



# General Assembly

Distr.: General  
26 March 2025

Original: English

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## Human Rights Council

### Fifty-ninth session

16 June–11 July 2025

Agenda items 2 and 3

### Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General

Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,  
political, economic, social and cultural rights,  
including the right to development

## Annual full-day discussion on the human rights of women

### Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

#### *Summary*

In accordance with its resolution 6/30, the Human Rights Council convened its annual full-day discussion on the human rights of women on 28 June 2024. The discussion was organized into two panels. The first was focused on economic violence as a form of gender-based violence against women and girls and the second on the human rights economy and women's human rights.



## I. Introduction

1. On 28 June 2024, the Human Rights Council, pursuant to its resolution 6/30, convened its annual full-day discussion on women's human rights. The discussion was divided into two panel discussions, the first on economic violence as a pervasive form of gender-based violence against women and girls and the second on the concept of a human rights economy, emphasizing its role in advancing women's rights and fostering economic justice and equality.

## II. Economic violence as a form of gender-based violence against women and girls

2. The first panel discussion was opened by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and moderated by a Vice-President of the Human Rights Council, Heidi Schroderus-Fox. The panellists included the Senior Legal Adviser at Equality Now, Esther Waweru, the Vice-Chair of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Genoveva Tisheva, the seconded National Expert in Gender-Based Violence at the European Institute for Gender Equality, Agata Szypulska, and the Chair of the Older Women's Network, Anne-Sophie Parent, who contributed a prerecorded video message.

### A. Opening statement

3. In his opening statement,<sup>1</sup> the High Commissioner for Human Rights commended the women's rights movement for some of the most extraordinary progress in human rights of the current generation and emphasized the importance of honouring and celebrating that progress. He noted that that progress had been hard won and was fragile and that gender-based violence against women and girls was an egregious expression of power, domination and patriarchy. He highlighted the ways in which gender-based violence was a roadblock to gender equality, sustainable development and peace.

4. The High Commissioner noted that gender-based violence persisted due to a pervasive culture of toxic masculinity and misogyny that transcended cultures, regions and religions. He emphasized that such violence served as a tool of control over women and girls, perpetuating their subordination, denying them freedom and stripping them of agency. He highlighted that, regardless of income or background, all women and girls faced the threat of gender-based violence, with nearly one in three experiencing it at least once in their lifetime.

5. The High Commissioner recalled the feminist author Carolina Criado Perez's words: "There is no such thing as a woman who doesn't work. There is only a woman who isn't paid for her work." He pointed out that economic violence was one of the forms of gender-based violence that too often went unseen and unregulated. He identified economic control, economic sabotage and economic exploitation as the three forms of economic violence that were playing out around the world. He added that, in all its forms, economic violence was facilitated by archaic gender norms that considered men to be the financial decision makers, stifling women and blocking them from living a life of autonomy.

6. The High Commissioner observed that economic violence occurred most frequently within the home and was often intertwined with physical or sexual violence. He noted that States could facilitate and even perpetrate such violence through discriminatory legal frameworks that restricted women's access to credit, employment, social protection and property and land rights. He emphasized that the world had failed to fulfil the promise of gender equality by neglecting to implement the measures necessary for half of humanity to enjoy their fundamental rights and freedoms. Globally, an estimated 3.9 billion women faced legal barriers that affected their economic participation. Women earned only 77 cents for every dollar paid to men, while 92 countries lacked provisions mandating equal pay for work

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<sup>1</sup> Statements are available at <https://hrcmeetings.ohchr.org/HRCSessions/RegularSessions/56/Pages/Statements.aspx?SessionId=77&MeetingDate=28/06/2024%2000:00:00>.

of equal value. The global wealth gap between women and men stood at a staggering \$10 trillion.<sup>2</sup>

7. The High Commissioner underscored that women's equality was central to human rights, human dignity and the shared future of humanity. He asserted that addressing economic violence and ensuring economic equity required a complete overhaul of discriminatory laws and practices, alongside effective implementation. That effort would demand policy measures that upheld women's economic, social and cultural rights, ensured access to decent work and equal pay for work of equal value, provided quality education that fostered human rights, gender equality and mutual respect and guaranteed the full realization of sexual and reproductive health and rights. He also called for equal property ownership, equitable access to and control over financial resources, shared childcare responsibilities and sufficient childcare options. He stressed the importance, above all, of ensuring that women had the choice and opportunity to shape their own lives.

8. The High Commissioner emphasized the need for stronger mechanisms to address economic violence and support survivors. He called for improved complaint systems, better economic and social support structures, more widely available psychological assistance and robust measures to bring perpetrators to justice. He denounced all forms of violence against women and girls as abhorrent and inexcusable, highlighting the ways in which such violence undermined their full and equal participation in society, stifled their potential and robbed them of choice and opportunity. He concluded by describing the discussion as a critical moment to reflect on and implement tangible actions to end such injustices.

## B. Overview of presentations

9. Ms. Waweru stated that there could be no equality in society without equality in the family. She identified inequality in the family as a root cause of economic violence, coupled with other factors emanating from retrogressive patriarchal norms. Globally, 1.4 billion women lived in countries that did not recognize economic violence in their legal system or provide legal protection to victims of that form of violence. Ms. Waweru was particularly inspired by the inclusion of economic violence in the definition of violence against women as set out in the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol), which included all acts perpetrated against women that caused or could cause them physical, sexual, psychological and economic harm, including the threat to take such acts. The Protocol, which had been ratified by 45 out of 55 member States of the African Union, also included a call for the adoption of economic measures to ensure the prevention, punishment and eradication of all forms of violence against women.

10. Ms. Waweru highlighted that the lack of legal protection and the existence of sexist, discriminatory laws, policies and practices could give rise to economic violence and make women and girls even more vulnerable to exploitation. Economic violence took a variety of forms, often reflecting gendered and intersectional dynamics, at both the intimate partner level and the macro level. She noted that economic violence was evident in legal pluralism, where women in religious and customary marriages lacked full legal protections, while child marriage deprived girls of education, career opportunities and the chance to build sustainable livelihoods. She elaborated on policies governing marriage, marital property and divorce that disproportionately harmed women, including the non-recognition of minority marriages, the absence of laws prohibiting domestic and economic violence and unequal legal frameworks for divorce, child custody, inheritance and matrimonial property.

11. Ms. Waweru shared insights from Equality Now's latest report,<sup>3</sup> in which key trends in 20 African countries were examined and pervasive discrimination in family laws highlighted. She noted that Equality Now also published a review<sup>4</sup> every five years

<sup>2</sup> World Bank, *Women, Business and the Law 2024* (Washington, D.C., 2024), p. xv.

<sup>3</sup> See <https://equalitynow.org/resource/family-law-africa-report>.

<sup>4</sup> See <https://equalitynow.org/resource/words-and-deeds-sex-discrimination-in-economic-status-laws-2024-update>.

identifying explicitly discriminatory laws in need of reform. Most recently, it had found that countries with laws that prohibited economic equality and consequently enabled economic violence inhibited women's full economic participation and often exposed them to exploitation. Those findings coincided with the results of an analysis of 190 economies by the World Bank.<sup>5</sup>

12. Ms. Waweru offered some recommendations to States, namely, to enact comprehensive laws to criminalize intimate partner violence, including economic violence, repeal marital power that designated husbands as head of household and ensure equal property rights for men and women before, during and after marriage. She advocated for the equitable sharing of marital property, the recognition of non-financial contributions, a guarantee of equal labour rights and the ratification and full implementation of international conventions, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Maputo Protocol and the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence. She concluded by emphasizing that achieving gender equality within families was a crucial step towards realizing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

13. Ms. Tisheva emphasized that the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was a cornerstone for women's rights, with clear obligations for States Parties and a strong focus on eliminating violence against women, including economic violence, which was recognized as a violation under customary international law. She noted that, out of 55 cases brought under the Optional Protocol to the Convention in which a violation had been found, nearly 30 concerned gender-based violence. Economic violence involved coercive control that limited women's autonomy, access to justice and political participation, often manifesting itself in such patterns as the non-payment of child support and broader domestic violence.

14. She highlighted the role of intersectionality, citing a case<sup>6</sup> in which the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women had recommended the provision of tailored support to Aboriginal women and improved accessibility measures, such as sign-language services for women with disabilities. Stressing the important role of non-governmental organizations, she called for stronger support systems to address inadequate services that exacerbated violence against women. She also underscored the need to implement the Committee's recommendations on economic violence.

15. In her presentation, Ms. Szypulska offered reflections on the reasons that economic violence against women and girls was still vastly overlooked as well as evidence-based solutions. She explained that the concept of economic violence had received more attention only recently and provided definitions of several forms of economic violence, including economic sabotage and economic control. She explained that data collection regarding economic violence was complicated by the lack of clear concepts and definitions. That lack of clarity made certain forms of economic violence against women invisible.

16. Ms. Szypulska observed that only nine member States of the European Union explicitly criminalized any form of economic violence in 2021. She noted that the lack of a unified understanding of economic violence complicated efforts to address it. For instance, when the European Institute for Gender Equality had asked States to provide data on economic violence in intimate partnerships, some jurisdictions had populated their indicators with data on relevant offences, such as damage against personal property, theft, financial control and non-payment of alimony, while others had provided data on slavery, trafficking in persons and enforced prostitution, including across borders.

17. Ms. Szypulska emphasized the need to fill knowledge and research gaps. She stated that it was crucial to undertake new research initiatives to fully understand economic violence, its emerging forms and its impacts on various groups and types of persons, including women who were marginalized because of their ethnic background, age, disability or immigration status. She emphasized that, apart from developing common definitions for economic violence, it was necessary to learn more about its prevalence and carefully listen

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<sup>5</sup> See World Bank, *Women, Business and the Law 2024*.

<sup>6</sup> See *Kell v. Canada* (CEDAW/C/51/D/19/2008).

to women's experiences, including, for example by conducting population-based surveys. She observed that data collection was beneficial not only when it came to protecting women, but also for improving institutional responses to violence, facilitating mutual learning between States and exchanging good practices to address economic violence more efficiently.

18. Ms. Parent covered two examples of economic violence against older women that States could address: the risk of economic deprivation in old age, which could result from pension reforms; and the risk of financial domestic violence and restrictions on financial independence faced by older women with low financial literacy and poor digital skills. She clarified that, while her presentation was based on the lived experience of older women in European countries, similar challenges had been reported in other regions of the world.

19. Ms. Parent noted that gender equality measures should be carefully designed, with a risk assessment for the diversity of profiles, including the most marginalized persons. She added that, even in countries where measures had been introduced to protect women in older age brackets, the risk of economic hardship was increasing among older women. She emphasized that the risk of institutional economic violence would persist in the future unless sufficient public funding was allocated to ensure accessible and affordable childcare and long-term care services.

20. Ms. Parent stated that, although the risk of financial abuse was not new, the rapid digitalization of retail payment services combined with a decrease in the acceptance of cash had put older women with low financial literacy or poor digital skills at higher risk of economic abuse. Such risk was also due to a lack of inclusive written payment solutions, which forced many older women to hand over the control of their assets to a third party, denying them the right to retain control of them. Ms. Parent noted that older women were often advised to designate a trusted person to manage their assets, even though, with a bit of help, they could improve their financial literacy and learn how to manage their accounts digitally.

21. Ms. Parent asserted that States could help to prevent financial abuse by requiring banks to provide alternative, non-digital financial services that were both accessible and affordable for those in need. She recommended that public authorities tailor financial literacy programmes and digital-skills training to meet the specific needs of older women, enabling them to exercise their right to financial independence and protect themselves from domestic economic violence. She also recommended that States ensure that staff at support centres for victims of domestic violence received proper training to recognize and address financial abuse experienced by older women.

### **C. Statements by representatives of States and observers**

22. Several delegates reiterated that women and girls faced multiple and intersecting forms of gender-based violence and noted that economic violence against women and girls was an underaddressed form of gender-based violence. It was observed that economic violence was reinforced by gender stereotypes and regressive social norms and that economic violence was an obstacle to women's and girls' economic independence.

23. It was also observed that addressing economic violence against women and girls would require comprehensive legal and policy strategies. Speakers noted that, despite increased global attention, significant legislative gaps remained with regard to gender-based violence, including economic violence. It was further observed that, in certain cases, economic violence could be perpetuated by traditional gender norms, legal frameworks and digital technologies.

24. Several speakers noted that, despite the enshrinement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in several human rights treaties and its centrality to the implementation of the economic empowerment remained a distant goal for millions of women and girls around the world. One in 10 women lived in extreme poverty and more than 2.7 billion women faced legal restrictions that prevented them from having access to the same job opportunities as men. It was observed that addressing that disparity required the removal

of all barriers that prevented the meaningful participation of women and girls in all their diversity.

25. Some speakers emphasized that child marriage was both a driver and a consequence of gender-based economic violence. They observed that poverty and a lack of income-generating activities could drive child marriage for girls, while forced marriage put women and girls at increased risk of other forms of gender-based violence. They added that women and girls who had married early urgently needed support, as they were excluded from access to and the full enjoyment of their rights. There was a call to scale up age- and gender-responsive interventions to reduce the risk and mitigate the impact of economic violence and other forms of gender-based violence that girls faced around the world.

26. Several delegates emphasized that, in times of crisis, women and girls were disproportionately affected. They noted the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on women, particularly regarding the alarming rates of domestic violence. Several speakers also highlighted the impact of the ongoing crisis in Gaza on women.

27. Several delegates emphasized positive advancements that had been made by States, including progress in the recognition in law and in policy of economic abuse as a form of gender-based violence and of the need to promote women's economic empowerment.

28. Despite such advancements, several speakers noted that significant challenges remained in terms of addressing economic violence towards women and eliminating gender-based violence and domestic violence in general. Several speakers asked the panellists for guidance in terms of policies and strategies to address economic violence against women in their specific contexts.

#### **D. Responses of panellists and concluding remarks**

29. In her concluding remarks, Ms. Waweru thanked the speakers and delegates for their statements and commended the sharing of best practices. She noted that countries continued to constrain women's property rights and stressed the importance of removing those legal restrictions and recognizing economic violence as a form of gender-based violence. While she highlighted the notable progress that had been made, she also stressed the staggering number of 1.4 million women who continued to be at risk of experiencing economic violence because of discriminatory laws and called for urgent change.

30. Ms. Tisheva emphasized the interconnectedness of national law and regional policy in the fight against gender inequality and gender-based violence. She recommended the adoption of temporary special measures to address inequalities and emphasized the utility of article 5 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women to address gender stereotyping as an underlying cause of gender-based violence. She also emphasized the importance of adopting and implementing domestic laws and policies that addressed economic violence specifically.

31. Ms. Szypulska highlighted examples of the efforts to address violence against women discussed during the session, stressing the critical role of data collection in shaping policies grounded in robust and reliable evidence. Citing the latest Eurostat survey,<sup>7</sup> she pointed out that 7 per cent of ever-partnered women across 18 member States of the European Union had reported partners forbidding them to work or controlling family finances. She underscored that the European Institute for Gender Equality remained committed to tackling all forms of economic violence.

### **III. Human rights economy and women's human rights**

32. The second panel discussion was opened by the United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights. The panellists were the Campaign Manager of the Global Campaign for Equality in Family Law, Hyshyama Hamin, the Senior Specialist, Gender

<sup>7</sup> See <https://eige.europa.eu/publications-resources/publications/financial-independence-and-gender-equality-joining-dots-between-income-wealth-and-power>, p. 12.

Equality and Non-Discrimination, at the International Labour Organization (ILO), Emanuela Pozzan, and the Senior Director of Global Policy at the Institute on Race, Power and Political Economy at The New School, Savi Bisnath.

## A. Opening statement

33. In her opening statement, the Deputy High Commissioner highlighted the ways in which global inequality and poverty had been growing, with around 4.8 billion people poorer than they had been before the COVID-19 pandemic, noting that they were more likely to be women and girls, particularly those who faced multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. With more than 10 per cent of women globally trapped in a cycle of extreme poverty, at the current rate of progress, 342 million women would still be living in extreme poverty in 2030.

34. The Deputy High Commissioner stated that current economic, legal and policy frameworks hindered the achievement of gender equality. She noted that gender discriminatory laws and practices had a severe impact on women's enjoyment of economic rights. For example, legal barriers against women having access to, owning and administering property persisted worldwide. In 102 countries, women's right to inherit their husband's property was denied under customary, religious or traditional laws and practices and women enjoyed universal access to pensions in only 56 out of 116 countries with relevant data.

35. The Deputy High Commissioner also stated that, globally, according to existing laws, women should enjoy roughly 64 per cent of the economic rights of men. On average, however, countries had established less than 40 per cent of the systems needed for the full implementation of those economic rights. As an example, she noted that, while 98 countries had enacted legislation mandating equal pay for women for work of equal value, only 35 had adopted pay transparency measures or enforcement mechanisms to address the issue.

36. The Deputy High Commissioner highlighted the ways in which gender stereotypes in dominant economic models affected women's and girls' rights. For example, women, including girls, young women, older women and women with disabilities, shouldered a disproportionate share of unpaid care and support as women were perceived as the primary caregivers. Yet unpaid care and support were not included in the calculation of gross domestic product or other macroeconomic indicators. She also highlighted that, even when it was paid, care and support work was often undervalued, as it was not recognized as skilled work, leaving women and girls unprotected and depriving them of equal opportunities to education, work and participation in public life.

37. The Deputy High Commissioner described the ways in which unsustainable levels of global public debt, combined with conditionalities in foreign financial assistance, were constraining the fiscal space of States, leading to drastic cuts in public services and the denial of economic, social and cultural rights. She noted that women would likely disproportionately face the brunt of such cuts, since they were overrepresented in public services both in the workforce and as their users. In addition, when public services were cut amid austerity measures, they were often replaced by women's unpaid care and support work.

38. She stressed that unlimited economic growth, the unsustainable exploitation of the environment and the disregard for States' obligation to realize economic, social and cultural rights needed to be re-evaluated. She stated that systems should be reformed to guarantee women's rights and gender equality, adding that the economic paradigm and approach to macroeconomic policies needed to be shifted towards realizing a human rights economy.

39. The Deputy High Commissioner noted that a human rights economy put people and the planet in the centre of economic, social and environmental policies, with the aim of dismantling structural barriers, eliminating discrimination and advancing substantive equalities, sustainable growth and shared prosperity. She stressed that a human rights economy demanded the equal and meaningful participation of women and girls in decision-making and prioritized investments in human rights.

## B. Overview of presentations

40. Ms. Hamin said that no country in the world had achieved legal equality between women and men and that inequality often started within the family. She added that, globally, women and girls were affected by discriminatory family laws and practices, resulting in multiple intersecting issues. Such laws and practices limited women's and girls' right to education, employment, economic independence and full participation in society. They also increased their risk of being exposed to gender-based violence, including such harmful practices as child and forced marriage.

41. Ms. Hamin noted that 1 in 10 women lived in extreme poverty. She said that addressing discriminatory family laws could contribute to the elimination of poverty in many countries where women's lack of economic rights and security was linked to unequal family laws and practices. She also noted that, in many contexts but especially in the Middle East, Africa, South and Southeast Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean, unequal family laws and practices affected the financial rights of women.

42. Ms. Hamin said that, at the household and family levels, family laws and practices affected the right to enter into and rights during marriages and unions and during and after the dissolution of marriages and unions. According to the 2024 World Bank report,<sup>8</sup> 76 out of 190 countries restricted women's property rights, 19 countries had laws that allowed husbands to legally prevent their wives from working, 43 countries did not grant the same inheritance rights to widows as widowers and 41 countries prevented daughters from inheriting the same portion of assets as sons.

43. She noted that, in her own country, Sri Lanka, the Muslim Marriage and Divorce Act of 1951, which applied to the Muslim minority, did not require the bride to be present during marriage ceremonies or to sign marriage documents, denying her full autonomy. She also noted that divorce proceedings remained unequal, with no guidelines on alimony or women's right to matrimonial property. She said, however, that the country's Ministry of Justice had announced reforms to the Act, which would potentially initiate comprehensive reform on those issues to ensure gender equality.

44. Ms. Hamin stated that many countries lacked provisions for calculating maintenance and alimony. In most countries of the global South, the division of matrimonial property was not recognized or calculated equitably and women's unpaid care and non-monetary contributions were not taken into account. When women worked, they had limited control over their earnings, leaving women and girls vulnerable to multiple layers of discrimination.

45. Ms. Hamin noted that, when women had economic rights, they had more access to loans, insurance and social protection schemes and experienced less poverty in old age and that they and their families were more resilient in crises. Family structures, gendered labour division within families and family laws affected women's well-being no less than labour market structures and labour laws. She added that an increase in the participation of women in the labour force accelerated gender equality and could result in economic gains nationally.

46. Ms. Hamin proposed key recommendations for States to accelerate progress. First, the international community should prioritize and promote egalitarian family laws and practices. Second, all States should ensure that family laws and practices were aligned with core human rights treaties and article 16 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, including by lifting reservations to and fully implementing that article. Family laws for all citizens, regardless of tradition, ethnicity or belief, should ensure that child marriage was prohibited and that women had full autonomy and equality to enter into marriage and within marriage and the right to a fair dissolution of marriage. She stressed that transforming gender and power relations was critical for challenging inequality within families and achieving gender equality.

47. Ms. Pozzan noted that the adoption of the Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189), of ILO had been an important step for the large majority of care workers who were invisible and that the Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190), of ILO had

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<sup>8</sup> World Bank, *Women, Business and the Law 2024*.

highlighted that workers in the care economy were exposed to violence and harassment. She also noted that, because of commitments and efforts by States, civil society and other organizations, there was now a common understanding of the definition of the care economy and the ways in which gender equality, care and decent work were intertwined.

48. Ms. Pozzan highlighted the International Labour Conference, held in Geneva in June 2024, where a resolution concerning decent work and the care economy had been adopted. It had been affirmed in the resolution that care and support were fundamental to human, social, economic and environmental well-being and to sustainable development. It had also been acknowledged in the resolution that care, both paid and unpaid, was essential to all other work and was the foundation of any society and economy.

49. Ms. Pozzan stated that a well-functioning care economy was critical for building resilience to crises and for achieving gender equality and inclusion. It was important to recognize the diversity of social, economic and political contexts in which care was delivered around the world and the highly heterogeneous nature of the care workforce and the social organization of care. That meant that the provision of care and access to care placed a disproportionate responsibility on women, leading to widening gender gaps in the world of work and leaving many women without adequate social protection.

50. Ms. Pozzan detailed the key innovative elements of the ILO resolution, namely, that labour in the care economy was not a commodity and that all people should be able to provide and receive care, which included self-care. That principle, as set out in the resolution, had been guided by a rights-based approach to care and was grounded in the fundamental principles and rights related to work and other relevant international labour standards.

51. Ms. Pozzan reiterated the connections between care, gender equality and decent work, noting that 16 billion hours of care were provided by women for free and was invisible. While unpaid care could be rewarding at the personal and community level, when it was excessive, it could undermine the economic opportunities and well-being of unpaid care providers and their enjoyment of their rights, including to an adequate standard of living, to family life, to social protection, to work and to freely choose employment, to decent work and good working conditions and to rest and leisure.

52. Ms. Pozzan highlighted that, globally, more than 600 million women and 41 million men were not in the labour market because of family responsibilities. She added that over 380 million people worked in the global paid care workforce – two thirds of them women – a sector in which discrimination and vertical and horizontal occupational segregation meant that women were to be found mainly in care jobs in the informal economy or in more precarious, less well-paid jobs. They were also less protected in terms of occupational safety and health, including in relation to violence and harassment, and in terms of social protection.

53. Ms. Pozzan stressed the importance of such policies as care leave, which allowed women and men to be in the labour market while also taking care of their families. While there had been increases in maternity protection, millions of women were still not covered and billions of men did not have access to paternity protection. She also noted the childcare policy gap of 4.2 years, meaning the gap between the end of leave entitlements and the age at which children could have access to childcare services or attend primary school. States were currently addressing that policy gap, which constituted a significant structural barrier in the world of work, particularly for women, including migrants, racialized women and women experiencing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination.

54. Ms. Bisnath noted that policymakers and the public were taught to think of macroeconomic policies as relevant to facilitating economic growth and full employment and maintaining some level of price stability, rather than to think of economic policies as relevant to the advancement of women's rights and gender equality, human rights and inclusive sustainable development. She noted, however, that the role of the economy was, in part, to facilitate human flourishing. Economic policies could help to ensure that the root causes of poverty and inequalities as experienced by women and the structural barriers that perpetuated them were addressed and redressed.

55. She added that there was a consensus that the current economic model was failing to deliver economic prosperity for all. For example, women were often paid less than men for

the same work and they faced discrimination based on such grounds as race, age and geographical location. Furthermore, inequality in opportunities and outcomes was influenced by gender, race, ethnicity, income, place of birth, occupation, sexual orientation, gender identity, wealth and parents' education. Such inequality could be seen in the disparities in the ownership and control of economic wealth, access to resources and markets, the exercise of political power and the lack of upward mobility.

56. Ms. Bisnath noted that, when States were obliged to privatize public services, there were direct implications for individuals, in particular for women engaged in care and support. The public sector played a crucial role in reducing such inequalities, however. She also noted that the Secretary-General had highlighted such challenges as geopolitical and economic fragmentation, mostly affecting women and girls, the cost-of-living crisis and the poorest countries with debt facing insolvency and default.

57. Ms. Bisnath stated that economic inequality within and between countries was grounded in economic and political systems in which the communities most left behind experienced multiple, persistent and intersecting forms of discrimination and were often historically marginalized. Most low- and middle-income countries allocated a significant share of their national budgets to debt servicing, potentially leading to increased poverty and inequality for women and girls. She stressed that there was an urgent need for reform of the global debt architecture.

58. Ms. Bisnath also stressed that equality required human rights-enabling economic policies. Economic decisions that centred people and the planet were driven by the recognition that assessments of the health and well-being of societies necessarily entailed going beyond aggregate growth to include care and support work, the share of workers in the informal sector, inequality by income and wealth and racial, gender and regional disparities.

59. Ms. Bisnath stated that macroeconomic policies, decisions and actions that enhanced human rights would maximize available resources, including through progressive taxation and the curtailment of corruption and illicit financial flows. An economy grounded in human rights principles and standards would facilitate transparency and accountability and space for social dialogue, scrutiny and participation.

### **C. Statements by representatives of States and observers**

60. Many representatives of States and observers highlighted that macroeconomic systems were not gender neutral. Current macroeconomic systems contained structural barriers that prevented gender equality and the full enjoyment of human rights by women and girls. Because of the intersection of multiple grounds of discrimination, women disproportionately experienced the negative impacts of those dominant economic models. Several speakers stated that a lack of women's representation in decision-making processes and the design of public policies on the economic level hindered gender equality. Several speakers stated that the unsustainable and unprecedented global public debt, coupled with a lack of sustainable development, disproportionately affected women and girls.

61. Some States expressed their commitment to move towards a human rights economy, including by dismantling structural barriers and other impediments to equality and justice and working towards equal and sustainable development for all. It was necessary that reform of the international financial architecture be guided by human rights standards and include a gender perspective. Several speakers noted the importance of placing women's and girls' rights and well-being, including mental health, at the centre of economic and fiscal policies. They emphasized the need for structural changes not only to economic policies but also to social, environmental and political policies to prioritize human rights.

62. It was noted that global crises, such as environmental damage, loss of biodiversity and rising inequalities, highlighted that the economic systems in which they were rooted operated at the expense of women, as their time was considered to be an unlimited free resource during such crises. Several speakers stated that the redesign of systems to bring about a human rights economy should include the well-being of the planet, the care economy, human-centred

economics and a prioritization of investments in economic, social and cultural rights and the right to development.

63. It was noted that the transformative potential of a human rights economy would be unattainable without addressing the global financial architecture and the way that the global South dealt with austerity and structural adjustment measures and loan conditionalities as set out by international financial institutions. Low-income countries were allocating twice as much funding to interest payments as to social assistance and 1.4 times more than to healthcare. It was stated that macroeconomic measures imposed on such countries served the interests of private businesses.

64. Some speakers stressed that men and boys needed to be involved as agents of change and strategic allies. Some highlighted their concern at the persistence of the gender pay gap between women and men, the proportion of women in the worst paid jobs and the unequal responsibility of women for caregiving. It was important for the entire international community to address the architecture of inequality through inclusive policies.

65. On the issue of care and support, some speakers reiterated that care should not be seen as a burden but as a public good, essential to economies, societies and humanity, that should be reprioritized. It was noted, however, that unpaid care was currently at the heart of gender inequality, as the societal organization of care contributed to women's time poverty and unequal labour force participation and the gender pay gap. Young girls were often pulled out of school to assist with household responsibilities, for example. It was noted that investing in care economies helped to ensure that women and girls could pursue their education and careers without unequal care responsibilities. Examples were given for how to increase and diversify financing to scale up innovations in the care economy, prioritize data collection to drive evidence-based policymaking and create robust accountability mechanisms to track financial commitments.

66. It was also noted that, to guarantee sexual and reproductive health and rights in a human rights economy, States should ensure the rights to clean water, safe infrastructure, adequate nutrition, access to affordable health services, quality education and skills to navigate equitable relationships, regardless of the profitability of such rights.

67. Speakers also noted that corrective measures needed to be taken to counterbalance gender inequalities and patriarchal stereotypes. Examples of such actions included tackling intersecting forms of discrimination and exclusion, implementing the 2030 Agenda and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. There was a need for comprehensive strategies to tackle macroeconomic issues through social protection systems and access to public services and sustainable infrastructure.

68. Some States said that the family in its traditional form could promote the physical and mental health of its members, safeguard their rights and improve the economic life of women. In one country, surveys had showed that a large number of women were looking for flexible job opportunities because of pregnancy or the tradition of being present in the home. The results indicated that women wanted to have a personal income while still taking care of their children.

69. Several States shared good practices, including gender-mainstreaming across all government action and putting in place policies to ensure that at least 40 per cent of board members of large companies and representatives in Government were women. Other examples included increasing women's participation and representation in leadership positions by investing in equal education and focusing on national budget allocations to social programmes, the establishment of interministerial bodies focused on policies and programmes for women, progressive taxation to reduce inequalities, investments in women's skills to broaden opportunities for employment and legislation to provide access to family services.

70. Speakers asked how macroeconomic systems could be transformed to advance human rights, how strategic macroeconomic national policies could reflect the experiences and realities of women in all their diversity effectively and how international cooperation could be enhanced further to accelerate achievements under Sustainable Development Goal 5 and ensure the integration of women's and girls' rights into State policies.

## D. Responses of panellists and concluding remarks

71. Ms. Hamin reiterated that, amid multiple global crises, countries in the global South had taken critical national expenditure away from such services as education and healthcare. Women and girls had been doubly affected, as they faced inequalities at the family and societal levels, which were exacerbated by economic crises that countries faced from their relationships with external economic institutions.

72. Ms. Hamin also stated that, while it was important for States to take specific measures to improve women's access to employment and labour force participation, they also had to address the inequality and discrimination that limited women's autonomy, decision-making and economic rights. She stated that Governments must recognize family law and not consider it solely as a personal or household matter, noting that that stance had been used by anti-rights movements to stifle conversations about family law reform and to roll back progress.

73. Ms. Hamin noted that inequality in family law and practices was a systemic issue that affected all other areas of life, including education, health, labour force participation and the political participation of women and girls. Family law should guarantee full autonomy and equal partnerships. The implementation of good practices and procedures was also needed.

74. Ms. Hamin concluded by urging the international community and Governments to recognize inequality in family law and practices as a priority issue that required reform. She stressed that States should lift their reservations to article 16 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. She reiterated that family law – regardless of tradition, ethnicity or religious belief – must ensure the equality and autonomy of women and men, from the time of entry into and during marriage and unions and at the time of dissolution and thereafter. She also stated that equal inheritance rights for children and widowed spouses should be recognized in family laws as should the equitable distribution of marital property that accounted for both financial and non-financial contributions, including unpaid care work.

75. In her concluding remarks, Ms. Pozzan said that the 5R Framework for Decent Care Work<sup>9</sup> was referenced in the ILO resolution concerning decent work and the care economy. The framework included the call for the recognition, reduction and redistribution of unpaid care work, the rewarding of more and decent work for care workers and the representation of care workers in social dialogue and collective bargaining. She added that the framework provided solutions for realizing structural change through macroeconomic policies, as it provided a strategy for achieving gender equality and addressing deficits in the care economy.

76. Ms. Pozzan noted that, to recognize, reduce and redistribute unpaid care work, its scope needed to be measured by means of data collection. She stressed that it was important to invest in quality care services, care policies and relevant infrastructures, as such measures would enable women and men to redistribute unpaid care work within the family.

77. Ms. Pozzan emphasized that the pay disparity between women and men was especially pronounced in the care sector, since more than 70 per cent of the care sector labour force were women. She noted that, when a sector was feminized in such a way, there was a tendency towards lower wages. Because of that, it was important to reward care workers working in that highly feminized sector. She also noted that many countries had been advancing wage transparency legislation.

78. Ms. Pozzan reiterated that it was important for paid care workers to be represented so that they could take decisions for themselves and shape the care economy that they worked in. Some interventions had highlighted the importance of having women in decision-making leadership and managerial positions. She highlighted the need for freedom of association, social dialogue and collective bargaining. The 5R Framework had the potential to address structural barriers for gender equality.

<sup>9</sup> See [https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2024-07/FINAL\\_UN%20System%20Care%20Policy%20Paper\\_24June2024.pdf](https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2024-07/FINAL_UN%20System%20Care%20Policy%20Paper_24June2024.pdf).