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Dear Dr. Gámez,

**Aldeena Raju**

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We would like to inform you that your contributions on

- Women's Participation in the Labor Market (Contributors: Alba E. Gámez and Manuel Angeles)

to the volume **Gender Equality** (eds. Walter Leal Filho, Luciana Brandli, Pinar Gökçin Özuyar and Tony Wall), part of the series **Encyclopedia of the UN Sustainable Development Goals** (editor-in-chief: Walter Leal Filho) and to be published by Springer International Publishing AG, part of Springer Nature, in 2020, has been reviewed and accepted for publication and is currently in production.

We thank you for your contributions and look forward to continue working with you.

With best wishes,

22 February 2019





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# Gender Equality

Editors: **Leal Filho, W., Azul, A.M., Brandli, L., Özuyar, P.G., Wall, T.** (Eds.)

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The problems related to the process of industrialisation such as biodiversity depletion, climate change and a worsening of health and living conditions, especially but not only in developing countries, intensify. Therefore, there is an increasing need to search for integrated solutions to make development more sustainable. The United Nations has acknowledged the problem and approved the “2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”. On 1st January 2016, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the Agenda officially came into force. These goals cover the three dimensions of sustainable development: economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection.

The Encyclopedia of the UN Sustainable Development Goals comprehensively addresses the SDGs in an integrated way. It encompasses 17 volumes, each devoted to one of the 17 SDGs. This volume addresses SDG 5, namely "**Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls**" and contains the description of a range of terms, which allows a better understanding and fosters knowledge. This SDG is considered by many as a pivotal goal since the significant role of women in achieving sustainable development has always been acknowledged in several official UN declarations. Yet gender disparity is still rampant under various guises in various countries. Women's rights need to be strongly safeguarded through legislation to ensure equal opportunities.

Concretely, the defined targets are:

End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere

Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation

Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation

Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate

Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life

Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences

Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws

Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women

Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels

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# WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE LABOR MARKET

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## B. Synonyms (if applicable)

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## C. Definitions

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*Labor market:* A place where work is exchanged for a wage. Labor markets can be identified by a combination of such factors as geography (local, regional, national, and/or international), industry, education, licensing or certification, and occupation. More generally, the labor market can refer to the processes by which workers and employers are brought into contact, and wages and conditions of work are decided (Black et al. 2017).

*Labor force:* the sum of the employed and the unemployed (International Labor Organization 2013)

*Labor segregation or occupational segregation:* This term refers to the unequal distribution of men and women in the professional structure—sometimes also (and more accurately) called 'occupational segregation by sex'. There are two forms. 'Vertical segregation' describes the clustering of men at the top of occupational hierarchies and women at the bottom; 'horizontal segregation' describes the fact

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that at the same occupational level (that is within occupational classes, or even occupations themselves) men and women have different job tasks (Scott and Gordon 2009).

### Main Body Text

#### Abstract

Women's participation in labor markets has significantly increased in the last decades, which is regarded as a source of female welfare and empowerment. This contention is clouded by profound inequalities not only in the workplaces but in the system as a whole: notwithstanding relevant differences in social and personal traits, regardless of the world region in which they live, women face disadvantageous conditions as compared to men. This chapter offers an overview of women's integration to labor markets, of analyses devoted to exploring the backstage of female employment, and of recommendations to advance their freedom of choice regarding work itself, the occupations in which they engage, and their paid and unpaid work conditions. The topic is particularly relevant regarding policymaking, as is being aware of the context in which policies should be implemented to achieve gender equality.

**Keywords:** women, gender, labor market

#### Introduction

There was a time in 19<sup>th</sup> century England, the cradle of the neoclassical perspective, when the economist's understanding of women's economic role could be characterized by the following points: (1) All women are married, or will be; (2) All women have children, or will have; (3) Women are financial dependents of fathers or husbands; (4) Women specialize in housework and are unproductive in industry; and 5) Women are irrational and unable to make sound economic decisions (Pujol 2003: 22). By the mid-fifties, in discussing development issues, W. Arthur Lewis pointed out the benefits of integrating women into labor markets for national income to grow, since:

most of the things which women otherwise do in the household can, in fact, be done much better or more, cheaply outside, thanks to the large-scale economies of specialization, and also to the use of capital (grinding grain, fetching water from the river, making cloth, making clothes, cooking the midday meal, teaching children, nursing the sick, etc.) (Lewis 1954:404).

Although Lewis referred to cultural and conventional reasons that explained women being away from labor markets, wages were still accounted for in terms of productivity (the value added for one more unit of labor, or an additional worker) to total output. Lewis made no further reference to the reasons why women would have to engage in the same household-type activities when holding paid jobs. Since then, studies have dealt extensively with gender segregation (Anker 1997, Estevez-Abe 2004), but the gender wage gap (the difference between women's and men's earnings, expressed as a percentage of men's revenues) is mostly explained by lower skills and education, preference to work part-time, primarily due to child-rearing and tendencies to work in feminine jobs (Becker 1964, Kunze 2005, Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development 2002, Blau and Khan 2017). Although supply factors (particular women's traits) and demand factors (employers' preferences) explanations are generally accompanied by calls for more equality in the labor market, they usually do not go in depth into the reasons behind these situations (Lips 2013).

Overcoming tautological explanations, that account for the current state of women's employment characteristics as a result of those employment characteristics, involves unveiling gendered labor market practices. Additionally, it also requires changing social norms and socio-economic constraints deeply embedded in societies –that include traditional notions of *feminine* traits– as well as valuing and, above all, *sharing* household chores and care

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provision (Kopalshnikova 2017, Hagquivist et al. 2017), which women mostly disproportionately do while also holding a paid job.

Welfare policies support women, especially in *familiarized* countries, that is, those who have advanced a friendlier work-family approach (nurseries, tax exemptions, child-support) (Estevez-Abe 2016; Mahon 2006); yet, claims have been raised about gender equality being superficial insofar as the primary objective is to facilitate market and household flexibilization, rather than equality between men and women (Mahon 2008). Thus, for instance, opportunities for part-time work for women with children support the one-and-a-half-earner model (Ibidem: 177), instead of challenging prevailing gender relations within society and the family. In any case, a "motherhood penalty" to women's careers is acknowledged since bosses view full-time employment and extended hours as proof of commitment to the firm (The Economist 2017).

In spite of the above, female participation in labor markets has increased worldwide during the past decades, a welcome outcome that is linked to individual welfare, and, socially, to economic growth. However, the current global labor force participation rate for women is one third less than men's and, in some regions, surpasses 50 percent; a gap which is not expected to be reduced in the near future (International Labor Organization 2018). In a context of shrinking employment for all, finding a job not only proves to be more difficult for women: they have restricted access to quality employment opportunities, face gender segregation, and are subject to higher unemployment rates (International Labor Organization 2018:6-7). These are but some of the factors that undermine the attainment of economic equality for women and hinder development opportunities for societies.

This essay offers an overview of women's participation in labor markets, of analyses devoted to exploring the backstage of female employment, and of recommendations to advance their freedom of choice regarding work itself, the occupations in which they engage, and their paid and unpaid work conditions. As gender gaps in employment expose profound inequalities between women and men, it is worth noticing that (regional, racial, income, class, sexual preference, migratory status, age) differences between women deserve consideration. This is particularly relevant in terms of policymaking, as is being aware of the context in which policies are to be implemented.

The text is divided into three sections. The first refers to women's work from a gender perspective; the second deals with gender and labor markets in the current global context, the third relates to institutional solutions to labor market inequality and their critics. Since gender inequalities are socially constructed and can, thus, be eradicated, some comments are provided at the end to stress the ethical imperative, and even the economic logic, behind actively promoting equality in every realm, including labor markets. This would certainly contribute to the United Nations' attainment of Goal 5 "to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls" of the 2030 United Nations Agenda for Sustainable Development.

### **Women's work from a gender perspective**

From the standpoint of their contribution to economic productivity, the participation of women in the labor market has been seen by some observers as a relatively recent phenomenon (Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development 2002:71, International Labor Organization 2018). This view has been challenged with the argument that the conceptual bases that support the definitions and measurement of work, productivity and the extent of market relations are, themselves, under contestation (Lips 2013). This alternative reading of the import of women's work puts to rest the perception that their contribution gained significance only after the Second World War. Such a view is seen by critics as illogical and historically false, and to willfully overlook the millennial participation of just over half of the world's population in the development of societies. Seen from the alternative viewpoint, the novelty is that during the postwar period women's participation in the job market began to be accounted for and measured, first in advanced economies and later elsewhere. What is new is the generalization of women's waged work and their possibility of accessing social security mechanisms in return for carrying out activities that they already performed and engaging in work from which they were generally

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excluded because of their sex, not the *fact* of women's work or their role as creators of value or productivity growth.

The postwar developments referred to above are not minor. In many places, they have brought about significant changes in the structure and composition of the labor force, a remarkable improvement for women's personal development chances, and new roles and relations within the family and in society at large. Nonetheless, the historically unequal distribution of the work of social reproduction has remained unaddressed, and is still seen as a predominantly female task. In this sense, the integration of women into the more visible occupations that are performed in formal or informal jobs has not led to the emancipation that paid work is said to provide. Rather, it has represented the doubling of their work obligations, as they must perform their paid job as well as carry out domestic work. This double shift results from the fact that women still bear the primary responsibility for reproductive tasks such as caring for children and the home, which they must do alongside their direct contribution to household income (Addati et al. 2018; International Labor Organization 2018). As much of the feminist literature avers, unpaid reproduction work allows the economic system to function (Bhattacharya, 2017; Grain, Poster and Cherry, 2016; Fraser, 2013).

Such work, as said, is not equally shared between men and women. On average, women account for 72.2 percent of unpaid household work, direct personal care, and voluntary work. Although social patterns are changing, at the current rate it would take 210 years to close such gender gap, which in monetary terms is estimated to be 9 per cent of global gross domestic product (GDP) (Addati et al. 2018:xxix-xxx); in countries such as Mexico it has been estimated at 21.6 per cent of GDP (Díaz Muñoz 2017). In addition, the economic cost of having 647 million persons of working age, most of them women, outside the labor force by 2018 due to family responsibilities is paramount (Addati et al. 2018:xxix-xxx).

Neoclassical economics has seen market dynamics as the cause of the relatively low historical presence of women in formal employment and their still unfavorable integration into the labor market. The standard explanation of factor payments, the mainstream narrative, has it that those conditions are due to the low productivity of female workers that result from lower educational and training levels, themselves the product of personal choice. In this light, women's preference for their roles as mothers and wives made them choose to receive insufficient or no instruction and to develop fewer formal-work skills, thus making them less productive than men (Benería, 2001). If the role of the housewife looked "natural", it also came naturally that they should engage in "feminine" occupations, and that their income should be lower because of high competition and low qualifications required in their market niche.

However, the neoclassical discourse that sought to explain the unfavorable conditions of women's paid work did not explain the reasons behind the domestic sphere being exclusively female, or why women should be relegated to a labor market segment made up of "feminine" occupations (Anker, 1997); neither did traditional Marxist analyses address the issue of gender inequality (Newell and Reilly 2001; for a study from a class perspective on gender inequality see Mandel and Shalef 2009). Thus, much feminist effort was dedicated to underscoring the contribution that women made to social reproduction through unpaid and domestic work. As a source of cheap labor, women's work furthered existing systemic mechanisms in two ways: by promoting capital accumulation and by giving support to a patriarchal ethos based on the superiority of men over women.

The vindication of women's role in economic growth is part of a much broader and older process to eliminate their "invisibility" in the public sphere and the market. The now wide recognition that there are, from the start, great inequalities in educational and life opportunities between men and women has been one of the central achievements of the feminist movements. However, the evaluation of women's position in development indicators, in general, and in labor markets, in particular, show that gender equality is still distant. As Lips (2013:181) states:

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What we need to understand is not what predicts pay inequities, but why and how the processes operate—and how those processes could be subverted. That implies a focus on the intersection of gender-normative societal expectations, organizational contextual factors, and work-related decisions.

### Women in world labor markets

Although with nuances depending on the geographical region and social group to which they belong, women are disadvantaged when compared to men: in 150 countries women are legally discriminated against and there are still 18 countries in which a woman is required to have the husband's permission to get a job (United Nations Development Programme 2016:6). Even in the group of the very high human development countries, in terms of empowerment (or rather, its lack), the Gender Inequality Index registers in average only one woman for every four men in parliamentary political representation, and even though education levels favor women, their average rate of labor force participation is 16 per cent smaller than men's (Ibid.:216).

In fact, female participation in the labor force is just around 48.5 percent in 2018, 26.5 percentage points below that of men. Although this figure implies a considerable increase in women's labor force participation when compared with the 33% registered in 1990, there are signs that its rate has slowed down, as evinced by the minimal rise shown between 2009 and 2017 (International Labor Organization 2018:6-7). Thus, although the growth rate of female participation in formal employment has been faster than that of men, the percentage of women in the labor force is lagging, showing important regional differences (Ibid.).

Data for 2017 exhibit a generalized fall in world labor force participation rates as compared to the period before the Subprime Crisis, which was evident by 2008. The world average female participation rate was 49.4 percent, compared to 76.1 percent for men. The lowest gaps were recorded in Sub-Saharan Africa (11.7 percent) and North America (12.1 percent), whereas the largest gaps were found in the Arab countries (55.2 percent), North Africa (51.2 percent) and South Asia (50.8 percent). On the other hand, with the exception South and East Asia, the labor market participation gender gap has become smaller during the past 20 years. This is attributable to higher female participation rates although, in the case of North America, the narrowing gap is explained by more rapidly falling rates for men rather than by a real improvement of women's integration into labor markets (International Labor Organization 2017:6).

Among developing countries, those with lower income levels show higher women participation rates than those with relatively higher incomes, which are partly explained by changing patterns of global trade. In many parts of Asia, and to a certain extent in Latin America, production for export has been restructured so as to favor manufacturing over primary products, which has created multiple opportunities for women to enter the labor force. Even though women still earn less than men do, the better wages paid in manufacturing activities mean that their incomes are higher than they would be in other occupations, such as services or domestic work (Dixon-Mueller, 2000). Nonetheless, the experience of Southeast Asia suggests that industrial demand for women workers falls as soon as the early stages of labor-intensive production are surpassed and more skill-demanding occupations are created. Loss of employment or a drop in the rate of absorption of female labor often has important effects on the population at large, especially when it affects women as the primary breadwinners.

Thus, the greater integration of women into labor markets is in no way a guarantee of justice or labor equality with men. In particular, there are persisting occupational segregation and gender wage gaps in those sectors that seem to promise the jobs of the future, especially in software and IT services, precision manufacturing and energy and mining, indeed most of the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) fields that the US National Science Foundation has favored. Sectors such as healthcare, education, Non-profits, legal work, public administration and media and communications, where the proportion of women employment is 50 per cent or more, are also those where – on richer and middle-income countries, the threat of automatization and robotization loom larger (World Economic Forum 2017:28). In this regard, as Lips (2013) puts it, the question is why such patterns persist.



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The greater economic integration and competition fostered by the globalizing processes on the last few decades has indeed stimulated the job creation and the insertion of women in the labor market. However, many of the new jobs offer disadvantageous working conditions, such as outsourcing, piecework and/or temporary work, and lack social security benefits. This is the case even in such developed countries as the United States and Britain, where, although still important, the education and work-experience gaps between men and women (the traditional human capital explanations of wage gaps) has been less relevant than gender differences in certain occupations in industry. This seems to point to the conclusion that despite similar levels of education, “gender differences in locations in the labor market” and the division of labor in the family play a crucial role, well above psychological attributes and non-cognitive skills. Although still largely unaccounted factors, they may well be related to discrimination and indicate its presence (Blau and Khan 2017:854).

War, violence, economic crises, and the search for opportunities abroad have spurred international South-North migration. Yet, an analysis of the United States context found that far from this signifying more equality for migrant women due to changing institutional surroundings (and although migrant men do face harsh conditions as well) they face initial part-time job placements, earn less than men, engage in feminine occupations, and are less likely to secure higher earning jobs when compared to men, even if they have higher levels of education than male workers. Migratory status makes a difference that is reinforced by racial origins: in the study, Latin American and Caribbean women rated worst. Moreover, the lack of proper refugee economic data leaves ideology, rather than facts, inform opinions and policymaking (Minor and Cameo 2018).

In all countries, women have a lower yearly per capita income than men. This is true even in Norway, the country with the highest Human Development Index: in 2015 women’s pay stood at only 71.4% of men’s. The wage gap is represented by the fact that, in the world’s average, a woman can expect to obtain a maximum of 55.5% of a man’s salary (United Nations Development Programme 2016:213). Likewise, motherhood and household responsibility are relevant elements in access to employment and the amount of remuneration.

Women with young children have a lower income than those without, and married women display lower employment rates than married men (Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development 2002:66). Caring for children means shorter working hours and, since part-time jobs tend to pay less, the maternity penalty is high. In contrast, having children rarely alters male employment positions or pay scales. An employed woman who interrupts her formal job in favor of child-rearing will be punished by the labor market in at least three ways: i) she will miss out from not knowing the newer techniques and procedures that came online in her firm, ii) she will pay a long-term “motherhood penalty” (a fall in future wages between 4% per child, 10% for higher-scale workers), and iii) she may be forced into dead-end part-time jobs (The Economist 2017). Even, a trade-off has been found between stable jobs and career advancement: many women with young children, who happen to have job security, have to settle for fewer opportunities for career progression (Hagqvist et al. 2017).

As mentioned above, some countries have advanced work-family reconciliation policies to improve women's labor chances. However, warnings about perverse effects of such policies, as in the case of lengthy maternity leaves, have been raised insofar as they can inadvertently obstruct women's chances of attaining higher-class positions in their workplaces (Mandel and Shalev 2009). That is, although welfare policies encourage mothers to enter the labor market, some of those policies, in the end, adjust work conditions to fit domestic obligations, which largely remain a women's issue. Since part-time and occupations in which generally women engage get lower wages and promotions, this has relevant implications for policymaking, so that choices need to be carefully examined and debated (Estevez-Abe 2016).

In this context, informal employment has been identified as an opportunity that allows women to reconcile childcare with work and the possibility of receiving advantageous remuneration (Perry et al. 2007:98, 126). This panorama is clouded by the fact that, in general, more women than men in informal jobs are in poverty, given that they tend to get the lowest levels of remuneration and the most precarious jobs. The impact of economic crises and the turn to flexible production and the labor market have also contributed to own-account work,

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affecting job possibilities and working conditions, particularly for women, who are over-represented in developing countries' informal employment (International Labor Organization 2018:9-10).

Within the framework of prevailing neoliberalization policies, many observers claim that the relationship between the growth of gross domestic product (GDP) and that of employment in different regions of the world is weaker than in the past. That is, an increase of 1% in GDP generates an increase of less than 1% in employment, given that technological change increases labor productivity and reduces the demand for workers by firms (Braunstein, 2012:8), and since the 1980s wages have stagnated while profits have risen greatly (Roberts, 2016).

In summary, it is found that: a) for all groups, employment is not very sensitive to changes in GDP growth, and b) women's employment-elasticities are higher than those of men. This means that, in the face of an increase in the GDP growth rate, women's employment increases at a faster rate than that of men. Similarly, the reduction in growth rates has a greater impact on female employment than on male employment. In this context, Latin America stands out among all world regions for the reduction of the labor market participation gap. Although this is due to a higher rate of female participation, it is also explained by a fall in male participation (International Labor Organization 2017:7).

Meanwhile, existing socioeconomic arrangements growth brings about two seemingly contradictory problems, both closely related to current market policies and the overall economic context (Braunstein, 2012: 12). First, given the low rate of economic growth, it seems that the increase in women's employment occurs at the expense of the employment of men; and second, that women suffer the effects of deflationary austerity more than men, given the preference for male workers: especially when it comes to full-time employment, employers prefer those without responsibilities in the home.

In this sense, the recommendations of the International Labor Organization are more than relevant. These include the need to eliminate all forms of labor discrimination, as well as to implement better policies to promote work-family balance; to create and protect quality jobs in the care economy; and to include gender approaches in macroeconomic policies (International Labor Organization 2017, 2018; Addati et al. 2018). These measures, among others, would allow the eventual incorporation into the labor market of the 742 million women in the world who could potentially participate in it.

The economic benefits of this rise in women's participation would be very high, and just meeting now the goal proposed in 2014 by the Group of 20 of reducing the labor force participation gap between women and men to 25% by 2025 (which means having 189 million new jobs) would imply that global GDP would be 3.9% higher, that is, it would grow by half a percentage point each year until 2025. Additional returns are potential tax revenues, and the boost derived from women accessing higher productivity sectors and occupations, as well as the positive impact of women achieving the freedom to choose whether and in what conditions participate in paid work (International Labor Organization 2017:18).

However, forecasts for the near future show concerns over the likelihood to increase female labor participation worldwide. As the International Labor Organization points out, the gap in participation rates between men and women in the labor market is shrinking in developing and developed countries, but this is not the case in emerging countries where a vast proportion of the world's population resides. Although some reasons relate to women postponing seeking jobs in order to spend more years in school, structural factors cannot be left aside (International Labor Organization 2018).

Narrowing educational gaps between men and women and promoting social norms favorable to women's engagement in paid work explain smaller gaps in developed countries (Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development 2002: see chapter 2), where a historical record of 15.6 per cent was reached, the lowest since 1990, in a trend that will continue for the next three years. In the developing world, poverty and economic need account for smaller gaps, and current rates are expected to remain the same in 2021. In terms of unemployment, women in developing and emerging countries face a grimmer forecast by 2021 due to poor labor conditions, even in those cases where they are above world averages (Ibidem:6-8).

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### **Institutional solutions to labor market inequalities and their critics**

Probably the most important, or at least talked-about, liberal solution to the problems reviewed above that has issued from gender equality discussions involving international institutions is gender mainstreaming. The UN Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (UN Office of the Special Advisor 2002:v) defines gender mainstreaming as:

[...] the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality.

While the Office of the Special Advisor regards mainstreaming as essential for attaining full human rights and social justice for women (as well as men), it also recognizes that the inclusion of gender issues in public policy can have a positive impact on economic development. Mainstreaming can lead to higher levels of socioeconomic wellbeing through "changes organizations –structures, procedures, and cultures– to create organizational environments which are conducive to the promotion of gender equality.

The Office (UN Women 2002:11) reported on a series of research findings that show advances in economic efficiency which have derived from policies that promote gender equality

- Providing women farmers in Kenya with the same amount of educational and farming inputs as men can increase agricultural productivity by more than 20 percent.
- In countries where the ration of female to male students enrolled in secondary school falls below 75 percent, GDP is likely to be 25 percent lower than in countries with more equality in education.
- If labor market discrimination against women in Latin America were eliminated such that women received equal pay, female wages would increase by about 50 percent, but GDP would grow by 5 percent.
- Discrimination by gender seriously – and negatively – affects the productivity of the next generation. When mothers are educated and employed the probability is greater that children will be in school. As well, the mothers' income tends to be directed at satisfying the children's basic needs to a greater extent than the extra income of the father.
- The female double shift is an important constraint on growth and development. Studies show that reducing women's time burden in the agricultural sectors of the global South can increase household cash incomes by 10 percent, labor productivity by 15 percent, and capital productivity by 44 percent.

More recent findings published by UN Women, the United Nations organization dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women, confirm that “when more women work, economies grow. An increase in female labor force participation—or a reduction in the gap between women’s and men’s labor force participation—results in faster economic growth” (UN Women 2017). Underscored is the fact that women’s earnings change household spending patterns so as to directly benefit the children. Also, when women and girls are afforded greater educational opportunities, economic growth is faster.

Data provided by UN Women show that in OECD countries over the last half century 50 percent of economic growth can be attributed to an increase in numbers of years in education; of this, half derives from greater opportunities for women. However, as mentioned previously, higher levels of education have not necessarily translated into better labor market results and women's participation in labor markets is still marked by profound inequalities (UN Women 2014). This is so, even in the case of developed countries, where women even exceed the educational level of men but still earn less than them. Although gender occupations and industries explain by

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far the wage gap between women and men, the existence of a component of gender discrimination in the form of glass ceilings or barriers to reaching higher positions in the workplace hierarchy cannot be discounted (Blau and Khan 2017).

Lack of satisfaction with the pace and limited success of ongoing gender anti-discrimination policies (mainstreaming and others, well-meaning though they might be), has led to a profound questioning by feminists of the real effects of gender mainstreaming. Some authors (Schild 2015) aver that economic and social hierarchies have been reinforced under globalized neoliberal capitalism, in ways where it may be impossible for feminism to survive ongoing neo-liberalization. In this view, gender mainstreaming has been only one more neoliberal strategy to quiet feminist contestation and protests, such as the Women's March in January 2016.

It has been argued that over the past three decades a critique of the post-modern, neoliberal political preoccupation with identity has brought the struggle over the distribution of income and wealth to a virtual standstill, so that the persisting and growing inequality in the distribution of wealth, income and power do not exist as mere after-effects of identity issues that can be put aright by cultural reforms, profound as they may be (Fraser 2013). In such a view, rather, oppressive realities characteristic of much of the 21st Century have a material basis: they have been structured upon a classed society (Ibid.). As Meger (2017) has put it: "Women are no more able to identify their way out of patriarchy as the exploited classes are able to identify their way into better socio-economic conditions".

The UNESCO Chair of Gender Research in Lancaster University, in England, has been quoted as advancing, in methodological rigorous and understated terms, her belief that neoliberalism poses great dangers for feminism and to the advancement of women's emancipatory agenda (Walby in McRobie, 2012). One particular threat, beyond those noted by Fraser, has to do in particular with the apparent de-democratization of many developed nations by neoliberalism itself, on the one hand; but also through the rejection of many of the tenets espoused by universalist worldviews, however, deformed they may have become in reality. Walby's hope is that the ascendancy of women in paid work will give them the economic and, thereby, political clout to bring about a change from the current post-Fordist regime to a gentler, socio-democratic governance arrangement. Walby (cited in McRobie, 2012) points out that:

There is an intrinsic tension in gender mainstreaming between feminism and the mainstream; if the feminist component is too weak then there can be not only invisibility but also a loss of impetus behind the project. However, it is necessary for feminism to engage with the mainstream and with other projects in order to be successful; so these dilemmas have to be faced rather than avoided.

Thus, alternative futures would depend on increasing politicization of the issues, rather than the de-politicization that goes hand-in-hand with neoliberalism.

### Final considerations

Economic autonomy through paid work has been recognized as a means of empowerment that reduces poverty and provides opportunities for personal development for women. However, there are obvious lags in this area in the labor market. In general, women earn less than men, occupy lower hierarchy positions in workplaces, work more hours in domestic and extra-domestic work, to a greater extent being unemployed and underemployed, and suffering the continuation of a horizontal and vertical segmentation of the labor market even when they are part of the formal economy (International Labor Organization 2017, 2018).

Although labor market conditions for women are heavily influenced by factors linked to their particular social contexts, there are common denominators that limit their possibilities for development and increased participation in public and private life, regardless of where they live. The gender perspective has made visible a situation of inequality, which not only contravenes fundamental ethical principles but also hinders the functioning and growth capacity of the economic system.

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Proposals that seek a greater and more even labor market insertion for women touch on issues that challenge deep-rooted cultural and institutional structures. However, if the goal is to achieve equality not only in the realm of paid work but in society as a whole, an education project focused on gender equality that is accompanied by real development opportunities for men and women would contribute significantly to the transformation of those structures. Also necessary are the policy strategies based on gender mainstreaming that we briefly outlined above. If the treatment of a multidimensional problem is not integral, it is doubtful that it will be solved. This is the mainstreaming of gender policies being advocated.

The complex interaction of gender relations, economic systems, demographic behavior and social policies are accompanied by the constraints of globalization and the socioeconomic restructuring to which it is associated, especially in the developing world. The debilitating effects of crises and the burden of the costs of structural adjustment have made themselves felt in both urban and rural areas, within practically all social and age groups, between most men and women. In their context, the re/productive participation of women is additionally affected by unfavorable gender relations. These are fundamental when determining the adverse conditions of entry that women face, their permanence in and exit from the labor market, their occupations and the remunerations they receive. Economic and social crisis have adverse effects especially on women as a group. Since this situation is not likely to improve in the near future, there must be a rethinking of the way in which global gender policies are conducted.

Going beyond the mere discursive sphere is needed to eliminate gender discrimination and the disadvantages it brings to women. This accomplishment would not only result in an improvement in social justice, it would also cement the foundations for real development. Achieving gender equality and empowering women requires a holistic approach, and this includes a careful –and ruthless– examination of the roles that the very dynamics of the current growth model and current policies have played in the subsistence of the gender inequality system. It also requires challenging ways of researching and approaching a subject that is in danger of being but just another subject on the agenda.

As mentioned in the main text, the more radical feminist analyses point in directions that differ from the liberal prescriptions, looking at a profound restructuring of cultural relations and subjectivities, a thorough-going transformation of social and property relations, or both. The elimination of inequality between the sexes, of wage gaps, of the sexual division of productive and reproductive work, which persist either openly or in disguise should not be just an accompanying factor in the development agenda, but at its forefront: how could it not when it is not just about women but about the whole world population interest?

### Cross-References (*if applicable*)

*Include a list of related entries from the encyclopedia here that may be of further interest to the readers.*

Gender Discrimination (Kiestner, E.)  
Gender Wage Gap (Schiffman, L., Koestner, C., Oden, R.)  
Economic Empowerment (of women) (Baghel, R.)  
Gender Division of Labour (Tiwari, V.)  
Gender Stereotypes (Vaidya, S.)

Glass Ceiling (Rathore, T.)  
Women Entrepreneurs (Mahajan, S.)  
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Gender Mainstreaming (Murambadoro, M.)

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