial intelligence (AI), robotics and automation, are going to radically transform the future of work. While AI systems can offer new opportunities for gender equality, in line with CSW67 which was held in 2023 and focused on 'Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age', trade unions are calling for the digital transition to be regulated through social dialogue to prevent and mitigate the negative impacts on women.

Challenges include the global gender digital divide in terms of access and use of the internet, access to digital skills and use of digital tools, and participation in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). Online gender-based violence and harassment such as cyberbullying and hate speech also pose another challenge, in response to which, the global union federation the **International Federation of Journalists (IJF)** is running a campaign titled *You Are Not Alone*⁴³, which frames the widespread harassment of female journalists and online trolling as a health and safety issue.

Trade unions are also responding to the occupational segregation and poor working

³⁸ ITUC, *Position Paper to the HLPF 2023: Making the 2030 Agenda a Reality through a New Social Contract*, June 2023

³⁹ Comisiones Obreras (CCOO), *Spain: A Pioneer Country in Just Transition*, April 2022

⁴⁰ COSATU, *Just Transition: A Blueprint for Workers (Summary Document)*, 2022

⁴¹ ILO, *Building Back Better for Women: Women's Dire Position in the Informal Economy*, September 2020

⁴² Equal Times, *Congolese trade unionist Joséphine Shimbi Umba: "We say 'protect the workers', but which workers are we talking about if only 2.5 per cent have formal jobs?"*, 10 October 2018

⁴³ IJF

conditions entrenched by digital platform work, where app-based workers are among the two billion informal sector workers with few legal protections. The debate concerning the employment relationship of workers on platform apps, (i.e. whether platform workers are employees or self-employed) is of great concern to women as female app workers have no access to work-related or social protection benefits, including paid maternity, parental and other carers' leave. What is sold as 'flexibility' in platform work, often reveals itself to be instability and irregularity, pushing platform workers to operate on multiple platforms or to work for longer hours just to get a sufficient income. In response to these concerns, the Gig and Platform Service Workers Union (GIPSWU) in **India**, the first women-led gig workers' union in the country, has taken repeated action since it formed in 2023 to demand the recognition of gig workers as employees, decent work and minimum wages⁴⁴. Meanwhile global unions support the adoption of a set of new international labour standards on decent work in the platform economy, which will be discussed at the 113th session of the International Labour Conference which will be held in Geneva in June 2025⁴⁵.

4. EQUAL PAY FOR WORK OF EQUAL VALUE

Equal pay for work of equal value is a fundamental labour right, as prescribed by ILO Convention 100 (1951) on Equal Remuneration. Still, in every region and across all income groups and sectors, men earn more than women. Furthermore, women workers affected by multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination on grounds such as race and ethnicity also experience larger pay gaps, while LGBTQI+ people, women with disabilities and refugee and migrant women are also affected. The gender pay gap is not only a

major obstacle to equitable and inclusive labour markets, but it is also a significant contributing factor in the feminisation of poverty.

Trade unions across the world are calling on governments and employers to take various measures to close the gender pay gap, such as establishing minimum living wages through statutory processes or collective bargaining, implementing pay equity and anti-discrimination legislation, introducing pay transparency laws, and adopting quotas or targeted initiatives to train, recruit and retain women in underrepresented sectors, such as STEM.

Although progress is slow, significant victories have been achieved. In 2017, the **Equal Pay International Coalition (EPIC)** was formed, a multi-stakeholder partnership (which is led by the ILO, UN Women and the OECD, and comprises of members from various governments, the ITUC and the International Organisation of Employers, among others) to help UN member states achieve SDG 8.5, which calls for equal pay for work of equal value by 2030. In April 2023, the **European Union** adopted new rules on pay transparency in the shape of the EU Pay Transparency Directive which, among other measures, requires EU companies to share information on salaries and take action if their gender pay gap exceeds 5 per cent, including compensation for those discriminated against and penalties for employers who break the rules. In July 2023, the **Brazilian government** approved Law 14,611/23, establishing that private legal entities with 100 or more employees are required to guarantee equal pay for women and men in the same position and undertaking work of equal value. And in 2024, the Health Services Union (HSU) and the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) managed to secure historic pay increases for nursing assistants and other aged care workers in **Australia**.

⁴⁴ The Print, *India's first women gig workers' union calls for digital silence on Diwali. 'Want voice to reach govt'*, 31 October 2024

⁴⁵ International Union Rights, *The fight for a new labour standard to regulate platform work*, Volume 31, Issue 3, 2024

5. A WORLD OF WORK FREE FROM GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT

Gender-based violence and harassment (GBVH) remains among the most prevalent and pervasive human rights violations in the world.

Globally, conservative governments are removing legislative protections for women. For example, in 2021 **Türkiye** withdrew from the Istanbul Convention, which obligates state parties to address violence against women, including domestic violence, in all its forms and to take measures to prevent it, protect its victims and prosecute the perpetrators. This is despite the fact that four out of ten women in Türkiye suffer from physical and/or sexual violence and 394 women in Türkiye were killed by men in 2024, the highest number on record⁴⁶. Globally, femicide – the most extreme form of gender-based violence – is also on the rise. In 2023, an average of 140 women and girls worldwide lost their lives every day at the hands of a partner or close relative⁴⁷.

Eliminating gender-based violence and harassment – which negatively impacts women’s dignity, safety and autonomy at work, as well as their basic ability to work – is essential to advancing gender equality. To date, 47 countries have ratified the groundbreaking ILO Convention 190 (C190) adopted at the International Labour Conference in 2019, also thanks to over a decade of trade union organising, campaigning and lobbying. C190 and its accompanying Recommendation 206 are the first international instruments that recognise everyone’s right to a world of work free from violence and harassment, including gender-based violence and harassment.

Even before the adoption of C190 – and with growing impetus since then⁴⁸ – trade unions have been lobbying for legislative changes⁴⁹, raising awareness around GBVH among union members as well as the wider society, negotiating collective bargaining agreements and other work policies⁵⁰, providing direct services to survivors and organising workers around the issue of GBVH.

Trade unions are calling for policies that protect women from violence and harassment in the world of work to be designed and implemented with trade unions, and there are many great examples of what can be achieved when they are. In Türkiye, a network of trade unions, women’s rights groups and other members of civil society are working together to tackle gender-based violence and discrimination through information campaigns, training and audits, and by enforcing their application as occupational risk prevention in collective bargaining agreements⁵¹. In **Lesotho**’s garment sector, trade unions used C190 as the basis to establish binding agreements between one of the country’s leading denim suppliers, three major global apparel brands and a coalition of trade unions and women’s rights organisations, to specifically tackle gender-based violence. Trade unions in many countries are organising workers, particularly in sectors where women are overrepresented, to strengthen their negotiation power with the voices of women workers and demand measures – for example, through CBAs – to tackle GBVH.

Trade unions are also taking action on the growing threat of third-party violence and harassment, which is a huge safety concern for workers in customer and public-facing roles. In

⁴⁶ Stockholm Center for Freedom, *Number of femicides in Turkey soared to 394 in 2024: rights group*, 6 January 2025

⁴⁷ UN Women, *Femicides in 2023 global estimates on intimate partner/family member femicides*, November 2024

⁴⁸ ITUC, *C190: Unions in action to end violence and harassment at work*, November 2023

⁴⁹ ITUC, *Workers Unite For The Right Of Everyone To A World Of Work Free From Violence And Harassment : #RatifyC190*, September 2022

⁵⁰ ITUC, *Unions in action to end violence and harassment in the world of work*, November 2024

⁵¹ Equal Times, *Turkish unions take an inventive approach to fighting gender-based violence in the world of work*, 19 June 2024

2023, the global union federation **UNI Europa**⁵² and employers in telecommunications, finance and gaming signed pioneering guidelines on eliminating violence and harassment in the world of work, with a specific focus on domestic violence as related to the world of work, third-party violence, and the psychosocial risks of telework. And trade unions are also taking action on GBHV in the context of increased remote work, telework and digital platform work. A 2024 study by the **European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)**⁵³ showed that Europe's legal framework is failing to keep up with new and rising threats against women in the world of work, such as those stemming from

increased digitalisation, telework and remote work. As a result, the ETUC is calling for a new EU directive on gender-based violence at work, supporting unions to collectively bargain for the safety of working women⁵⁴.

Trade unions are also calling for increased investment in prevention and greater funding for anti-violence public services. This should include gender transformative education systems, training and awareness raising programmes, accessible grievance mechanisms through social dialogue, programmes for survivors' economic recovery and legal support, and adequate labour inspection.

RECOMMENDATIONS

With only five years left, the global trade union movement is calling on governments around the world to take urgent and meaningful action to ensure the full realisation of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development in line with calls for a New Social Contract rooted in a gender-transformative agenda.

Trade unions are calling on the 69th session of the United Nations Commission of the Status of Women to include the following demands:

- A. **recognise gender equality as a fundamental component of social justice, democracy and peace,**

through commitments to build a world free of all forms of discrimination and recognize that advancing equality at work and in society is essential to strengthening democracy and building inclusive and peaceful societies.

- B. The **ILO's fundamental principles and rights at work** must be upheld for all women – including freedom of association, the right to organise, and the right to bargain collectively. Establishing universal and gender-transformative social protection systems, with adequate and sustainable funding, is essential for women's full enjoyment of human rights, as are quality and affordable public services.

⁵² UNI Europa and social partners sign first-of-its-kind EU cross-sectoral guidelines on eliminating violence and harassment - UNI Europa

⁵³ ETUC, *Report: Safe at work, safe at home, safe online: Tackling gender-based violence and harassment in a changing world of work*, 2024

⁵⁴ ETUC, *Letter from the ETUC Women's Committee to Commission President Ursula von der Leyen*, 2024

- C. Achieving gender equality in the economy is contingent upon equal access to **decent work for women**. Governments must develop national employment policies and plans and invest in the creation of 575 million new decent jobs by 2030, including in the care sector, with a gender-transformative just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies for all, as well as the worker-led formalisation of one billion workers in the informal economy. National comprehensive **care systems** are crucial to advancing women's participation in the labour market and building a fairer, more inclusive society. The **digital transition** should also be regulated through social dialogue to promote gender equality and mitigate the disproportionate negative impacts of automation and work reorganisation on women. Trade unions support the adoption of a new set of ILO standards, in the form of a Convention and Recommendation, on platform work, as well as the establishment of policies and regulations on artificial intelligence in line with the 2030 Agenda and ILO standards.
- D. Systemic and structural approaches are necessary to finally close the **gender pay gap**. Trade unions are calling for the establishment of minimum living wages through statutory processes or collective bargaining, the implementation of pay equity and anti-discrimination legislation, the introduction of pay transparency laws, and the adoption of quotas or targeted initiatives to train, recruit and retain women in underrepresented sectors, such as STEM, as well as revaluing feminised occupations and sectors.
- E. Finally, eliminating **gender-based violence and harassment** is essential to advancing gender equality. Trade unions call for the ratification and effective implementation of ILO Convention 190 and Recommendation 206 as well as increased investment in prevention and greater funding for anti-violence public services, which include training and awareness-raising programmes, accessible grievance mechanisms through social dialogue, and adequate labour inspection.
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