



Task Force 6
Accelerating SDGs: Exploring New
Pathways to the 2030 Agenda



TACKLING MULTIDIMENSIONAL GENDER INEQUALITY IN G20 COUNTRIES

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Abstract



The conversation around multidimensional gender inequalities across education, care economy, economic security, safety, and investment in social development at the G20 is key to accelerating progress towards achieving all Sustainable

Development Goals (SDGs) and building a net-zero world. This policy brief focuses on these issues, examining the impact of COVID-19 on the lives of women and girls and gender-related SDGs. It subsequently identifies policy measures to build resilient, fair, and inclusive societies.



The Challenge



1

Education: Pandemic-induced dropouts

The multifaceted repercussions of withdrawing adolescent girls from school during lockdowns are significant. School

closures in low-literacy contexts, where girls are typically inaugural learners, induce profound societal strain. Past epidemics demonstrate the heightened susceptibility of adolescent girls to discontinue education permanently.¹

Figure 1: Interlinkages between SDG 5 and other SDGs

Target 5.1: End discrimination against women and girls 	Equal access to quality and affordable education (SDG 4) 
	Access to the labor market (SDG 8) 
	Political participation (SDG 10) 
	Contribute to promoting peaceful and inclusive societies (SDG 16) 
	Decent work and employment (SDG 8) 
	Poverty reduction (SDG 1) 
Target 5.2: End all violence and exploitation of women and girls	Achieving peace and security and human rights (SDG 16) 
	Providing safe public spaces and transport (SDG 11) 
Target 5.3: Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation	Employment (SDG 8) 
	Education (SDG 4) 
	Decent work (SDG 9) 
Target 5.4: Value unpaid care and promote shared domestic responsibilities	Full and productive employment and (SDG 8) 
	Decent work (SDG 9) 
Target 5.5: Ensure full participation in leadership and decision-making	Water and sanitation (SDG 6) 
	inequalities (SDG 10) 
	Peaceful and inclusive societies (SDG 16) 
	Enhance agricultural productivity (SDG 2) 
	Health (SDG 3) 
	Contribute to climate change planning and management (SDG 13) 
Target 5.6: Universal access to reproductive rights and health	Maternal mortality and ending diseases like HIV and AIDS (SDG 3) 
	Education (SDG 4) 
	Sanitation and hygiene (SDG 6) 
	Employment (SDG 8) 

Source: Authors' own

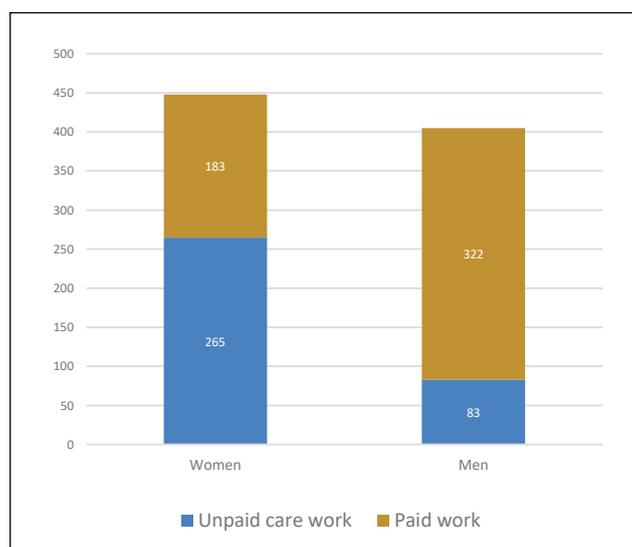
In the context of the pandemic, increased demands on unpaid and invisible care work that is foundational to households worsened gender-based inequalities. Without significant social support systems, the responsibility of unpaid care and domestic chores falls on women and girls. Pre-pandemic, women's share in unpaid work ranged from 55.3 percent to 92 percent, with no country having achieved equal sharing of unpaid care work.² The International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimates that unpaid care work is amongst

the most critical barriers preventing women from joining and remaining in the workforce.³

Unpaid care work: Have we devalued Women's Labour?

Indian women consistently dedicate significantly more time to unpaid care work than men. Pre-COVID-19, women spent around eight times more hours on care work than men surpassing the global average of three times.⁴

Figure 2: Time spent daily in unpaid care work and paid work



Source: COVID-19 and the Unpaid Care Economy in Asia and the Pacific, UNESCAP, 2021⁵

Measuring unpaid care work

Time-use surveys are, till date, the best tool available to measure the amount of time spent by people within a national or sub-national region on various activities such as paid labour, education, unpaid care work, or leisure. In India, the National Statistical Organisation (NSO) conducted the first time-use survey in 2019 covering ~83,000 rural and ~53,000 urban households.⁶

Opportunity cost of women's labour

The opportunity cost approach to women's labour assumes that time spent on unpaid labour is at the cost of earning a market wage. Based on estimates by the ILO, unpaid care and

domestic work amount to an aggregate 9 percent of global GDP, equivalent to US\$11 trillion in purchasing power parity terms. This approach estimates the value of women's unpaid work (globally) to represent 6.6 percent of GDP or US\$8 trillion while men's contribution equals 2.4 percent of GDP or US\$3 trillion.⁷

Gender-based violence: The shadow pandemic

Lockdowns triggered surges in domestic violence, sexual assaults, and child abuse, especially among young girls. Gender-based violence escalated notably in areas with persistent poverty and existing violence, worsened by pandemic-induced disruptions to education, health, and social support systems.⁸

Figure 3: Gender-based violence at a glance



Source: UN Women, 2020⁹



Poverty: Mind the gap

The pandemic intensified multidimensional poverty. Women's employment dipped by 5 percent in 2020, far more than men which dropped by 3.9 percent.¹⁰ 90 percent of

jobless women anticipated prolonged disruption. The gender poverty gap could have widened due to resource shifts within poor households. An estimated 388 million women and girls lived on under \$1.90/day in 2022.¹¹

The G20's Role

2



The 2021 Rome Declaration and 2022 Bali Declaration recognise the amplified toll the pandemic has taken on women. They've pledged to prioritise gender equality (SDG 5) in the G20's pursuit of all-encompassing post-pandemic revival and enduring progress. Within this context, the G20's guidance could propel global advancement through women-led initiatives. Research from India underscores that unpaid care work's burden curbs women's workforce engagement.

At the Brisbane G20 summit in 2014, a commitment was made to shrink the gender gap in workforce participation by a quarter before 2025. Progressing from this, the Women 20 group at the G20 and the second G20 Ministerial Conference on Women's

Empowerment (2022) highlighted the care economy's challenges.

The "Women at Work in G20 Countries" paper prepared for 2023 by the ILO and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) presents a G20 dashboard of gender gaps in labour market outcomes in 2022 and notes changes since 2012, depicting a positive change towards closing the gap in multiple job roles across G20 countries.¹²

The Government of India also planned a G20 Ministerial Conference on Women's Empowerment¹³ which was held at Gandhinagar, Gujarat from 2nd to 4th August, 2023, focusing on women-led development for accelerating progress towards gender equality, women's empowerment, and achieving SDG 5.



Recommendations to the G20

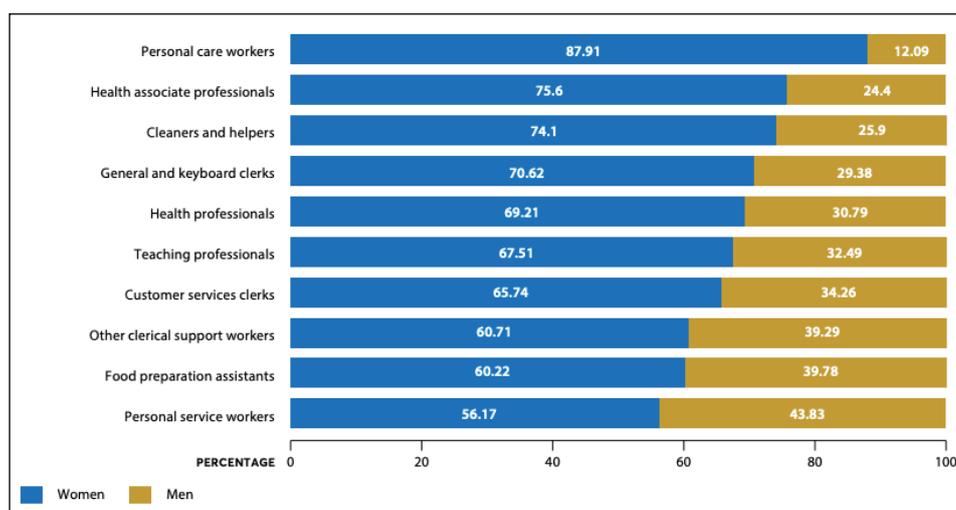


3

Recognising, reducing, and redistributing unpaid care work; rewarding paid care work¹⁴

1. **Recognising unpaid care work:** To create gender-sensitive policies, it is important to collect data on unpaid care work, which should be linked with migrant population data and labour policies to create gender and context-sensitive policies.
2. **Reducing unpaid care work burden:** This can be done by providing services and utilities to help women, social protection to those caring for dependent populations, and care-friendly employment terms like sick leave, flexible working arrangements, and contributory social protection schemes to employed women.
3. **Redistribution of unpaid care to men, market, state¹⁵:** Shift unpaid care work from women to men, as well as to other stakeholders. States and markets can offer institutional care services and prioritise investments in social infrastructure.¹⁶
4. **Rewarding paid care workers:** Women are majorly employed in occupations that are usually low-paying, lack social protection, and have poor working conditions.¹⁷ Such sectors have been ravaged by the Covid-19 pandemic, increasing

Figure 4: Occupations with the largest share of women's employment (in %)



Source: COVID-19 and the Unpaid Care Economy in Asia and the Pacific, UNESCAP, 2021¹⁸

risk-laden extra work and job losses. Policies should reward and respect paid care workers, establish minimum wages, define social protection, and improve working conditions for women.

Ensuring education for all

1. **Grasping the context-specific causes of non-participation in education is critical to formulating targeted interventions:**

Sub-national quantitative and qualitative surveys are important to identify reasons for low enrolment and dropouts (especially with regard to girls) from both the demand and supply perspectives of education.

Supply-side variables (inter alia) include poor infrastructure, lack of gender-segregated toilets and menstrual hygiene management tools, and cost of education.^{19,20}

Demand-side variables include restrictive socio-cultural norms, time spent on chores and care work, and performance-related factors.²¹

The survey design should capture the role of pandemic-triggered factors in changing the educational trajectories of female students.

2. **Involving parents and community leaders in education campaigns:**

Education-seeking behaviour can be encouraged when parents and community leaders value education.²² Engaging school management committees, religious and political leaders, and Parent Teacher Associations to raise community awareness about the importance of girls' education can be an effective way to boost enrolment.²³

Mapping out relevant stakeholders to ensure community buy-in for interventions can promote greater programmatic acceptance.

3. **Timely identification of potential dropouts' signals and corrective interventions can reduce drop-out rates:**

Signals such as long-term absenteeism,^{24,25} disengagement with learning, and repeated poor performance can be used to identify children at risk of dropping out.²⁶ Special learning programmes can be designed to retain them.

4. **Conditional incentive programmes have proved successful in attracting and retaining children, especially girls in schools:**

Linking incentives with



attendance and performance has positively contributed to retaining girls in schools and enhancing their academic performance.²⁷ To encourage attendance, the cost of education could be reduced, and direct transition pathways from education to employment could be built.

5. **Enabling access to technology for girls has become a prerequisite for their integration into educational and employment networks:** Lack of technological access has constrained girls' access to education online, disadvantaging them and impacting future participation in labour markets. The goal of bridging the digital gender divide should be adopted in the National Action Plans on Digital Education.

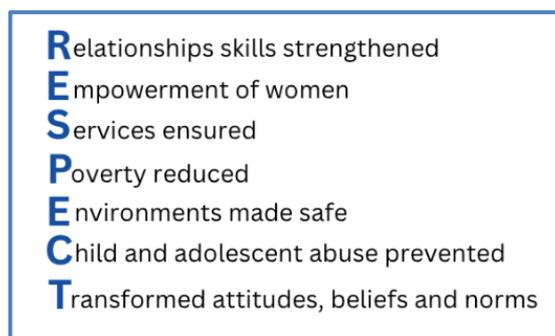
Preventing and ending violence against women:

1. **Implementing laws and solutions to address violence against women effectively:** Inadequate data hampers tracking gender-based violence and achieving

gender equality. States must partner with women's groups, follow global frameworks, reinforce laws, and provide intervention tools for eliminating violence against women.

2. **Addressing socio-economic stressors that may lead to violence:** Food insecurity, extreme poverty, and the absence of any income source for women are risk factors that can trigger violence. These can be reduced by creating social safety nets and gender-differentiated cash transfers.²⁸
3. **Encouraging cross-country and multi-sectoral cooperation on ending digital violence against women:** Widespread digitalisation has increased cyber violence against women, which takes many forms and is connected to offline violence. Laws lack definitional clarity and consistency and fall behind technological developments.²⁹ Addressing this requires cooperation across countries and sectors. The G20 can encourage its member countries to establish common definitions, legal frameworks, roles, responsibilities, and standards of accountability for intermediaries.

Figure 5: Women's RESPECT Policy Framework



Source: UN Women, 2020 ³⁰

4. **Promoting long-term investment in transforming entrenched gender biases:** To prevent violence against women, we need long-term efforts to change gender stereotypes that involve men in promoting gender equality and include gender-sensitive education. By investing in national strategic plans for gender equality and empowerment, the G20 can use the UN Women's RESPECT Policy Framework to assess policies and implementation to address this challenge.³¹

Policy options for poverty alleviation among women and children

1. **Making laws gender-sensitive:** Because over 2.4 billion women are restricted in their job choices

by legalities and have inferior land, resource, and property rights, women and children are at greater risk of experiencing poverty than men.³² If consensus can be reached on doing away with gender-biased laws in a time-bound manner, progress can be made in eliminating relative poverty for women and children.

2. **Providing equal opportunities for women to participate in the labour market:** Completing school education, skill development, and adapting to digital technology and labour market demands can help women achieve equal participation in the labour market. This can help lift women out of poverty. Bridging the wide gender wage gap of 23 percent³³ through legislation will help improve women's socio-economic status.

3. **Development of the care economy:**

Women tend to spend around 2.5 times more time on unpaid care and domestic work than men, which adversely impacts women's labour force participation rate.³⁴ Making this care work remunerative will have a direct impact on reducing poverty.

4. **Introducing gender-sensitive social protection policies:**

Gender gaps in job access hinder women's social security, heightening poverty and debt risks. Gender-sensitive policies are essential to countering socio-economic uncertainties.

5. **Providing basic infrastructure and protection from climate change and environmental degradation:**

Safe water and sanitation gaps disproportionately affect women. Insufficient sanitation facilities impede menstrual hygiene and hinder physical and socio-economic progress. Without social security, women and children face heightened challenges from environmental shocks, displacement, and deforestation.

Marshalling insight into action

To prioritise gender equality and empowerment, G20 leaders can create a group of women parliamentarians from G20 countries, tasking them with developing policy pathways to accelerate these goals into action. This will help bridge 'the long road ahead' on SDG 5.C that focuses on adopting and strengthening 'sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality'. Gender equality and care-burden-related targets are areas where the distance to attaining gender-related SDGs is farthest.³⁵

G20 women parliamentarians can propose policy pathways to gender equality and empowerment

The G20 EMPOWER initiative aims to enhance women's private sector leadership. A subgroup of women political leaders in the G20 countries can propose strategies to counter the pandemic's socioeconomic setbacks for women. By engaging stakeholders, the group can highlight pandemic-induced gender disparities in policies and expedite pathways to global gender parity.

Addressing the acute dearth in quantity and quality of data to monitor progress on indicators related to SDG5 and all interlinked SDGs

In addition to medium to long-term recommendations, the group can recommend short-term response strategies, including quantitative and qualitative ways in which national statistical systems can collaborate with grassroots women's organisations. It can also shed light on the intersectional data required on different vulnerable groups within the category of women.

1. Developing social protection and social security policies providing coverage to women with differential needs, particularly in times of crises.³⁶
2. Recognising, reducing, and redistributing unpaid care loads and rewarding paid care workers.
3. Assessing whether it is time to revise the right to free and compulsory primary education to include free, compulsory secondary education for all, which can be coded into the educational policies of G20 countries so that dropped-out girls

can be brought back to education by law in a rights-based framework.

4. Developing a framework for policies including budgets to assess where they stand on a continuum of gender-discriminatory—gender-blind—gender-neutral—gender-sensitive—gender-responsive approaches and revising policies along the spectrum on a graded basis at least or designing plans for a galloping leap if their context allows.
5. Establishing innovative ways to finance the formulation and implementation of new policies that empower women on the socio-economic aspects of education, employment, preventing and addressing violence, care economy, health, and social protection.

A G20 digital platform for preventing and ending cyber violence against women

Addressing the escalating transnational, anonymous violence against women demands a targeted multinational effort. Led by G20 technology ministers, this subgroup should include technocrats,

Figure 6: Digital violence against women at a glance



Source: *The Economist Intelligence Unit, and The Report of the Secretary-General, 2022*^{37,38}

specialised women’s organisations, major tech intermediaries, and the UN. Incorporating women’s perspectives to address the gender imbalance in the Information and Communications Technology sector, the subgroup must collaboratively establish standards, laws, and solutions to combat evolving digital violence against women.

Employing a gender-focused approach and harnessing multidimensional strategies to address intricate cross-cutting challenges through precise yet harmonised interventions offer a promising route towards achieving not only SDG 5 but also interconnected SDGs. Within the G20 framework, prioritising interventions in the care economy, along with gender equality policies and legislation, becomes imperative, given the substantial

shortfall in meeting targets (target 5.4, 5.C) within SDG 5. The urgency of combating transnational digital violence against women requires dedicated multilateral endeavours.

Social protection schemes to alleviate gender inequality

Worldwide, over half the population lacks social protection, with only under 30 percent receiving comprehensive coverage.³⁹ Women face further setbacks in these systems, encountering reduced coverage and benefits. Factors contributing to this include flawed schemes built on male-centric models, women’s limited presence in formal job markets (coupled with overrepresentation in unprotected informal sectors), the burden of unpaid care work, and gender pay disparity.

Funding social protection schemes

SDG credits: In simple terms, SDG-based credit strategies encourage investors to invest in companies that help them achieve SDG goals. This can mean buying bonds for companies that contribute to one or more SDGs and avoiding companies that break SDG norms.

Robeco's measurement framework for SDGs follows a three-step evaluation process- product assessment (positive/negative impact), production procedures analysis, and a study of the company's involvement in litigations and controversies. Such frameworks enable investors to analyse corporate bonds, favouring those aligning with SDGs and excluding those conflicting with them.

SDG bonds: Bond markets provide cost-effective capital for SDG implementation. With a US\$6.7 trillion global annual bond issuance, SDG bonds can help meet rising investor interest in social impact.⁴⁰ These bonds, such as corporate, bank, asset-backed, project, sovereign, or municipal SDG bonds, can help shape socially conscious investing.

Domestic fiscal measures for gendered budgeting

Domestic fiscal strategies encompass two paths: one, channelling funds for gender-sensitive social protection; and two, shaping fiscal policies that incentivise gender-equitable industries. Yet, India's annual budget has shown inadequate gender-focused allocations, declining from 4.72 percent (FY21) to 4.4 percent (FY22) and 4.3 percent (FY23) of total expenditure.⁴¹

Gig economy

The World Economic Forum defines the gig economy as an "exchange of labour for money between individuals or companies via digital platforms that actively facilitate matching between providers and customers, on a short-term and payment-by-task basis."⁴² The OECD reports that globally gig workers largely experience job satisfaction, suggesting their participation is voluntary and not due to limited alternatives. In India, digital platform freelancing allures women with flexible work arrangements, reducing reliance on fixed locations, aiding in balancing paid and unpaid responsibilities.



A McKinsey study ⁴³ categorised independent workers into four segments:

- **Free agents** (who choose independent work and derive their primary income from it),
- **Casual earners** (who use independent work by choice for supplemental income),
- **Reluctant workers** (who make their primary living from independent work but would prefer traditional jobs), and
- **Financially strapped** (who do supplemental independent work out of necessity).

Gig work, characterised by its flexibility and digital platforms, has rapidly expanded as an employment option. However, it is essential to recognise that this form of work is not without its fair share of problems. Workers engaged in gig work often face challenges such as inconsistent income, limited access to traditional employment benefits,

and potential exploitation due to the absence of regulatory frameworks. Additional concerns include a lack of job security and uncertain employment status. According to a study conducted by the Observer Research Foundation and the World Economic Forum in 2018, 35 percent of surveyed women were disinterested in joining the gig economy due to similar reasons.⁴⁴

Globally, lower- and middle-income nations witness 7 percent mobile ownership gap and 15 percent mobile internet gap between the genders.⁴⁵ These disparities in access to mobile technology can impact various aspects of the gig economy, potentially further marginalizing certain groups and hindering their participation in this evolving employment ecosystem.

The challenges posed by the pandemic present a unique chance to reshape societal dynamics towards a just, equitable, and nurturing world, where women lead development rather than passively benefitting from it. Grasping this moment is a pressing necessity.

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