Women and Pensions Workshop Statement
International Day for the Eradication of Poverty (IDEP)
17 October 2025

Women face a unique set of challenges when it comes to pensions and retirement security. These challenges are shaped by social, economic, and structural factors that often result in lower pension income compared to men. Career breaks, part-time work, unequal pay and lower lifetime earnings leave many women financially vulnerable, particularly as they are more likely to take time off for childbirth and childcare or for other family-related responsibilities. Very few countries offer pension credits for child-rearing: Argentina, Australia, Finland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, Switzerland. Coupled with women's longer life expectancy – on average 3-5 years more than men – more retirement savings might be required than for men.

Women's pension income is on average 25–30% lower than men's in OECD member countries.[1] Addressing this gap requires policy reforms, such as caregiver credits and flexible pension contributions, alongside early financial planning and financial education to strengthen women's retirement security.

Not everyone has the capacity or capability to think or prepare for life after retirement. For example, a mother doing her best to meet her children's physical and emotional needs in the here and now. Daily life can be so demanding and urgent that long-term security becomes an abstract luxury. It's not only about financial hardship - the emotional and social costs of poverty are profound. The hardest part isn't always making ends meet, but how one is treated: the bureaucrat who makes things difficult but who always seems to imply that it's all your fault, the principal who talks down to you, the police officer, the bank teller, the cashier — all looking at you as if you don't quite belong, as if you aren't pulling your weight.

For this reason, this year's theme for the International Day for Eradication of Poverty was defined as follows: "**Ending Social and Institutional Maltreatment: Ensuring respect and effective support for families living in poverty."** This highlighted two of the Hidden Dimensions of Poverty experienced by people directly impacted by poverty.

During the workshop, Halida Nasić presented the work of the UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, Mr. Olivier De Schutter, highlighting his call to move "beyond growth" and focus on human rights, equality, and sustainability as the true measures of progress. Despite rising global GDP, poverty and inequality persist because economic growth alone cannot guarantee poverty eradication, reduce inequalities, or safeguard planetary boundaries.

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[1] https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/towards-improved-retirement-savings-outcomes-for-women_f7b48808-en.html

One of central themes of the Special Rapporteur's work is the **recognition of unpaid care work**—the invisible foundation of economies. Approximately 16.4 billion hours of unpaid care and domestic work are performed daily, representing about 9 percent of global GDP - if valued at minimum wage. 76 percent of this work is done by women, who devote over three times more time than men to unpaid care, leading to lifelong inequalities, including lower pensions. De Schutter urges governments to **recognize, reduce, and redistribute** care responsibilities. This includes integrating care work into social protection and pension systems ("care credits"), expanding public services like childcare, water and sanitation, and promoting shared responsibility between men and women and between households and the state.

The Special Rapporteur also links unpaid care to the undervaluation of socially useful work under current economic structures based on "growthism," where profitability is rewarded over social value. He advocates for a human-rights-based economy that re-values essential work in education, healthcare, and community support — the "foundational economy" that sustains life.

Gender inequality is particularly evident in pension systems, where women often receive smaller pensions due to lower life-long wages, career interruptions for childbirth, childcare, or other family responsibilities, part-time work, and lower lifetime earnings. These factors leave many women financially vulnerable and limit their ability to contribute consistently to pension schemes. Olivier De Schutter highlights the need for **pension justice**, advocating for universal and care-related credits that recognize caregiving as real work and ensure dignity and financial security for women in old age.

Eradicating poverty "beyond growth" requires reimagining economies to value care, solidarity, and sustainability. Recognizing and compensating unpaid care work is not charity, but a matter of justice and equality – and valuing everyone's contribution to our common life.

The Special Rapporteur's ***Roadmap for Eradicating Poverty Beyond Growth*** advocates building a **human rights economy** through a catalogue of immediate, medium-, and long-term policies that prioritize well-being, social protection, care work, redistribution and ecological sustainability. In the medium term, it emphasizes strengthening social protection, income security, and labor rights, while the long-term focuses on transforming economic systems to ensure equitable, sustainable, and dignified living standards for vulnerable groups, including women and informal workers. Notably, *Policy Area 2: Labour Policies and the Care Econom,* covers the world of work broadly, including measures to address the casualization of work, working conditions, green jobs, job guarantee schemes, fair wages, industrial relations, democratisation of the workplace, etc. It also emphasizes the recognition and support of formal and informal care work, along with promoting gender

equality in the workplace and valuing contributions traditionally overlooked in economic frameworks. The Roadmap will be presented to the Human Rights Council in 2026.[2]

Alejandro Bonilla Garcia (International Gender Champion, Chair NGO Committee on Ageing in Geneva, Representative to the United Nations in Geneva of the International Federation on Ageing) shared with us the value in including seniors in policymaking to ensure that legislation reflects the lived experiences and needs of older adults. A handful of countries actively involve senior councils or pensioner-representatives in shaping legislation and public policy.

Workshop participants agreed with the experts' input and added personal stories that underscored the existing disadvantages.

[2] https://www.srpoverty.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Concept-note-Beyond-Growth-Roadmap_UNSREP_May2025.pdf