

Closing the Gender Pay Gap: Eliminating Legal and Structural Barriers to Achieve Social and Economic Justice

Concept Note: CSW70 Side Event by the Equal Pay International Coalition (EPIC)

Thursday, 12 March 2026, 5:30 – 6:45 pm

UN Women Headquarters, 220 East 42nd Street, 19th Floor Conference Room, New York, NY

Background

The 70th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW70) in March 2026 will focus on the theme of ‘Ensuring and strengthening access to justice for all women and girls, including by promoting inclusive and equitable legal systems, eliminating discriminatory laws, policies, and practices, and addressing structural barriers’. This is particularly relevant in the context of equal pay for work of equal value, as persistent gender pay gaps are sustained not only by discriminatory norms and practices, but also by gaps in legal frameworks, limited access to effective remedies, implementation challenges, including inadequate enforcement mechanisms and capacity constraints that prevent women from fully realizing their right to social and economic justice.

Women still earn 20 per cent less than men globally,¹ a gap that is more pronounced for women who face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and disadvantage. Closing the gender pay gap is pivotal for achieving social and economic justice, equal opportunities and fair treatment at work in line with ILO Convention 100 on Equal Remuneration (C100) and ILO Convention 111 on Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) (C111). This can only be ensured through inclusive, equitable, accountable legal systems, anchored in International Labour Standards and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly SDG5 on gender equality, SDG8 on economic growth, employment and decent work, SDG10 on reducing inequality and SDG16 on peace, justice, inclusion and strong institutions. Justice for all is impossible without justice for women, and equal and effective justice for women is foundational for inclusive, sustainable development and reaching those furthest behind.²

Discriminatory laws, policies and practices – together with weak enforcement and structural barriers – continue to hinder the realization of women’s social and economic rights. During the past decade more attention has been placed on promoting and implementing laws and measures on pay equity. Most economies (98 out of 190 assessed) have enacted legislation mandating equal pay for work of equal value in accordance with ILO C100.³ Yet gaps remain to ensure comprehensive legislation that covers all persisting barriers to equal pay for work of equal value. While wage transparency legislation has emerged

¹ ILO. 2024. [Global Wage Report 2024–25: Is wage inequality decreasing globally?](#) Geneva: International Labour Organization.

² UN Women, World Bank, IDLO, Taskforce on Justice. 2020. [Justice for Women: High-level Group Report](#).

³ World Bank Group. 2024. [Women, Business and the Law 2024](#).

as a prominent measure to advance pay equity, approximately only 35 countries have adopted related measures or enforcement mechanisms to address the gender pay gap.⁴

Gender pay gaps stem from multiple factors and as such they require a wide range of robust laws, policies and tools – including clear definitions and understanding of the notion of ‘work of equal value’ as promoted by ILO C100 – as well as increased awareness around them.

Achieving equal pay for work of equal value requires predictability and clear guidance that enable enterprises to comply effectively and sustainably. Accessible job evaluation and equal pay analysis tools as well as further well-designed pay equity measures can support enterprise performance by improving talent attraction and retention, strengthening workplace trust, reducing disputes, and providing legal certainty for employers across sectors and enterprise sizes. Workplace dispute resolution is also an important element in this context, as is the ability for employers and workers to engage in social dialogue. In addition, well-developed complaint and protection mechanisms are essential as cases on unequal pay are often difficult to navigate and workers might fear retaliation.⁵ Greater participation of women in the justice sector, more accessible justice systems and more effective enforcement mechanisms have the potential to better address the gender pay gap. Freedom of association and the right to organize play a key role in creating an enabling environment for access to justice.

Barriers to achieving equal pay for work of equal value can only be dismantled through collective efforts, the participation of employers’ and workers’ organizations as well as women’s organizations. Employers are responsible for complying with the law, ensuring that pay structures, job classification systems, and remuneration practices are free from discrimination. Workers and their representatives advocate for appropriate legal frameworks, raise workers’ concerns where inequalities persist or negotiate collective agreements, amongst others. Together, they engage in social dialogue and collective bargaining, supporting compliance with the law and promoting adequate, inclusive and transparent wage systems. International institutions that set normative standards and academia play a critical role in providing policy guidance, research, data and analysis, capacity development and technical support, as well as the monitoring and assessment of laws and policies and their implementation in practice.

Objectives

This side event will examine how strengthening access to justice and promoting inclusive, equitable and accountable legal systems are essential to closing the gender pay gap, in line with the CSW70 priority theme. Organized by the Equal Pay International Coalition (EPIC) led by ILO, the OECD and UN Women, the session will highlight how legal and institutional reforms, gender-responsive justice systems, and robust accountability mechanisms can accelerate progress toward equal pay for work of equal value and the

⁴ World Bank Group. 2024. [Women, Business and the Law 2024](#).

⁵ OECD (2023), [Reporting Gender Pay Gaps in OECD Countries: Guidance for Pay Transparency Implementation, Monitoring and Reform](#). OECD Publishing: Paris.

realization of women’s economic rights. The discussion will draw on the commitments of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the ambition of the 2030 Agenda, particularly SDG Target 8.5 on securing equal pay for work of equal value, the Doha Political Declaration of the World Social Summit under the title ‘the Second World Summit for Social Development’, as well as fundamental principles and rights at work and other international labour standards.

The event will also underscore the role of multistakeholder partnerships and collective action across governments, employers, workers, civil society, academia and international organizations in dismantling systemic barriers and advancing structural change. By linking pay equity to access to justice, the dialogue will offer action-oriented discussions on pathways to advance the CSW70 agenda, women’s economic empowerment and gender equality at work.

Agenda:

Moderator: Ms. Cynthia Samuel-Olonjuwon, Special Representative to the UN and Director of the ILO Office for the United Nations

Time	Segment	Speaker
5:30 – 5:38 pm	Welcome and opening remarks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ms. Maira Lacerda, Head of the Special Advisory Office for International Affairs at the Ministry of Labor and Employment, Federal Government of Brazil (EPIC Chair) Ms. Seemin Qayum, Chief, a.i., Economic Empowerment Section, UN Women (on behalf of the EPIC Secretariat)
5:38 – 5:45 pm	Keynote Speech	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ms. Hyeshin Park, Head of the Gender and Development Unit, OECD
5:45 – 6:25 pm	Panel discussion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Practical examples of effective enforcement, complaint mechanisms and policies Practical examples of worker-led and employer-led initiatives and tools supporting equal pay implementation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ms. Maha Ali, Secretary General of the Jordanian National Commission for Women Ms. Irena Moozova, Deputy Director General, Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers (DG JUST), European Commission



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EQUAL PAY FOR WORK OF EQUAL VALUE

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The role of social dialogue in preventing disputes and supporting compliance• Practical examples of how to deal with fear of retaliation, high costs and procedural barriers• Practical examples of awareness raising and capacity building for institutional and judiciary systems (training of judges, labour inspectors, lawyers and mediators on equal pay and gender bias)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Speaker (TBC), Azerbaijan• Ms. Shea Gopaul, Permanent Representative of the International Organisation of Employers (IOE) to the United Nations• Ms. Jotika Sharma, Chair of the ITUC Women’s Committee, International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)
6:25 – 6:40 pm	Q&A	
6:40 – 6:45 pm	Closing remarks	Ms. Cynthia Samuel-Olonjuwon, Special Representative to the UN and Director of the ILO Office for the United Nations