

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Negotiating Collective Bargaining with a Gender Perspective

A manual for union



Purpose

This manual provides trade union delegates with practical tools and evidence-based guidance for integrating gender equality into collective bargaining processes. Developed by UNI Global Union's Equal Opportunities Department, it addresses the urgent need for gender-responsive negotiations amid a global context where progress toward equality has stalled or reversed, and to strengthen unions' bargaining capacity in the face of the current challenges of the world of work.

Context: The urgency for action

Nearly thirty years after the Beijing Declaration, structural gender inequalities persist across labour markets worldwide. Current projections indicate: 300 years to end child marriage; 286 years to close legal protection gaps; 140 years to achieve equal workplace leadership representation; and 47 years to achieve parliamentary parity. Simultaneously, organized backlash against gender equality is expanding through disinformation campaigns, anti-feminist rhetoric and attacks on women's rights defenders. These dynamics directly affect workplaces, weakening rights, questioning equality policies and normalizing new forms of discrimination.

Key framework

The manual establishes collective bargaining as a transformative tool built on three interconnected ILO rights: freedom of association (Convention 87), collective bargaining rights (Convention 98), and equality and non-discrimination (Convention 111). When these rights are protected, bargaining processes address the diverse realities of workers, including women, young workers and marginalized groups. This framework positions trade unions as central actors in the effective guarantee of these rights.

Benefits of Gender-Responsive Collective Bargaining

- reduces gender pay gaps through transparent wage structures and pay audits;
- establishes protections against workplace violence and harassment aligned with ILO Convention 190;
- addresses unpaid care work through co-responsibility measures and flexible arrangements;
- creates pathways to leadership for women and marginalized groups;
- strengthens union membership, representativeness and democratic processes;
- and it enhances trade union legitimacy among new generations of workers.

Priority Areas for Negotiation

The manual identifies eight key areas for gender-responsive bargaining:

- 1. Equal Opportunities and anti-discrimination:** Transparent recruitment, fair representation, equal training access.
- 2. Gender pay gap:** Mandatory pay audits, gender-neutral job classifications, wage transparency.
- 3. Work-life balance:** Parental leave for all genders, flexible arrangements, breastfeeding provisions.
- 4. Health and safety:** Gender-responsive risk assessments, menstrual/menopause policies, psychosocial protections.
- 5. Violence and harassment:** ILO C190 implementation, technology-facilitated gender-based violence protocols, and domestic violence leave.
- 6. Digitalization:** Algorithmic transparency, limits on surveillance, and digital literacy for women.
- 7. Intersectionality:** Address overlapping discrimination based on race, disability, migration status, and LGBTQI+ identity.
- 8. Diversity, equity and inclusion:** Anti-discrimination clauses, inclusive recruitment, and accommodation policies.

Core message

Gender equality strengthens unions. Research demonstrates that women who feel represented demonstrate higher rates of membership, mobilization and leadership participation. Diverse bargaining teams produce more comprehensive agreements. This creates a reinforcing cycle: more membership leads to more strength, representativeness, and democracy. Gender-responsive collective bargaining is not separate from unions' core work - it is essential to building worker power and ensuring decent work for all. Negotiating with a gender perspective is not optional: it is a condition for collective bargaining to remain relevant in the 21st century.

Resources

The manual includes practical activities for training sessions, a comprehensive checklist for gender-responsive agreements, implementation and monitoring guidance, and an Annex for Executive Committees with actionable recommendations.