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Statement submitted by Sociologists for Women in Society, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Gender is a defining factor in poverty. Women and other gender minorities overall experience higher rates of impoverishment than men while minoritized women, such as Black and Indigenous women, women with disabilities, immigrant women, older women, and LGBTQ+ experience even more extreme conditions.

The majority of the world's poor live in rural communities of color, where agriculture continues to be the main source of employment. However, rural women disproportionately struggle to own land and benefit from new agricultural innovations. High poverty as such remains pervasive. It is not limited to women living in the Global South, for in the United States, the largest economy in the world, 70 per cent of the nation's poor are women and children. Children living with only their mothers are more than twice as likely to live in poverty than those who live with only their father.

There are several reasons for this phenomenon, the feminization of poverty, that continues to increase overtime. Many of the current crises of the global economy are expected to have a disproportionately negative effect on women, especially for women in diversely, vulnerable situations. The causes of the higher levels of poverty among women are intersectional, as gender identity, race and ethnicity, sexual orientation and disability are among the main factors that are interwoven with structural and institutional dynamics. These include access to education, work in the formal or informal economy, occupational segregation, gender pay gaps, the domestic division of labor and domestic violence, among other factors.

Labor force participation

Women's participation in the labor market globally has stagnated and, in some cases, fallen in the last decades. It is a complex trend, often hinging on disproportionate numbers of women vulnerably working in informal employment or unemployed and lacking alternative income security and protections. This is especially evident in Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, Southern Asia and, more generally, in low- and lower-middle-income countries. Women are overrepresented in the most vulnerable categories of the informal economy, with many laboring as home-based workers doing piece-rate work in the lower tiers of supply chains, or domestic work.

Workers in the informal economy have no or little job and social security protections. They do not have access benefits that guarantee income security, particularly in cases of unemployment, sickness, invalidity, work injury, maternity, old age, or loss of a breadwinner. The gender disparity is exacerbated among women of color in informal employment. Indigenous women are more likely to work in the informal economy than their non-indigenous counterparts (86.5 percent versus 60.9 percent).

Recommendations

Member States should:

- Adopt cash transfer programs, universal or for families living in poverty. The transition to formality first requires access to better working and living conditions.
- Integrate such programs with “exit doors” including access to education and skills training and be combined with access to other social protections such as universal health care, and subsidized housing, that reduce poverty and increase economic security for women and families in the long term.

- Promote gender-inclusive access to credit and access to finance and assets.
- Guarantee by law and practice a minimum wage that considers the needs of workers and the cost of living in their country.

Care work, Part-time work, and Unpaid work

Women tend to work fewer hours in the paid workforce as they balance work and care commitments. There is no country where men and women provide an equal share in terms of unpaid care work, defined as the work of caring for others including minors, older adults, those who are ill, disabled, or unable to care for themselves. Such work is quite often challenging and goes undervalued by society, and underpaid, if compensated at all. Globally, women contribute two to ten times more care work. In fact, women account for 76.2 percent of total hours contributed to unpaid care work. Women also do much of the paid care work, which typically tends to be low-wage work.

Recommendations

Member States should:

- Increase investments in the care economy, particularly by improving access to affordable care services for children, older persons and other dependent sick or disabled persons.
- Implement federally mandated paid parental leave, moving beyond current paid maternity leave rights to paid parental leave with provisions to increase the proportion of participating fathers.
- Address the economic and cultural foundations of the worldwide persistence of work-family life imbalance and the domestic division of labor associated with higher levels of unpaid care work performed by women.

Gender Wage Gap

On average, women earn less than men—and the wage gap is wider for minoritized women. The gap compounds over a lifetime, with women ending up with fewer resources and savings than men. As it stands now, it will take 170 years to close the gender wage gap. This represents a significant factor contributing to the gender disparity in poverty rates, especially among older women. The gender wage gap is driven by numerous factors, including differences in types of occupation, hours worked, and years of experience. Women with disabilities are further disadvantaged, as they make 72 cents to every dollar made by a disabled man.

Recommendations

Member States should:

- Promote efficient and transparent mechanisms for the enforcement of equal pay legislation, beyond guaranteeing equal pay by law.
- Improve the quality of minimum wage jobs through policies that increase minimum wage, provide paid sick days and paid family leave

The US should pay a fair wage to women with disabilities by revising the U.S. Fair Labor Standards Act, Section 14(c), which lets businesses pay people with disabilities less than the minimum wage.

Occupational segregation

When occupations are dominated by men they usually pay better than female-dominated fields, even when those jobs require the same level of education and skill. Even when women enter traditionally male dominated fields, they tend to go into the lower-paying specialties. However, women, especially women of color, are often segregated into low-wage jobs such as childcare and domestic work. In the United States, women represent about two-thirds of workers earning the federal minimum wage and nearly 70 percent of tipped workers, for whom the federal subminimum wage is even smaller. Women are underrepresented in high-wage occupations such as engineers, computing, and other STEM occupations, which are among the fastest growing and most lucrative careers.

Recommendations

Member States should:

- Promote equal access to all levels of education, primary, secondary, and tertiary.
- Adopt policies to promote work-family life balance and increase investments in the care economy.
- Identify and prevent early barriers to STEM for girls and young women in STEM education and skill building.

Rural Women

Globally, over 70 per cent of people in poverty live in rural areas where agriculture continues to be a key source of economic livelihood. Women make up almost half of the global agricultural workforce yet are less likely than men to have access to new agricultural technologies. Globally, fewer than 1/5 of landholders are women, and women are denied the right to inherit their spouse's property in over 100 countries. Climate change has led to an increase of drought and desertification, yet rural women are often blocked from full participation in mediating climate change risk.

Recommendations

Member States should:

- Create policies that protect women and girls, especially widows, rights to land ownership and land use.
- Fund and prioritize learning opportunities for all women in rural areas, especially Native and indigenous women, in the development of new technologies and agricultural innovations.

Domestic Violence

Survivors of intimate partner violence lose a total of 8 million workdays each year. Nearly all survivors experience economic abuse, such as financial control and exploitation by their abusers. Women with disabilities from various backgrounds encounter structural and gender-based violence, leading to heightened barriers to accessing education, securing employment, and receiving social support. Consequently, women of diverse backgrounds find themselves trapped in impoverished and unstable situations, restricting their possibilities to live in environments free from violence. Furthermore, many nations enact economic violence against women and children through their austerity policies that disproportionately have a negative impact on women.

Recommendations

Member States should:

- Fund programs and services such as local shelters, transitional housing programs and culturally specific support services for women and other gender minorities who are experiencing intimate partner violence.
 - Report disability, sexual identity, race, and citizenship status in femicide observatories.
 - Provide economic resources for survivors who are in financial debt or economic instability because of domestic violence.
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