



Economic Empowerment

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1. Historical developments

The economic status of women internationally is one of the most widespread and contentious issues. To this day, women are disproportionately affected by poverty and exploitation^[1]. A shift to industrialized societies during the 19th century placed men in the position of being breadwinners in the families, with women expected to stay at home and live under many restrictions^[2]. These changes had long-lasting effects on the gender balance in the economy, which has only relatively recently changed in developed nations. Women in the US^[3] and Europe^[4] went from holding about 35% of jobs in 1970 to 45% or more by 2010. In the meantime, women in developing countries are facing greater challenges including access to the education and financial resources necessary to enter the economy.

2. Some of the Current Challenges

2.1 Gender Pay Gap

Perhaps the most well-known challenge faced by women in economies may be the gender pay gap. In most OECD countries, the gender pay gap is situated between 5% and 20%^[14]. Among other factors, this gap is caused by conforming to different traditional gender roles, uneven choices made with education, education, and differing gender-based evaluation of work performance^[5]. The gender pay gap is far from just a first-world problem, as it rose as high as 30% in sub-Saharan Africa in 2015^[10].

2.2 Access to Education

In poorer countries, girls are also suffering under lower access to education, thus making the fight for economic empowerment there even more difficult. Currently 129 Million girls are out of school, with a vast majority of them being in poor countries^[12].

2.3 Access to Financial Resources

A problem prevalent in poorer countries is the lack of access to financial services as well as informal employment, which reached 89% for women (and 83% for men) in sub-Saharan Africa in 2015^[13].

2.4 Maternal Leave

Whether through gender norms or personal choices, women continue to spend disproportionately more time than men on unpaid housework, childcare, and long-term care for other people^[14]. Furthermore, this burden is greater for women in lower-paid jobs as they are unable to rely on external services^[13]. When this work is outsourced, it tends to go to migrant women, transferring the gender inequality down the chain^[14].

3. UN Women Activity

UN Women supports women's economic empowerment through various international commitments, partnering with organizations to promote women's access to jobs, assets, and influence over policies, with a specific focus on addressing unpaid care work, and on aiding marginalized groups like rural women and domestic workers to enhance income, resource control, and security^[8]. In Europe and Central Asia, UN Women focuses on women's economic empowerment within normative frameworks, striving to enhance women's incomes, secure their employment rights, and broaden access to decent jobs, especially for marginalized groups by supporting initiatives that promote women's entrepreneurship, asset building, financial literacy, and better job opportunities with improved wages and working conditions^[9].

The right policies and partnerships supported by UN Women could help accelerate the presence of women in economies internationally, helping them leave poverty and participate on equal footing.

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