



The Contribution of Social Dialogue to Gender Equality

Summary of the Global Deal Brief

by Hayley Pierson

The [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), a continuation of the previously outlined [Sustainable Development Goals](#), focuses on a myriad of topics, with one in particular being of pressing focus for the matter of gender equality globally. SDG 5.5 places an emphasis on the importance of empowering women's voices in social dialogue bodies as well as collective bargaining teams. Globally, women are underrepresented in decision-making bodies, their representation being disproportionately lower than that of men's in roughly 195 countries. The presence of women in the labor force is also significantly less than that of men's. Women present in the labor force tend to face discrimination due to vertical and horizontal occupational gender segregation, as well as prevailing gender stereotypes and unequal power relations between men and women that continue to pose as obstructions to women gaining equality in the workplace. Though the [International Labor Organization](#) (ILO) as well as trade unions make several suggestions as to how to improve the standing of women in the workplace, of which some progress has resulted, greater efforts to empower women's access to senior and leadership positions within organizations are necessary.



Source: *World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends for Women* (2017) in *The Global Deal* (2020), *The Contribution of Social Dialogue to gender Equality*, Thematic Brief, 4.

The following paragraphs outline the key ideas of a recent brief published by the Global Deal. The Global Deal is a multi-stakeholder initiative which brings together several entities such as governments, businesses, employers' organizations, trade unions and more for the purpose of promoting social dialogue and inclusive growth.

The brief offers a thorough analysis of the most pressing issues for women currently in the world and potential solutions to alleviate these issues through the work of governments, employers and workers. This version of the brief was published in December 2020 and is a revised version of a brief published in March 2019, revised to include the Covid-19 Pandemic as well as the Violence and Harassment Convention of 2019 in its considerations of women's plights.

As for the Global Deal publication, social dialogue could be a useful tool for gender parity in the workplace and at home for both men and women, promoting an equal access between men and women to things such as jobs and skills, maternity/paternity leave, and more. Gender diversity in the workplace, studied by ILO, has proven to be an environment that only enhances a workplace. It leads to improved access to markets, less staff turnover, greater productivity and several other benefits. Though the efficacy of social dialogue and collective bargaining has lessened in recent years as union density has decreased, they are still tools to consider.

Bipartite social dialogue, between trade unions and employers' organizations, is incredibly powerful and not to be overlooked. Trade unions, in their responsibility for workers' pay and the conditions of employment, hold a unique ability to advocate for women in the workplace. Collective bargaining through trade unions with negotiating teams that include women are significantly effective at increasing women's participation in the labor market and addressing the gender pay gap. The efficacy of collective bargaining relies simultaneously on the commitment of the trade union and the employers' organization to gender equality, but when used properly, collective bargaining combats gender inequality in several ways. Pay bargaining considering historically discriminatory pay towards women and other vulnerable workers, gender neutral evaluation methods, increasing access to parental leave and advocating for preventative measures for violence and harassment in the workplace which in particular affects girls and women are all ways that collective bargaining promotes gender equality in the workplace. **Social dialogue is not only limited to domestic trade unions and domestic employers' organizations. In an increasingly globalized world, cross-border social dialogue leads to transnational social responsibility initiatives which greatly assist in shifting the international community towards globalized gender equality. Finally, social dialogue also allows for the inclusion of third-party actors through tripartite dialogue. This ability becomes particularly important when one considers the informal sector.**

The informal sector is a typically undervalued sector of the economy, and in most countries, it is dominated by women doing domestic work, which affords them little to no protections or security. Therefore, trade unions can bring in the informal sector to the conversation and allow them a voice they would otherwise lack and, by extension, further oppress women. Some trade unions create formal structures which represent informal workers. As for the Global Deal brief, examples include but are not limited to the Union of Informal Workers Association established in

2015 by Ghana Trades Union Congress as well as the Ugandan Amalgamated Transport and General Workers Union Informal Sector Women's Committee. Consideration of this part of the economy and their inclusion in negotiations is important given the prevalence of women within the informal sector. **This problem in regard to the informal sector is worse in light of the Covid-19 pandemic, which disproportionately affects women. In a majority of countries, the health and social sectors are already female dominated, and women are also doing care work at home, part of the informal sector (horizontal occupational segregation).** Because of the pandemic, this home-care work increases dramatically in a way that is not affecting men the same. Women face more significant economic repercussions like career interruptions and the first to be targeted for retrenchments as well as decreasing employment opportunities and job quality thanks to female-dominated industries being economically impacted. Social dialogue and collective bargaining serve to address these issues, as well as the long-term, future issues of work that will result from this pandemic as well as a changing global economy.

Production fragmentation and technological advances have given rise to new issues in the future of work. As expected, women are left behind in this increasingly technological world; women are systematically underrepresented in the fields of science, math, technology and engineering (STEM) that have come to dominate the labor force. There is also the furthering of the care role due to the Covid-19 pandemic, as previously mentioned, that leaves women struggling to catch up in their careers for potentially years to come. Increased representation and efforts through social dialogue, however, speeds up this process before the problem worsens once more.

The brief ends with several recommendations for governments, employers' organizations, and workers' representatives. All focus on the efficient promotion of women into more leading roles in regard to social dialogue, as well as addressing problems that plague women in particular, like violence in the workplace and the pandemic. The recommendations also emphasize the importance of the inclusion of the informal sector. Overall, the key to achieving gender equality in the workplace as women grow into an increasingly vulnerable role in the world is found in participating in social dialogue and collective bargaining, with women having seats at the table.

Hayley Pierson
Arcadia University