

Transformative Strategies Towards Gender Equality in Trade Unions A Handbook

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ACRONYMS

ACTRAV(ILO)	Bureau for Workers' Activities, International Labour Organization	GUF	Global Union Federation
ALU	Associated Labour Unions	HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
APHEDA	Australian People for Health, Education and Development Abroad	IDEA	Independent Democratic Association of Informal Economy Association
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations	ILO	International Labour Organization
ATUC	ASEAN Trade Union Council	ITF	International Transport Federation
AWWCI	Association of Women Workers in the Construction Industry	ITF-AP	International Transport Federation Asia Pacific
BWI	Building and Wood Worker's International	ITUC	International Trade Union Congress
BWI South Asia	Building and Wood Worker's International South Asia	ITUC-AP	International Trade Union Congress Asia Pacific
BWTUC	Building and Wood Workers Trade Union Federation of Cambodia	KFCITU	Korean Federation of Construction Industry Trade Unions
CATU	Cambodian Alliance of Trade Unions	LGBTQI+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex plus
CATW-AP	Coalition Against Trafficking of Women-Asia Pacific	LO-Norway	Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions
CBA	Collective Bargaining Agreement	LRS	Labor Research Services
CBL	Constitution and By-laws	LMC	Labor-Management Council
CFSWF	Cambodian Food and Service Workers Federation	Makalaya	Manggagawang Kababaihang Mithi ay Paglaya (Women Workers for Freedom)
CIO	Congress of Independent Organisations	M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
CIO-ALU	Congress of Independent Organisations-Associated Labour Unions	MSTKS	Maharashtra State Bus Workers' Union
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019; disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 (2019-nCoV) coronavirus	NACUSIP	National Congress of Unions in the Sugar Industry in the Philippines
CSDCI	Construction Skill Development Council of India	NGO	Non-governmental organization
CTEVT	Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training	NSDIs	National Social Dialogue Institutions
CUT	Central Única dos Trabalhadores (Unified Workers' –Central)	NUBCW	National Union of Building and Construction Workers
DGB	Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund (German Trade Union Confederation)	OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
DGB-BW	Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund Bildungswerk	PCSC	Paints and Coatings Skill Council
DTDA	Danish Trade Union Development Agency	PIGLAS	Pinag-isang Tinig at Lakas ng Anakpawis (United Voice and Power of the Labouring Class)
EI	Education International	PM	Partido ng Manggagawa (Workers' Party)
EML	Expanded Maternity Leave	PMA	Philippine Metalworkers Alliance
FES	Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung	PSI	Public Services International
FES-GEHA	Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Gender Justice Hub Asia	PSI AP	Public Services International Asia Pacific
FNV	Federatie Nederlandse Vakbeweging (Federation of Dutch Trade Unions)	SASK	Trade Union Solidarity Center of Finland
GAP	Gender Action Plan	SENTRO	Sentro ng mga Nagkakaisa at Progresibong Manggagawa
GEFONT	General Federation of Nepalese Trade Union	SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
		SOLIDAR	Network of European and Worldwide Civil Society Organisations
		TESDA	Technical Education and Skills Development Authority

TF2	Trade Federation 2
TF2-FFW	Trade Federation 2-Federation of Free Workers
TUSSOs	International Trade Union Solidarity Support Organizations
UN	United Nations
UNI	Union Network International
UNI APRO	Union Network International Asia and Pacific Regional Office
Union2Union	Cooperation body composed of Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO), the Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees (TCO), and the Swedish Confederation of Professional Associations (Saco)
VAWC	Violence Against Women and their Children Law
VGCL	Viet Nam General Confederation of Labour
WTO	World Trade Organization
WYRs	Women and Youth Representatives



PREFACE

Since 2020 the Gender Justice Hub Asia (GEHA), hosted by FES Nepal in Kathmandu, has been coordinating the work on gender justice of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) in the Asia Pacific region. Together with our colleagues from 13 FES offices in the region, feminist activists and partners, we create spaces for mutual learning and develop strategies to support transformative change.

One of the focus areas of our work is to better understand how transformative change towards gender justice becomes a reality. As a first step, we set out to explore what transformative change is and how feminist strategies for change look like. The findings of this journey, on which we were joined by Rowan Harvey and Chloé Safier, have been documented in the practical guide [↪ Transformative Change for Gender Equality: Learning from Feminist Strategies](#). The publication offers a range of analytical frameworks and tools to reflect on one's own approaches to change and provides inspiration on how to make your organisation's work more feminist and transformative.

The exploration of what we refer to as 'transformative strategies for gender equality' proved very useful to revisit our own work and was also very welcomed by our partners. Thus, we decided to take this special lens and use it for a closer look at strategies for change in trade unions. For us at FES, trade unions – as membership-based organisations and important socio-political actors – are one of our most important partners in supporting democracy and social justice worldwide. Plus: Especially in a changing world of work, gender equality is of strategic importance to strengthen union power. Therefore, we wanted to learn more about trade unions' practices in supporting change towards gender equality and create a platform for exchange among champions and proponents of gender equality in trade unions in Asia and beyond.

Along the way, we were joined by almost 40 unionists in two workshops, where we exchanged experiences and had the opportunity to learn from many inspiring sisters and brothers from national unions from nine countries as well as several regional and global federations and confederations: A big thank you for sharing your thoughts and knowledge! We would also like to thank the people who made time for an interview and shared their insights with the research team (a full list can be found on page 77) – their work and knowledge makes the core of this handbook and without them this project would not have been possible! Last but not least, we would also like to thank our colleagues Anja Bodenmüller-Raeder, Natalia Figge, the gender coordinators from all FES offices in the Asia Pacific region and our former colleague Kai Dittmann for their invaluable support and feedback!

Of course, the research team working on this project – Melisa R. Serrano, Verna Dinah Q. Viajar and Vera Eileen V. Pupos, from the School of Labour and Industrial Relations, University of Philippines – were the ones who brought all this together. Right from the start, they were enthusiastic to embark on this journey with us and, even though we were only able to meet virtually during this project, they always brought an amazing energy to our conversations: It was a great pleasure to work with you on this project during these difficult times!

This guide explores strategies, ideas and methods that have been applied in trade unions to address gender equality by means of active participation (on different levels), advocacy, networking efforts and others. Together they provide not only insights of how engaged unionists raise issues of gender justice in their unions, but also how they turn these unions into agents of change in the world of work and the wider society to bring about a gender and socially just future.

We understand this handbook as an attempt to gather knowledge on advancing gender equality in trade unions and make it available to others. Even more so, we hope that it might support and work as a starting point for conversations on what works and what does not work in transforming unions into more gender just organisations. It already provided a platform for us, which allowed us to meet many inspiring unionists working hard on making change happen. Possibly, it can also be a starting point for more such conversations between unionists worldwide to share their experiences, ideas, and knowledge on advancing gender justice.

Jonathan Menge and Priyanka Kapar
FES Gender Justice Hub Asia







INTRODUCTION

Historically, trade unions have been ‘organisations of brotherhood’. However, this situation has been changing; today, about 40 per cent of the global labour force is female. Working in low-paying, part-time jobs and often under harsh working conditions, women, however, are underrepresented in leadership positions. While overall women’s membership rates have been increasing significantly in many trade unions worldwide, their representation in union leadership remains low. Meanwhile, union membership is shrinking in many parts of the world. Thus, it is of strategic importance for trade unions – which are struggling with member losses and political marginalisation in many places – to strongly include women and their interests, not only to build their membership base, but also to consolidate their societal influence.

Meanwhile, women in trade unions have been driving action to dismantle traditional and persistent structural barriers at the intersections of race, gender, sexual orientation, identity, and class. They have also been pushing through collective bargaining for economic and social justice, equitable and sustainable development, and a just transition, and have been raising their voice against gender-based violence, harassment, and exploitation. Against the background of the feminisation of the labour force, female trade unionists have also been able to dynamise women’s participation in the trade union movement and mainstream issues of female workers (e.g. equal pay, decent working conditions, access to social protection, care work).

However, on the policy side as well, there is still a long way to go in many unions. To continue bringing substantive changes into the world of work and unionism, it is important to reflect on innovative approaches, share experiences and successful strategies, reflect on what went well and where there is room for improvement in establishing gender-just unions and workplaces. It is against this backdrop that this handbook was developed. It is intended to serve as an accessible and practical tool that helps trade unionists and labour activists in Asia and beyond in their work towards gender equality.

In this handbook, we define **gender equality** as meaning “[...] that all people, regardless of their gender identities, have equal access to resources, opportunities, voice, participation, decision-making, and rights” (Harvey and Safier, 2021: 12). While there are other gender identities, this handbook focuses on women as women issues have been at the core of struggles for gender justice within and outside the labour movement.

In developing the handbook, the authors, with the support of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) Gender Justice Hub Asia, analysed the existing literature on gender equality, reviewed materials and records shared by trade unions, conducted interviews via Zoom with female and male leaders of global trade unions, national federations and confederations in six countries, and organised two virtual workshops, where women and men shared their experiences on working towards gender equality in trade unions in August and November 2021. The virtual interviews involved 34 female and male leaders: 20 union leaders (18 women and two men) from national federations and confederations, 11 female leaders from global trade unions (International Trade Union Confederation and Global Union Federations), and three from an international trade union support organisation. Each of the two workshops were attended by more than 20 key trade unionists from national, regional, and global trade unions in and outside the Asian region. Overall, the project involved leaders from national trade unions (i.e., confederations and federations) in nine countries (Cambodia, Germany, India, Indonesia, Nepal, the Philippines, South Korea, Thailand and Vietnam) and seven global trade unions and their Asia Pacific regional offices or organisations. Interviewees from global trade unions from the Asia Pacific region furthermore shared insights from their work with unions in the region.

What's inside the handbook

The contents of the handbook are derived from the above mentioned conversations with women and men from international and national trade unions regarding their experiences in advancing gender equality in trade unions. Overall, it covers the following:

- *Core strategic arguments for trade unions to include gender issues in their policy agendas and work towards more gender equal representation in leadership*
- *Ideas, strategies, and methods applied in the various structures, processes, and activities that address gender equality in trade unions (e.g., institutionalisation of women's active participation on different levels, capacity-building, mentoring programs, organising, bargaining, campaigning, lobbying and advocacy, networking)*
- *Transformative elements of union policies, methods, and strategies that are aimed at addressing gender equality in trade unions*
- *Factors that facilitated and constrained the adoption and implementation of these transformative strategies through short case studies*
- *Necessary conditions to make union approaches, strategies, and initiatives to become more gender-just successful*
- *Strategies as well as specific methods which female/feminist activists in trade union movements have been using to put their strategic approach into action*

This handbook is designed to supplement on-going union initiatives towards mainstreaming gender equality in trade unions. For trade unions or trade unionists that are planning to embark on transforming their unions into more gender-just organisations, this handbook can serve as a guide. It can also be used for the union's education courses or as study material on gender equality. Finally, we hope that this handbook also serves as a starting point for future conversations on what works with regard to supporting gender equality in trade unions.





CHALLENGES FOR WOMEN IN THE WORLD OF WORK

Women's higher participation in the labour market has a positive impact on improving their welfare and provides them the opportunity to realise their goals. However, despite progress made globally, **gender inequality remains prevalent, particularly in terms of the persistent wage gap, job precarity, and workplace discrimination experienced by women.** Women's labour force participation rate pales in comparison to men. In 2019, the rates for women and men were 47.4 per cent and 74.3 per cent, respectively, a significant difference of almost 27 percentage points (ILO, 2021a: 4; World Bank, 2020). This gap persisted in 2020, with women's labour force participation rate declining since 2000. One of the main reasons for this is that women are continually constrained when it comes to participating in paid work due to their disproportionately high share in unpaid work.

However, there are a number of **factors that hinder women's employment opportunities, such as women's educational level, caregiving role, lower and unequal pay, tax systems, violence and harassment in the world of work, gender-based technology and digital divide, and limited voice and representation** (ILO, 2019).

The COVID-19 pandemic is a huge setback to progress made on gender equality, as women are disproportionately impacted by the ongoing health and economic crises. In fact, gender equality in the world of work seems to have worsened. Women's employment declined by 4.2 per cent between 2019 and 2020 compared with 3 per cent for men (ILO, 2021b). **The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and exacerbated the large gender gaps in the quality of employment, especially for the many women working in feminised sectors and occupations, and in the informal economy.** Even before the pandemic, jobs usually held by women were characterised by low wages, long working hours, limited opportunities for career advancement, and exposure to occupational health and safety risks as well as violence and harassment. These **pre-pandemic work conditions put women workers at greater risk of being laid off and exposed them to a further deterioration in their working conditions.** Moreover, during the pandemic, "women's unpaid care work has also increased as women shouldered much of the burden of intensified childcare and online or home-schooling activities, further reinforcing traditional gender roles" (ibid: 3).

These are but the manifestations of gender inequalities perpetuated by centuries of patriarchal social relations, where women are subordinated and stereotyped in reproductive roles and exploited by capitalist economic structures that devalue social reproduction (i.e., childcare, domestic work). The world of work then becomes the terrain where gender inequalities are most visible.

Persistent gender gaps in employment and pay

About 70 per cent of the women interviewed from a global representative sample said they prefer to be in paid work, while 66.5 per cent of men stated the same preference (ILO and Gallup, 2017). Yet, women are much less likely to be employed than men. In 2018, 2 billion men and 1.3 billion women were employed, a gap of 700 million. Among the employed, women are also most likely to have lower-paid jobs in precarious working conditions. They continue to be overrepresented in the informal sector, particularly in the developing countries in Asia, and in informal employment or precarious jobs in the formal sector.

In Asia Pacific, despite an overall rise in wage levels and wage employment, women remain less likely to find wage employment than men and are paid less. **Across Asia and the Pacific, female workers are concentrated in various types of informal work, such as own-account or family workers, or are self-employed in the informal sector.** Access to paid employment, which offers regulated

work conditions and income security, is considered an important indicator for gender equality in the labour market (ILO, 2019). Female workers in wage employment are also stereotypically to be found in lower-paid occupations such as domestic work, where working conditions are bad and wages are typically low.

In addition, the gender pay gap persists throughout the world. According to the ILO, weighted global estimates of the gender wage gap range from about 16 per cent to 22 per cent, depending on which measure is used (ILO, 2018: xv).¹ A gender pay gap of 22 per cent is obtained when basing the index on median monthly wages. The gender pay gap varies across countries, with the mean hourly gender pay gap ranging from 34 per cent in Pakistan to -10.3 per cent in the Philippines – that is, women earn on average 10.3 per cent more than men in the Philippines (ILO, 2018: xv).

Multiple burdens and care work

Global statistics reveal that 606 million (21.7 per cent) women provide full-time unpaid care compared to only 41 million (1.5 per cent) men (ILO, 2019). In the OECD countries, women spend an average of four and a half hours per day in unpaid labour compared to only two hours and 30 minutes for men (OECD, 2021). These constraints lead to women getting jobs in low-paid sectors and only slowly, if at all, progress in their careers; hence, there is a persistent gender wage gap.

Even though education and skills are factors, care work plays the biggest role in affecting women’s employment opportunities and quality of jobs (ILO, 2019). For centuries, women have been stereotyped as the “caregivers” in society in such a manner that unpaid care work constrains women’s participation in the labour market and their access to secure and income sustainable jobs. Motherhood reduces women’s chances of being employed, suggesting the existence of a “motherhood employment penalty”. In 2015, among 51 countries, 45.8 per cent of mothers of young children were in employment compared to 53.2 per cent of women without children under six years of age (ILO, 2019). **Family responsibilities were also found to be the main barrier to women’s leadership, followed by gender stereotypes and masculine corporate culture.**

There has been **only slow improvement in the area of shared domestic work across the world.** Between 1997 and 2012, housework done by women diminished by only 15 minutes per day, while men’s share in care work increased by eight minutes per day. If this pace continues, it will take 209 years to close this gap (ILO, 2019).

Violence, harassment and discrimination at work

Violence and harassment at work include physical violence, bullying or psychological violence, and discrimination of one group by another. **Physical violence and harassment is frequently reported in occupations where workers deal with the public, including in education, health care and social work, which are care-related and female-dominated** (ILO, 2019: 48). Physical violence committed by patients and students is often considered to be simply “part of the job”. Violence is widespread as well in the domestic work sector. Nonetheless, harassment and violence is not confined to these sectors, and that the aggressor can also be a co-worker or a boss (abuse of power relations). In the garment industry in Cambodia, a study done by CARE (2017) found sexual harassment the most common type of gender-based violence and harassment against women. The study revealed that

¹ The ILO estimated the global weighted gender pay gap using four different combinations (mean/median and hourly/monthly). The two measures that are most commonly used are the “mean gender pay gap” and the “median gender pay gap”. The latter compares the middle value in the wage distribution for women with the middle value located in the wage distribution for men.

nearly one in three (28.6 per cent) female garment factory workers reported experiencing sexually harassing behaviours² over the last 12 months. However, sexual harassment is said to be under-reported; 40 per cent of workers do not think there is a clear and fair system for reporting sexual harassment, according to the CARE study. Although there are existing legal mechanisms prohibiting sexual harassment (e.g., Article 172 of the Labor Law), implementing mechanisms do not exist. As a result, some women opt to avoid and ignore the perpetrators.

Moreover, discrimination at work persists even after decades of fighting against it, and discrimination according to sex remains prevalent. Women are still the most discriminated sector in the workplace in terms of the persistent ‘glass ceiling’ and gender pay gap. ILO Convention No. 111 (Convention concerning Discrimination in Respect of Employment and Occupation) defines workplace discrimination as “any distinction, exclusion or preference made on the basis of race, colour, sex, religion, political opinion, national extraction or social origin, which has the effect of nullifying or impairing equality of opportunity or treatment in employment or occupation.” The Convention covers discrimination in all aspects of employment and occupation, such as job tenure, equal remuneration for work of equal value, career advancement, and social security measures and welfare facilities and benefits provided in connection with employment.

Among 189 countries, almost 80 per cent prohibit gender discrimination in employment (World Bank, 2018). Yet, unfair treatment, which includes abuse, harassment, and discrimination, is among the top three challenges working women face, especially young women between the ages of 15 and 29 (ILO and Gallup, 2017). **Workplace discrimination pushes women to low-paid and less secure jobs and traps them in invisible jobs such as in the informal economy with no proper social protection, training, and safe work conditions.** The ILO declared the Convention on workplace discrimination as one of the Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work in 1998. The following are inter alia some of factors that influence women’s discrimination in employment:

- **Caregiving is the most important factor.** *As discussed earlier, unpaid care work is the main reason why women stay outside the labour force.*
- *Motherhood reduces women’s chances of being employed, suggesting the existence of a “motherhood employment penalty”.* **Family responsibilities were also found to be the main barrier to women’s leadership, followed by gender stereotypes and masculine corporate culture.**
- **Gender pay gap persists** *despite faster growth in female wage employment.*
- **Income taxation affects women’s participation in employment more than men.** *A higher tax burden on workers with lower earnings or marriage related tax incentives may have a disproportionately negative effect on female employment, as women typically earn less than men. This phenomenon, often also called “marriage tax or penalty”, combined with high cost of childcare, is a disincentive for women, especially those with children, to participate in the labour market.*

² The CARE study identified the common forms of sexual harassment experienced by women in the garment industry in Cambodia: received unwanted stares, sexual comments, noises or gestures; being “rated” based on looks or sexuality; referred to in sexist or degrading terms; subject of rumors of a sexual nature; heard or received inappropriate jokes in person, text messages, emails or other ways of communication; unwanted physical contact; being followed, hassled or harassed to go out after work; asked inappropriate questions of a sexual nature; shown pornographic or unpleasant pictures; coerced to have intimate relationship in exchange of work favors; and subjected to sexual graffiti.

- **Women in general have a 'weak voice' and representation.** Women are frequently employed in sectors of the economy, occupations or in work arrangements with lower rates of union membership. As discussed in the next chapter, women remain underrepresented in trade unions.







3

WHY SHOULD TRADE UNIONS CARE ABOUT GENDER JUSTICE?

Trade unions, given their historical role as proponents of social equality, have been at the forefront in integrating female workers into the labour movement. In their classic work *The History of Trade Unionism*, which was first published in 1894, Sidney and Beatrice Webb defined a trade union as a continuous association of wage-earners for the purpose of maintaining and improving the conditions of their working lives. But beyond advancing immediate economic interests of their direct members, **trade unions in various countries play, albeit in varying degrees, broader economic, political, and social roles.** Unions continue to be critical actors in capitalist democracies “because they form an integral part of democratic civil society, because they encourage participation in democratic processes, **because they represent the interests of those that tend to be underrepresented,** because they are able to overcome a crucial collective action problem, and because they add to the interest representation in pluralist societies” (Behrens et al., 2004). In short, **trade unions play a key role in promoting democracy, equality, and social justice not just in the workplace but in larger society as well.** Gender equality is thus among the core principles and focus areas of unionism. As unionists Perna Prasad and Najrina Jalil³ assert: “Gender equality forms the basis for democratic and socially just trade unions. Without promoting gender equality, trade unions cannot ensure fair representation and decent work for all.”

Yet, **women remain underrepresented in trade unions,** despite the fact that over the years, women have become more important in the world of work. **According to a 2017 Gender Equality Survey of the International Trade Union Congress (ITUC), women on average comprised 42.4 per cent of all its members** (Gausi, 2018).

The same ITUC survey found that the average **representation rate for women in the highest union decision-making bodies within ITUC affiliates was 28 per cent.** Women are also underrepresented in national social dialogue institutions (NSDIs), such as economic and social councils, tripartite commissions, and labour advisory boards. Available data for 2018 shows that female membership in NSDIs ranged from 20 to 35 per cent only (Gausi, 2018). Therefore, women’s representation in union membership and leadership still needs to be increased to close these gender gaps.”

Nonetheless, even if there still needs to be done, trade unions, in many countries, have been playing a key role in advancing gender equality in various spheres – at work, in the labour market, in education, in the economy, and in the political sphere. **Within trade unions, the espousal of gender equality is already expressed or operationalised in various ways** – by having substantial representation of women in union membership and leadership, non-differentiation of leadership skills between women and men, mainstreaming gender in the union agenda and all facets of union work, having provisions in collective agreements that address women’s issues, agitating for women’s rights and welfare in policy-making within and outside the union, and recognising that care work is both a woman’s and man’s job. But becoming a gender equality champion does not happen overnight. Transformational processes within trade unions, which are still mostly dominated by men, have accompanied union initiatives toward gender equality.

³ Interview via Zoom with Perna Prasad and Najrina Jalil, South Asia Program Officer and Regional Program Officer, respectively, for Building and Wood Worker’s International Asia Pacific (BWI-AP), a global union federation, 22 September 2021.

What's in for unions?

In our workshop in August 2021 and during the interviews we conducted, female union officers and leaders identified a number of reasons why trade unions should care about gender equality:

Women speak: This is why trade unions should care for gender equality!

- *Trade unions as democratic institutions work for equal representation of workers from all sections of the population. **Women comprise half of the world's population and are an important part of the labour market.** Women are more likely to be found in low-wage and low-skilled jobs and in informal employment and are thus more vulnerable to economic shocks – they are among those who need unions to defend their interests the most! Yet, women are less organised and their issues are often ignored.*
- ***Organising women is essential to building union power!** The rise of precarious employment, the difficulty in organising these workers, and the decline in union density require unions to be more inclusive to survive. Organising female workers and addressing their issues are key if union decline is to be arrested. The future of unions are women.*
- ***There is no social justice without gender justice!** Social justice is at the core of the union agenda. Therefore, trade unions should care about gender justice by challenging gender stereotypes, ending gender-based violence and discrimination, and protecting and promoting the rights of women at work.*
- ***Gender equality is a driver of innovation!** Gender equality will improve diversity in the organisation, which will in turn boost the performance of unions in many ways (e.g., driver of overall organisational innovation). As Josefina Lim⁴ underscores: "Women tend to be more open-minded and understanding, thus they are more open to change."*
- ***Unions need women's skills!** With their skills women add value to trade unions and the workplace. Judy Ann Chan Miranda⁵ explains it this way: "In our union, women take care of our organisation's day-to-day operations from finance, resource generation, to disaster response. Women have innate skills; they are very resourceful and do magic in raising resources. The back staff in all our successful activities such as congresses and conferences are all women."*
- ***The pandemic has opened a window of opportunity!** The COVID-19 pandemic has served as an eye-opener regarding the issues of gender inequality in the labour market, as women have been disproportionately affected, with a higher rate of job losses, time spent in unpaid care work, limited access to social protection, and a rise in violence and harassment. The time for unions to pick-up "women's issues" is now!*

⁴ Officer-in-Charge and Vice-President for Mindanao, Congress of Independent Organizations, a trade union federation organising workers in various sectors in the Philippines.

⁵ Secretary General, Partido ng Manggagawa, a labour-political centre in the Philippines, which also organises workers in various sectors, including in export-processing zones.

It becomes apparent that trade union should have an interest in becoming more gender equal organisations and address issues of gender justice in the world of work. It can significantly contribute to building union power. In the following, we take a closer look at how gender equality can contribute to boosting union power.

Gender equality boosts union power!

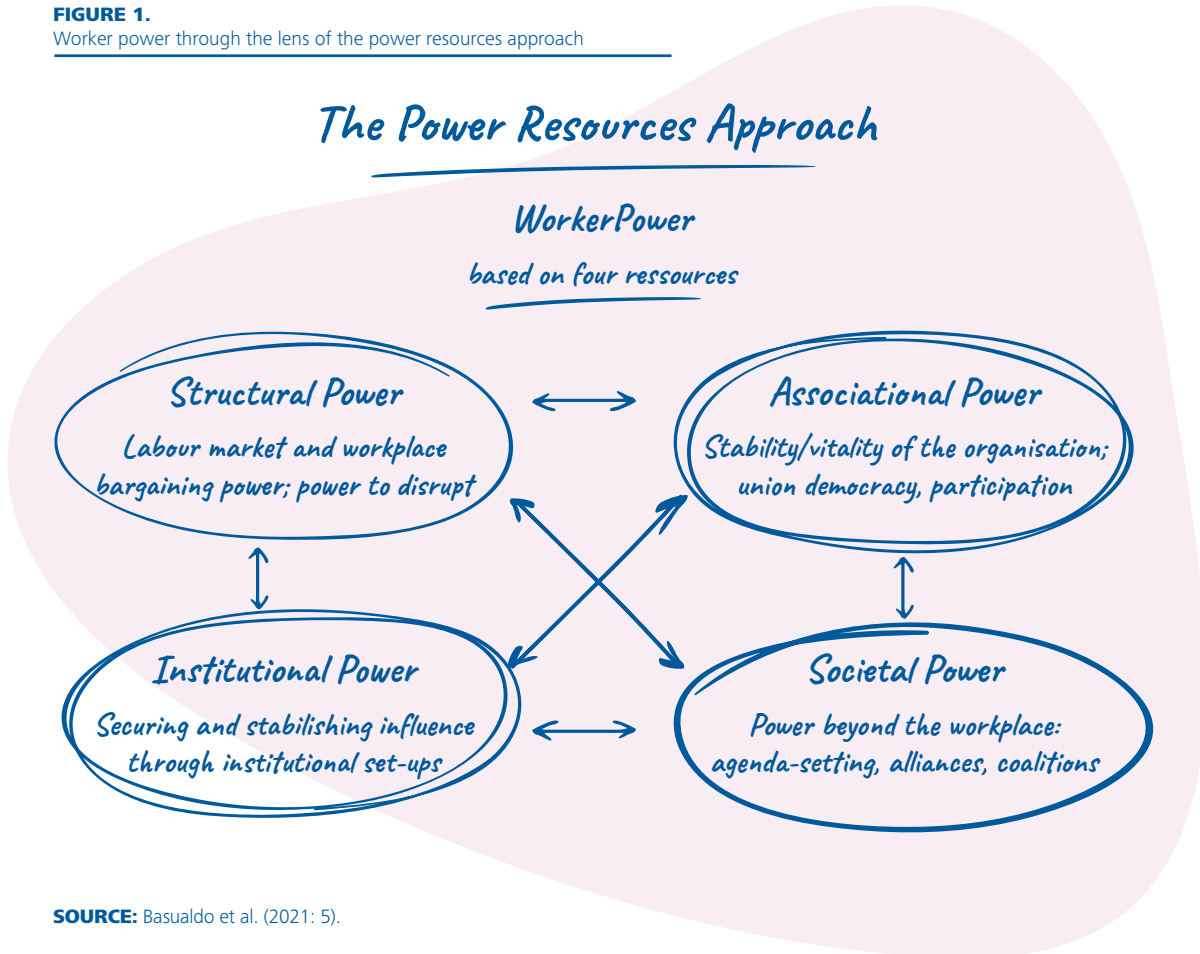
Union strength is fundamentally measured by the capacity of a union to influence social and economic policies. **The bases of union strength are normally indicated by the number of union members in absolute (net union membership) and relative (net union density) terms and the degree of a union's encompassment or inclusiveness (unity and integration and bargaining levels).** However, given the fact that unions in many countries are, in varying degrees, experiencing a crisis in terms of declining membership and overall union density, weakening of economic and institutional influence, and increasing institutional exhaustion (or lack of institutional vitality), the 'union advantages' (e.g. better wages and benefits, job security, social security, workers' voice) face the threat of erosion. **Increasing female membership and participation in trade unions and integrating gender equality in the union agenda and union work can potentially maintain or regain these advantages by enhancing the power resources of trade unions.**

The power resources approach is an analytical tool that looks into **four sources of workers' power – structural, associational, institutional, and societal power** (→ [Figure 1](#)) – and how, by developing and activating these sources of power, trade unions might be able to transform and address challenges they face in a changing political and economic environment (Schmalz et al., 2018). These four power resources are connected and are embedded in power relations:

Structural power arises from the position of workers in the economic system, either from workplace bargaining power (this being their ability to stop production) or from marketplace bargaining power (this being the possession of rare skills or the ability to withdraw from the labour market). *Associational power* refers to the strength of workers' organisation, which can be influenced by factors such as membership, member participation and infrastructural resources. *Institutional power* refers to labour law and institutional rights organised labour can draw on, although it is not only emancipatory, as many institutional rules also imply restrictions to act. *Societal power* can either emanate from networks with other social actors such as social movements (coalitional power) or from the ability to successfully intervene in public debates (discursive power). (Badualdo et al., 2021: 5).

These power resources are continuously influenced by changing class relations and developments in global capitalism (ibid).

FIGURE 1.
Worker power through the lens of the power resources approach



As membership is a key element of associational power, increasing women’s membership in the union, their participation in union activities, and representation in union leadership can **enhance associational power**. One good example for this is the initiative by the Unified Workers’ Central (Central Única dos Trabalhadores, CUT) of Brazil, one of the world’s largest trade union federations and the most important one in Latin America, in implementing gender parity in its decision-making bodies at national and state level in 2015. Gender equality has shaped the CUT’s identity, and its associational and societal power is intrinsically linked to women’s participation (Godinho-Delgado, 2017). The experience of the German Trade Union Confederation (DGB) in Germany in increasing union density also highlights the link between organising women and building union power. According to Christina Stockfisch⁶, recruiting more women into the union is a way to arrest the decline in union membership. However, she noted that, to be able to attract women, unions have to have women on top. Having women in leadership positions can help attract women to join and feel represented in the union.

The capacity of trade unions to generate resources influences the union’s (organisational) power. Women play a key role in mobilising resources for the union. Judy Ann Chan-Miranda explains how this is done: “We get more funding from international organisations if we have good programmes and projects for women.”

⁶ Federal Board Member, European and International Gender Equality Policy, German Trade Union Confederation (DGB, Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund), Germany.

Structural power pertains to the power of workers who possess rare skills or who occupy a strategic position within the production process or in the supply chain of key industries to disrupt production or business. **In many industries in the Global South (e.g., garment and textile, electronics assembly, healthcare, and community and social services), women count significantly among the workforce and union membership. For employers, any disruptive action by these women workers is costly.** For example, in Cambodia, women workers in the garment and footwear sector joined large-scale strikes between late December 2013 and early January 2014. Together with trade unions, they addressed their demand for a US\$ 177 wage in 2014 directly to international buyers in order to pressure the garment employers' association and the government to act on the workers' demand. The disruptive effects of the strike prompted some key buyers to issue a public statement declaring their support for an appropriate wage increase (Serrano and Nuon, 2018: 139). In the Philippines, women are often at the forefront of collective actions by unions as well. As Judy Ann Chan-Miranda points out: "In all our collective actions, women comprise half of the union members mobilised." Having more women in the union also increases the bargaining power of trade unions, as is what happened in the case of many affiliates of the International Transport Federation (ITF), according to Suresh Geetha⁷.

Women's contribution in building up both associational power and structural power of a union can, in turn, secure the union's sources of *institutional power*. **Having more women in the union, particularly in the leadership, spurs unions to broaden their agenda to include gender equality and other women issues. This makes the union more inclusive in terms of influencing policy-making at various levels of government through legislation and implementation and enforcement of laws and regulations.** For example, female union leaders and activists in the Philippines were at the forefront in the campaign and lobbying for the ratification of ILO Convention No. 151 (Protection of the Right to Organize and Procedures for Determining Conditions of Employment in the Public Service) and the passage in 2019 of the Expanded Maternity Leave Law in the Philippines. These institutions have provided political and legal opportunities to organise workers. **Finally, integrating gender equality into the union agenda can win more allies (e.g., women's movements, feminist organisations, non-government organisations) for unions, as well as enhance union legitimacy in society, both of which are key in mobilising societal power.** For example, the Philippine trade unions' campaign for an expanded maternity leave law drew material and mobilisation support from international trade union solidarity support organisations, women's and feminist organisations, organisations of female workers in the informal sector, and other non-government organisations. According to Eva Arcos⁸, many labour and social policies⁹ are now in place in the Philippines as a result of women's advocacies. These policies benefit not only workers and their families, but all Filipinos in general. Women union leaders and members have also been at the centre of the union campaigns that have resulted in the passage of the reproductive health law and the expanded maternity leave law. Today, female workers are taking the lead in the campaign for the ratification of ILO Convention 190 (Violence and Harassment in the World of Work) not only in the Philippines but in many other countries as well.

⁷ Global women's team regional representative and gender lead, International Transport Federation Asia Pacific (ITF-AP), a global union federation.

⁸ National Vice President for Education and Information and Chair of Women's Committee, Associated Labour Unions (ALU), a national trade union federation which organises workers in various sectors in the Philippines.

⁹ One of these laws is the anti-sexual harassment act addressing workplaces and educational and training institutions. The Philippines is the first country to have such a law.







4

UNDERSTANDING TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE IN TRADE UNIONS

Transformative strategies for gender equality are long-term, sustainable approaches that tackle the root causes and intersectionality of gender discrimination, including structural discrimination, inequality, and unequal power dynamics, to achieve a gender-just union organisation. Transformative strategies are ‘approaches of change’ consisting of a set of complementary policies, organisational structures, processes, and practices, both formal and informal, that is aimed at challenging and changing (over time) existing patriarchal structures and systems, power relations, and socio-cultural norms and behaviour that perpetuate gender inequality within and beyond trade unions.

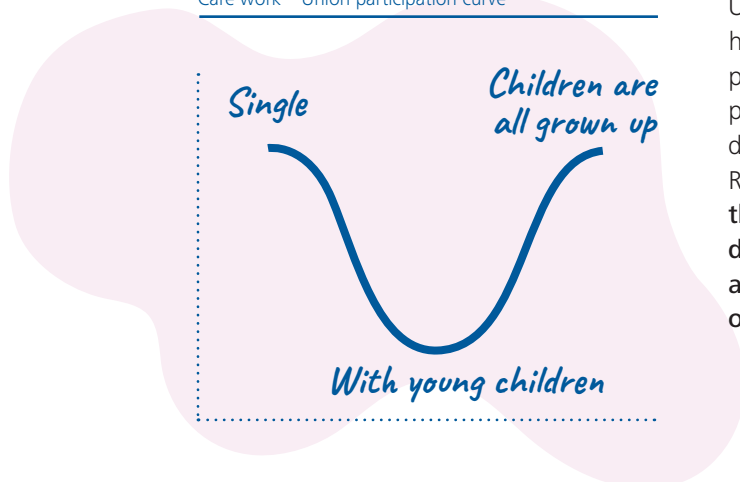
Transformative change towards gender equality is a multi-faceted process. It starts with identifying and analysing barriers and challenges to gender equality. As mentioned, **transformative change is achieved by coherent and consistent use of complementary strategies that are aimed at challenging and changing patriarchal mindsets and behaviours, power relations, and socio-cultural norms and behaviour that bring about gender inequality within and outside trade unions.**

Barriers and challenges to gender equality in trade unions

Female membership in trade unions has been increasing in the last 10 years and **trade unions have instituted policy changes and initiatives in promoting women to leadership positions, advocating equal pay for equal work at the workplace, and fighting against discrimination, violence and harassment in the world of work (ILO, 2020).** However, women’s increased presence in trade union membership and leadership does not automatically lead to substantive change in terms of gender equality. **At present, women still remain outnumbered in trade union membership and leadership, except in the public sector, where women are mostly employed.** Structural and entrenched gender inequalities require systemic transformations at the level of institutions, programmes, processes and actions.

Barriers and challenges continue to hamper genuine realisation of gender equality for female workers in all aspects of their trade union life. The trade union respondents in this study have identified the major barriers to gender equality in trade unions and workplaces. These barriers are interconnected and not mutually exclusive.

FIGURE 2.
Care work – Union participation curve



Care work and multiple burdens

Unpaid care work resulting in multiple burdens in the household remains the major reason for women not fully participating in trade unions and taking on leadership positions. Women’s participation in the union can be depicted as a U-shape trend (→ **Figure 2**), according to Rey Rasing¹⁰: **“Women are very active in the union when they are still single, but their participation starts to decline and even dips once they get married and start a family. They become active in the union again later on in life again, when their children have grown up.”**

¹⁰ Secretary General, Philippine Metalworkers Alliance (PMA), a national federation of unions in the auto and metal-working sector in the Philippines.

Family responsibilities are often cited as the main hindrance to women's active participation and taking leadership roles in trade unions. Jena Jain Thapa¹¹ commented that one member, a female community health worker, was even asked by her family to choose between union work and family, as it was perceived that she was spending too much time in the union. She got divorced eventually. Jessica de Ocampo who works¹² in a cigarette-manufacturing plant in the Philippines experienced the same dilemma. She faced more difficulties doing her union responsibilities after getting married and having young children. Although she is very well qualified to become the next union president, this is not possible as, for her, her family takes priority.

In developing countries in Asia and the Pacific – as in other parts of the world –, daycare centres where women workers can leave their child while working are not yet institutionalised and publicly funded. However, in Cambodia where it is required by labour law to establish childcare centres at workplaces, many companies still try to subvert this law and, instead of providing day care, pay childcare allowances to women. Tepphallin Ou¹³, however, emphasises that these childcare centres are also important for single fathers, and that employers must provide meal allowance for women after giving birth and pregnant women are to be assigned light work. According to Judy Ann Miranda, multiple burdens in care work remain the biggest stumbling block for women to participate in union activities, hold leadership positions, and increase female union members.

Gender bias due to culture of machismo/patriarchy

Despite many improvements in gender relations, **gender bias and the culture of patriarchy persist in many societies in Asia, which also acts as a source of resistance to gender equality as well as a source of women's reluctance to participate and take on leadership positions.** Josefina Lim of the Congress of Independent Organisations (CIO) mentions that women are considered second class and men do not believe in the ability of women, so women are not included in collective bargaining negotiations. Due to this exclusion of women, most collective bargaining agreements' (CBA) provisions remain non-gender responsive. A majority of the trade union respondents also reported that **aside from patriarchal attitudes of male trade union leaders towards women, union meetings are often not women-friendly, and venues are sometimes not appropriate for married women.**

Gender bias is most keenly felt in 'male-dominated' industries such as transport and construction. Suresh Geetha of the ITF-AP stresses the **need to address toxic masculinity and power structures** that have always been a barrier in the transport sector as gender-equality programmes challenge long-established and unquestioned privileges. The need for **"working on empowering women to engage with leadership and working closely with male allies, building alliances, and strengthening the network has been central to shifting power structures** for women transport workers", according to Geetha. In the construction industry in the Philippines, Jane Vargas¹⁴ states, older male leaders become barriers to gender equality because they are close-minded when it comes to new issues. She adds that these leaders do not attend gender orientation meetings, and view women as talkative when they demand change. In one union congress, male union leaders even tried to block women nominees for leadership positions because they still think that the construction industry is only for men.

¹¹ Project Organiser in Nepal, Public Services International (PSI), a global union federation.

¹² Jessica de Ocampo, Secretary General, Philip Morris-Fortune Tobacco Company Labor Union (PMFTCLU), an enterprise-based union in the Philippines.

¹³ President, Cambodian Food and Service Workers Federation (CFSWF), a national trade union federation of workers in the food, hotel, and other service sectors in Cambodia.

¹⁴ National Treasurer and Organizer, National Union of Building and Construction Workers (NUBCW), Philippines.

Due to historically entrenched patriarchal structures in society, as mentioned by male trade union leaders who are gender equality champions in the Philippines, women as well as men are conditioned to act within these walls of gender bias. Or as one female leader from PSI AP, Kate Lappin¹⁵, puts it “there are women who are accustomed to being told they’re not valued, such that the idea of leadership is not for them. Due to this culture, they might feel extremely apprehensive about saying that they would like to lead a union.”

Limited capacity, skills and self-confidence of women to take on leadership positions

The female leaders we interviewed emphasised that the **challenges and barriers to gender equality are interconnected and should not be viewed in isolation from each other**. Gender inequalities perpetuate the exclusion of female workers from obtaining secure and decent employment. This is even more pronounced in the construction sector, where women have lower level of education and skills compared to men. As noted by Perna Prasad of BWI-South Asia, women are confined to low-paid and unskilled jobs that often result in a negligible presence of women in large infrastructure or in mega construction projects funded by international financial institutions. Employers in the building and construction industry likewise discourage or avoid women employment, as this is associated with additional compliance requirements stipulated by law, such as separate toilets. Laudicia Casaña¹⁶ likewise bewails the low level of female representation in leadership positions due to the lack of capacities and skills, so they just follow what the leaders say, who are mostly male.

Not being able to provide time for union training courses and capacity-building due to unpaid care work results in the cyclical unpreparedness of women to take on leadership positions due to a lack of skills and capacities. This in turn decreases women’s self-confidence, making it even less likely that they will take on elective leadership positions.

Lack of or low prioritisation of women’s issues in trade union work and activities

Gender issues remain low in priority for many trade unions in the Asia Pacific region. In Cambodia, not many unions raise gender issues during union meetings or in negotiations. Tepphallin Ou of CFSWF holds that trade unions **only focus on working conditions like annual leave, public holidays, salary increase, food allowance and similar issues, while women’s concerns are only included to a very limited extent during bargaining negotiations with employers**. In Vietnam, even though there are already policies put in place by the state that make it mandatory for trade unions to promote gender equality in all activities and fields, challenges remain in the implementation of regulations and policies on gender equality, which are still limited in scope. Awareness of gender equality among many male leaders is still limited, according to Bui Phuong Chi.¹⁷

However, **the lack of prioritisation could also be due to differences in culture and progress on the part of trade unions given different contexts**. As averred by Alice Chang,¹⁸ unions may not be that progressive even if they come from a progressive country. Thus, since trade union operate in different contexts, a ‘one-size-fits all’ approach towards gender equality might not be a suitable approach.

¹⁵ Regional Secretary, Public Services International Asia Pacific (PSI AP).

¹⁶ Chairperson of the Trade Federation 2 (TF2), a national federation of unions in the manufacturing sector in the Philippines.

¹⁷ Researcher, Institute of Workers and Trade Unions, Vietnam General Confederation of Labour (VGCL), the trade union centre in Vietnam.

¹⁸ Director of Women and Equality Opportunities, UNI Asia Pacific Regional Organization (UNI Apro), a global union federation.

Resistance to affirmative actions and gender equality policies

The march towards more inclusive trade unions on gender-equality programmes encounters resistance every step along the way. According to Eva Arcos of the Associated Labour Unions (ALU), the main constraint on female leadership will be observed in a patriarchal union. **It is not only about the structure that has a built-in bias for male supremacy, stereotyping of positions for women (e.g. union secretary, public relations officer, treasurer), but also the undervaluation or devaluation of women’s competence and accomplishments, unequal access to opportunities, attitudes, and control over narratives.**

Society at large likewise influences the workplace in terms of openness (or lack thereof) to gender equality issues. Sion Binos¹⁹ from the Philippines points out that the culture of misogyny in the current government affected the rights of women even at workplace levels. Thus, it was said to be difficult to fight for recognition of women’s reproductive needs such as the need to have seats during rest hours or the assignment of light work for pregnant women at the workplace, if national political leaders devalue the reproductive rights of women.

At the international level, Veronica Fernandez Mendez and Marta Ochoa²⁰ state that **resistance to the 40 per cent rule on female participation for participants in international union meetings remains a constant challenge to its implementation.** They note that some local affiliates find loopholes to avoid implementation. For example, by arguing that it was not a rule but rather a recommendation. An experience that was shared by DGB with the implementation of the 50-50 representation rule in activities and leadership positions, where particularly male-dominated industry unions initially resisted, according to Christina Stockfisch. While the 50–50 representation agreement has been existing in the union since 1998, **implementation has been a rather slow process in meeting quotas, because the organisational culture has to change along the way.** In the past, ‘old fashioned men’ who became trade unions leaders did not have to take up housework responsibilities in the same way today’s young men and women do. **DGB works toward providing leadership opportunities for more women by promoting a work-life balance and changing the culture towards shared care work in the family.** “It took a long time to change the culture in the union so that meetings did not take place at 5:00–6:00 in the evening and male and female workers can still go home at 4:00 pm for their family duties,” Stockfisch comments.

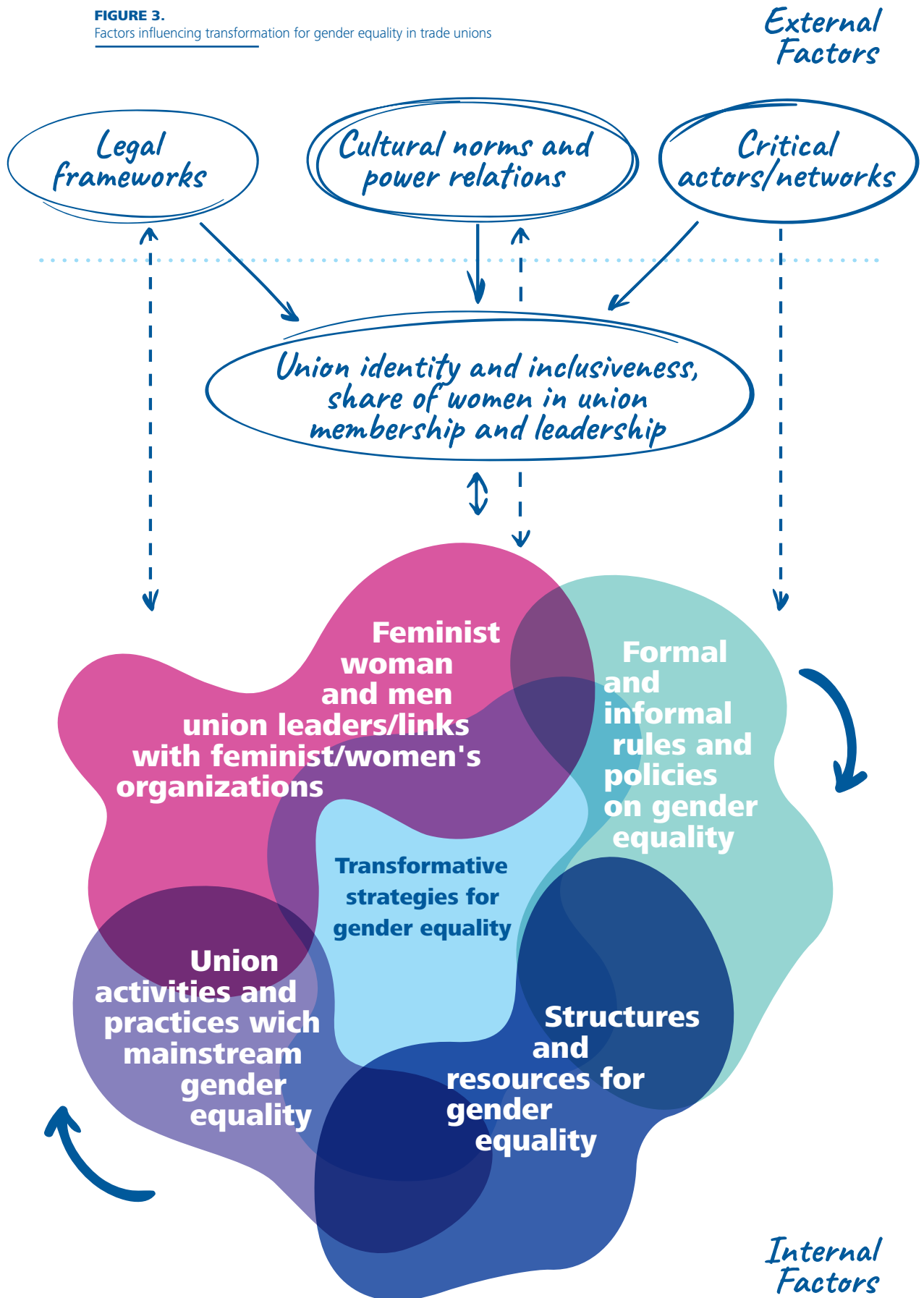
How transformative change happens

Several factors – both internal and external – influence trade unions’ transformation processes towards gender equality, including the actions they take to address the challenges identified in the previous section (→ see Figure 3). **There are four key internal elements that influence a union’s pursuit of gender equality, namely: (1) formal and informal policies and rules on gender equality; (2) structures and resources for programmes and activities for gender equality; (3) women’s robust participation in union activities and integrating gender in union practices; and (4) feminist women and men as union leaders that espouse gender equality and/or enduring coalitions with feminist and women’s organisations. These key elements, particularly the first three, are complementary and mutually reinforce each other.** For example, merely having a formal policy of a minimum quota or threshold for women’s representation in union leadership, even if such was adopted in a union congress or embedded in the union constitution, is not enough to make gender equality a reality within the union. In fact, all four elements make up an effective transformative strategy for gender equality.

¹⁹ Chairperson, Pinag-isang Tinig at Lakas ng Anakpawis (PIGLAS, United Voice and Power of the Labouring Class), a national federation in the Philippines that organises workers in various sectors (i.e., gas, metal, and garments).

²⁰ Veronica Fernandez Mendez and Martha Ochoa, Head of Equal Opportunities and Global Director of Equal Opportunities, respectively, UNI Global Union, a global union federation.

FIGURE 3.
Factors influencing transformation for gender equality in trade unions



The adoption and implementation of **policies and rules, both formal and informal, provide the institutional framework for integrating gender equality into the union agenda and programmes**, and for setting the direction for desired behavioural changes within and beyond the union. As behavioural changes in socio-cultural norms evolve over time, there is a **need for durable policies and rules**. Policies on gender equality (e.g., a quota system for women’s representation in union activities and leadership, assignment of specific leadership positions to women, establishment of a Women’s Committee/Department) established in the constitution and by-laws (CBL) of a union, for example, result in a more stable or enduring policy framework for gender equality. As a number of unions leaders we interviewed succinctly put it, policies on gender equality in the CBL direct unions to continuously integrate gender issues in all aspects of union work.

As trade unions are also organisations, having a **functional and flat organisational structure responsible for gender equality – such as a Women’s Committee, Women Department, and Women’s Desk – allows a union to remain focused, effective, and efficient in achieving its long-term goal of transforming the union into a gender-just organisation**. These structures identify who does what so a union can track progress in meeting a set of objectives. The existence of a distinct structure for women’s or gender equality issues also ensures that these issues are organisationally embedded. For these structures to function effectively the responsibilities need to be clearly defined and adequate material/financial resources need to be assigned on a regular basis.

Union policies aimed at mainstreaming gender equality in unions are **implemented in various aspects of union work (i.e., organising, collective bargaining, education and training, policy advocacy, strikes and other forms of collective action) and activities**. For example, when women are part of the bargaining team, it is more likely that the collective agreement will include provisions that address women’s specific needs (e.g., workplace mechanisms that prohibit gender-based violence and harassment, additional maternity leave and paternity leave, equality clauses on pay and promotion). Women’s direct involvement in organising, especially when the targeted workplace is dominated by female workers, does not only develop women’s leadership skills; it potentially increases women’s membership in the union as well. **To sustain women’s robust participation in union activities and representation in union leadership requires taking into account women’s concerns** (multiple burdens) on how these activities are arranged and conducted.

Another factor that influences a union’s transformational process is the presence of **feminist-oriented female and male union leaders**. Many global and national union confederations and federations included in this handbook have registered notable achievements towards gender equality and have female and male leaders who are feminists or ‘champions’ of gender equality. As Madeleine Kennedy-Macfoy²¹ emphasises, having a feminist consciousness is key in driving gender equality in trade unions. She attributed EI’s strong gender equality orientation from an early stage to the founding president of EI, who is a feminist and was politically committed to advancing gender equality in the union.

Having a strong support group of women and men in the union while pushing for gender equality is also an important factor in transformation processes. In this way, women will not feel isolated, and it becomes easier to secure buy-in on the part of union leadership and members for gender equality policies and programmes.

²¹ Coordinator and in charge of gender-related issues, Education International (EI), a global union federation. This statement was made during the FES-GEHA Validation Workshop via Zoom, 12 November 2021.

For some unions, their **long-term engagement and collaboration with feminist and women's organisations** have influenced their general behaviour and approach towards gender equality, including their initiatives to change legal frameworks.

→ **Figure 3** also illustrates that **the four internal elements of the transformational process are in turn influenced by other internal factors**, particularly how a union frames its **identity and how inclusive it is in terms of representation** and, corollary to this, the share of women in union membership and leadership. We hypothesise that the more inclusive a union is in terms of having a significant share of women in union membership and leadership and integrating women's issues into the union agenda and programmes, the more likely the union is to carry out institutional, structural, and socio-cultural behavioural changes to achieve gender equality.

Finally, all the internal factors may also be influenced by several **external factors**, such as, but not limited to, **cultural norms and power relations, existing (national) legal frameworks, and presence of critical actors and support networks**. Cultural norms and power relations that result in and perpetuate women's subordination in the family, at the workplace, in institutions, and in society at large also find their way into the union organisation. **Through the adoption and implementation of concrete and targeted policies, structures, processes, and practices that are aimed at addressing the sources of women's subordination, trade unions can effectively contribute to women's emancipation.**

A **legal framework** that accords protection to women and prohibits all forms of gender-based discrimination influences a union's representation structure. For example, laws that promote and protect women's participation in the labour market increase women's share in paid employment. **For many unions that have been experiencing a decline in union membership, broadening and diversifying the membership base by organising female workers has been one key strategy in stemming the decline, and in some cases even reversing the trend.** Laws that enhance women's well-being (e.g., maternity leave, paternity leave, work-life balance, elimination of violence and harassment at the workplace, non-discrimination) are also mirrored or further enhanced in many collective agreements. It is to be noted that many of these laws are a result of unions' campaigns and advocacy work over the years, in many cases teaming up with feminist/women's rights proponents, often headed by female leaders. For example, female union leaders in the Philippines were at the forefront in the campaign and lobbying work that led to legislation being adopted in 2019 expanding maternity leave and safe spaces law.²² This suggests that **unions that advocate gender equality can also contribute to improving women's conditions outside the workplace.**

Finally, **critical actors and support networks** may also influence unions' attitude towards gender equality. Here, we see the role of the International Labour Organization (ILO), international trade unions (e.g., International Trade Union Confederation), global union federations (GUFs), and international trade union solidarity support organisations (TUSSOs²³). These organisations provide various forms of support (e.g., training and education, research and publication, campaigns) for mainstreaming gender equality in national and enterprise unions. Some of the projects supported by GUFs, for example, led to the formation of Women's Committees, expanded women's activities, and enabled women to hold leadership positions in national and local unions.

²² The Safe Spaces Law prohibits all forms of gender-based sexual harassment committed in public spaces, educational or training institutions, workplace, as well as online space. See: <https://pcw.gov.ph/republic-act-no-11313-safe-spaces-act-bawal-bastos-law/>.

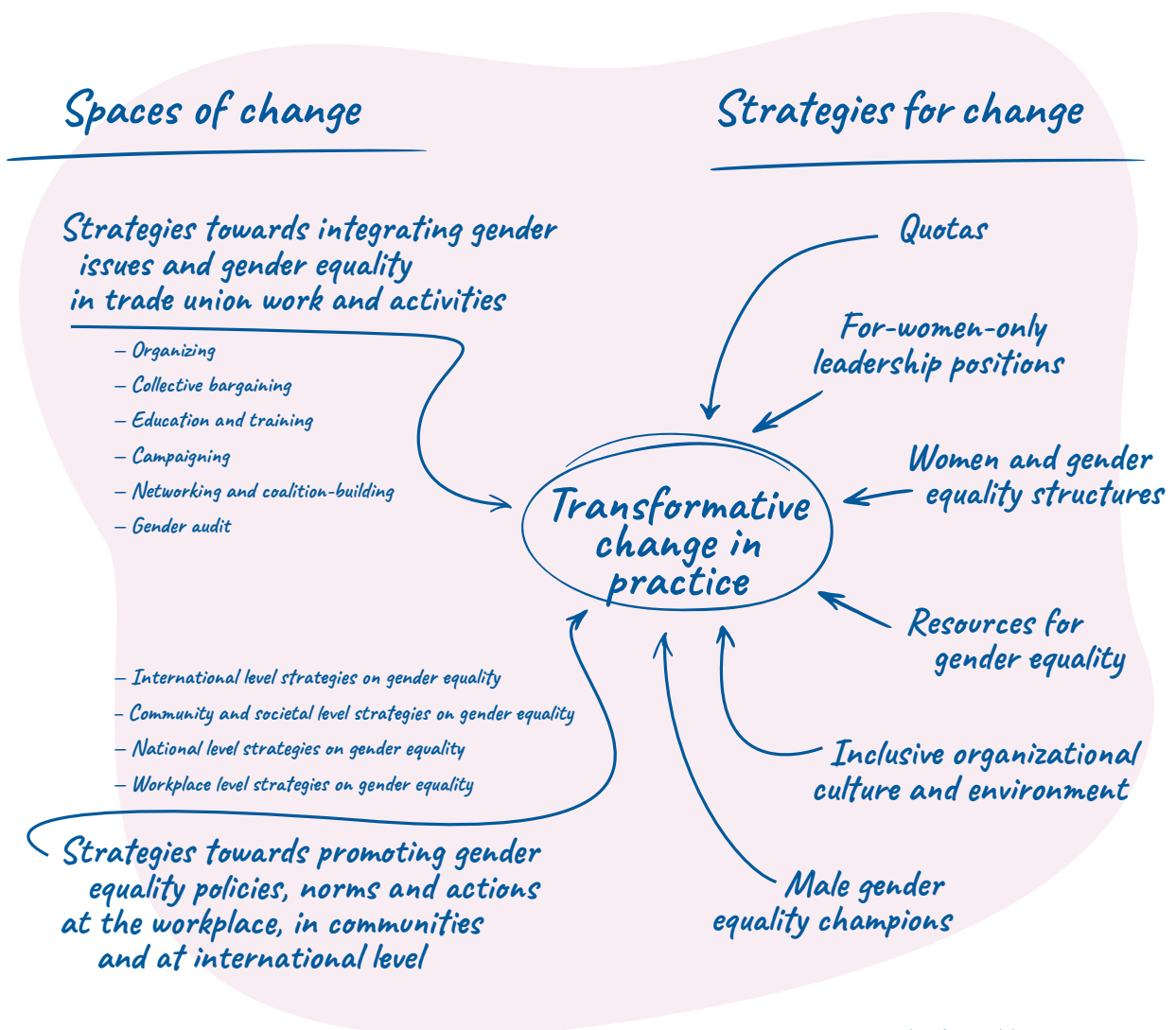
²³ These TUSSOs include the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), Union Aid Abroad-APHEDA, SASK-Finland, LO-Norway, DGB Bildungswerk (DGB-BW), Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), Solidarity Center, and others.

Transformative change in practice

Trade union initiatives and actions towards transformative change on gender equality can be pursued at various levels or spaces (i.e. at the workplace, in communities, and at the international level) and through the adoption and implementation of various policies and strategies. All the internal and external strategies that make up the transformation process, as discussed in the next two chapters (→ Chapter 5 and 6), are complementary and mutually reinforcing.

The spaces of change (→ Chapter 5) may be both internal and external. The internal transformation process involves the integration of gender issues and gender equality in trade union work and activities such as organizing, collective bargaining, education and training, campaigning, networking and coalition building, and gender audit. At the same time, trade unions can also implement strategies towards gender equality beyond the union organisation.

FIGURE 4.
Transformative change in practice



SOURCE: Authors' own elaboration.

Internally, the transformation process can be pursued through a combination of strategies (→ [Chapter 6](#)) that are complementary and mutually reinforcing. **Trade unions that have achieved substantial progress towards gender equality within and outside their organisation have adopted various strategies** such as quotas on women representation in leadership and union activities, allocating for-women-only leadership positions, establishing women and gender equality structures, allocating and mobilizing resources for activities that promote gender equality, promoting an inclusive organizational culture and environment, and encouraging men to become gender equality champions. The march to gender equality may be longer and more arduous if one or two of these strategies are implemented.







TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE IN PRACTICE: SPACES OF CHANGE

As illustrated in → [Figure 3 \(p. 32\)](#), the **transformational process towards a gender-just union organisation is a multi-faceted and long-term process that can take place at various spaces and levels of trade union work and through a combination of strategies**. The various policies, strategies, and activities pursued by the trade unions which are considered gender-fair and just by the female leaders we interviewed, are **interconnected and mutually reinforcing**. They are also **influenced by several external** (i.e., legal frameworks, cultural norms and power relations, critical actors/networks) **and internal factors** (i.e., union identity and inclusiveness, share of women in union membership and leadership, presence of feminist female and male leaders).

Many of the **internal elements** or strategies that are aimed at integrating gender issues and gender equality in trade union work and activities, such as organising, collective bargaining, education and training, and campaigning, **contribute to building the union's associational power**. Organising more female workers, for example, increases union membership. The wins the union gets from collective bargaining and from its campaigns, and the skills acquired by female workers from the union's education and training deepen female members' identification with union goals and objectives and thus their 'willingness to act' if necessary (i.e., to go on strike). **Having strong associational power, expressed in terms of greater numbers of female members, is key to wielding structural power**, as women provide more 'flesh and muscle' in strikes and other forms of work disruption. As mentioned earlier by Judy Ann Chan-Miranda of PM, female members account for half of all the union's protest actions and mobilisations. Female workers in the garment sector were also in the vanguard of large-scale multi-sectoral strikes in Cambodia in 2013–2014.

Meanwhile, **external dimensions such as networking and coalition-building** with feminist/women's organisations, human rights groups, LGBTQI+, youth organisations, environmental groups, political organisations, and other progressive civil society groups, whether at the community, societal, national, regional or international level, **can boost the union's societal power, which in turn, is critical in building institutional power** in terms of advocating and lobbying for women- and worker-friendly laws and policies. In some cases, a union's institutional power can make up for weak associational power, that is, having a low union density or declining union membership.

Integrating issues of gender equality in trade union work and activities

Organising

Targeted organising of female workers: Despite increasing participation of women in the labour market through the years, female membership in trade unions has not kept up. Among the strategies for the trade union respondents is to implement targeted organising to increase female membership in trade unions. **The trend toward dwindling union membership in many countries has compelled many trade unions to substantially step up the organisation of female workers in unions**. For PM, female union organisers are deployed particularly in the community to organise women living in the vicinity of the factories in the Philippines. Due to restrictions on organising workers in the factory premises or on the shop floor, female union organisers mobilise workers and their families from dormitories and communities near workplaces (i.e., export-processing zones). When the Building and Wood Workers Trade Union Federation of Cambodia (BWTUC) started organising female workers in brick kilns and construction fields, the women would not share their ideas, but the union activities

that encouraged women to get involved encouraged them to tell the truth. Sann Chandoeun²⁴ stated that the number of women in the federation has increased from only one woman in 2008 to many women in 2016.

Deploying female union organisers: Repeatedly mentioned by respondents is the effective strategy of deploying female organisers. **In the past, female unionists were stereotyped into education, administrative and office work, but expanding trade union roles for women as union organisers trains them to take on leadership roles.** Trade unions have noted that women as union organisers can effectively mobilise workers to become members of trade unions and join labour campaigns. **Particularly in male-dominated industries such as construction, metal-working, and transportation, female organisers have proven that they are as effective union organisers as men by building trade guilds for women in construction.** Female labour organisers usually have deep commitment to the ideals of unionism and are able to convey that commitment through connection with other workers. Union organising is one of the core tasks of trade unions and female organisers develop other skills in this task such as paralegal, education, networking and negotiating. These skills are important in developing women to ultimately take on trade union leadership roles in their organisations. Josefina Lim of CIO stated that before she achieved a top leadership position, she had to prove her competence in labour education work, in which she ventured into labour organising, and headed collective bargaining negotiations in her trade union.

Collective bargaining

Collective bargaining negotiation is one of the core tasks of trade unions, a terrain where few women are included at the negotiating table. To integrate women's issues in collective bargaining agreements (CBA), trade unions have instituted consultations with women's committees to include women's benefits especially in workplaces with more than 30 per cent women on the workforce. However, participation by women in actual negotiations remains low due to the barriers and challenges mentioned earlier. However, for unions in female-dominated industries such as garments, women are more visible at the negotiating table.

According to Serrano and Certeza (2014), there is a **strong correlation between women's limited representation in union leadership and in bargaining processes and the greater likelihood that gender/women-related proposals in collective bargaining will be traded off for other bargaining gains.** They identified several critical factors that may increase the likelihood of specific gender and women's issues being integrated into the collective agreement and into company policies, such as women's involvement in organising drives, union policy on women's representation in leadership, union policy on women's membership in bargaining teams, and the appointment of gender equality officers.

Among the common women's issues included in collective bargaining agreements are maternity benefits, separate toilets, reproductive health benefits (i.e., light work for pregnant women, menstrual leave, etc.), anti-sexual harassment, and most recently enforcement of laws protecting women against violence and harassment. For trade union affiliates of IndustriAll Asia, particularly PMA, which organises unions in the automotive and metal-working industries, CBAs usually include labour laws and social policies such as the Solo Parents Act (Republic Act No. 8972), paternity leave, and special leaves for women with gynecological illnesses. However, to date only hotel unions in the Philippines have been able to include in a collective bargaining provision on menstrual leave for female workers. Meanwhile, PM, NUBCW, PMA, and other federations in the Philippines continue to push for inclusion of this leave in collective agreements.

²⁴Vice-President, Building and Wood Workers Trade Union Federation of Cambodia (BWTUC), a national trade union organising workers in the building and construction sector in Cambodia.

Education and training

All the union leaders we interviewed stated they have integrated and have been implementing a programmatic gender equality curriculum in their workers' education programmes. **The most common gender education programmes include gender sensitivity training courses for men and women and education modules on reproductive health, gender orientation, and special women's issues.** In some unions, **integrating and embedding women's issues in the workers' education programs is the first step in instituting gender equality policies** (e.g., anti-sexual harassment, revising union's constitution and by-laws to include gender equality) at the workplace and in trade unions. This is the case at the Sentro ng mga Nagkakaisa at Progresibong Manggagawa²⁵ (SENTRO, Center for United and Progressive Workers), where gender inequality, patriarchy, and power relations are discussed in the union's basic and advance training courses, according to Joanna Bernice Coronacion²⁶. The union's education curricula are also regularly updated to bring in new analyses of workers' conditions, including women's issues.

A number of unions we interviewed **integrate 'stories of change' into their training courses, which focus on the key roles women play in the historical development and achievements of the labour movement, the rise of women-led unions, and good practices in integrating gender equality in trade union work.** These stories are often the result of research undertaken by trade unions or by academics and researchers cooperating with trade unions.

To further integrate gender equality in education programmes, trade unions target the **involvement of women in designing curriculum, preparing training materials, and developing female trainers.** In male-dominated industries such as construction, metal, and transportation, gender orientation seminars are integrated into the curricula through the advocacy of female trade unionists. Likewise, women design capacity-building training activities to build up women capacities in leadership, negotiation, organising, or project management skills. In the case of the Cambodian Alliance of Trade Unions (CATU)²⁷, Yang Sophorn²⁸ noted that women are assigned by rotation as focal point persons responsible for every training workshop in order to train them to be trainers who can train other women.

What are the possible contents of a leadership training programme for women? A good example is the training and curriculum manual *The WaY2Go Women and Youth Together for Leadership* jointly developed by the ITUC-AP and the ASEAN Trade Union Council (ATUC) (→ [Case Study 1](#)). The programme forms part of a **project on strengthening women and youth leadership within the trade union movement** for decent work, a three-year collaboration (2019–2021) between 15 affiliates of the ITUC-AP and ATUC with support from the DGB Bildungswerk BUND e.V..

²⁵ The Sentro ng mga Nagkakaisa at Progresibong Manggagawa (SENTRO) is a national confederation in the Philippines. It is among the four affiliates of the ITUC in the Philippines.

²⁶ Deputy Secretary General, SENTRO. Statement made during the FES-Nepal validation workshop on 12 November 2021.

²⁷ CATU is a national trade union federation in Cambodia that organises workers in textile, garment, footwear, and travel goods factories in Cambodia.

²⁸ President, Cambodian Alliance of Trade Unions (CATU).

CASE STUDY 1. ITUC-AP's The WaY2Go Women and Youth Together for Leadership Training and Curriculum Manual

The comprehensive training manual is designed for trainers and/or facilitators who are performing face-to-face training. The trainers/facilitators may be Women and Youth Representatives (WYRs) or union member/non-member trainers and facilitators.

The training programme consists of 10 face-to-face modules of learning which are conducted on eight full days and two half-days (total of nine days) of training. The sessions are designed to be highly interactive and provide participants with opportunities to reflect on particular topics of interest and learn from each other and the facilitator through structured discussion, paired discussion and exercises.

These 10 modules of the programme are:

- Module 1: Trade Unionism and Me
- Module 2: Our World of Work
- Module 3: Gender Equality: Women and Youth Are All In This Together
- Module 4: Me as a Trade Union Leader
- Module 5: Educating Unionists, Stakeholders and Other Allies
- Module 6: Communication Strategy
- Module 7: Advocacy and Campaigns
- Module 8: Negotiation is Fun
- Module 9: SMART Planning
- Module 10: Results-Oriented Monitoring

The training manual is accompanied by a Trainer Resource Pack which provides additional annexes containing supplementary information to support the facilitator, participant learning, and group discussions in each of the modules of the programme.

SOURCE: Extracted from ITUC-Asia Pacific, DGB Bildungswerk, and ASEAN Trade Union Council (2021). The WaY2Go Women and Youth Together for Leadership: Training and Curriculum Manual. <https://www.ituc-ap.org/resources/the-way2go-women-and-youth-together-for-leadership-training-and-curriculum-manual>.

Global unions have also initiated **leadership-mentoring programmes for women** (→ **Case Studies 2 and 3**).

Education and training, combined with other interventions (e.g., participation in collective bargaining, campaigns, lobbying for legislative reforms), for women's leadership development also forms part of a union succession plan. Tepphalin Ou of CFSWF underscored the need for a succession plan for female leaders, as this will facilitate the transformation towards a more gender-fair union organisation. At CFSWF, although there is no formal succession plan, it has been a practice to identify four to six women who have the potential to become leaders in the future and develop their leadership capacities through various training activities, and by **providing them practical opportunities to further develop their skills.** These opportunities may include acting as trainers, organising union events and activities, recruiting new members, being part of the union collective bargaining team, engaging with government officials and lawmakers.

CASE STUDY 2. UNI Equal Opportunities leadership-mentoring programme for women

The UNI Global Women-Mentoring Programme is among the most successful mentoring programmes for women to date. Patterned after the German union Ver.di's mentoring programme launched in 2013, it aims to strengthen female leaders while developing new leaders, and increase numbers of women in leadership positions in all structures of the organisation. The programme is currently being implemented in four regions (Asia Pacific, Africa, Latin America and Europe) and 51 countries and involves more than 800 women. The programme intends to address the lack of women in leadership positions, and the union has found that women trade unionists confront lack of support at the workplace and in the unions to be able to actively participate in meeting their special needs. According to the female leaders of UNI Equal Opportunities, Veronica Fernandez-Mendez and Martha Ochoa, "Women have very specific challenges throughout their lifetimes, in terms of family responsibilities, care responsibilities, but also our needs are very different whether it's in terms of health and safety, whether it's in terms of violence and harassment. Women have specific needs and specific demands, so when they have joined the workforce, what we have been seeing is women who have not had enough support."

As a continuing programme, it brings together a senior woman leader, experienced in trade union structures, and a younger woman trade unionist under the age of 35, with both of them agreeing on a 'job shadowing', which means performing their jobs in the trade union in tandem. The younger woman, through job shadowing, learns how to work within trade union structures on leadership, negotiations, communications, activism, organising, etc. In turn, the senior female union leader learns from the junior unionist "what the new trends are, what the new workforce is looking for, what the issues are that pertain to younger women who are entering into the trade union." The mentoring programme has a two-year cycle involving planning workshops, skills trainings and conferences, after which the new female union leader takes on a mentee, keeping the programme cycle moving.

The mentoring, which reinforces the UNI's *40for40* campaign for 40 per cent representation of women in leadership structures, involves a flexible programme design based on the context, conditions and needs of women at the local or national levels. The planning stage is crucial, as this is where the right tandems are identified, and the programme is designed with the participants.

In Western Africa, some of the mentor-mentee tandems have stated the following: "Listen, you know, the more we implement the programme, the more women who come up to us and say we want to be part of the programme, we want to have a mentor." What the programme is building is not only just a work relationship, but also a personal relationship between the women involved.

SOURCE: UNI Equal Opportunities power point presentation on the *40for40* campaign, and interview via Zoom with Veronica Fernandez Mendez and Martha Ochoa, 14 September 2021.

Some trade unions **involve men as participants in gender-sensitivity education activities** to better orient men on the issues important to women. In other instances, male trainers in women capacity-building training programmes were also encouraged to discuss union leadership structures and negotiations for women to gain better insight into working within the unions. For example, the construction federation NUBCW let male leaders participate in skills training programmes with gender-sensitive topics to gain support for women's campaigns on gender issues such as reproductive health. Male trade unionists are

CASE STUDY 3. The ITUC global leadership programme

The ITUC Global Leadership Programme, which was formally launched in January 2021, aims to clear “a pathway for more women in leadership positions in the trade union movement, to keep those spaces clear and expand it to make sure that more women can step into those spaces”. The leadership programme strives to have an intergenerational cohort so that women who are more experienced can exchange their knowledge and experiences with upcoming women leaders. Before the formal launching, the ITUC contacted women and spoke to their unions/affiliates to make sure they are on board with the programme. A survey was also conducted in 2020 in collaboration with Labor Research Services (LRS) in South Africa to get an idea of practical issues such as duration of the programme, participants’ expectations, hopes, and objectives in the programme, etc. The female participants were divided into two groups according to a clustering of regions.

Each of the modules in the programme can be run for 2.5 to 3 hours every month, and in between these, there is a one-hour conversation event. A module can be run twice each week for the two groups of participating regions. The one-hour conversations bring together all the groups of women. The first module discusses the dimensions of power, such as people’s understanding of power, understanding of leadership, comparing traditional patriarchal understanding of leadership with a more transformative feminist aspect of leadership, and the definitions from different strands of feminism.

Each module tries to look at the differences, the tripartite aspects of people’s motivation and about “barefoot guides on designing and facilitating creative conversations and learning activities.” The programme also discusses issues like “self-care and emotional intelligence and being able to recognise one’s own limits when one is emotionally or physically exhausted and finding ways to manage stress and find things that are constructive”, and incorporating these into the female leaders’ lifestyles.

SOURCE: Interview with Tola Ositelu, ITUC Project Coordinator, 6 October 2021.

also encouraged to join women’s mobilisation campaigns. They are also invited to attend women training programmes as speakers on certain topics (i.e., HIV, human/workers’ rights, health and safety).

Trade unions in the Philippines, such as PM and SENTRO, offer **child-minding services at the union workshops for female unionists**. The unions also sponsor **family-oriented union activities** such as Family Day with unions and Christmas celebrations involving the members’ families. PIGLAS includes in its gender-sensitivity seminars unequal sharing of household chores and encourages men to share in this reproductive work to broaden women’s participation in trade unions.

Most trade unions gender education programmes consist of all-women seminars/training activities and mixed-gender skills trainings. The curriculum design and implementation of gender education programme are among the tasks taken on by women committees in trade union structures. Nonetheless, some of the women leaders we interviewed pointed out that when men are present in meetings or dialogues, women tend to keep quiet and do not feel confident enough to speak out. Thus, like in gender training programmes, **it is important to provide a safe space for women to speak, reflect and participate, without fear or judgement.** Women caucuses or all-women consultations at the regional and global levels have also been institutionalised in international or global unions.

Campaigning

All the trade union leaders we interviewed asserted that their **unions have conducted and/or have ongoing campaigns on gender equality measures and advocacies on specific women’s issues**. In the Philippine unions (SENTRO, PM, IndustriAll-Philippines, PIGLAS, ALU), the enforcement of a recently amended law on Expanded Maternity Leave (EML) providing for an increase to 105 days of paid maternity leave occupied a majority of their campaigns on gender equality. Most of these unions were also involved in a very difficult campaign to amend the Reproductive Health Law (Republic Act No. 10354) and are now vigorously campaigning to ratify the newly amended ILO Convention 190 (Eliminating Violence and Harassment in the World of Work).

Smritee Lama²⁹ admitted that it is difficult for the union to launch a campaign to ratify ILO Convention 190 because they are still occupied in campaigning for ratification of ILO Convention 155 (Occupational Safety and Health), an ongoing campaign in the last 12–15 years. Unions affiliated with PSI Asia Pacific, particularly in South Asia and the Philippines, are vigorously campaigning for the recognition of community health workers, who are mostly women and serving on the front lines in this pandemic. Community health workers are providing health services at the village levels, but they are not recognised as workers, but as volunteers, with no social protection and adequate wages. The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted their precarious work conditions. The PSI in Nepal and India were able to negotiate increases in their daily allowances and health coverage during the pandemic. The long-term goal in the campaigns for community health workers is to recognise and regularise them as workers.

Networking and coalition-building

Networking with other civil society groups and coalition-building among social movements have been part of trade union work. These **networks serve to strengthen campaigns and sometimes lead to organisational coalitions to advocate specific labour policies and issues**. Important in strengthening societal power of trade unions, coalition-building and networking allow trade unions to engage their immediate communities and relevant institutions in society. Principled coalition-building initiatives develop solidaristic relationships between trade unions and social movements. Trade union networking likewise facilitates the sharing of resources and exchange of capacities.

A majority of trade union respondents’ **network with other progressive civil society groups such as human rights groups, LGBTQI+, youth, environmental, political and feminist organisations** at the national, regional and international levels. The NUBCW in the Philippines collaborates with a feminist labour organization, Makalaya (Women Workers for Freedom) on its campaigns to enforce the Anti-Violence Against Women and their Children Law (VAWC), Reproductive Health Law, the Magna Carta for Women, expanded maternity leave, and “*bawal bastos*”³⁰ policies in the communities. SENTRO also works with the Coalition Against Trafficking of Women-Asia Pacific (CATW-AP) in its campaigns on VAWC and in the design and implementation of gender-sensitivity training programmes. The Union Aid Abroad-APHEDA³¹, a labour NGO in Cambodia, supports its partner trade unions in

²⁹ Acting Secretary of the Foreign Affairs Department, General Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions (GEFONT) and Deputy Secretary-General, Central Union of Painters, Plumbers, & Electro & Construction Workers Union (CUPPEC).

³⁰ There is no equivalent English translation but these policies prohibit macho/misogynistic attitudes/behavior from men that can be construed as sexual harassment, such as green jokes, catcalls and groping in public places.

³¹ Union Aid Abroad-APHEDA is the global justice organisation of the Australian union movement. It works to support stronger union and social movements in thirteen locations in Southeast Asia, the Pacific, the Middle East, and Southern Africa through projects and campaigns. Financial support for these projects comes from individuals throughout Australia, the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU), Australian unions and workplaces, international grants as well as from the Australian government’s overseas aid agency, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).

improving gender equality in their organisations, but also their networking activities. APHEDA and its partner trade unions collaborate with the Ministry of Women's Affairs to implement their projects and advocate the recognition of trade unions' role and workers' representation in national projects on gender equality.

For ITF Asia Pacific, **its networking with feminist organisations gives strategic direction to the work and national campaigns on gender/women's issues**. Support from different stakeholders is crucial because it is difficult to develop support in isolation.

The Vietnam General Confederation of Labour (VGCL), the labour centre in Vietnam, has institutionalised collaboration with local civil society groups, feminist organisations, other rights groups and networks with international organisations such as the ILO. VGCL has a coordination mechanism and cooperation programmes with a number of state institutions and mass organisations. Among others, they include programmes and activities (a) with the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism to develop policies related to workers' families, organise a forum for dialogue with workers on issues of marriage and family; (b) with the Department of Gender Equality to develop policies on gender equality for female workers in laws and regulations; action plan; (c) with the youth union, to organise activities for young workers; (d) with the Women's Union, to organise activities for female workers at the place of residence; (e) with the Ministry of Health to provide periodic health check-ups for workers, and obstetric examinations for female workers or healthcare consulting. VGCL also coordinates with international organisations, such as ILO, FES, and international care organisations in Vietnam in the areas of collective labour agreements and prevention of sexual harassment at the workplace.

Gender audit

A few trade union leaders we interviewed stated that before planning for a gender-equality programme within the union, the affiliates had undergone a comprehensive gender audit. SENTRO in the Philippines had its very first gender audit in 2020 with the support of TUSOs and using the ITUC-AP participatory gender audit guide (ITUC, 2015). A significant finding of the gender audit was that even though the union had many women-related activities and affirmative actions for women, it was not enough. Nonetheless, the audit process revealed a substantial shift in the leadership mindset in relation to gender analysis and gender sensitivity. The audit however saw the need to strengthen implementation of the gender policies of the union, such as encouraging affiliates to have their own anti-sexual harassment policy within the union, strengthen the Safe Spaces Act, and formulate a comprehensive gender equality policy at the national level. The gender audit identified an absence of a specifically written gender equality policy at the labour center, but only a statement in its constitution and by-laws about gender equality. It is intended to institutionalise the comprehensive gender equality policy and the practice on gender representation and women leadership quotas. The gender audit likewise found that the organisation has only few targeted women organising activities, weak gender-segregated data, and limited participation by women in collective bargaining work.

Promoting gender equality at the workplace, in communities, and the international level

The following strategies are both internal and external and may take place at various levels – at the workplace, within the union, in the community, and at the national and international levels.

Workplace-level strategies (internal)

These strategies refer to **transformations of company rules and regulations on gender equality, including advancing equal pay for equal work and all gender equal labour standards (e.g., anti-harassment, anti-discrimination, laws for female workers such as maternity leaves, solo parent benefits), through collective bargaining and other forms of social dialogue.**

Some unions in the Philippines, **through bargaining and workplace social dialogue mechanisms such as labour-management councils or committees (LMCs), occupational safety and health or family welfare committees, have advanced reforms in company policies towards gender equality.** Foremost is institutionalisation at the workplace of an anti-sexual harassment policy within the workplace. Cases of such are subject to the unions' grievance machinery processes with the company. The local union at the Philipp Morris Tobacco Company/Fortune Tobacco company in the Philippines, which is an affiliate of PM, was able to negotiate enforcement and increase of 10 days solo parent leave on top of the seven-day solo parent leave stated in the Solo Parent Law of 2000. Local unions in the agricultural sector (CIO affiliates), construction (NUBCW affiliates) and manufacturing (PM affiliates) were able to **enforce policies against sexual harassment and violence and discrimination on company premises through company social dialogue mechanisms.** NUBCW is able to defend its women members against illegal dismissal and sexual harassment at the workplace.

Alice Chang of UNI Apro remarked that **change for gender equality can be achieved at the workplace** because its unions are organised in the formal sector so it can push for changes first with employers. She added that UNI Apro's affiliates can **push for change with employers' organisations and set standards through collective bargaining.**

National level strategies (external)

These strategies refer to **pushing for laws, norms, and actions on gender equality at all levels (local, regional) and in all branches (executive, legislative, judicial) of government.** These strategies entail **collaboration with national or local government agencies** in their respective countries. BWI affiliates in India and Nepal have been working to improve women's skills in building and construction industries by implementing a focused intervention on Certified Skills Training and Women Empowerment. In India, the intervention has a **detailed skills training framework that covers certified skills training** either through partnership with the Sector Skill Councils of the Ministry of Skills Development and Entrepreneurship, Paints and Coatings Skill Council (PCSC), and Construction Skill Development Council of India (CSDCI) in the government of India.

In Nepal, BWI cooperates with the Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training (CTEVT) for post-training employment linkages through formal collaboration with employers/contractors to employ trained female workers and formation of women-led cooperatives who can seek independent construction contracts. Apart from the skilling framework, the intervention places equal weight on capacity-building and leadership development of female workers. A number of issues have been taken up for **capacity-building so that female workers are aware of their rights, labour laws, applicable benefits and they are also able to raise their issues at worksites.** This has also led to more female workers taking up an active role in the trade unions and gradually being integrated into unions' structures at various levels. The broad aim of this intervention is to ensure socio-economic empowerment of female construction workers towards improved participation of women in the labour market and also strengthening gender equality.

Similarly, the BWI affiliate in the Philippines, NUBCW, collaborates with a public skills training agency, the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), to train female workers in construction skills. Graduates receive skills certifications necessary to find employment in the building and construction sector. At the same time, NUBCW organises graduate women workers into guilds or trades associations such as the Guilds of Women Welders to **provide a network of support for female workers**. The support involves post-training employment opportunities, labour rights seminars and further capacity-building training programmes.

Ana Lee Fos-Tuvera³² stated that through their three-year project (2019–2021) with DGB-BW on strengthening women and youth representation in union leadership, affiliates at the national level engaged their respective national unions, government agencies, and other stakeholders through increased representation of women and youth representatives (WYRs). The union affiliates have utilised leadership potential to improve conditions of women and young people within their unions and elsewhere through organising and engagement in collective bargaining/negotiations and social dialogue concerning labour standards at various levels or forums. For example, a WYRs local union in Indonesia **proposed the elimination of tax discrimination against women workers**. In Indonesia, unlike their male counterparts, women cannot claim tax exemption or reductions when filing income taxes. The union WYRs started a social dialogue with the relevant government agency to this end. In the Philippines, ITUC-AP affiliates, with inputs from their WYRs, started a social dialogue with the labour department by participating in online consultations and sending letters requesting formal commencement of the process of ratification of ILO Convention 190 on violence and harassment in the world of work. Another affiliate in Cambodia engaged in social dialogue on sexual harassment cases involving eight women and obtained compensation for one victim.

The Nepal Health Volunteer Association (NEVA), a PSI-AP national union affiliate, has successfully bargained with its national centres and obtained representation at the provincial level through the elected President of NEVA, who is automatically a member of the General Federation of Nepalese Trade Union (GEFONT), a trade union confederation in Nepal. At the time of writing, NEVA was also **negotiating with the local governments to have representation of community health workers at all decision-making levels in the local health sector**. Unfortunately, worker representation in the health sector at the national level is male-dominated, even though the number of female workers is higher.

The pandemic has hit community health workers the hardest. Aside from having to do their household chores before going to their communities to serve, they are also exposed to the many health dangers of the pandemic. However, the pandemic has also created a positive image of community health workers as important front line workers during this crisis. PSI AP affiliates in India, Nepal, and the Philippines are lobbying with their national and local governments for better treatment and recognition of community health workers during the pandemic. In Nepal, community health workers successfully achieved 33 per cent female representation in a national government decision-making structure which formulates standards and national policies for the health sector.

Community and societal-level strategies (external)

These strategies involve undertaking gender-equality **projects towards building economic and political power of women in partnership with community-based organisations, women’s organisations, NGOs, and/or academia**. Examples of projects include gender representation at the village level and community-based livelihood projects for women in the informal economy.

³² Director for Gender Equality, International Trade Union Confederation-Asia Pacific (ITUC-AP).

Suresh Geetha of ITF-AP underscores that there is **strength in alliance-building and unions cannot build support in isolation from their communities**. Through their “We Stand Together” initiative, ITF affiliates have been conducting regular meetings and women advocacy workshops amongst female cadres. The initiative aims to build confidence and provide support amongst the women cadres in addressing any problem faced by even a single woman, be it emotional or gender-biased behaviour by colleagues. Such meetings have also helped change the outlook of society towards women in general, and consequently strengthens the emotional capacities of women. Experiences in community networking and alliances like the Maharashtra State Bus Workers' Union (MSTKS), a transport trade union in India, had been instrumental in bringing visibility to the work women do and the demands that they have raised at different times.

In one local union of an ITUC-AP affiliate in the Philippines, two women/youth representatives who were involved in the DGB-BW and ITUC-AP project proposed and successfully negotiated with their school the inclusion of trade union rights in the senior high school curriculum (starting in December 2019) and in career guidance orientation for senior high school and fourth-year college students (starting in March–April 2020).

International level strategies (external)

All the global trade union leaders we interviewed declared that their unions are active in **building regional and international affiliations and alliances with other trade unions and civil society organisations towards increasing and strengthening women’s representation and tackling gender-equality issues at the level of multilateral and/or transnational institutions (e.g., UN, ILO, WTO) and at regional organisations (e.g., ASEAN)**. For female trade union leaders, their participation in international trade union activities and training programmes abroad provides the necessary exposure and capacity-building to develop. For example, female trade union leaders from two labour confederations in the Philippines have occupied significant leadership positions at the international union level (i.e., global women’s committees, global boards) thanks to opportunities provided by their unions in the way of policies on gender parity, quotas for women in leadership positions, and equal representation in all union structures and activities.

Other strategies involving cooperation with international organisations

Union Aid Abroad-APHEDA³³ works to build solidarity across borders. In Cambodia, it is working closely with three national unions in promoting and strengthening women’s participation and representation in trade unions. Sometime between 2013 and 2014, some union members of CFSWS, who were beer promotion workers, reported cases of abuses in this sector. APHEDA worked on a research project commissioned by the ILO that recorded cases of abuses. Based on the findings produced by the research, APHEDA conducted an information campaign in 2015 highlighting the abuses experienced by female beer promoters. After a year, the government issued a Ministry Order (*Prakas*), Proclamation Order 194, which directed restaurant owners/employers to provide protection and be responsible for abuses at the workplace in the beer promotion and entertainment sector. Currently, APHEDA and CFSWS, together with two other federations in Cambodia (i.e., BWTUC and the Independent Democratic Association of Informal Economy Association, IDEA) continue to collaborate with the national Ministry of Women Affairs in the enforcement of these policies.

³³ Union Aid Abroad-APHEDA is the global justice organisation of the Australian union movement. It works to support stronger union and social movements in thirteen locations in Southeast Asia, the Pacific, the Middle East, and Southern Africa through projects and campaigns. Financial support for these projects comes from individuals throughout Australia, the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU), Australian unions and workplaces, international grants as well as from the Australian government’s overseas aid agency, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).

The regional trade union structure of the ITUC-AP likewise focuses on strengthening its cooperation projects with many international labour organisations (e.g., ILO Bureau of Workers' Activities) and labour solidarity foundations such as the Danish Trade Union Development Agency (DTDA), FES and others. The projects involve promoting the ratification of Convention 190 with the ILO and most recently project collaboration on gender equality with the DGB-BW (Box 5). The gender equality initiatives of ITUC-AP fall within ITUC's framework for women (Platform of Action for Gender Equality) and youth (Youth Charter) and the ITUC AP women and youth agenda which outline the terms for building women and youth leadership.





6

TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE IN PRACTICE: STRATEGIES FOR CHANGE

For many trade unions, whether at the global, regional, national, or enterprise level, the **transformational process towards gender equality often starts with the adoption of substantial changes in union policies and organisational structures that increase and sustain women’s representation in union leadership and union structures**. These changes not only aim at democratising organisational structures or making them more inclusive, but more importantly **altering power relations between men and women** by conferring to the latter real decision-making power. It is to be noted nonetheless that these changes are often the result of women’s sustained fight and lobbying over long periods in the unions.

Quotas work

One strategy that is considered effective and successful is the **adoption of a union policy that provides or mandates a minimum quota or threshold for women’s share in union leadership positions and representation in union structures**. In addition, a quota policy may also be adopted in terms of women’s representation or participation in **union congresses (i.e., women’s share in the union delegation), conferences, training activities, and other events**. For national trade unions (i.e., national confederations and federations) and enterprise unions, this is usually done **by including this policy in the union’s constitution and by-laws or amending these accordingly**. For global union organisations like the ITUC and the GUFs, such policy is taken up and adopted at regional and global congresses and conferences.

Our interviews with women leaders revealed that **getting a quota policy for women in union leadership involves a long and often arduous process. Getting the policy implemented is another matter** and, in most cases, entails a longer time, and is equally, if not more, taxing. For example, it took about four years for ITUC-AP to see some results from the time a quota policy was adopted by ITUC. For UNI Equal Opportunities’ *40for40* campaign, it took eight years for women to gain 43 per cent of the seats on UNI’s World Executive Board (→ [Case Study 4](#)).

How do unions come to have a quota policy? In the case of UNI and ITUC-AP, this involved a series of steps and a mix of strategies:

- **Preparing a proposal for a quota policy.** This is often done by the Women’s Committee, Women’s Department or any other female structures in the union.
- **Presenting and getting the approval of the Union Executive Board/Union Executive Council and Governing Board** for the quota proposal. To get to this, there is a need for a **group of women that continuously follows up or “pesters” the top union leaders to get their support**. In many unions, members of the Women’s Committee are also represented on the Union Executive Board and Governing Board.
- **Preparing a motion for the Union Congress.** This follows obtaining the approval of the Union Executive Board or Union Executive Council and is done by the Women’s Committee, Women’s Department or any other female structures in the union, together with the Union Executive Board.
- **Getting a Constitutional mandate or adopting the motion in the Union Congress.** This involves launching the Union Congress and having it approved. A Constitutional mandate or Congress resolution is needed to **secure unions’ total buy-in** of the quota policy.
- **Making follow throughs.** For the implementation of the quota policy, the support of the Union Executive Board and Union Board is crucial. **Follow-throughs as well as periodic review of progress made are performed by the Women’s Committee/Department**. In the case of UNI’s *40for40* campaign, other measures were used as well to get the 40 per cent quota policy implemented (→ [Case Study 4](#)).

CASE STUDY 4. UNI's 40for40 campaign: What made it work?

In 2010, the UNI Equal Opportunities Department launched the *40for40* campaign on gender equality, which aimed at increasing women's representation in trade unions to 40 per cent at all levels and in every committee meeting and conference at all levels (global, regional, national).

The campaign was initiated by a two-women team from the Equal Opportunities department—Veronica Fernandez Mendez, Head of UNI Equal Opportunities, and Martha Ochoa, UNI Global Coordinator of Equal Opportunities. A succession of activities and actions were undertaken to get the campaign rolling. After the motion for 40 per cent women's representation was unanimously adopted in UNI Nagasaki World Congress in 2010, the campaign was formally launched in May 2011. The launching involved several activities—issuance of the *40for40* declaration, social media campaign, mapping of women's leadership status among affiliates across the regions, and release of a *Booklet on Equality*. In October of the same year, the Equal Opportunities team launched another booklet, *Practical Guide to Establish Equality Policies in Unions*. In December 2012, another resource material was released, the booklet *Equality in Union Culture: Good Practices*. By September 2015, 228 unions in 69 countries had signed the campaign, a significant increase from the 189 unions in November 2011.

To address confusion stemming from multiple interpretations of the 40 per cent rule, the UNI World Women's Committee Meeting came up and adopted a procedure for the implementation of the 40 per cent rule in all delegations. The procedure was likewise adopted by the UNI World Executive Board in November 2016. It was first implemented in the UNI Africa Regional Conference in March 2017. In the 5th UNI World Congress in Liverpool in March 2018, the 40 per cent rule on women's representation in all delegations was likewise implemented.

To monitor compliance of affiliates with the 40 per cent rule, a 'gender police' was designated. This monitoring action, which started in 2019, involved distributing letters to affiliates who did not comply with the 40 per cent rule on their delegations, and asking them to explain the reasons for non-compliance. In effect, this monitoring system serves as a 'soft rule' to enhance compliance.

Has the campaign been successful? In 2009, women comprised 17.3 per cent of UNI's World Executive Board. By 2018, eight years since the campaign started, women's share had increased markedly to 43 per cent. At present, the General Secretary and Deputy General Secretary of UNI are both women.

SOURCE: UNI Equal Opportunities power point presentation on *40for40* campaign; interview via Zoom with Veronica Fernandez Mendez and Martha Ochoa, 14 September 2021.

There are **a number of factors that facilitates the adoption and implementation of a quota policy** for women's share in union leadership. Firstly, **women leaders**, most of whom are feminists or gender-equality champions, or who have links with feminist and women's organisations, are the prime movers for the initiation, adoption and implementation of a quota policy. Secondly, **support from the top union leaders** (i.e., General Secretary), including male leaders who are gender-equality champions, is important to getting a quota policy off the ground. Thirdly, **if women comprise a significant share of union membership (e.g., 30%), it is more likely** that a quota policy will be initiated. Fourthly, **"celebrating gains" by posting success stories or good practices** on gender equality achieved by unions on social media and other communication channels not only spotlights that the quota policy works, but in some ways "pressure" other unions to follow suit. Fifthly, **necessary structures (e.g., Women's Committee)** populated by committed women and male members and leaders **and a dedicated regular "women's budget"** are necessary for smooth implementation of the quota policy. Finally, **bringing women and men together** to drive the quota policy is another effective way to generate a broader buy-in.

The **global unions** we interviewed have an existing **quota policy on women's representation in union leadership which ranges from 30 per cent to as much as 50 per cent**. At the time of writing, amendments to the PSI Constitution are ongoing, and include setting a minimum quota of 50 per cent female representation among the leadership. Nonetheless, women comprise half of the PSI's governance structures. The Regional Constitution and Standing Orders of ITUC Asia Pacific, as amended in the 4th ITUC-AP Regional Conference on 7–9 October 2019 in Tokyo, mentions the active promotion of gender parity, with a progressive target starting at a minimum 40 per cent for women's membership on the Regional General Council. This minimum threshold applies to titular and first and second substitute membership on the Regional General Council. The BWI sets a minimum quota of 30 per cent for women's representation across its leadership structures.

Despite the difficulties of getting a quota policy into the union, many of the national unions we interviewed have such a policy as well. In the case of DGB, **a strict quota policy on the representation of women in the leadership at the district and regional levels** within the confederation was adopted. **A quota policy that is not strict simply does not work**, according to Christina Stockfisch of DGB. The quota at DGB **depends on women's share in union membership**. At the time of writing, women made up a third of the leaders in the nine DGB districts. Now that women's share in membership has gone up to 34 per cent, each of the districts will have four women leaders. It is also a policy of the DGB that **women have to be represented in the same way as men at all levels and in all political areas covered by the confederation, and the perspective of women has to be integrated into all political areas**.

In Asia, among the **national trade unions we interviewed, the minimum quota for women's representation in leadership varies – from 20 per cent** (NACUSIP Executive Board at the federation and local union level), 40 per cent of union leadership (ALU), **to as high as 50 per cent of the executive directors**, where applicable (SENTRO), and the leadership of CATU. The quota **policy may or may not be cascaded down to the enterprise unions affiliated** with the national federations. In many unions, nonetheless, enterprise unions are encouraged to adopt the same policy. For example, CATU's quota policy is cascaded down to the enterprise unions. It is to be noted that CATU's membership is concentrated in the garment sector, where women workers account for about 90 per cent of the workforce. Female union members in SENTRO, meanwhile, comprise nearly half (49.4%) of all members.

For many of the Philippine trade unions we interviewed, the quota is 30 per cent. This is the case for PM, PMA, TF2-FFW, and NUBCW. For PMA, the quota can reach as much as 40 per cent, especially in enterprise unions where the number of women members is high. A 30 per cent quota for women's representation in the Executive Committee can also be observed in VGCL. Meanwhile, a 33 per cent quota policy has been adopted by all the union affiliates of GEFONT in Nepal, although women may comprise the entire leadership in workplaces and sectors where women dominate.

In some national unions where a formal quota policy is absent, there is a long-term practice to put more women in the leadership. In the federation PIGLAS in the Philippines, it has been a practice for women to occupy half of the leadership positions. It is to be noted women make up the majority of the federation's membership. The president of PIGLAS is currently a woman. Similarly, IDEA, the association of workers in the informal sector in Cambodia, has no formal policy on the share of women in leadership. However, efforts have been made to have two women among five of the association's leaders.

Several female leaders we interviewed pointed out that **many women members who are married decline to be elected to a leadership position because of family obligations, so single or unmarried women are often elected as leaders.** In fact, a number of the female leaders we interviewed who were occupying top leadership positions had remained single or without a partner. The section on education and training and the section on building an inclusive organisational culture and environment relate some ways trade unions have dealt with women's multiple burdens.

Has the quota system worked in terms of increasing women's representation in the leadership of national unions? The answer is yes in the case of the following national and global unions:

- In GEFONT, women comprised 40 per cent of the National Executive Committee.
- In NUBCW, which organises workers in the construction sector where men dominate, women make up 60 per cent (three out of five) of the top leadership.
- In SENTRO, women make up one-third of the combined number of Executive Committee members of all its federation and national union affiliates.
- In DGB, half (two out of four) of the top leadership positions, including the Vice-President position, are occupied by women.
- In CATU, there are more female than male leaders. The president and deputy president are women, while the director-general is a man.
- In VGCL, 90 per cent of trade unions from the national centre, national industrial unions, and provincial unions have female leaders.
- ITUC-AP reached gender parity for the first time in the 2019–2023 Regional General Council (40% in Titular, 43% in 1st Substitute, 67% in 2nd Substitute), an increase of 3–4 percentage points from the 2015 Conference. Today, women make up between 30% and 40% of the leadership of affiliates of UNI Apro.
- In UNI, the *40for40* campaign resulted in an increase in women's share on the World Executive Board, from 17.3 per cent in 2009 to 43 per cent in 2018. There were also marked improvements in terms of women's share in regional decision-making bodies in Africa and the Americas between 2013 and 2014. Meanwhile, the proportions for Asia Pacific and Europe remained stable.

TABLE 1.
Women's share in decision-making bodies

Region	Women's share in decision-making bodies	
	2013	2015
Africa	37.3%	39.7%
Americas	27.0%	35.7%
Asia Pacific	19.8%	19.8%
Europe	33.6%	33.6%

SOURCE: UNI Global Union Equal Opportunities
40for40 Campaign power point presentation.

For-women-only leadership positions

For some unions, the **quota policy is complemented by the creation or allocation of leadership positions exclusively for women**. This is especially the case when the quota policy is neither strictly enforced nor met. This measure addresses the common perception shared by both women and men that women are not cut out for a leadership position. This measure also ascertains whether women are represented in the leadership in workplaces where men significantly outnumber women. **Having key leadership positions dedicated to women not only motivates women to aspire to leadership positions, but directs the union to provide the necessary conditions and interventions to capacitate women to assume leadership roles.**

In DGB, the vice-president position at the national/central, district and regional level is reserved exclusively for women. Similarly, the TF2-FFW created a position for women, Vice-President for Women, which is in charge of internal and external activities or programmes for women. This is the case as well in the Korean Federation of Construction Industry Trade Unions (KFCITU), which requires each of its unions to include the position of Women Vice-President among the leadership positions. In CFSWF, the presidency of the Gender Committee is reserved for women. In SENTRO, the position of Director for Women is for women only, which also comes with a reserved seat on the Executive Committee.

Women and gender equality structures are key

As mentioned, **the presence of women and gender structures in the union organisation not only embeds gender equality organisationally, but keeps the union focused and effective in achieving its long-term goal of transforming the union into a gender-just organisation**. Structures are important in identifying the persons responsible for certain functions and tasks. **Having structures led by women facilitates the development and implementation of programmes and activities, and tracks progress made on set goals using a set of indicators**. According to a female leader at DGB, it is important that trade unions support gender equality structures within the union to mainstream gender equality at all levels of the union organisation and address unequal power relations between men and women. **Through these structures, unions make and advocate policies that benefit women in trade unions, in the economy, and in decision-making bodies.**

For many unions, **setting up structures such as a Women's Committee, Gender Equality Committee³⁴, Women's Desk, Committee for Women's Concerns, and other similar structures is often the first step in making the union organisation more inclusive and gender fair**. Where they exist, **these structures are often the mechanisms that implement and track progress on quota policies, and women's activities**. In many national unions, members of the Women's Committee consist of the chairpersons of the Women's Committees of member/local unions and, if they exist, of enterprise unions. In the case of KFCITU, the gender equality officers of its affiliated unions form the Women's Committee. For global unions, the chairpersons of their affiliates' women's committees comprise the former's Women's Committee or Women's Council.

A representative, often the chair or president, of the women's committee at the federation or confederation level sits on the highest decision-making body of the union like the National/General Council or Governing Board. Therefore, **through the women's committee, women get to participate in the decision-making processes of the union.**

³⁴ The Gender Equality Committee is not only focused on women's issues but also the issues of other gender groups, such as the LGBTQI+.

In some national federations and global unions, a separate women's department may also exist. This structure is more of a staff function, which is to say, the union staff hired for this department assists and enables the work of the women's committee/council.

Women's committees or similar structures are present in the ITUC and the GUFs, and various notable programmes and projects for gender equality have been implemented over the years through these structures. However, not all national trade unions, and this is more so the case with enterprise unions, have these structures and, in some cases, these structures exist but remain inactive. Global trade unions and TUSOs have often played a key role in the establishment or reactivation of women and gender-equality structures among their affiliates. Programmes and projects on women empowerment and gender equality, which are supported by these organisations, almost always require women and gender structures, whether formal or ad hoc.

Nearly all of the national trade unions we covered in our study have formal women structures. A women's/gender committee or council exists in ALU-TUCP, Cambodian Food and Service Workers Federation (CFSWF), CIO-ALU, GEFONT, KFCITU, NUBCW, PMA, and SENTRO.

Gender equality requires resources but also mobilises internal and external resources

Programmes, projects and activities that are aimed at increasing opportunities for women's participation in union work and building women's capacity and confidence to assume a leadership role requires dedicated and sustained funding. **Resources are key in facilitating change** and therefore proponents of gender equality need to secure these. One key indicator that **unions are serious about gender equality is when a budget is regularly allocated for programmes and activities for this purpose**. Interestingly, three federations from Cambodia have recently **adopted a policy allocating a 'women's budget' in their annual budget**, which ranges from 20 per cent (BWTUC), 25-30 per cent (IDEA) to 30 per cent (CFSWF) of their annual budget. This budget is used for various women's activities, including training and seminars, gender campaigns, and research. At the time of writing, the three unions were participating in a two-year project, *Women Workers' Rights Through Stronger Unions*, sponsored by the Australian TUSO Union Aid Abroad-APHEDA, which aims to advance and strengthen women's representation and participation in trade unions. The project focus includes targeted institutional changes such as the adoption of a quota for women in union leadership and the allocation of an annual budget for women's programmes and activities.

ALU sets aside 5 per cent of its annual budget for women's programmes and activities. KFCITU, the regional offices of its affiliates, and some branches have allocated budgets for gender activities and designated gender-equality officers.

In Vietnam, the Trade Union Law (section on union finance, gender organisation activities and gender equality) has specific provisions on trade union finance for activities related to women issues and gender equality. This assures a steady source of funding for such activities undertaken by grassroots and upper-level trade unions. According to Bui Phuong Chi, researcher at the VGCL Institute of Workers and Trade Unions, funding for women's activities has been drawn from this source.

Funds for women and gender-equality programmes and activities are also sourced externally. In fact, for many unions, the bulk of funding for these activities comes from global unions (ITUC and GUFs), TUSOs, and the international programmes of national confederations in developed countries. This is the case for the four national trade unions in Cambodia (BWTUC, CATU, CFSWF, IDEA), most of the unions in the Philippines (ALU, CIO, NACUSIP, PMA, SENTRO), GEFONT, and KFCITU. But in many cases, **access to external funding is conditional on having well-thought-through women's programmes in which women are meaningfully included in the design and implementation and are provided with the resources and opportunities to do so.**

Like national unions, global union federations source funding for their women's programmes and activities from TUSOs and national confederations in developed countries. BWI-South Asia gets funding from different TUSOs (FES, Solidar), DGB Bildungswerk (DGB-BW), Swedish Trade Unions-Union2Union, and LO-Norway. ITF South Asia also gets some funding from its TUSO partners. Some of their affiliates allocate a part of their internally generated funds for women activities. PSI's gender-equality programmes at the global and regional levels are mainly funded by European TUSOs, such as FNV, SASK, Union2Union, which are usually the ones most interested in gender equality.

UNI's Equal Opportunities is among the departments at UNI that gets the smallest budget. Therefore, the *40for40* campaign and the women mentoring programme draws funding support from the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), DGB, and some of UNI's regional organisations. In addition, UNI affiliates that do not have a lot of money to carry out activities have come up with **creative ways to raise funds**. For example, women prepare cakes or other food to sell. In the Philippines, female leaders of some affiliates sell handicrafts to raise money to fund their activities.

UNI-Apro, meanwhile, has no specific allocation for gender-equality programmes and activities. Nonetheless, resources for women's activities can be sourced internally as well as through external project funding. UNI Apro generates its own funds from affiliates' subscriptions, which can be allocated for the implementation of projects of affiliates and grassroots unions.

While gender equality may be driven by donors and GUFs, it is **important that gender equality is embedded over time in union structures, agenda, and culture so it does not become an "external agenda"** disconnected from the local values of societies in which unions operate, especially in Asia.

Unions need to build an inclusive organisational culture and environment

In chapter 4, we identified several barriers and challenges to gender equality, namely women's care work and multiple burdens, gender bias due to a culture of machismo/patriarchy, lack of or low prioritisation of women's issues in union work and activities, and resistance to affirmative actions and gender equality policy. However, as we have pointed out earlier, **trade unions need more women in the union to build union power. But to attract more women to join and stay in the union, there is a need for a gender-fair organisational culture and a safe environment to nurture their participation in the union and support their development for leadership roles.** Therefore, it is crucial that barriers to women's participation in the union be addressed by changing attitudes and norms among union members and in union structures. This is a step towards building an inclusive organisational culture and environment for women.

Trade unions have come up with measures and innovative ways, both formal and informal, in building a women-friendly organisational culture and environment. For example, in DGB, the gender perspective is mainstreamed in the policymaking of each of the departments of the confederation. In PM, **despite the absence of a Women's Committee, women issues are integrated in all aspects of union work and the leadership has a deep appreciation for women's concerns being union concerns.**

Discrimination and harassment cannot be ruled out even in trade unions. In this light, **some trade unions have adopted formal policies against gender-based harassment and violence within the union.** For example, SENTRO has a formal policy on sexual harassment, which was adopted in 2015. This policy instructs all its affiliates to create a committee on decorum at the workplace, in the community, and other places of work. This committee is tasked with handling and reviewing sexual harassment complaints and deciding on remedies (e.g., counselling, reprimand, exclusion from the Congress, exclusion of the respondent from future activities without prejudice). **In some unions, rules that prohibit discrimination and harassment are informal and are always iterated verbally during union meetings and events.** One woman leader from the Philippines related the following:

Between 2001 and 2010, I was the only woman attending meetings of union leaders. Before the meeting started, I would always remind the men to wear their shirts properly, avoid smoking in the meeting room, refrain from telling sexist jokes, and not use loud voices, but good reasoning during discussions. On many occasions, men started opening bottles of liquor even before the meeting ended.

Many female leaders who perform union work side-by-side with men on a daily basis also verbally **call out unwelcome behaviour of men towards women.** One female leader of a construction union in the Philippines asserted that this practice sensitises men, and that over time men have stopped making sexist remarks, are more conscious of their behaviour towards women, and have become more gender-sensitive.

Support for women to assume and sustain their leadership roles starts in the family. Smritee Lama of GEFONT recounted her experience:

As a full-time trade union leader, I can just look after the trade union as my day-to-day job and then my family work later in the day. Other female leaders have to face three types of work. Firstly, they have to work on the day-to-day job. Secondly, they have to look after the family. Thirdly, they have to look after the trade union as leaders. Work-life balance is very important for women. It is difficult to convince the family of what you are doing. As a women leader, I first had to convince my husband, who is the breadwinner, of the importance of my work and that the union is a safe place for women like me. I asked my husband to drop me off to our meetings so he could get to know my colleagues and comrades, talk with them, and get to know what the trade union is doing. After several months, my husband was convinced that I enjoy working for the rights of workers. I now tell other women leaders to bring their husbands to their workplace or during meetings or activities of the union so they too can find out about what trade union work is and what they are doing

Global union federations have similar policies. ITF has a **formal policy on mutual respect**, which defines and prohibits various types of behaviour, in particular, harassment, bullying and victimisation,

on account of age, disability, gender, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, nationality, race, religion or beliefs, sexual orientation, parental and caring responsibilities. BWI likewise has a **formal policy against discrimination and harassment** based on nationality, race or skin colour, sex, age, pregnancy, marital or relationship status, sexual orientation, gender identity, religious belief, or political affiliation. In 2020, BWI established **World and Regional Anti-Harassment and Discrimination Investigation Committees**, which are tasked with reporting to the World Board or the respective Regional Committee. Each Investigation Committee includes a member of the International or Regional Women's Committee, selected from among their own ranks, a member of the BWI World Board and a member of BWI staff as well as the relevant contact persons, ensuring that both genders are represented on the committee (BWI, 2020).

Many of the female union leaders we interviewed underscored that **women's multiple burdens are real and this is the single most important factor influencing their participation and role in trade unions**. Women's multiple burdens **remain the main reason why quotas for women in leadership are difficult** to meet. As Judy Ann Chan-Miranda of PM explains:

There are still more men than women in union leadership bodies because they have time to assume leadership roles. Women perform domestic work and other forms of care work and this frees men to attend meetings, rallies, seminars, and other activities even on weekends or until late in the evening. During the pandemic, (online) webinars and activities allowed women to participate but in many cases, this is done simultaneously while performing care work (e.g., doing the laundry, cooking, carrying a child).

Support mechanisms for women's social reproduction work are therefore needed as part of a transformation project towards gender equality. These mechanisms can be in the form of *inter alia* childcare and elderly facilities, support for domestic work, and women-friendly scheduling of activities.

One national union (PM) in the Philippines experimented with **providing an allowance for female union members who attended a one-day meeting**. This allowance can be used for buying cooked food for the family or for compensating a relative who looks after young children while the woman is away attending a union activity. For trade unions that do not have much resources, this measure is difficult to sustain.

One strategy is to **integrate into the union programme measures that address women's multiple burdens**. These may include **establishing a whole day child-minding centre** (for toddlers and children up to 10 years old) in communities that have this need. Trade unions can also push for **public laundry stations in the union or in the community** where most workers of a company live. Trade unions may negotiate with employers, local governments, and national government over these measures.

Integrating into a union's organising measures that take into account women's (unpaid) care work has proven to be an effective strategy in organising female workers. As one Nepalese saying goes, **"If you want to get the mother cow, look after the calf."** Thus, GEFONT's strategy in Kathmandu of organising garbage collection and cleaning workers, who are members of a lower caste, included **running an informal school or childcare centre** for the children of these female workers. This was started 25 years ago and is again being replicated in the construction sector.

In Vietnam, the VGCL sets up child-care centres and **negotiates with employers over the establishment of on-site/factory-based-child-care-centres or the provision of monthly childcare allowances** for workers in companies situated in industrial zones. For example, the Taekwang Vina Company, based in Dong Nai province, which makes shoes for export and assembles products for brands like Nike, built a childcare centre which can accommodate up to 500 children from the age of three to six years (VNA, 2020).

Mobilising male leadership support is key to transformation processes

Gender equality is not only a women's issue. It is also a workers' issue as both women and men are among the membership of trade unions and the workforce. As argued in this handbook, **developing an inclusive organisational culture and women-friendly environment in particular, and transforming trade unions into gender-just workers' organisations in general, requires the support and commitment of union leaders** who are often men. Top leaders promote gender equality by making sure that they themselves, other officers, and members comply with decisions made at congresses, conferences, and other key union events. This suggests that **men play a key role as agents of change**, which is a strategy to promote gender equality.

However, for many trade unions, having feminist-oriented or gender-equality champions among male leaders and members of the union is seldom the case. **Developing gender-equality champions among men can in fact be a long and challenging process.**

Nonetheless, there are a number of **factors that may facilitate the development or transformation of male leaders into gender-equality champions.** One is men's **early exposure to women's issues.** Two male leaders we interviewed started as organisers in sectors where female workers predominate – garments and textile and hotels and restaurants. Their involvement in trade union work in these sectors and their day-to-day interactions with women exposed and sensitised them to women's issues and problems, eventually changing their stereotypical male behaviour.

Other factors and measures that are key in developing male gender equality champions were identified in a study by Holmberg (2018: 8–17):

- ***Women's empowerment is key.*** Most men who are engaged in gender equality actions and processes have come to do so as a result of gender work initiated and led by women. **Progress made towards gender equality in most trade unions was the result of women's struggles to advance their rights and women's leadership.** Women had to organise themselves for their rights. Thus, women's empowerment and ability to claim their rights was what forced men to accept – or in the best-case scenario – support gender equality work.
- ***Making gender equality a labour rights issue.*** Both women and men might be reached **more effectively if gender is addressed as a mainstreamed issue or a specific component in union/labour rights training programmes, rather than in specific gender training formats.** Referring to and **using experiences from class-biased power relations and intersections with other forms of discrimination in society has been an effective method.** Discussing the fact that some workers who happen to be women have worse working conditions and are more exposed to abuse at the workplace keeps the focus on the union's core issues. There are also issues that engage both women and men, such as sexual harassment at the workplace, gender-based violence and maternity/parental leave and other rights of mothers and fathers at the workplace. **Men working**

with gender equality also showed that the commitment to gender equality was based on anger about injustices and a strong sense of solidarity. They did not view engagement with women's labour rights and gender equality within the trade union movement as being very far removed from the overall reasons why they had joined the union. This supports the assertion of other respondents that **gender equality should remain at the core of the labour rights discourse**. Thus, making gender equality always a labour rights issue – and not a side issue that mainly concerns women – is thus important.

- ***Reaching out to men through gender training programmes and women projects.*** Men who were working on gender issues had participated in gender training programmes and/or in specific projects targeting women's labour rights. Having longer gender training programmes is also a strategy with which to deepen efforts to promote better working conditions for women in particular, but also for men. **Men have been reached mainly through general and inclusive gender training sessions and gender discussions** a) as participants in specific gender projects that welcome both women and men, b) in basic/introduction courses on labour rights and other union training courses that are mainstreamed with a gender perspective, and in which both men and women take part, c) as participants at congresses and conferences where gender equality is discussed, and d) as part of their formal responsibilities as union leaders.
- ***Mixed workshops as a good practice.*** Mixed workshops, that is having both men and women in attendance, offers an **opportunity for men to listen to women's stories and to gather more knowledge about different forms of discrimination against women at the workplace**. The debate between female and male unionists is important in challenging norms and learning from experiences of gender discrimination. Direct contact and the issue of identification seem to be important for engagement.
- ***The effectiveness of active methods in gender training and workshops.*** Union educators stressed the **importance of using active methods, inviting participants to make personal reflections on gender discrimination and stereotypical behaviour**. Through role-play and in-depth discussions, often in gender-divided groups, women and men may be invited to reflect on their attitudes and behaviour. Men need to experience what it is like to be discriminated as a woman on the job, and that the use of role-play in men-only groups is one way of producing and embodying those feelings of gender discrimination.
- ***The importance of external cooperation.*** External cooperation has pushed leaders and unions to embrace gender policies and to work more actively with gender issues. Moreover, the presence of women in leading positions at the international level has also served as an inspiration to both women and men in unions that have had few women as union leaders. **International cooperation has created gender initiatives and spaces, including gender-coordinating functions. It has inspired and fostered new ways of developing unions, broadened the member base and led to a recognition that so-called 'women's issues' have become general labour issues**. International cooperation has also contributed to addressing gender in a more comprehensive way.

In the transformation of men into champions of gender equality, or at the very least as supporters of gender equality, what is **crucial is the presence of a strong organisation among female workers**. In the absence of this, "the focus on men as champions for gender equality will not be successful" (Holmberg, 2018: 24).





TOOLS TO SUSTAIN CHANGE FOR GENDER EQUALITY

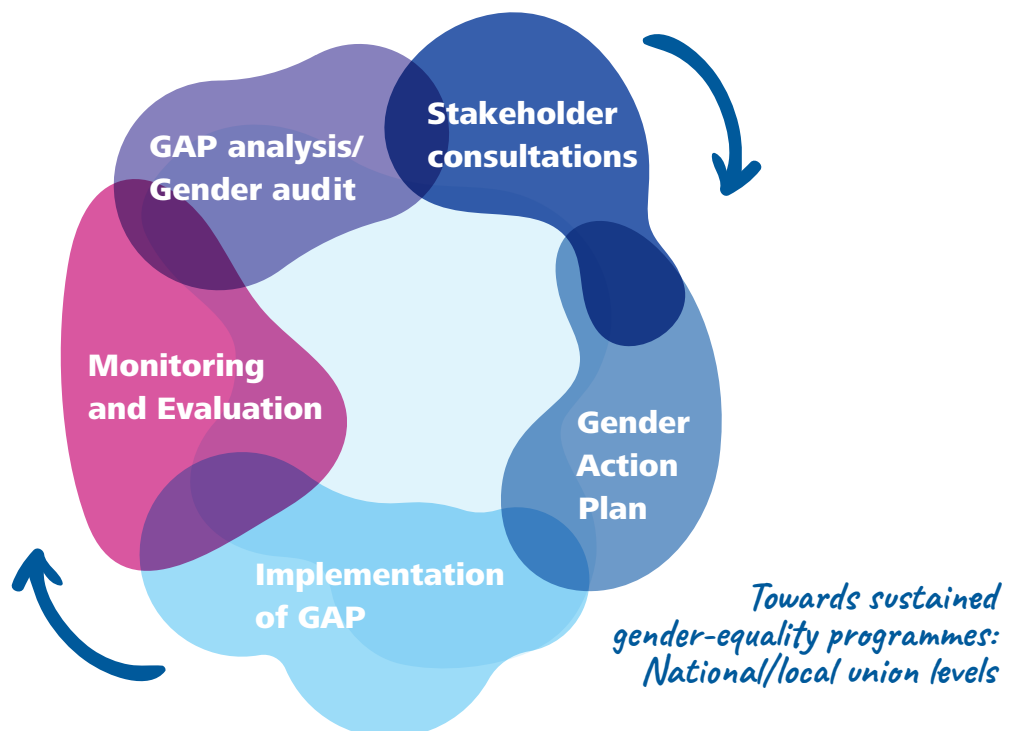
More often than not, **gender-equality programmes of trade unions are considered special activities or projects that are external to union issues and actions.** However, throughout this study, we have seen that this is a **false perception.** **Women’s issues are workers issues and promoting gender equality can be a decisive element in building powerful and innovative unions.**

In this chapter, we propose a **sustainability cycle which seeks to mainstream and maintain gender equality change in trade unions, in terms of policies, programmes and structures,** until such time that gender equality becomes one with, and integrated into, the union. **Sustaining change for gender equality needs institutionalised processes to maintain policies, programmes and structures for gender equality within the union.** As discussed in this handbook, gender equality policies may take the form of gender quotas in leadership and representation, gender programmes may take the form of gender sensitivity training courses, and structures for gender equality mean the establishment of women committees and women’s caucuses for collective negotiation, social dialogue and other core union activities.

Programmes and actions relating to gender equality may be influenced by external and internal factors, while trade unions may undergo a transformation process to (1) jump-start a sustainable gender-equality programme and/or (2) sustain/improve an existing gender equality or gender mainstreaming programme in trade unions. We illustrate in → **Figure 5** the **sustainability cycle, which involves various stages in the process of coming up with and sustaining a gender-equality programme in national and enterprise/local unions.**

The gender sustainability cycle illustrates how gender equality change be regularised within union programmes and actions. **The cycle proposes integration of gender-equality programmes through regular gender audit/analysis, consultations, planning, implementation and monitoring within trade union activities until it becomes endemic and normalised as part of the trade union.**

FIGURE 5.
The sustainability cycle: Towards a sustained gender-equality program



Gender audit/Gender gap analysis

A gender audit or gender gap analysis is a commonly used tool to assess how much the union has achieved in gender mainstreaming with the objective of a more gender-just union. It examines the effectiveness of internal organisational systems and processes on gender mainstreaming, identifies the gaps and challenges to achieving gender equality, and recommends strategies how to address these gaps.

The gender audit process requires organisational commitment or a ‘buy-in’ by union leadership and cooperation between the staff and members of a union. A well-prepared plan on how to conduct the gender audit/gap analysis needs to be designed and presented to the union leadership to secure the needed resources.

This handbook suggests the following materials/tools, all available online, as a guide in designing a gender audit process/gender gap analysis:

- a. [↪ ITUC-AP Achieving Gender Equality: A Trade Union Manual \(2008\)](#). It is useful to utilize the checklist on “Women in Trade Unions” in Part 2 of the manual.
- b. [↪ ILO Manual on Participatory Gender Audit \(2012\)](#). The manual particularly guides gender audit facilitators in conducting participatory gender audits at the organisation, work unit, and individual levels. The participatory gender audit aims to “promote organisational learning on how to implement gender mainstreaming effectively in policies, programmes and structures and assess the extent to which policies have been institutionalised.”
- c. [↪ The Gender Audit Handbook: A Tool for Organizational Self-Assessment and Transformation \(2010\)](#). This handbook provides a step-by-step guide on how to prepare a gender audit process for organisations in general and not specifically for trade unions. However, the tools in the handbook are useful in guiding preparation for a gender audit.

After the gender audit design has been formulated, some of the methods in the conduct of the audit/gap analysis include the following:

- *Desk review of existing tools on gender audits/gap analysis.*
- *Designing the concept and designing the gender audit/gap analysis particularly in the context of one's own trade union/organisation.*
- *Consultations with union leadership and staff in which the design and resources needed to conduct the audit process are presented.*
- *Conducting the audit process through survey questionnaire, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews.*
- *Processing of data and writing up results.*
- *Validation and presentation of results to respondents and union leadership.*

Stakeholder consultations

The results and recommendations of the gender audit/gap analysis need to be discussed among relevant stakeholders in the effort to build a holistic gender action plan to address the results of the audit. Stakeholders may be the trade union leadership and membership, union women’s committee, network organisations, and donor partners. Stakeholder consultations may take the form of focused-group discussions, workshops, caucuses and stakeholder conferences.

Gender action plan

The gender action plan (GAP) is a **roadmap advancing gender equality in the organisation involving its members, leadership and stakeholders**. The GAP is also a **commitment and consensus** among the union members and organisations involved to implement the action plan based on an implementation plan or workplan in the GAP document.

Some examples of gender action plans developed by other international organisations include:

- [↪ UNICEF Gender Action Plan 2022–2025](#). This GAP is presented as a roadmap towards gender equality and integrates programmes on gender equality within the organisation.
- [↪ Asian Development Bank Gender Action Plan](#). An example of a GAP document that outlines the proposed outputs and outcomes with the aim of advancing gender equality in a particular country and/or sector.
- [↪ ILO Action Plan for Gender Equality](#). After the independent evaluation of ILO’s gender action plan 2010-2015, the ILO Governing Body approached the future Gender Action Plans of ILO with specific commitments on gender equality as detailed in this report.

Coming up with a gender action plan involves **setting key objectives, designing a workplan, identifying the actions required to meet objectives, deciding how to evaluate the activity, producing an agreement on the timeframe for action, identifying the resources (human, financial, technical), finalising the plan, and evaluating the results**. The GAP contains specific workplans on each key objective.

A workplan may comprise the following: intermediate objectives, indicators, activities, expected outputs, timeframe, resources needed, and persons/committees responsible. → [Figure 6](#) provides an example of a workplan.

FIGURE 6.
Workplan for a gender action plan

Sample Workplan

Key Objective 1	Indicators	Activities	Expected outputs	Timeline	Ressources needed	Persons/ Committees responsible
Intermediate Objectives						

Implementation of the gender action plan

The implementation of the gender action plan needs to be agreed upon by all the stakeholders with an understanding of the changes needed along each step of the way. Stakeholders and implementers provide inputs with identified actions to meet the objectives. An implementation guide may be drafted by means of a stakeholder workshop that clarifies and identifies relationships between activities, expected outputs, and outcomes. Outputs from key objectives are tangible results of the actions and resources provided. Outcomes refer to concrete changes that affect the beneficiaries in terms of process shifts, policy reforms, and structural transformations within the union/organisation. Impacts are long-term changes or transformations towards the higher goals of gender equality or gender mainstreaming in the union/organisation. → [Figure 7](#) provides a sample framework for implementation of the plan.

In designing the workplan and implementation plan of the GAP, see the resources on results-based management:

- [↔ ILO Guidebook on Results-Based Management \(RBM\)](#). This guidebook, even though continually updated, contains a detailed guide on setting targets, setting baselines and designing a results-based workplan.
- [↔ SIDA Guide to Results-Based Management \(RBM\)](#). This guide can assist in the planning process in using indicators to design workplans based on the logical framework approach.

FIGURE 7.
Workplan for a gender action plan

Sample framework in GAP implementation

Input	Action	Output	Outcome	Impact
The resources include financial support, human resources, technical expertise and other organizational resources, i.e. office space, etc.	These could be activities such as workshops, trainings, research, meetings, conferences, practicum, etc.	Outputs are concrete results from the activities such as proceedings, training manuals, EICs, videos, publications, etc.	Outcomes are results in policy and/or structural changes, i.e., committee formation, resolution on gender mainstreaming, etc.	Impacts are long-term results from the action plan, i.e., quota systems institutionalized in union CBL, etc.

Monitoring and evaluation

The framework on monitoring and evaluation can also be embedded in GAP, but a separate **monitoring and evaluation (M&E) plan** is useful especially for strategic actions plans, such as three- to five-year action plans. Monitoring and evaluation processes may take place every six months to effectively monitor implementation and provide recommendations whenever there is a need to adjust the workplan.

To develop a monitoring and evaluation framework/plan, **identify the indicators and decide on the evaluation questions and/or format**. The indicators listed in the workplan can be further elaborated in the monitoring and evaluation process. For further guidance in formulating a monitoring and evaluation framework, see the following tools:

- [↪ ILO Evaluation Manager Handbook](#) (2013). Primarily designed to monitor and evaluate development projects, the handbook provides insights into processes involved in project management.
- [↪ Evaluation Toolbox](#) (2010). Provides a simple summary of common evaluation templates used in the M&E process.
- [↪ ILO Policy Guidelines for Results-based Evaluation](#) (2020). Provides a step-by-step guide on the process of ensuring a results-based evaluation of organisational programmes or development projects.

The M&E process may track the progress of a plan by answering the following questions:

(a) **Process indicators** – “Are activities being implemented as planned?”

- Numbers of training sessions held...
- Numbers of resolutions adopted on gender equality...

(b) **Outcome indicators** – “Have the planned activities made a difference?”

- Percentage increase in female members ...
- Percentage increase of women in leadership positions...

An example of a monitoring/evaluation report is provided in [→ Figure 8](#).

FIGURE 8.
Sample of an M&E framework/reporting plan

M&E framework/reporting plan

Indicator	Baseline	Expected outputs	% of target achieved	Remarks

The results of the M&E process are then presented, validated, and discussed in order to recalibrate the Action Plan. The cyclical process then continues to bring about the changes outlined in the Gender Action Plan. Updates and reports on the status of the GAP need to be presented, discussed, and monitored during the union's executive committee meetings and general assemblies.







Useful Resources

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- Certeza, Ramon.** National Coordinator, IndustriALL Global Union Philippines, 26 July 2021.
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- Jalil, Najrina.** Regional Programme Officer, Building and Wood Workers' International (BWI) Asia Pacific, 22 September 2021.
- Kim, Kyung Shin.** Vice President, Korean Federation of Construction Industry Trade Unions (KFCITU); Chair of BWI Asia Pacific Regional Women's Committee.
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