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## Trade unions fight poverty for a gender-transformative world of work

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Global Unions have submitted a joint statement to the UNCSW68 in a comprehensive call to action for improving the state of poverty and inequality faced by women in the global workforce.



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PRINT ARTICLE

Global Unions have submitted a joint statement to the UNCSW68 in a comprehensive call to action for improving the state of poverty and inequality faced by women in the global workforce.

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The statement highlights the vicious cycle of poverty, gender gaps, and discrimination that persist due to the unfair distribution of unpaid care work, lack of access to education, inadequate social protection, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Emphasizing the role of trade unions in combating poverty and promoting social progress through collective bargaining and social dialogue, it ends with a call to action for governments, such as investing in the creation of new jobs, ensuring fair wages, reforming financial and trade systems, strengthening public services, and supporting the International Labour Organisation's decent work agenda.

The full statement is available for download on the [CSW68 website](https://unioncsw.world-psi.org/news/Tradeunionsfightpovertyforagender-transformativeworldofwork?id=14380&lang=en).

## Follow the trade union delegation at #CSW68

The Voice of Women workers at the UN: union women from around the world are preparing to attend the 68th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW67), taking place at the United Nations Headquarters in New York from 11 to 22 March 2024.

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### **Trade unions fight poverty for a gender-transformative world of work: through social dialogue and collective bargaining**

The world today has never been so rich (three times more wealth than thirty years ago), yet 685 million people live in extreme poverty and hundreds of millions of people work in precarious and informal jobs, the majority of whom are women. Inequality has reached record levels: the top 1 per cent has taken 38 per cent of all wealth whereas the bottom 50 per cent has gained only 2 per cent. In 2022, shareholders received record-high dividends, while billions of people around the world struggle to survive a cost-of-living crisis since workers' wages are too low and more than half of the world lacks access to social protection. A decades-long erosion of workers' rights is driving poverty, inequality, inequity, exclusion and insecurity, further exacerbated by multiple crises including the global care crisis; the climate and biodiversity crisis; erosion of democracy; freedom of expression; and the rise of the far right.

Changes in work patterns, including through new technology and digitalisation, and the abusive use of temporary and short-term contracts have resulted in massive job insecurity and have undermined freedom of association, collective bargaining and access to labour protection. This hits women the hardest. They are over-represented in poor and low-paying jobs, deeply affected by persistent forms of discrimination, exclusion, gender-based violence and intersecting systems of oppression based on class, ethnicity, race, migration status, ability, sexual orientation, gender identity and other grounds. The gender gap in labour force participation remains stuck at 27%. On average, women continue to be paid 20 per cent less than men. At the current rate of change, it will take 257 years to close the global gender pay gap. Girls from the poorest households continue to be excluded from education. At current rates of progress, it will take another 54 years to reach universal primary school completion for girls. 53.1 per cent of the global population – 4.1 billion people – have no social protection. Only 30.6 per cent of the working-age population are legally covered by comprehensive social security systems that include a full range of benefits.

When women do access social protection they experience a lower social protection coverage range and substantially lower benefit levels as contributory systems penalize women who are often responsible for a disproportionate share of unpaid care work. This burden increases when public services are absent, inadequate or privatized. A large proportion of women experience profound impacts to access and maintain a paid job because of gender-based violence and harassment in their world of work.

One of the key factors for the persistent gender gaps in the world of work is the unfair distribution of unpaid care work, the inadequate social organization of care and decades of weakening the State responsibility in care policies and under investments in the care economy including public health, care and education services, deregulation, underfunding, and privatisation including corporate capture of health and care. During the COVID-19 pandemic, 90% of women who lost their jobs in the first 18 months exited the labour force while women have lost around US\$800 billion in income. This loss is comparable to the combined GDP of some 98 countries. The pandemic revealed a 8 per cent gender-gap in social protection. While women already performed three times as much unpaid care work as men, these responsibilities increased during the pandemic. The pandemic showed as well the importance of public services, including front-line services. The pandemic has further deepened inequalities in education for girls and young women, leading to increased drop-out rates, adolescent pregnancies, and girl marriages. Women saw a steep surge in domestic violence and gender-based violence and harassment in the world of work. Migrant women and refugees, young and older women, Indigenous women, racialized women, women with disabilities and LGBTI+ persons were particularly affected.

Breaking the cycle of poverty requires full employment and decent work for all, including the creation of millions of decent jobs, worker-led formalization of informal jobs, universal access to social protection systems and floors and equitable access to public quality services and free, quality, inclusive education and training opportunities.

Whether at a local, national, sectoral or global level, trade unions are at the forefront of the fight against poverty, including in-work poverty, and the effort to create a fairer society. This can only be achieved when workers can effectively organise, campaign and engage in social dialogue and collective bargaining, with representation in all their diversity throughout negotiations and decision-making, around important economic and social issues for them and their families.

Against this backdrop, trade unions have achieved the adoption of ground-breaking laws and policies which have the potential to elevate women out of poverty by improving their opportunities to access and remain in paid, secure and decent work, free from gender-based violence, harassment and discrimination. Trade unions engage in social dialogue and lobby and advocacy to ensure women's access to adequate and universal social protection and quality public services to shifting the sole responsibility for unpaid care work from the shoulders of women and girls and ensuring a gender-transformative just transition. Trade unions are fighting for wage justice and equal pay for work of equal value, especially in feminised sectors where jobs are undervalued, such as education, health and care sectors.

Social dialogue is essential in translating economic development into social progress. The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the crucial role of social dialogue – based on the respect for freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining – in saving jobs, incomes and the lives of millions of workers.

However, fundamental workers' rights, including the right to form and join a union, and trade unions themselves are under attack. The result is an erosion of collective bargaining, a decline in wages, weakening of labour rights and protections, reducing social protection, a backlash against equality laws, policies and measures, and rising inequality.

A strong and effective International Labour Organisation (ILO), driving the multilateral agenda, is essential. The ILO, the only UN entity with a tripartite constituency, has a principal role in labour standard setting which is essential for strengthening national law and policies and improving working lives, dignity

and respect for fundamental rights. The ILO's transformative agenda elevates women out of poverty by advancing gender equality, equality of treatment and opportunity for all, non-discrimination and inclusion. This includes closing the gender pay gap, promoting decent work including in care and through care leave policies, and ending gender-based violence and harassment in the world of work.

Reform of the international financial institutions, in order to secure the conditions for both gender-transformative job creation and worker-led formalisation, is crucial. So too are the creation of a worker-friendly trade system and the design and delivery of industrial policy including international support for domestic industrial policy initiatives.

Global Unions call on governments to take concerted actions that will lift millions of women out of poverty, towards a life of dignity and equality with income security and equal opportunities to access paid, decent and formal work – free from violence and harassment – and to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, accelerate the implementation of the Beijing Platform of Action and implement the UN Global Accelerator for jobs, social protection and just transitions with its ambitious targets on decent jobs creation in the care economy and on realising social protection floors for all by 2030.

More specifically, we call on governments to engage with unions in social dialogue to:

- Develop national jobs plans and invest in the creation of 575 million new decent jobs by 2030, including in the care economy and climate-friendly jobs, with a gender-responsive Just Transition towards environmentally sustainable economies for all, as well as the worker-led formalisation of one billion informal
- Ensure long-term and adequate public investments for the creation of 300 million new decent jobs in education, health, care and social services. Guarantee equitable access to quality, gender-transformative public health, child- and long term care and education services as well quality public Guarantee decent work for all care workers. To end public sector wage bill constraints including those imposed by the International Monetary Fund. To adopt inclusive labour market policies, family-friendly workplace policies and gender responsive social protection which grant an equitable sharing of care responsibilities and care jobs.
- Secure fair wages for all, including through the establishment of minimum living wages, the realisation of equal pay for work of equal value, improving pay and working conditions including in feminised sectors, addressing intersecting discrimination based on class, gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, and migrant, indigenous, disability status and other grounds, and ending the occupational segregation of women and other marginalised groups; guaranty women's fundamental right to work;
- Reform the world's financial and trade systems that deny prosperity to billions of people and build a peaceful world and a just, rights-based development model realised through the promise of the SDGs and multilateral reform;
- Strengthen public services which binds communities and provides dignity, a safety net and public protection floors. Gender-transformative public quality services are the greatest equalizer and leveller of equality in society – giving everyone equal and universal access to services across their life course from early childhood education to elder
- Ensure gender-transformative universal social protection systems and floors and a global social protection fund in order to support low income countries develop and extend social protection systems, in line with ILO To

redesign social protection schemes so that periods of care are credited fairly and to ensure that contributions continue to be paid during periods of care leave and to ensure adequate public non-contributory social protection schemes including basic pensions and guaranteed minimum unemployment benefits.

- Ensure equitable access to free, quality, inclusive education and training opportunities, including skills development, training, and life-long learning, supported by education and training strategies with active labour market policies, for skilling, reskilling and This is essential to guarantee gender-transformative just transition plans in response to climate change and technological shifts.
- Bridge the global digital divide, in countries and between the North and the South, to bring internet connectivity to all the world's people as a human right and to ensure meaningful equitable access to technology for all; ensure gender transformative proactive digitalisation policies and Ensure that new and green technology guarantees decent work for all and gender equality and equity in the world of work.
- Fully support the ILO with its normative mandate and tripartite structure and decent work agenda, and ensure the respect and the effective implementation of ILO's fundamental principles and rights at work, including freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining (ILO Conventions 87 and 98), the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation (ILO Conventions No. 100 and 111); and a safe and healthy working environment (ILO Conventions No. 155 and 187). And to further accelerate equality and equity in the world of work, to ratify and effectively implement the ILO Conventions on social protection (No. 102), family responsibilities (No. 156), Indigenous Peoples (No. 169), maternity protection (No. 183), Domestic Workers (No. 189) and Violence and Harassment (no.190 and Recommendation 206).

*Statement submitted by Education International, International Federation of Journalists, International Trade Union Confederation, International Transport Workers' Federation, International Union of Food Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers Associations, and Public Services International, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council.*



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Trade union calendar

Fri, Mar 22, 2024

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CSW68



CSW68 (2024)

The UNCSW provides a unique opportunity for coalition-building with other trade unions and progressive organizations, and for influencing global policies on gender equality. In 2024, the UNCSW will consider the priority theme of “Accelerating the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls by addressing poverty and strengthening institutions and financing with a gender perspective”.

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