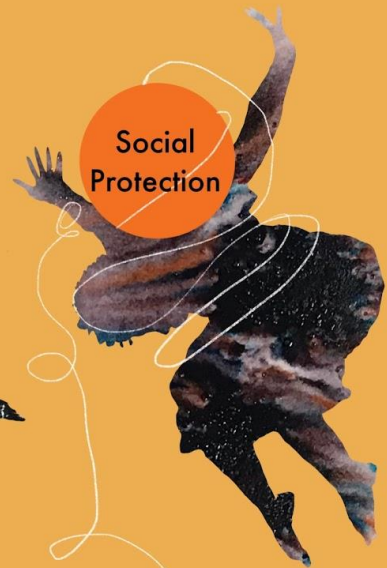




Jobs



Social  
Protection



Rights

**A NEW SOCIAL CONTRACT  
FOR RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE  
GROUNDED IN EQUALITY AND EQUITY**



Equality

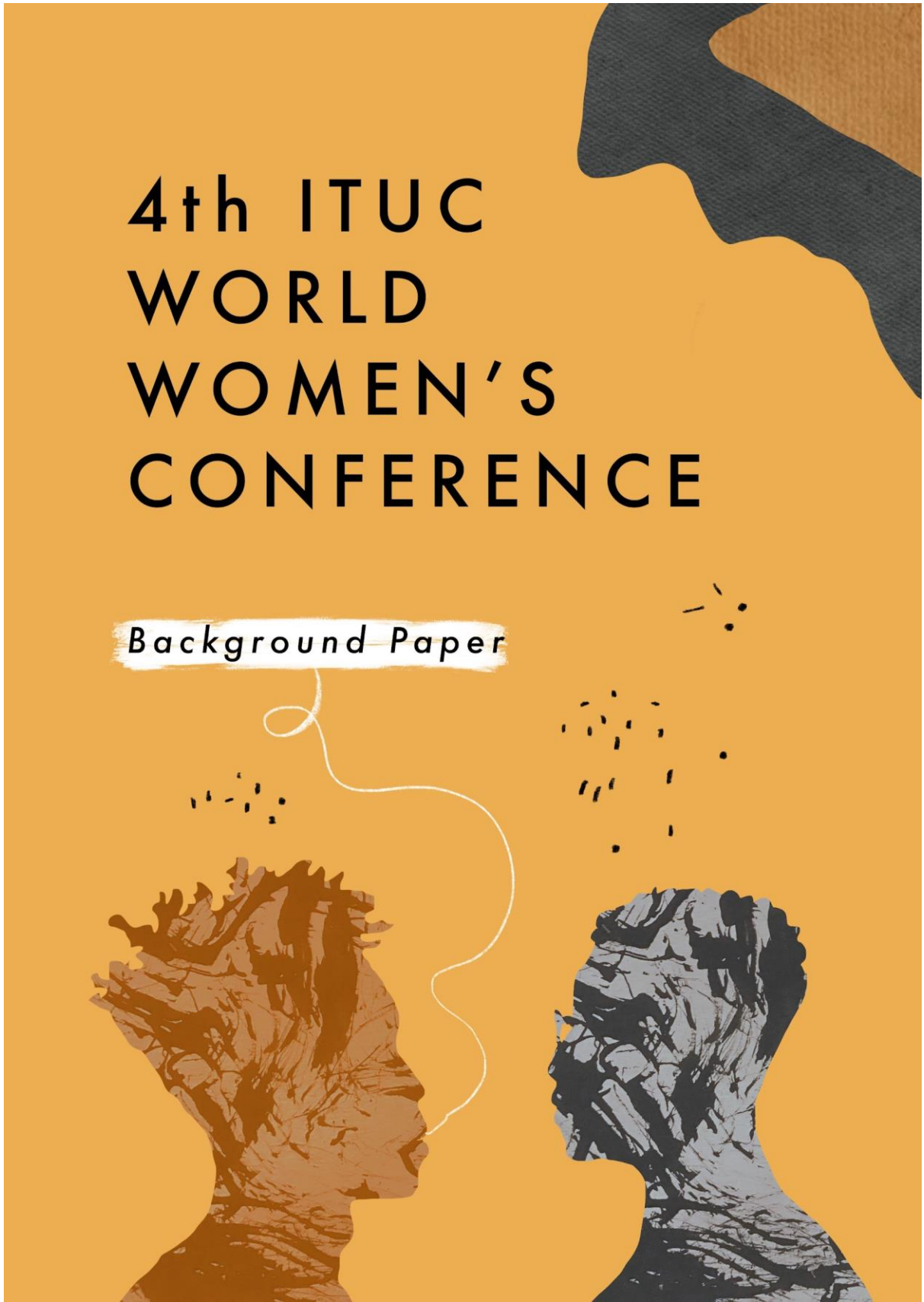
Inclusion



ITUC CSI IGB

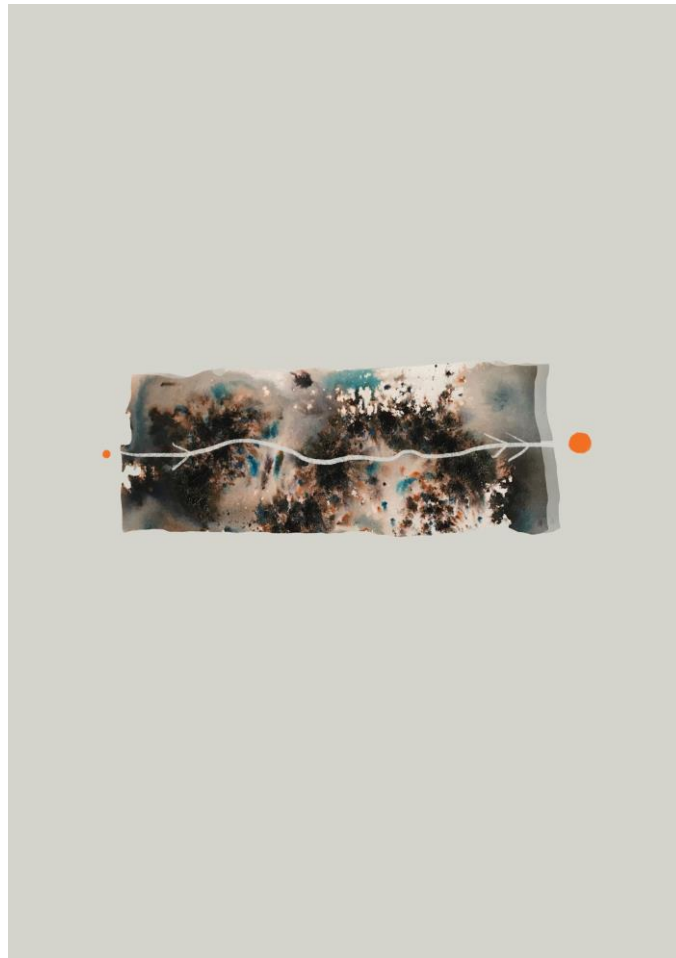
# 4th ITUC WORLD WOMEN'S CONFERENCE

*Background Paper*



# Table of Contents

Introduction .....	4
Investments in Care and Climate-friendly Jobs .....	5
Rights and Protections for Women at Work .....	9
Towards Universal Gender-Responsive Social Protection .....	11
Tackling the Gender Pay Gap .....	13
Advancing Equality and Inclusion .....	16
Building Women's Transformational Leadership .....	18



### Introduction

In the four years since the last [ITUC World Women's Conference in Costa Rica](#), women in unions have vigorously taken action to achieve tangible change while continuing to respond to the rising challenges in today's world of work. Although we are still fighting to end deep-seated social and economic inequalities across women workers and workers in all their diversity, the global attack on women's reproductive and sexual rights, and the misogyny, racism, anti-immigrant politics and anti-LGBT hate crimes that endanger the lives of some of the world's most vulnerable people, the Covid-19 pandemic has once more revealed, and amplified, the world's problems. Millions of jobs have been lost, disproportionately affecting women, particularly the most marginalised women, with no guarantee that those jobs will return. According to International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates, [there will be 13 million fewer women in employment in 2021](#) compared to 2019. Covid-19 has widened the poverty gap between women and men, pushing an estimated [47 million more women and girls below the poverty line](#). It has exposed the fragility of our health and care infrastructure, a result of decades of privatisation, austerity measures and underinvestment. The increase in violence against women and girls since the arrival of the coronavirus in early 2020 has been dubbed by the UN Secretary General '[a shadow pandemic](#)'. And as it stands, [more than 2.1 billion women and girls](#) live in countries that will not reach any of the five key gender equality targets laid out in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The 4th ITUC World Women's Conference – held for the first time over three sessions in December 2021 (online), March 2022 (online) and in-person at the November 2022 ITUC Congress in Melbourne, Australia – brings together women trade unionists from around the world to share our struggles, challenges and successes, as well as strategies on how to build workers' power for all workers, in all our diversity, dismantle deeply rooted and structural gender inequalities, and to forge a gender-equitable recovery. Under the theme of *A New Social Contract for Recovery and Resilience - Grounded in Equality and Equity*, the conference will revolve on the following key themes:

- *The differentiated impacts of COVID-19 on women*
- *Building a caring economy - #InvestInCare*
- *Eliminating gender-based violence and harassment in the world of work – #RatifyC190*
- *Securing equal pay for work of equal value and gender-responsive social protection*
- *Building women's transformational leadership in the unions*
- *Climate justice and just transition – women as actors for a just transition*
- *Women's struggles for peace, freedom and democracy*
- *How do we ensure that equality and equity is at the heart of recovery.*

The discussions during the Conference will deliver recommendations on how to ensure that the [five key workers' demands for a New Social Contract](#) are grounded in equality and equity – **Jobs, Rights, Social Protection, Equality, and Inclusion.**

## Investments in Care and Climate-friendly Jobs

Since the onset of the pandemic, women have been dropping out of the global workforce in record numbers. Women with caregiving responsibilities have been overwhelmed with increased levels of unpaid care work due to the increased demands of home schooling, child care, elder care and other domestic tasks. Workers in the health and care sectors (where women predominate) and other 'essential' jobs found themselves on the pandemic frontline. To keep our societies functioning, to help their communities and to continue feeding their families, these workers persist in putting their lives at risk, often while dealing with low wages, long hours of work, significant health and safety risks, and violence and harassment on the job.

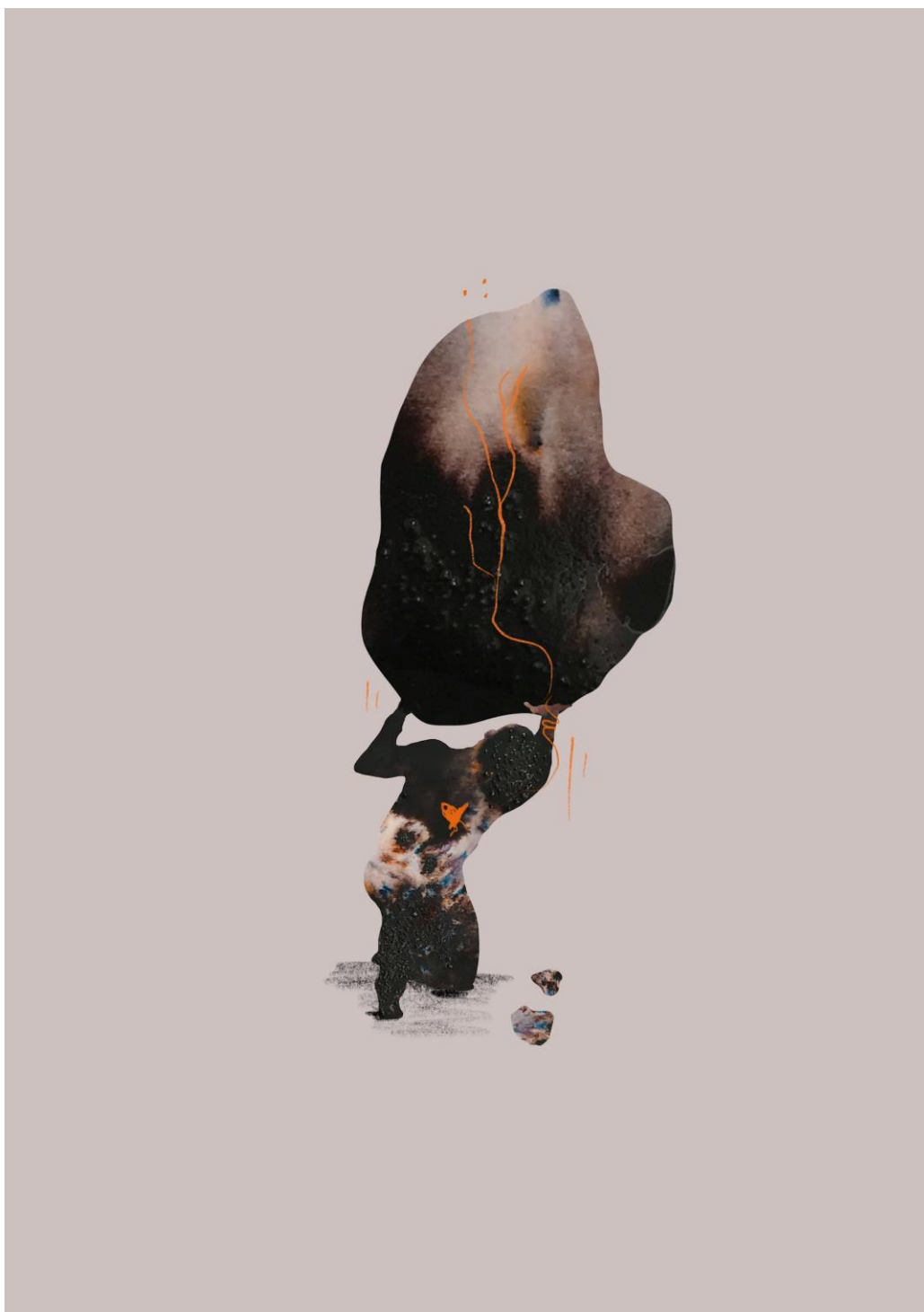
Women workers, long over-represented in feminised jobs and sectors such as the service industry (domestic work, food service, hospitality, tourism, retail, etc.) and poor-quality jobs in global supply chains, found their jobs annihilated by Covid-mitigation measures, leading to the loss of incomes and livelihoods, and driving many more women and women-headed households into poverty. Worldwide, [740 million women work in the informal economy](#), and during the first month of the pandemic their income fell by 60 per cent. In some countries and regions, women represent up to 75 per cent of the informal economy, where they work without employment contracts, legal rights, health insurance or any kind of social protection; in the context of a pandemic, this means no sick pay, no redundancy pay and absolutely no safety net.



For years now, women trade unionists have been [shaping the agenda](#) when it comes to reimagining our concepts of what care is, how it should be funded, who is performing it and how it is performed. We have been calling for policymakers to recognise the human right to care, with quality services that are affordable and accessible, that are staffed by trained workers who enjoy decent pay and decent working conditions. We have appealed for better access to care services and a more equal distribution of care responsibilities between women and men to reduce the amount of unpaid care work performed by women. We have insisted on increased financial support for unpaid caregivers and increased investment in public care services through fair and progressive tax systems. We have been demanding an end to the

outsourcing, casualisation and deskilling of care work and cuts to investments in public care services, which leads to the devaluation of a sector of paramount social and economic importance. It is ironic given how much unwarranted attention conservative forces give to women's autonomy over their bodies that there is so little interest in how women are supposed to look after the families they are too often coerced into having. We are determined to see the true value of care recognised, properly funded and for care workers to be fairly remunerated according to the true value of the work they perform. We also want to ensure that all rights and protections are extended to care workers in the informal economy, including access to social protection.





In July 2021, the Global Alliance for Care was launched during the Generation Equality Forum (held to mark the [25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the historic UN Beijing Women's Conference](#)) in Mexico. The Alliance, [initiated by the government of Mexico](#), currently features over 12 governments, the ITUC, PSI and IDWF, the ILO, civil society organisations, philanthropic foundations, private sector actors and international organisations, all mobilising for

policy and action around a feminist care agenda to be fully installed globally by 2026. In addition, as previously mentioned, [Generation Equality Action Coalitions](#) have been assured the largest amount of investment ever to advance gender equality and women's rights. In the area of economic justice and rights, the Coalition has set itself the target of securing investments in the care economy of between 3-10 per cent of national

income, in addition to the creation of up to 80 million decent care jobs globally. And since 2019, every year on 29 October trade unions organise and mobilise on [a Global Day of Action for Care](#) to demand proper investment to create millions of new care jobs, decent jobs, with improved wages and decent working conditions.

There have been various projections about the number of jobs that can be generated by investments in care. According to the ILO, doubling investment in the care economy could lead to [a total of 475 million jobs by 2030](#), meaning 269 million new jobs, (compared to 2015), and would allow countries to deliver on SDG targets for health and education. Research from the [ITUC and the UK's Women's Budget Group](#) in 2016 shows that investment into the care economy of 2 per cent of GDP in seven high income countries would increase employment by up to 6.1 per cent, create over 21 million jobs and increase the rate of employment for women by between 3.3 to 8.2 percentage points. A [second joint care economy report in 2017](#) focusing on six middle income nations revealed that if 2 per cent of GDP were invested in the health and care sector, it would increase employment by up to 3.2 per cent, creating over 42.4 million total jobs.

[Trade unions](#) have also been making the link between increased investment in care and the just transition. Although the focus of just transition efforts thus far has been on ending the coal industry, which is predominantly male, the care sector is projected to be one of the biggest areas of climate-friendly jobs in the future. As a result, governments are being encouraged to invest in low-carbon care jobs to help those who have lost employment during the pandemic find new career paths.

They are also being asked to improve the wages and conditions of existing jobs in low carbon sectors – such as renewable energy and public transport – and make these new, decent jobs more accessible to women, while [developing just transition policies and collective bargaining models](#) for the sectors where women predominate. Recently, to mark the launch of the [UN Women's Feminist Plan for Sustainability and Social Justice](#), the Indian feminist economist Jayati Ghosh [succinctly advanced the trade union position on just transition and the care economy](#):

*“...unpaid care work and the environment cannot be treated – as they effectively have been all this time – as limitless resources, which can be used for free and depleted without cost or consequence. Instead, economic institutions and policies must not only recognise the contributions of care work and nature but be directed towards socially valuing them and providing the conditions in which they will flourish.”*



## Rights and Protections for Women at Work

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a devastating and disproportionate impact on women and girls. According to [ILO research](#), 54 million women lost their jobs during the first year of the pandemic, extending a gap in women's labour force participation that could take years to bring back to pre-pandemic levels. In addition, only 43.2 per cent of the world's working-age women were employed in 2021, compared to 68.6 per cent of working-age men, which makes women 25.4 percentage points less likely to be in employment than men. On average women earn [23 per cent less than men](#), women are over-represented in insecure and informal work, and women do at least twice as much unpaid care work as men, valued at [an astonishing US\\$10.8 trillion](#).

Safe, dignified and decent work with equal pay for work of equal value are basic human rights and need to be enshrined in law and policies and prioritised in national budgets. Across the world, women trade unionists are on the frontlines defending workers' rights and freedoms, galvanised by the [2019 ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work](#) which reaffirms fundamental labour rights for all workers, regardless of their employment status, and promotes labour protection floors, maximum working hours, living minimum wages and health and safety at work (among other points) as central to the future of work. Although the latest [ITUC Global Rights Index](#) lays out the many ways in which governments and employers have exploited the pandemic to dismiss workers, violate collective bargaining rights and restrict workers' rights to privacy, free speech and free assembly, trade unionists are working hard to ensure that the rights that

workers do have – including social dialogue and social protection – are strengthened and expanded to all workers, including those in the informal economy, as well as made more gender-responsive and inclusive.

After 10 years of trade union organising, lobbying and campaigning, the 2019 adoption of a new global standard against violence and harassment at work made history. C190 is the first ever international labour law that sets a clear framework to end violence and harassment in the world of work. Alongside the 2011 adoption of [ILO Domestic Workers Convention No. 189](#), C190 is one of the best examples of the power of the international trade union movement and what can be achieved when women workers rise collectively to defend the rights of the vulnerable and disadvantaged.

There is still more to do: we, as trade unionists, are [focused on making C190 a reality](#) by campaigning globally and locally for the wide ratification and effective implementation of C190 in line with R206 and the inclusion of its provisions in workplace policies and collective bargaining agreements. The impacts of the pandemic – leading to a surge in domestic violence and violence and harassment at work, especially for essential workers – have underscored the intrinsic importance of the ILO instruments. To date, nine countries have ratified C190 – Uruguay, Fiji, Namibia, Argentina, Somalia, Ecuador, Mauritius, Greece and Italy. All governments need to follow in their footsteps to ensure that national laws and policies are put in place to prevent, address and remedy violence and harassment, including gender-based violence and harassment, in the world of work. Unions are also educating and mobilising its members to ensure C190 is high on the collective bargaining agenda.

The ILO Centenary Declaration foregrounds the importance of “achieving gender equality at work through a transformative agenda” which:

- ensures equal opportunities, equal participation and equal treatment, including equal remuneration for women and men for work of equal value;
- enables a more balanced sharing of family responsibilities;
- provides scope for achieving better work–life balance by enabling workers and employers to agree on solutions, including on working time, that consider their respective needs and benefits;
- and promotes investment in the care economy.

## Towards Universal Gender-Responsive Social Protection

While some countries have been able to respond to the Covid crisis with stimulus packages, furlough schemes and wage subsidies to mitigate its worst impacts, in many countries and in many contexts, workers were simply left to fend for themselves. Globally, [4.1 billion people](#) (53 per cent of the global population) have no social protection coverage at all, while just 30.6 per cent of the working-age population are legally covered by comprehensive social security systems (child and family benefits, pensions, etc.) with, significantly, women's coverage 8 percentage points behind men's. As a result of earning less than men, having fewer savings and being more likely to work informally, women have been less able to absorb the economic shock delivered by Covid-19. Women are also disadvantaged by social protection systems that are historically modelled on organised (male) workers in full-time employment; social insurance benefits such as pensions, redundancy pay and accident or illness payments are not typically paid out to informal or part-time workers, especially not at the same rates. In the absence of social protection floors, women are often left without any support, and even where covered, there are large gaps. For example, within the European Union, [women's pensions are on average 40.2 per cent lower than those of men](#). Social protection not only helps reduce poverty, inequality and social exclusion, it also promotes a more equitable and healthier society, as well as helping workers to transition from informal to formal employment. In the [ILO World Social Protection Report 2020-2022](#), ILO Director-General Guy

Ryder points out: "Another hard reminder provided by the crisis has been that we are only as safe as the most vulnerable among us; our well-being and destinies are intimately entwined, regardless of our location, background or work. If some people cannot count on income security while sick or in quarantine, then public health will be undermined, and our collective well-being jeopardized." Gender-responsive, universal social protection for all workers, regardless of citizenship status and inclusive of workers in the informal economy, is the answer. Workers need access to comprehensive support throughout their lives, "regardless of the type of employment they have or the nature of their work. This is essential for the human-centred, equitable recovery we need," Ryder affirms.

It is time for governments to commit to policies that address labour market inequalities, close the gender gaps in social protection and extend coverage and benefits to those that are currently excluded. Reforms to social protection systems can reduce the challenges women face in accessing social protection, while women can be assisted to join and stay in the workforce if provided with affordable and good quality public care services, paid family leave and flexible working arrangements to lighten the burden of care which traditionally falls on them. Governments should also adequately credit care periods in women's contributory social protection systems, in order to maintain contribution levels, while supporting the transition of informal workers to the formal economy.

Increased social protection spending, in the shape of equitable access to vaccines and investments in quality public health care, will be key to the social and economic recovery from the pandemic, as is universal access to health and care services for all people, including refugees and migrants. According to the aforementioned *World Social Protection Report*, to guarantee a minimum of basic social protection coverage, low-income countries would need to invest an additional US\$77.9 billion per year, while lower-middle-income countries would need to find an additional US\$362.9 billion per year and upper-middle-income countries a further

US\$750.8 billion per year. That represents 15.9 per cent, 5.1 per cent and 3.1 per cent of their GDP respectively.

To help some of the world's poorest countries meet these funding targets, trade unions have been leading the call for the establishment of [a Global Social Protection Fund](#). In essence, it would help provide the funding to build up social protection floors in countries most in need. Financing would come from several sources, including official development assistance, increased international cooperation on taxation and contributions from international financial institutions.

## Tackling the Gender Pay Gap

Social and economic justice for women cannot be achieved without the transformation of women's participation in the labour market. This means closing the gender pay gap that sees women earn 77 cents on every dollar earned by men for each hour worked - a gap that's even wider for women with multiple and intersecting identities – based on race, class, age, ethnicity, disability, migrant status and sexual orientation and gender identity -, and one that, in the best-case scenario, will not be closed until 2069. It means tackling the gender discrimination, occupational segregation and undervaluing of work in female-dominated sectors which sees women siloed into insecure, involuntary part-time, low-waged work which is often mislabelled as 'low-skilled'. Women's lower pay in combination with the career breaks and job losses incurred to take on unpaid care responsibilities plus lower social security contributions because of restricted access to well-paid, full-time employment, leaves women vulnerable to poverty in their old age.

The establishment and enforcement of equal pay and anti-discrimination legislation is a key tool to uphold the legal framework for equal pay for work of equal value, as well as to

provide legal recourse to victims of pay discrimination. Dozens of countries have passed laws to safeguard equal pay, and in 2017 the ILO, UN Women and the OECD formed the [Equal Pay International Coalition \(EPIC\)](#), which is working to reduce the gender pay gap and make equal pay between women and men for work of equal value a reality by 2030. Since 2020, the UN has also been marking International Equal Pay Day on 18 September, during which trade unions redouble their efforts to ensure the universal ratification and effective implementation of the ILO Equal Remuneration Convention (No. 100). [Unions have also been calling for](#) the adoption of gender-neutral job evaluations and classifications by employers to avoid bias in the recruitment and promotion of women, as well as more transparency regarding pay scales. Governments and social partners are being encouraged to tackle gender segregation in the labour market, for instance, by setting quotas and/or establishing targeted initiatives to train, recruit and retain women in underrepresented sectors and jobs, while providing living minimum wages along with adequate universal social protection systems. Collective bargaining agreements should be widely implemented and legally binding, and finally, governments need to invest in paid family leave, affordable public care services and decent, formal jobs in the care industry with access to training and lifelong learning.



Without appropriate and sustained interventions, the disproportionate effects of Covid-19 on women's employment will have far-reaching consequences for women's future job opportunities and lifetime earnings. There are also similar projections for the current and anticipated impacts of the climate emergency, which will further deepen gender inequalities in the world of work. Rebuilding inclusive economies requires gender-responsive budgeting initiatives, sustainable public finances enabled by leveraging progressive forms of taxation, tackling tax evasion, and promoting higher levels of formal employment. This is most urgent in the Global South where poorly funded public health systems, weak social protection systems and high levels of national debt has stifled pandemic responses.

Trade unions are [calling for tax justice](#) in a multitude of ways: improved global governance on tax; taxes on financial transactions, corporate profit and individual wealth; an end to tax havens and illicit financial flows; strong measures to uphold governments' fiscal transparency and accountability; the adoption of a 25 per cent corporate tax rate, based on the global profits of corporations; and the introduction of a 'billionaire tax' and a global digital tax. Trade unions are also calling for [debt relief](#) (including debt cancellation) and [a substantial increase in climate funding](#) (including loss and damage) for the South. Such measures would ensure that developing countries can boost their paths towards the realisations of the SDGs.

## Advancing Equality and Inclusion

Covid-19 has exposed a litany of pre-existing inequalities and oppressions within our societies. From the lack of access to testing, treatment and vaccines for the world's poorest people to the lack of social dialogue between governments and employers with women workers, the results speak for themselves. In the United States, for example, [women workers accounted for all of the job losses during the last month of 2020](#); and nearly all of those women were Black or Latina. In countries like the Philippines, Honduras, Brazil and Colombia there has been no let-up in the forced disappearance, harassment and murder of [Indigenous leaders](#). A [study conducted by the TUC](#) found that disabled people in the UK were not only disproportionately affected in terms of loss of life by the pandemic (six in 10 Covid-19 related deaths in the UK were people with disabilities), but the pre-existing workplace barriers faced by disabled workers (such as discriminatory treatment) had been accentuated by the Covid crisis. Another [UK study](#) found that over a third (37.7 per cent) of disabled mothers said they were struggling to feed their children, compared to 16.7 per cent of non-disabled mothers. In a [collaborative report](#) by members of the ITUC's Interregional Network on Migration and Germany's Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES) on the experiences of West African women migrant workers for example, a number of those interviewed spoke about the disastrous impact of the pandemic on their sole source of income as informal traders. For some women, this work had represented financial autonomy after suffering abuse and employment precarity as domestic

workers. And globally, young women workers have been massively impacted by the Covid crisis. According to [research conducted by the ILO in 35 high-income countries](#), the employment of young women aged 15-24 shrank by 11.8 per cent in 2020, almost twice as much as it did for young men (-5.8 per cent). This is due to a number of factors, from the over-representation of young women in informal work and in the sectors hit hardest by the crisis, to the fact that many young people were already looking for work at the time the crisis hit.

Within trade union structures and in alliance with the labour movement, women with multiple and intersecting identities are working hard to see these barriers acknowledged and removed. For example, the Council of Global Unions has set up a working group on LGBTI rights to promote inclusion and diversity in the workplace and help support and protect LGBTI workers who are facing discrimination, violence and harassment. To this end, global unions have created a Solidarity Charter as well as [a dedicated online space for LGBTI workers](#) and allies across the world. Resources on the website include [a guide for trans people at work](#) with specific recommendations for the transition process prepared by the Spanish trade union CC.OO and a ['rainbow' collective bargaining checklist](#) from the Dutch union FNV.

Finally, trade unions have been advocating for measures to protect the migrant domestic workers that labour informally under very poor conditions and with very low pay while helping to supply the vital care needs of wealthier countries. The advocacy of domestic worker unions in countries like the Dominican Republic, South Africa and the Philippines helped ensure that domestic workers were included in government relief efforts during the pandemic. And in 2020, the IDWF



set up [a solidarity fund](#) with the aim of supporting 150,000 domestic workers and their families with food, hygiene products and

emergency cash assistance amongst other measures during the Covid-19 crisis.



## Building Women's Transformational Leadership

Evidence shows that women are vastly under-represented in decision-making positions, including in plans related to the climate emergency and the Covid-19 pandemic. Until women from all backgrounds enjoy equitable representation in leadership and decision-making at all levels of economic, social and political life, decisions on public policies will be gender-blind – and detrimentally so. Genuine inclusion requires a multi-pronged approach. For one, we need to see more women in positions of leadership, and at the highest levels of decision-making; women who embody and practice models of inclusive, feminist leadership to tackle widening inequality and a world teetering on the brink of climate breakdown. Trade unions have been working hard to increase women's membership and leadership in the movement. Since 2014, the [ITUC's Count Us In! campaign](#) has sought to achieve at least 30 per cent representation of women in the decision-making bodies of ITUC affiliates. Successes

have included CUT Brazil, which in 2015 became the first national trade union federation to introduce gender parity in its decision-making bodies at both the national and state level, and the campaigns behind the adoption and ratification of ILO conventions C189 and C190, which have been led and powered by a global coalition of women from all sectors of society.

Building on the work of campaigns such as Count Us In! and #RatifyC190, the Women in Global Leadership pilot programme was launched online in January 2021. Its objective is to redress the historical balance of male-dominated unions by identifying and sustaining pathways for current and future generations of transformative women leaders in the global trade union movement. In order to meet the numerous socio-economic and existential challenges of this generation, the programme equips participants to further transform and advance not just the trade union movement itself, but the policies in their own national contexts and beyond – with a gender-responsive approach. This includes the issues on which women's lobbying and activism has yielded significant results, such as the campaign to eliminate gender-based violence and harassment in the world of work.

