



CSW 69 Beijing +30 Shadow Report

Women and Poverty

Elahe Amani

The Beijing Platform for Action recognizes that women's poverty is set in the context of public policies and social practices that privilege men and create barriers for women in an unequal economy. In the face of higher rates of poverty among women, the Platform asks governments to provide **adequate safety nets** and strengthen state and community support systems to enable women living in poverty to preserve their means of livelihood in times of stress (para 58g). To strengthen women's capabilities to earn a living, governments and community entities need to mobilize to protect women's right to full and **equal access to economic resources**, including the right to inheritance and to ownership of land and equal access to credit (para 60f). To track changes in women's poverty, **gender and age-disaggregated data** on poverty and all aspects of economic activity are essential (para 68a).

In the United States, nearly half of the workforce is composed of women, and they are now the sole or co-breadwinners in half of American families with children.¹ Additionally, women earn more college and graduate degrees than men.² However, women still earn considerably less than men,³ leading to lower retirement benefits and reduced income for families. A key factor is the persistent gender wage gap for working women in all sectors of the US economy.

Closing the gender wage gap is essential to reducing poverty among women across all US states. According to an analysis by the Institute for Women's Policy Research, achieving equal pay would reduce poverty for families with working women by more than half.⁴ Since 1990, the female employment rate in the US has remained relatively steady, peaking at 57.5% in 2000. By 2023, this rate stood at 55.4%, up from 54.3% in 1990.⁵

Women in the United States are 35 percent more likely than men to be poor in America, and single mothers face the highest risk. Currently, 35 percent of single women with children live and raise their families in poverty.⁶ Achieving equal pay would reduce the poverty rate for working women from 8.0% to 3.8%. For working single mothers, equal pay would lower the poverty rate from 28.9% to 14.5%.⁷ Equal pay would reduce the number of children with working mothers living in poverty from 5.6 million to 3.1 million and add \$513 billion to the national economy.⁸

Equal pay would impact states with higher-than-average poverty rates. In **New Mexico**, the poverty rate for working women would drop from 13.9% to 8.4% and in **Mississippi**, the rate would decrease from 13.6% to 8%.⁹

US macroeconomic policies addressing women's poverty focus on several key areas. These policies aim to empower women economically, reduce poverty, and promote gender equality. However, their impact has been mixed.

- **Pay Transparency** The US has not implemented federal-level gender pay transparency laws since the commitments at Beijing Platform for Action. However, steps are being taken at the state level, and there are ongoing discussions about potential federal action. Some states and cities have introduced laws requiring employers to provide salary ranges or disclose wage information to improve pay transparency. **California** requires employers to disclose pay scales upon request, and it has rules around equal pay. **Colorado** has one of the strongest pay transparency laws, requiring employers to include pay ranges in job postings. **New York City** passed a law requiring employers to disclose salary ranges in job ads, which took effect in November 2022.¹⁰ The **Paycheck Fairness Act** has been proposed multiple times to address wage discrimination and increase transparency but has not passed Congress.¹¹
- **Salary History Bans** Salary history bans prohibit employers from asking about salary history to prevent past pay discrimination from affecting future earnings.¹² While this has not been implemented at the federal level, several states have taken steps to address pay inequality. Currently, states with these bans include **Alabama, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina (state agencies), Oregon, Pennsylvania (state agencies only), Rhode Island, Vermont, Virginia (State Agencies), and Washington**. Additionally, the **District of Columbia** and **Puerto Rico** have similar bans.¹³
- **Pay Discrimination** A positive development in the United States since the Beijing Conference is the passage of the **Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act (2009)** that allows individuals facing pay discrimination to file a complaint within 180 days of their last paycheck, resetting the clock with each discriminatory paycheck.
- **Collective bargaining** Unions have made significant improvements in collective bargaining for women. Encouraging unionization enhances bargaining power for better wages and benefits.¹⁴ Women represented by unions earn approximately 4.7% more in hourly wages compared to non-unionized women, helping to reduce the gender pay

gap.¹⁵ Unions also negotiate for clear pay standards and transparency, mitigating the impacts of gender discrimination. Sectoral bargaining, advocating for bargaining at industry or regional levels, addresses pay gaps more effectively across wider worker groups. Unions ensure women are represented in decision-making roles, influencing outcomes that benefit women workers.

Social safety net programs are critical in facilitating women’s capacity to work and reducing financial hardship though some of the programs have significant shortcomings and much more needs to be done.

- **Subsidized childcare and paid maternity leave** are vital for women to remain in the workforce, especially for poorer women facing higher childcare costs relative to their income. The United States has made efforts to expand subsidized childcare and paid maternity leave, but the success has been mixed. The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) allocated \$39 billion in childcare to states,¹⁶ leading to various state-level initiatives to lower costs and expand access. However, these efforts often rely on temporary funding, raising concerns about long-term sustainability. While there have been proposals to expand paid family leave, comprehensive federal legislation has not been enacted. Some states have implemented their own paid leave programs, but nationwide coverage remains limited.
- **Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)**¹⁷ created in 1996, replaced the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program, shifting from an entitlement program to a block grant system. TANF has seen a decline in assistance receipt among eligible women due to state incentives to reduce caseloads. Only 21 out of every 100 families in poverty received benefits by 2020, compared to 68 out of 100 in 1996, leaving many without needed support.¹⁸
- **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)**,¹⁹ originally established as the Food Stamp Program in 1939, evolved to electronic benefit transfers (EBT) to reduce food insecurity, especially benefiting women as heads of households. 63% of adult recipient of SNAP are women, and households headed by single women are common among SNAP beneficiaries, with 92% of such households led by women.²⁰ While SNAP is effective in alleviating food insecurity, challenges remain, such as inadequate benefit levels and barriers to participation for some vulnerable groups.
- **Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP)**²¹ provides health services to children in families with incomes too high to qualify for Medicaid but too low to afford private coverage. The program is managed by states according to federal requirements though there are significant state differences.²²

Better Gender Data

While significant research and data collection have been conducted on women and poverty, some gaps remain. An imperative is the need for more nuanced gender-disaggregated data, especially around intersecting factors like race, disability, and immigration status, to fully understand the feminization of poverty. Longitudinal studies tracking the impact of specific policies on reducing women’s poverty are needed to assess the effectiveness of interventions. While research informs policy, there remains a lag in implementing evidence-based gender-sensitive policies at the federal level.

¹ Sarah Jane Glynn 2019. *Breadwinning Mothers Continue to be the U.S. Norm*. Center for American Progress.

² Michael T. Nietzel 2024. *Women Continue to Outpace Men in College Enrollment and Graduation*.

³ Suzanna Fritzberg and Ksenia Shadrina 2024. *Spotlighting Women’s Retirement Security*.

⁴ Institute for Women’s Policy Research 2014. *How Equal Pay for Working Women Would Reduce Poverty and Grow the American Economy*.

⁵ Statistic Research Department 2024. *Employment Rate of Women in the US Since 1990*.

⁶ The Women’s Legal Defense and Education Fund n.d. *Women and Poverty in America*.

⁷ Diversity Plus Magazine n.d. *Equal Pay Would Cut the Poverty Rate for Children with a Working Mother by Half*.

⁸ Jessica Milli et al. 2017. *The Impact of Equal Pay on Poverty and the Economy*. Institute for Women’s Policy Research.

⁹ Elyse Shaw and Halie Mariano 2021. *The Economic Impact of Equal Pay by State*. Institute for Women’s Policy Research.

¹⁰ Pay Analytics 2024. *US Pay Transparency Laws by State*.

¹¹ US Congress 2024. *118th Congress H.R. 17 Paycheck Fairness Act*.

¹² Amy Dalrymple 2023. *Equal Pay in the United States: Salary History Bans*. US Department of Labor Women’s Bureau.

¹³ Paycor 2022. *States with Salary History Bans*.

¹⁴ Elise Gould and Celine McNicholas 2017. *Unions Help Narrow the Gender Wage Gap*.

¹⁵ Economic Policy Institute 2021. *Unions Help Reduce Disparities and Strengthen Our Democracy*.

¹⁶ US Health and Human Services Office of Child Care 2024. *American Rescue Plan Act Child Care Stabilization Funds FAQ*.

¹⁷ US Department of Health and Human Services Office of Family Assistance. *Temporary Assistance for Needy Families*.

¹⁸ Aditi Shrivastava and Gina Azito Thompson 2022. *TANF Cash Assistance Should Reach Millions More Families*.

¹⁹ US Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Program. *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program*.

²⁰ National Women’s Law Center 2023. *NWLC, MomsRising and FRAC Lead Other Gender Justice Groups in Pushing to Strengthen SNAP Benefits*.

²¹ US Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. *Children’s Health Insurance Program*.

²² US Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. *CHIP State Program Information*.