

TRANSFORMING ECONOMIES, REALIZING RIGHTS

Progress of the World's Women: Transforming economies, realizing rights documents the ways in which current economic and social policies are failing women in rich and poor countries alike, and asks, what would the economy look like if it truly worked for women?

The report brings together human rights and economic policymaking, and provides the key elements for a far reaching new policy agenda that can transform economies and make women's rights a reality.

FACT SHEET – EAST ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

1 / TRANSFORMING WORK FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS

With the right mix of economic and social policies, governments can generate decent jobs for women and ensure that the unpaid care work that goes into sustaining all economies is recognized and supported.

PERSISTENT GENDER GAPS IN LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION AND PAY

Between 1990 and 2013, women's labour force participation rate in East Asia and the Pacific decreased from 69 to 62 per cent.

Women's LFPR varies across the region. In 2013, Cambodia had the highest women's LFPR, with 78.8 per cent and Samoa had the lowest women's LFPR at 23.5 per cent.

The gender pay gap for East Asia and the Pacific is 20 per cent, compared to 24 per cent globally.

TOO OFTEN WOMEN ARE TRAPPED IN LOW PAID, POOR QUALITY WORK

In East Asia and the Pacific (excluding China), 78 per cent of women (and 79 per cent of men) are in informal employment. Over a third of employed women and men are in informal agricultural self-employment.

There is some evidence of a decline in 'unprotected' employment (which shares many of the characteristics of informal employment) in some countries. In China, 42 per cent of women were in 'unprotected' employment in 2010, compared to 55 per cent in 2002 (compared to a decline from 57 to 41 per cent for men).

WOMEN'S DISPROPORTIONATE SHARE OF UNPAID CARE WORK LIMITS THEIR OPPORTUNITIES

Across East Asia and the Pacific, women report doing a larger share of unpaid care and domestic work than men: five times as much in the Republic of Korea, four times more in Cambodia and Lao People's Democratic Republic; and almost three times more in China.

A recent survey of long-term care arrangements in China found that the principal caregivers of care-dependent older people households had to cut back on paid work in 48 per cent of rural households compared to 4 per cent in urban, in order to provide unpaid care work. Only 2 per cent of rural households could afford to hire paid caregivers to ease the burden, compared to 45 per cent in urban households.

POLICIES TO TRANSFORM LABOUR MARKETS

Laws are an important basis for women's right to work and at work. By 2014, Cambodia, Fiji and Viet Nam had passed laws stipulating equal remuneration for

work of equal value; non-discrimination based on gender in hiring and banning sexual harassment in employment.

Recognizing, reducing and redistributing women's unpaid care and domestic work

China, Mongolia, Singapore and Viet Nam are among the countries in the region that meet or exceed the ILO minimum standard of 14 weeks paid maternity leave. In 2013, the highest minimum length of paid maternity leave was in Viet Nam, with 26 weeks.

The extension of paternity or shared parental leave, has been very limited, with most countries offering just a few days of leave, and often unpaid.

Narrowing gender pay gaps and addressing occupational segregation

In Hong Kong (SAR China), gender pay gaps have narrowed only because men's wages have fallen more dramatically than women's. In Mongolia, both women and men experienced an increase in their wages, nevertheless the gender pay gap has actually widened.

Targets and quotas are one way to break down occupational segregation and tackle stereotypes. A number of countries, such as the Philippines and Mongolia, have applied quotas or targets to boost women's employment in the public sector.

Guaranteeing domestic worker's rights

The ILO Domestic Workers Convention (No. 189) was adopted in 2011. The convention requires States to extend basic labour rights to domestic workers, such as overtime pay, annual paid leave, minimum wages and safe working conditions. To date the Philippines is the only country in the East Asia and the Pacific Region that have ratified the convention.

Increasing the returns to women's informal employment

Policies should recognize the contribution of informal workers, such as street vendors and waste pickers, to the functioning of urban environments. They must also guarantee that women can work safely in public spaces, such as streets or markets.

In Papua New Guinea, the Port Moresby Safe City Free from Violence against Women and Girls Programme works in partnership with the local authority, the police, women's organizations, vendors and customers, to improve infrastructure and prevent sexual harassment and violence against women vendors.

2/ MAKING SOCIAL POLICY WORK FOR WOMEN

Well-designed social policies can enhance women's income security, and their ability to realize their potential and expand their life options. Social protection policies—including family and child allowances and old-age pensions—can be powerful tools to address women's poverty and reduce inequality. Social services, such as health care, child- and elder-care, and water and sanitation can have an even greater effect, as well as reducing the drudgery of unpaid care and domestic work.

WOMEN'S GREATER VULNERABILITY TO POVERTY IN CHANGING SOCIETIES

In Cambodia, Timor Leste and Vanuatu, household survey data show that women aged 20-59 are more likely than men to live in a poor household.

Migration within and across national borders also raises challenges : in China, rural-urban migration of working age adults has resulted in a large left-behind population: a full 28 per cent of rural children live with only one parent, grandparents or other relatives.

WOMEN HAVE LESS ACCESS TO SOCIAL PROTECTION

Currently, 73 per cent of the world's population have only partial or no social protection. Women are over-represented in this group.

Active pension scheme contribution rates of the working-age population are low for both women and men in some countries. For example, 17 per cent of women compared with 18 per cent of men in Viet Nam contribute to a pension; in other countries, gender gaps are wide – almost three times more men than women contribute in the Solomon Islands, for example.

SOCIAL TRANSFERS ARE ESSENTIAL FOR REALIZING WOMEN'S RIGHTS

A recent review of pre- and post-transfer poverty rates in 27 high-income and 10 middle-income countries shows that social transfers reduce poverty in China and the Republic of Korea by 18 and 32 per cent respectively.

Such measures are affordable, even for lower income countries in the region: in Viet Nam, providing an allowance to support families with children under 16 years would cost 0.8 per cent of GDP.

Non-contributory social pensions are a powerful tool to prevent women's poverty in older age. In Thailand, access to pensions is granted as a universal right to older persons. Civil society advocacy led by older people in the Philippines have proved highly effective for improving and extending the coverage of social pensions.

ACCESSIBLE AND AFFORDABLE SOCIAL SERVICES ARE JUST AS IMPORTANT

Social services can have an even greater effect on poverty and inequality than that of social transfer systems, and can reduce the demands of unpaid care and domestic work on women.

Access barriers to social services remain large for women

The majority of women report major barriers to accessing health services in Cambodia (72 per cent) and Timor-Leste (86 per cent). Women from poorer and rural households are particularly likely to experience difficulties. In the Philippines, for example, 88 per cent of lower-income women report difficulties in accessing health care, while 39 per cent of rural women in Cambodia report problems accessing health care because facilities are too far away.

In the Timor-Leste, half or more of the women report difficulties in accessing health care cite concerns over the availability of a female health provider. In Viet Nam, ethnic and indigenous minority women are less likely than non-indigenous women to have access to contraception, antenatal care and skilled birth attendance.

High out of pocket payments (OPP) for health care can keep women from getting the health care they need. Global average out-of-pocket health expenditure in 2012 was 22.2 per cent of total health expenditure. The average for East Asia and the Pacific was 29.7 per cent.

Health care

Various countries have developed successful strategies to overcome the barriers that women face in accessing health care. In Thailand, for example, after the introduction of the Universal Coverage Scheme in 2001, total health coverage reached 98 per cent of the population by 2010 and the share of out-of-pocket payments in total health expenditure had fallen from 27 per cent in 2002 to 14 per cent.

Health-care providers have a critical role to play in detecting abuse and in caring for women who experience violence. The government of Kiribati has integrated the issue of violence against women into sexual and reproductive health programming by, for example, through training health providers to follow a women-centred approach when caring for survivors.

Care services

East Asia and the Pacific has seen significant progress in the expansion of services for older people and other care-dependent adults.. In Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam, governments have supported NGOs to recruit and train volunteer caregivers and create self-help groups as a way to support growing numbers of older people who require assistance.

In the Republic of Korea, the government has significantly expanded social care provisions since 2000 through publicly subsidized childcare services. Following the example of Japan, the Republic of Korea has also introduced long-term care insurance to finance services for care-dependent dependent adults.

Water and sanitation

A variety of approaches can be used to enhance affordability in networked water supply. In Cambodia, for example, the publicly owned Phnom Penh Water Supply Authority (PPWSA), set up in the 1990s, was particularly successful in providing water access to the urban poor and significantly reduced the cost of water.

Private sector participation in water and sanitation provision has had mixed results for availability and affordability. Indonesia and the Philippines terminated their concession agreements with private providers in response to public protest-often with women at the forefront-or court disputes over tariff hikes.

3/ TOWARDS AN ENABLING MACROECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

Macroeconomic policies can and should support the realization of women's rights, by creating dynamic and stable economies, by generating decent work and by mobilizing resources to finance vital public services.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ECONOMIC GROWTH AND GENDER EQUALITY

Gaps in labour force participation are associated with lower growth rates overall. In the East Asia and the Pacific region gender gaps in the labour market reduce GDP per capita by an estimated 12 percent.

However, in some cases *gender inequality* fuels growth. In some contexts, lower wage rates for women contribute to lower average labour costs, providing a short-term boost to growth in labour-intensive industries.

Virtually all economies rely on the unpaid care and domestic work that is largely provided by women. Firms, for example, depend on the human resources that are produced and sustained through such work. The unequal distribution of the costs of care therefore supports economic growth.

To support substantive equality for women, macroeconomic policies need to go beyond a sole focus on GDP growth, to work in conjunction with social policy, with the aim of creating inclusive economies that truly work for women—and indeed all members of society.

UNPAID CARE WORK UNDERPINS ECONOMIC GROWTH AND MUST BE RECOGNIZED AND SUPPORTED

The work involved in caring for people is essential for reproducing the labour force and generates real economic value. Despite the benefits to society, the unpaid care work predominantly performed by women is not incorporated into the calculation of GDP or reflected in other macroeconomic indicators, or taken into account in economic policymaking.

In the Republic of Korea, for example, the total value of time spent on unpaid care and domestic work is estimated to be equivalent to 18 per cent of GDP.

MOBILIZING RESOURCES TO FUND SOCIAL POLICIES

Governments need revenue to pay for social policies and corporations must pay their fair share.

Cambodia is among the countries that has reduced spending on security and the military and redirected resources to fund social protection.

Papua New Guinea is considering using revenues from gas production to set up a sovereign wealth fund to fund social policies.

Reducing debt burdens or restructuring the national debt can free up financial resources. For example, Thailand was able to reduce its debt servicing costs, partly by reducing its reliance on external debt, and one third of the resources free went to fund social programmes.