



IN BRIEF



THE WORLD SURVEY ON THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN DEVELOPMENT 2024: Harnessing Social Protection for Gender Equality, Resilience and Transformation

Photo: UN-Women

The World Survey on the Role of Women in Development is a report from the UN Secretary-General, mandated by the Economic and Financial Committee (Second Committee) of the General Assembly, which focuses on macroeconomic policy, sustainable development, financing and poverty eradication. It is presented every five years and provides an important opportunity for a research product covering in-depth assessment of a theme related to gender equality and economic and social policy for deliberation by Member States. Previous editions of the *World Survey* have focused on [sustainable development](#) (2014) and [time and income poverty](#) (2019). The forthcoming 2024 edition will be on the theme of 'Harnessing social protection for gender equality, resilience and transformation'. This brief summarizes key issues that will be covered in the report.

Over the past years, the world has been rocked by repeated shocks and multiple, overlapping crises – from the COVID-19 pandemic to the current food, fuel and financial crisis. Armed conflict is a deadly reality for billions of people, while climate-related disasters continue to increase in frequency and severity. These shocks overlap with and intensify underlying structural crises in jobs and livelihoods, care and the environment. Their impact has reversed progress on poverty eradication and gender equality. In this world of sky-rocketing risks and vulnerabilities, the need for universal, gender-responsive social protection systems has never been greater. As the midpoint in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is fast approaching, such systems could play an important role in putting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) back on track and avert further reversals. Yet, as the UNDP UN-Women [Global COVID-19 Gender Response Tracker](#) confirmed, too often social protection fails to address gender-specific risks and vulnerabilities.

The *World Survey 2024* will build on previous editions, as well as the lessons from the social protection response to COVID-19, to look at the role a gender-responsive approach can play in the context of more frequent disasters and crises. It will focus on four key social protection functions: (1) alleviating poverty over the life course and in response to external shocks, such as violent conflict, pandemics or natural disasters, primarily through social assistance (**protection**); (2) strengthening women's resilience and ability to cope with shocks, including through insurance and livelihood diversification (**prevention**); (3) providing women with sustainable pathways out of poverty, including through stronger integration of social protection, public services and labour market interventions (**promotion**); and (4) addressing structural drivers of poverty, inequality and marginalization, including multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and gender-based violence and women's lesser control over economic resource, lack of representation, agency and equal participation in decision-making, lesser control

over economic resource and disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care and domestic work (**transformation**).

The pandemic underlined the urgent need for better coordination between short-term (protective) humanitarian assistance and longer-term (preventive, promotive and transformative) efforts aimed at building robust social protection systems that can be rapidly expanded and adapted in response to shocks. Going forward, integrated and coordinated approaches will be critical if social protection systems are to live up to their transformative potential and respond to the multidimensional needs of women and girls, especially the most marginalized such as women with disabilities, migrants and refugees, racialized and indigenous women and those living in rural areas and marginalized urban settlements. The report will explore how social protection systems can harness synergies with investments in public services, labour markets and adaptation and mitigation policies to contend with the climate emergency in order to promote gender equality, including in the context of transitions towards low-carbon economies. It will also engage with the ongoing trend towards digitalization of social protection information systems and registration and benefit disbursement processes, looking at how digital and data innovations can be harnessed to increase women's access to social protection while ensuring data protection and the right to privacy.

Protracted crises, persistent poverty and the potential of gender-responsive social protection

The report will analyse how the current context of repeated shocks and overlapping crises of food, fuel and finance affects women and girls and highlight the potential of social protection to promote gender equality in crisis response and recovery. Drawing lessons from the COVID-19 response, it will show that this potential remains under-realized. While the pandemic ushered in important social protection innovations, it also revealed persistent gaps and blind spots. To inform the discussion of gender-responsive social protection design and delivery systems, the report will review [trends in poverty](#) by sex and age at global and regional levels. It will also draw on more granular panel data analysis of gendered poverty dynamics at country level to identify gender-differentiated vulnerabilities and

coping strategies in response to life course events and covariate shocks. This analysis will be used to tease out the implications for adaptive, gender-responsive social protection systems that cater not only to women and girls who are trapped in poverty (chronically poor), but also those who churn around the poverty line (transient poor) and those who experience heightened vulnerability to poverty (vulnerable non-poor), particularly against the backdrop of repeated and protracted crises.

Mind the gaps – achieving universal social protection for all

The right to social security (or social protection), as defined by international human rights and labour standards, remains elusive for most women and men. Despite important progress in coverage, [4.1 billion people](#) – 53.1 per cent of the world's population – still lacked any form of social protection in 2021. Where sex-disaggregated data exist, they often show that women are overrepresented among those who remain excluded. The report will take stock of where we stand with regards to social protection coverage by region and sex. It will highlight how multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination in the labour market are major drivers of gaps in social protection *coverage* and *adequacy* and discuss strategies for closing these gaps. It will also provide a gender perspective on *comprehensiveness* by looking at the extent to which national social protection strategies are recognizing and addressing gender-specific risks and vulnerabilities across the life course. Current trends, reforms and promising practices of contributory and non-contributory schemes will be discussed, with a focus on extending social protection to women in informal employment, as well as specific policy and programme design features that enhance the protective, preventive, promotive and transformative potential of different social protection schemes for women and girls.

Join the dots – advancing towards integrated gender-responsive social protection systems

Linkages to other policy areas can enhance the protective, preventive, promotive and transformative potential of social protection systems. Coordination is a key element of the rights-based approach to social protection and critical to respond to the multidimensional needs of women

and girls, especially the most marginalized. The report will propose a gender-responsive approach to coordinated social protection and employment policies, in line with the [UN Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions](#), and highlight the importance of health, education, childcare and long-term care services as key areas where synergies can be created in terms of the creation of decent jobs, the extension of social protection and the pursuit of gender equality. Strengthening the links between social protection and efforts to prevent and address gender-based violence will be discussed as another area with significant transformative potential from a gender perspective.

Leave no one behind – strengthening social protection delivery systems

Robust social protection delivery systems are critical to ensure that support reaches those who need it in a timely, efficient, effective, inclusive and sustainable manner. The pandemic has accelerated discussions about social protection data systems and digitalization, but a gender analysis of opportunities, risks and levers for respecting, protecting and promoting rights along the social protection delivery chain is largely missing. The report aims to fill this gap by looking at how delivery mechanisms – such as registration, eligibility and enrolment processes; payments, service delivery and case management; and monitoring, participation and accountability – can be strengthened to reduce discrimination, address multiple and intersecting inequalities and empower women and girls in all their diversity. To do so, it will review evidence on barriers and enablers, including ways in which digital and data innovations can be harnessed to increase women's access to social protection as well as the role of women's organizations in demanding access, sensitizing communities, supporting last mile registration and monitoring and accountability.

Invest now – filling financing gaps for gender-responsive social protection

Currently, global social protection expenditure remains insufficient to guarantee national social protection floors, let alone to provide progressively higher levels of protection to as many people as possible. The report will engage with the pressing question of how to close the 'great finance divide' that currently curtails the ability of many developing countries to invest in gender-responsive social protection systems through greater domestic resource mobilization and complementary international support. Through a review of evidence, it will explore pathways and good practices for increasing domestic resources from taxation and social security contributions in a progressive, gender-equitable and sustainable way. Even though many countries have the means to create [fiscal space](#) domestically, low-income countries are unlikely to be able to raise on their own the additional USD 77.9 billion, or 15.9 per cent of their GDP, required for the implementation of a basic social protection floor. The report will therefore also discuss the need for global measures, including on debt cancellation, reform of the lending practices of multilateral development banks, equitable global tax accords that ensure multinational corporations pay their fair share and an increase in official development assistance.

The process of producing the report will bring together researchers, policymakers and civil society actors as well as UN partners, which all play leading roles in advancing social protection in different contexts. In so doing, we aim to produce a report with strong and sustained inputs and buy-in that provides guidance to policymakers; supports advocacy for a new generation of gender-responsive social protection systems able to meet the challenges of a world in turmoil; and informs related initiatives, such as the UN Global Accelerator, the Action Coalitions on Economic Justice and Rights and on Feminist Climate Justice, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's Cash Advisory Group and the Women, Peace & Security and Humanitarian Action Compact.