

Delivering Economic Justice for Gender Equality: A Call to Action for Governments at Women Deliver 2026

Policy Brief



From Commitments to Action

The Governments gathering at Women Deliver Conference 2026 face a critical choice: act to advance gender equality or allow deepening economic inequalities to continue undermining the rights of women, girls, and young people. Structural injustices driven by unequal access to resources, the disproportionate burden of unpaid care work, and gender-blind fiscal policies continue to shape life trajectories and limit access to education, decent work, and decision-making.

Economic justice is a political imperative and a precondition for equality and sustainable development. The current resourcing crisis reflects priorities, not scarcity: while feminist movements remain underfunded, wealth concentration continues to grow. Governments must decide whether to support feminist alternatives that centre redistribution, care, and collective wellbeing, or uphold systems that perpetuate inequality.

Why Governments Must Act Now

Recent global crises, including pandemics, climate shocks, conflict, and rising debt, have intensified existing inequalities. Yet policy responses have too often relied on austerity and market-driven approaches that reduce investment in essential public services such as health, education, and social protection. These decisions disproportionately affect women, girls, and young people, reinforcing cycles of inequality.

Women remain overrepresented in informal and precarious work, while girls and young women face increasing barriers to entering secure and decent employment. At the same time, unpaid care work continues to subsidize economies, limiting participation and opportunity. Feminist organisations, many led by young activists across the Global Majority, continue to deliver critical services and advocacy despite chronic underfunding. These outcomes are not inevitable; they are the result of policy choices. Governments have both the responsibility and the capacity to redesign economic systems so they deliver equity rather than exclusion.

Priority Actions for WD 2026

1. Invest in Care as Essential Economic Infrastructure

Care systems underpin all economies and sustain our societies and the planet, yet they remain systematically undervalued and under-resourced. Women and girls continue to shoulder a disproportionate share of unpaid and underpaid care work, often at the expense of their education, employment, and wellbeing. Governments must recognize care as foundational economic infrastructure and significantly increase public investment in universal, quality care systems, including healthcare and long-term care. Policies must actively reduce and redistribute unpaid care work while ensuring that care workers, many of whom are women, migrants, and young people, receive fair wages, labor protections, and social security. Building economies that put care at the center is essential to advancing collective wellbeing and ensuring that economic systems reflect social realities.

2. Fund Feminist Movements as Drivers of Change

Feminist and women's rights organizations, including youth-led movements, are central to advancing economic justice. They are not only service providers but political actors shaping alternative economic models, holding governments accountable, and driving systemic change.

Yet these organizations remain critically underfunded. Governments must shift from short-term, project-based funding to long-term, flexible, and trust-based support that sustains movements and enables leadership from grassroots and Global Majority communities. Supporting feminist funds and strengthening collaborative funding ecosystems is essential to ensuring resources reach those best positioned to drive transformative change and redistribute power.

3. End Austerity and Advance Feminist Economic Policies

Economic policy decisions are never gender-neutral. In many countries, governments are subordinated to exploitative debt regimes and creditor control, with austerity imposed through binding fiscal conditionalities. Resources are diverted to debt servicing at the expense of social investment, and the burden of adjustment falls disproportionately on those with the least power. When governments prioritise debt servicing over social investment or implement austerity measures, the burden falls disproportionately on those with the least power. Governments must move away from austerity-driven approaches and instead strengthen public financing through progressive taxation, increased investment in social infrastructure, and the institutionalisation of gender-responsive and age-responsive budgeting. Public financing for gender justice is a political obligation that cannot be outsourced to private actors. Transforming fiscal policy is essential to redistributing resources and ensuring that economic systems work for people rather than perpetuate inequality.

4. Guarantee Decent Work and Economic Rights for All

Labour market inequalities continue to reflect entrenched gender, racial, and social hierarchies. Women, particularly young women and those from marginalized communities, are more likely to be concentrated in insecure, low-paid, or informal work with limited protections.

Governments must ensure access to decent work by guaranteeing living wages, labor rights, and universal social protection across all sectors. This includes addressing intersectional discrimination, supporting the formalisation of work without eroding livelihoods, and enabling collective organising and worker representation. Without these changes, economic growth will continue to depend on inequality and exploitation rather than inclusion and dignity.

5. Democratize Economic Decision-Making

Economic policymaking remains inaccessible to many of those most affected by it, particularly women, girls, and young people. This exclusion reinforces existing power imbalances and limits the effectiveness of economic policies. Governments must ensure meaningful and sustained participation of women, girls, and young people in economic decision-making spaces, including budgeting processes and recovery planning.

This requires investing in gender- and age-disaggregated data, strengthening transparency, and building accountability mechanisms that ensure commitments translate into real change. Democratising economic governance is essential to shifting power and ensuring that economic systems reflect the needs and priorities of all.

Call to action

At Women Deliver 2026, governments must move beyond rhetoric and commit to concrete, systemic change. This means investing in care systems as foundational infrastructure, ending austerity and strengthening public financing, and providing sustained, flexible funding to feminist and youth-led movements. It also requires guaranteeing decent work and universal social protection, while opening economic decision making to those most affected.

The path to gender equality depends on economic justice. The choices governments make now will shape the futures of women, girls, and young people for generations to come. We must ensure that the future is equitable, inclusive, and just.

This document is part of the recommendations from the Financing for Feminist Futures (F4FF) Conference held in October 2025, compiled by the Walking the Talk consortium. A more comprehensive Reflections Paper, sharing the diverse range of perspectives, reflections and strategies can be found at <https://f4ff.global/reflection-paper/>

The Walking the Talk Programme aims to boost the adoption of Feminist Foreign Policies (FFP) and equitable financing for gender equality in the United Kingdom, Germany, France, the Netherlands and the European Union.

Contact

Bruna Martinez, Program Manager Walking the Talk. bmartinez@hivos.org

Emily McChrystal, UK Programs Manager Restless Development. emilymcchrystal@restlessdevelopment.org

