

INTERNATIONAL LEGAL MEANS OF PROTECTING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC RIGHTS: CURRENT STATUS AND PROSPECTS FOR DEVELOPMENT

Zamula Alina

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Annotation. The article provides a comprehensive analysis of international legal means of protecting women's economic rights, taking into account current challenges and prospects for overcoming them. It examines leading international documents – the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the conventions of the International Labour Organization (Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100), Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111)) – which define standards of equality in the field of labor, fair remuneration for equal work, protection against discrimination, and promotion of women's economic activity. The role of monitoring and control mechanisms – in particular, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and ILO bodies – in shaping legal policy and its adaptation in national legal systems is revealed; the practices of states that have successfully implemented international standards through gender-sensitive legislation and organizational instruments for reform implementation are examined.

Key obstacles to the effective implementation of women's economic rights have been identified: sociocultural stereotypes, unequal access to financial and productive resources, insufficient institutional capacity, as well as risks arising from digital transformation, the spread of non-standard forms of employment, the COVID-19 pandemic, and armed conflicts. The specifics of the gender digital divide as a new structural factor that exacerbates inequality in access to labor markets and entrepreneurial opportunities have been characterized.

Proposals were made for improving international legal mechanisms: updating standards to take into account new forms of employment and remote work, integrating a gender perspective into sustainable development strategies, strengthening intergovernmental cooperation, activating the role of international financial institutions, and expanding civil society participation in monitoring state obligations. It is concluded that ensuring women's economic rights is not only a human rights imperative, but also a key condition for economic growth, poverty eradication, and the building of a just and inclusive society.

Key words: human rights, women's economic rights, women's labor rights, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), ILO conventions, international standards, gender-sensitive legislation, intergovernmental cooperation, sustainable development strategies, inclusive society.

1. Introduction.

Despite the declarative recognition of gender equality in most legal systems around the world, practice shows a persistent incompatibility between the formal legal obligations of states and the real situation of women in the economic sphere. This discrepancy is not accidental: it reflects a deep contradiction between universal international standards, which are formulated in isolation from specific socio-economic

conditions, and the heterogeneous practice of their implementation in states with different legal cultures, levels of development, and political priorities.

This contradiction becomes particularly acute in circumstances where traditional models of legal regulation of labor and entrepreneurship are unable to cope with new economic realities. Gig work, platform work, and other non-standard forms of employment create legal loopholes in which women – as a statistically more vulnerable group – find themselves outside the scope of traditional protective mechanisms. At the same time, international legal instruments, which are largely focused on regulating traditional labor relations, do not respond to the challenges that have emerged only in the last decade.

The issue of institutional effectiveness deserves special attention: even where relevant legislation has been formally adopted, its implementation often remains limited due to the lack of specialized control bodies, insufficient access to justice for women, and low awareness of existing protection mechanisms. Thus, the problem lies not only in the content of the norms, but also in the architecture of law enforcement – and it is this dimension that requires in-depth scientific analysis.

2. The state of problem solving.

The issue of international legal protection of women's economic rights is addressed in the works of scholars from various countries. In Ukrainian legal doctrine, the relevant issues in the context of gender equality and human rights have been examined by T. Melnyk, Y. Goncharova, O. Pushchilina, and O. Uvarova. A significant analytical contribution to the study of these issues has been made through the preparation of expert reports within the framework of the UN, ILO, World Bank, and EU, which focus on gender equality in the field of labor, the impact of globalization and digitalization on women's employment opportunities, and the role of international institutions in shaping relevant policies.

At the same time, comprehensive studies that systematically combine an overview of international legal documents, control mechanisms, and contemporary challenges – non-standard forms of employment, digital transformation, the consequences of armed conflicts – remain few and far between. This is precisely what necessitates a synthetic approach that integrates legal analysis with the socio-economic context.

3. The purpose of the article is to clarify the content and significance of international legal means of protecting women's economic rights, to identify factors that influence their effectiveness, and to summarize possible directions for the development of these mechanisms in the context of contemporary transformations.

4. Presentation of the research material.

Women's economic rights are an integral part of the overall human rights framework and are a key factor in ensuring gender equality, social justice, and sustainable development of society. Their implementation covers a wide range of issues, from equal access to the labor market, resources, and entrepreneurial opportunities to ensuring fair working conditions, pay, and social protection. The recognition of the need to guarantee equal economic opportunities for women and men is enshrined in international legal documents, in particular the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) 1979 [1], its Optional Protocol, the conventions and recommendations of the International Labour Organization, as well as in the documents of the Council of Europe and the European Union. These acts create a regulatory and legal framework for the protection and realization of women's economic rights in different countries and define the obligations of governments to implement effective policies and institutional mechanisms [2].

Monitoring and control mechanisms ensure that regulatory obligations are put into practice. The UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women reviews state reports, adopts general recommendations, and considers individual complaints under the Optional Protocol [3]. The ILO supervisory

bodies – the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations and the Committee on Freedom of Association – assess the implementation of labour conventions and make recommendations to remedy violations. The Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100) establishes the principle of equal remuneration [4], while the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111) prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex [4]. ILO technical assistance supports states in developing gender-sensitive employment policies and implementing international standards.

UN Women coordinates women's economic empowerment programs, provides technical assistance, and promotes the dissemination of best practices [5]. Together with other UN agencies and donors, the organization mobilizes resources, supports national reforms, and creates global platforms for the exchange of experience [6].

The global HeForShe initiative involves not only women, but also men and organizations in overcoming gender inequality in all areas, including the economy. The initiative promotes changing social attitudes and forming public-private partnerships [7].

The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) collects and analyzes data on the state of gender equality in Europe, develops indices and recommendations for national governments. Open access to EIGE's analytical resources promotes the unification of approaches and the exchange of practices between EU member states [8].

Regional platforms and foundations – the African Women's Development Fund (AWDF) [9], the Asian Women's Fund [10], and the Women's Foundation of the South (WFS) [11] – bring together non-governmental and civil society organizations, activists, and government officials to work together. They amplify women's voices in political processes and adapt international norms to regional characteristics.

Private sector initiatives are becoming an increasingly important complement to public law mechanisms. Leading corporations in the fields of technology, finance, and consulting are implementing gender policies, supporting training programs for women, and ensuring equal career opportunities, thereby setting standards for corporate responsibility in the area of gender equality.

However, the effectiveness of both public law and corporate mechanisms is largely determined by the quality of their implementation at the national level – this is where the most significant gaps between declared commitments and actual law enforcement practices are found. This dysfunction is determined by a complex of interrelated legal, institutional, and sociocultural factors.

First, the insufficient institutional capacity of regulatory and judicial bodies, the lack of effective mechanisms for appealing discriminatory practices, and the imperfection of monitoring systems prevent the law from fulfilling its protective function [12]. Second, sociocultural stereotypes about gender roles lead to segregation in the labor market: women are concentrated mainly in low-paid, unstable sectors of the economy, which reproduces structural inequality. Third, limited access to economic resources – credit, property, training programs, business networks – restricts women's entrepreneurial potential and their ability to participate fully in the economy [13].

The digital transformation of the economy is also a significant challenge. On the one hand, it opens up new opportunities for remote work, digital entrepreneurship, and access to global markets [14]. On the other hand, it exacerbates existing inequalities through the gender digital divide: limited access to digital technologies, the Internet, and relevant skills in many regions puts women at a disadvantage [15].

At the same time, the gender digital divide is only one manifestation of the broader structural vulnerability of women, which has been significantly exacerbated by the global crises of recent years. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a disproportionate reduction in employment in sectors with a predominantly female workforce – services, trade, and the informal economy – while significantly increasing the amount of unpaid care and domestic work. Armed conflicts, in turn, disintegrate the institutional infrastructure of legal protection and create new categories of highly vulnerable persons – internally displaced women, women with young children, and women belonging to national minorities.

Therefore, the development of international legal means of protecting women's economic rights objectively necessitates their systematic adaptation to a dynamically changing global context. The priority area for such adaptation is the extension of legal regulation to non-standard forms of employment – remote work, the gig economy, platform labor relations – which are structurally excluded from the scope of traditional protection mechanisms and deprived of appropriate social guarantees. Updating legal instruments in this area should provide for both regulatory coverage of these forms of employment and the introduction of inclusive social insurance models capable of ensuring adequate protection for workers [16].

In parallel with the expansion of non-standard forms of employment, there is a growing need to adapt international standards to the challenges of the digital transformation of production. Automation and digitalisation are creating new risks of structural exclusion of women, primarily due to the gender digital divide, insufficient training for professions in demand in the digital economy, and the uneven distribution of responsibilities for caring for children and family members. Updated international standards should integrate requirements for education, retraining, and ensuring a balance between work and family life [17].

Eliminating these risks requires not only specific legal solutions, but also the systematic integration of gender equality into social development strategies. In this context, it is particularly important to align international legal instruments with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development [18]: The SDGs establish an inextricable link between women's economic rights and poverty eradication, inclusive growth, and social integration, which requires the development of cross-sectoral approaches that take into account economic, environmental, and social aspects in their interdependence. An integral element of such integration is the strengthening of monitoring and reporting mechanisms – improving data collection systems, introducing gender-sensitive indicators, and activating the role of international control bodies, which will ensure the prompt identification of systemic problems, policy adjustments, and increased transparency in the implementation of commitments made by states [19].

Based on the analysis, the following priority areas for improving international legal means of protecting women's economic rights can be identified.

The first and fundamental area is strengthening the regulatory and institutional framework at the national level: clearly enshrining women's economic rights in sectoral legislation, introducing effective procedures for handling complaints of discrimination, expanding the powers of regulatory bodies, and developing gender-sensitive monitoring systems with the involvement of civil society institutions [20].

The second direction is to overcome socio-cultural barriers through targeted awareness-raising and educational activities aimed at transforming social perceptions of gender roles in the sphere of labor and entrepreneurship. Systemic influence on social attitudes requires the involvement of opinion leaders, the media, and civil society organizations as actors in shaping an inclusive social environment [21].

The third direction is to expand women's economic opportunities through the development of microfinance programs, facilitating access to credit resources, and introducing training courses on financial literacy and entrepreneurial skills. Women with a high degree of vulnerability – internally displaced persons, representatives of national minorities, and young people – require special attention [22].

The fourth area is bridging the gender digital divide by investing in digital infrastructure, especially in rural and economically disadvantaged regions, implementing digital education programs for women and girls, and encouraging their involvement in technology industries and the development of barrier-free platforms for remote work and business [23].

The fifth area is the systematic integration of gender equality principles into national sustainable development strategies in the areas of employment, education, social protection, and technology. Effective implementation of this area requires interagency coordination and institutionalized partnerships between government authorities, the private sector, and civil society [24].

The sixth area is strengthening international cooperation by promoting the exchange of best practices, attracting technical and financial assistance, and systematically participating in international monitoring

mechanisms – reporting to the CEDAW Committee, ILO consultation procedures, and UN program platforms [25].

5. Conclusions. The study allows us to draw the following conclusions. First, the existing international legal framework in the field of women’s economic rights – CEDAW, ILO conventions, UN documents, and regional instruments – contains a developed system of obligations and control mechanisms. However, its effectiveness is hampered by uneven national implementation, institutional constraints, and sociocultural barriers.

Second, contemporary challenges – digital transformation, new forms of employment, global crises – reveal the structural vulnerability of existing mechanisms and require the rapid adaptation of international standards. This applies above all to extending social protection to women in non-standard employment and overcoming the gender digital divide.

Third, improving the effectiveness of women’s economic rights protection requires an integrated approach that combines legislative reforms, institutional modernization, educational and technological measures, and enhanced international and cross-sectoral cooperation. The involvement of civil society and the private sector is of particular importance.

The effective protection of women’s economic rights goes beyond purely human rights issues. It is a key prerequisite for sustainable economic development, poverty eradication, and the formation of an inclusive democratic society capable of responding adequately to the challenges of the 21st century.

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Alina Zamula,
PhD in Law, Associate Professor,
Associate Professor of the Department of International
and European Law
of the Faculty of Law and International Relations
State Non-Commercial Company
«State University «Kyiv Aviation Institute»
E-mail: alina.zamula@ukr.net
ORCID: 0000-0002-0428-9783