

Assessing National Action on Women's Income Security



Over 65 years ago, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights established that all people, regardless of sex, “are born free and equal in dignity and rights.” A series of treaties in the following decades—most notably the U.N. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women—created more specific guarantees for the world’s women and girls. In 1995, 189 nations reaffirmed their commitments to advancing women’s and girls’ civil, social, political, and economic rights through the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, a landmark document that laid out a detailed strategy for addressing remaining gaps and barriers. To mark its 20th anniversary, this fact sheet series by the WORLD Policy Analysis Center examines countries’ progress toward enacting laws and policies to achieve gender equality.

Background

- In 1995, the Beijing Platform urged nations to “review, adopt and maintain macroeconomic policies and development strategies that address the needs and efforts of women to overcome poverty.” The Platform also emphasized the importance of safety nets for “enabl[ing] women living in poverty to withstand adverse economic environments and preserve their livelihood.”
- Despite declines in extreme poverty over the last twenty years, women are still more likely than men to lack access to basic resources such as adequate food, safe drinking water, secure shelter, decent sanitation, electricity, and health care. Additionally, poverty threatens women’s autonomy, and puts them at greater risk of being involved in violent relationships.
- Decent jobs and wages are fundamental to ensure adequate resources for women to meet their basic needs, and are most effective when coupled with complementary social policies:
 - Around the world, women are more likely than men to hold low wage jobs. As a result, an adequate minimum wage is particularly important for protecting women’s income and closing gender pay gaps.
 - Because women tend to hold less secure jobs than men, income protection during periods of unemployment is essential for women’s economic stability.
 - In old age, women are more vulnerable to poverty than men due to lower rates of participation in the formal labor force, lower wages, and longer life spans. Non-contributory pensions ensure a minimum level of income support for all women in old age, including those who worked in the informal economy.

Findings

Ensuring adequate minimum wages

- Out of 189 countries on which data were available, 88% ensured a minimum wage as of 2012.
- Still, some are set too low: 23% of countries have a minimum wage that is not high enough to guarantee an income that is above the global poverty line of US\$2/day per individual, for a family consisting of one working mother and one dependent child.

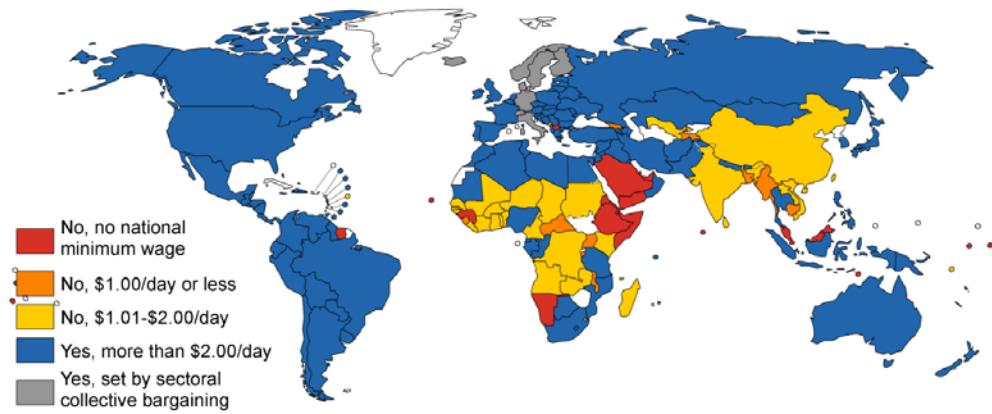
Protecting income during unemployment

- 90% of countries guarantee at least some form of income protection during unemployment.
- However, 45% of countries only require employers to pay severance pay and do not provide for any unemployment benefits through social insurance, thus excluding the many women working in the informal economy.
- Only 15% of countries explicitly extend unemployment benefits to the self-employed, a group that includes some of the poorest women in the world.

Providing pensions for older adults

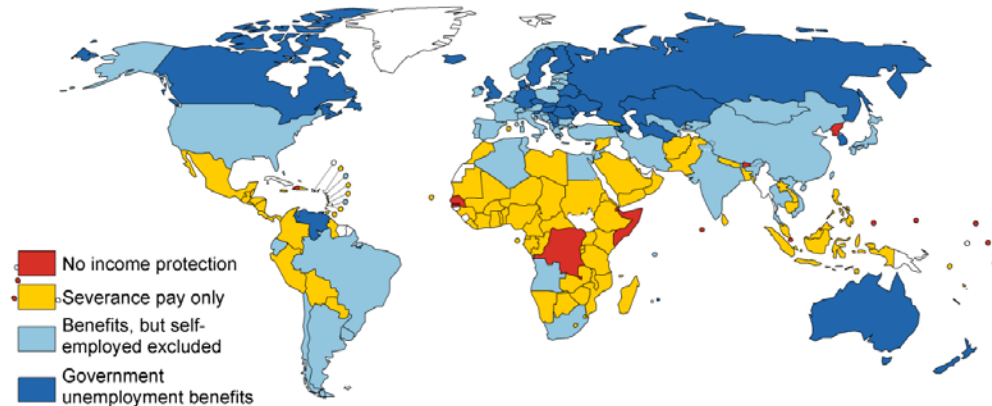
- While 95% of countries have some form of pension system in place, 49% of countries have only a contributory system.
- Evidence shows that non-contributory systems act as an important safety net for women in old age, but only 43% of countries guarantee both contributory and non-contributory benefits.

Map 1: Is there a national minimum wage that lifts a worker and a child out of poverty?



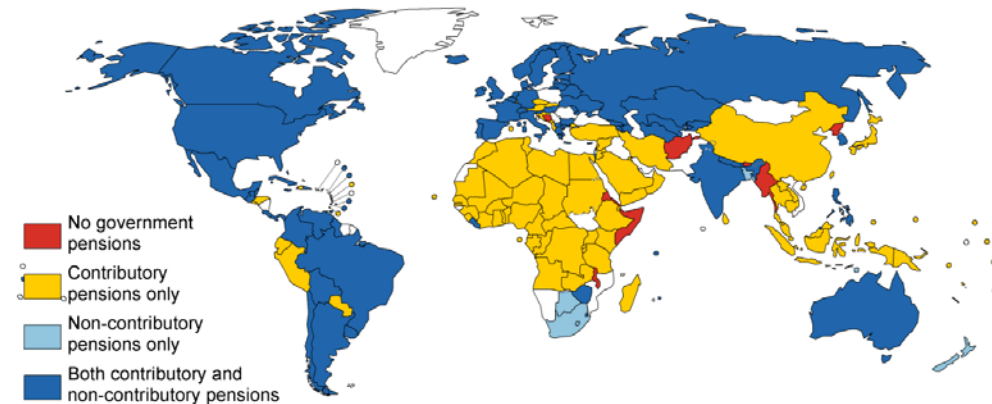
Source: WORLD Policy Analysis Center, Poverty Reduction Database. Data reflects legislation available as of March 2012.

Map 2: Is income protection during unemployment available?



Source: WORLD Policy Analysis Center, Poverty Reduction Database. Data reflects legislation available as of March 2012.

Map 3: Are there income protections for the elderly?



Source: WORLD Policy Analysis Center, Poverty Reduction Database. Data reflects legislation available as of March 2012.

For further information, see WORLD and MACHEquity's policy brief, "Minimum Wage Policies to Support Women and Their Families in 121 Low- and Middle-Income Countries."

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