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PRESS RELEASE

GLOBAL EMPLOYMENT TRENDS FOR WOMEN 2007

ILO study warns on the feminization of working poverty

GENEVA (ILO News): More women than ever before are in work, but a persistent gap in status, job security, wages and education between women and men is contributing to the “feminization of working poverty”, according to a new report by the International Labour Office (ILO) issued for International Women’s Day.

According to “Global employment trends for women - 2007”, the number of women participating in labour markets—either in work or looking actively for work—is at its highest point. In 2006, the ILO estimated that 1.2 billion of the 2.9 billion workers in the world were women.

However, the ILO said more women than ever before are unemployed (81.8 millions), stuck in low productivity jobs in agriculture and services or receiving less money for doing the same jobs as men. In addition, the ILO also said the share of working-age women who work or are seeking work had actually stopped growing or declined in some regions, partially due to more young women in education rather than work.

“Despite some progress, far too many women are still stuck in the lowest paying jobs, often in the informal economy with insufficient legal protection, little or no social protection, and a high degree of insecurity,” said ILO Director-General Juan Somavia. “Promoting decent work as a fundamental instrument in the global quest for gender equality will go a long way in raising incomes and opportunities for women and lifting families out of poverty.”

The report adds that women must be given the chance to work themselves and their families out of poverty through creation of decent employment opportunities that help them secure productive and remunerative work in conditions of freedom, security and human dignity. Otherwise, the process of feminization of poverty will continue and be passed on to the next generation.

The report also shows that today more women out of the total number of women at work are in wage and salaried employment (47.9 per cent) than 10 years ago (42.9 per cent). However, the study also noted that the poorer the region, the more likely it is that women work as unpaid contributing family members or low-income own-account workers, in a higher proportion than men.

The step from unpaid contributing family worker or low-paid own-account worker to wage and salaried employment is a major step toward freedom and self-determination for many women, the ILO said. However, in the poorest regions of the world the share of female contributing family workers in total employment is still much higher than men's, with women less likely to be wage and salaried workers.

In sub-Saharan Africa as well as in South East Asia, four out of 10 working women are classified as contributing family workers compared with two out of 10 men. In South Asia, six out of 10 working women are classified as contributing family workers, but again only two out of 10 working men have this status. In the Middle East and North Africa, the proportions are three out of 10 women and one out of 10 men.

In the last Global Employment Trends for Women (2004), it was estimated that women made up at least 60 per cent of the world's working poor – people who work but don't earn enough to lift themselves and their families above the US \$1 per person, per day line. According to the current ILO study "there is no reason to believe that this situation has changed in the recent past or will in the near future."

Closing but persisting gaps

According to ILO estimates, in 2006 women were still more likely to be unemployed than men. Whereas the female unemployment rate was 6.6 per cent, unemployment among men rate was at 6.1 per cent.

Employment-to-population ratios – which indicate how much economies take advantage of the productive potential of their working-age population – are much lower for women than for men in the world as a whole: Merely half of working-age women over the age of 15 actually work, whereas more than seven in 10 men do.

Gender imbalance in employment-to-population rates is most notable in the Middle East and North Africa, where only slightly more than two out of every 10 working-age women work, compared to almost seven out of 10 men.

The report notes that the gap between female and male employment-to-population ratios decreased in all regions over the past decade, except in East Asia where it widened and in sub-Saharan Africa where it remained unchanged.

The report also cites evidence that wage gaps persist. Throughout most regions and many occupations women earn less money for the same job. But there is also some evidence that globalization can help close the wage gap for some occupations.

A review of data available for six occupation groups shows that in most economies, women still earn 90 per cent or less of what their male co-workers earn. Even in "typically female" occupations such as nursing and teaching, gender wage equality is lacking.

Last but not least, even though young women are more likely to be able to read and write than 10 years ago, access to education and education levels are still far from equal in most regions. In addition, 60 percent of school drop-outs are girls: they often have to leave school to help in

households or to work. Preventing girls from finishing even basic education burdens their chances to determine their own future, underlines the study.

The findings of this year's Global Employment Trends for Women are only partly encouraging. Gender gaps are closing but at slow pace. The report concludes that "creating adequate decent and productive work for women is possible, as shown by some of the progress detailed above. But policy-makers not only need to place employment at the centre of social and economic policies, they also have to recognize that the challenges faced by women in the world of work require intervention tailored to specific needs."

For more information, please see www.ilo.org/trends. For more information on International Women's Day, see <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/inf/event/women/2007/index.htm>