



International
Labour
Organization

FACTS ON *Promoting Gender Equality in the World of Work*

Today, women are active everywhere in the economic sphere. Job opportunities for women in an ever expanding labour market are increasing. Some gaps between women's and men's wages, treatment and opportunities in the workplace are gradually shrinking, and women's education and entrepreneurship are rising. More women than ever before are completing higher education and moving into management positions.

Yet discrimination based on sex still pervades the labour market. Inequality between women and men is a determining factor in world poverty, with women comprising 60% of the world's working poor.

Women are more likely to earn less than men for the same type of work, even in so-called traditionally female occupations. And women are also more likely than men to be found working in the informal economy with no legal and regulatory protection, little or no social security, and a high degree of instability. In addition, women's contribution to household work exceeds that of men in almost all economies.

Work in the informal economy often provides women their only source of income – especially in areas where cultural norms bar them from working outside the home or where, because of household responsibilities, they cannot undertake regular working hours. Women are also more likely than men to be involved in productive yet informal (and hence less visible and difficult to measure) activities such as subsistence agriculture, family businesses and home-based work, in addition to their unpaid traditional responsibilities such as food preparation, childcare and household duties and community-based and other social obligations.

Gender equality is a key element in the ILO goal of promoting opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity. To achieve this goal the ILO has four strategic objectives, all of which include a gender dimension:

- ◆ Ratify or make progress in implementing the four key gender equality conventions. (Of the ILO's 178 member States, 162 have ratified Convention No. 100 on equal remuneration, 164 Convention No. 111 on discrimination, 11 Convention No. 183 on maternity protection and 36 Convention No. 156 on workers with family responsibilities.)
- ◆ Assist member States in developing and implementing gender-sensitive employment policies and action plans and increase economic opportunities for women in conditions of decent work.
- ◆ Protect women workers' health through the improvement of their working conditions and working environment, focusing in particular on maternity protection and supporting female and male workers with family responsibilities, responding to HIV/AIDS in the world of work, and pursuing measures to prevent and reduce trafficking of persons, the majority of whom are women and girls.
- ◆ Make measurable progress in the representation of women at decision-making levels to attain balanced participation with men in key positions in government, employer and worker organizations, and in social dialogue institutions.

Key Statistics

- Currently, there are only 12 elected female heads of state or government.
- In India, a number of states have reserved 33 per cent of the local government seats for women.
- In 2004, only 23 per cent of businesses in the European Union were owned by women.
- Out of the 550 million working poor in the world, an estimated 330 million, or 60 per cent, are women.
- In 2006, the gender pay gap was as much as 30 to 40 per cent in some countries.
- Of the 17 million women between the ages of 15 and 49 living with HIV, 98 per cent live in developing countries (77 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa).

The Decent Work Agenda

Decent Work is a development strategy that acknowledges the central role of work in people's lives: work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom to express concerns, opportunity to organize and participate in decision-making, and equal opportunity and treatment for all women and men. Decent work belongs at the heart of global, national and local strategies for economic and social progress. It is central to efforts to reduce poverty, and is a means for achieving equitable, inclusive and sustainable development.

Putting the Decent Work Agenda into practice is achieved through the implementation of its four strategic objectives with gender equality as a cross-cutting objective:

Creating Jobs – an economy that generates opportunities for investment, entrepreneurship, job creation and sustainable livelihoods;

Guaranteeing rights at work – obtain recognition and respect for the rights of workers. All workers, and in particular disadvantaged or poor workers need representation, participation, and good laws that are enforced and work for, not against, their interests;

Providing basic social protection – marginalization and poverty mean that those most in need do not have minimum protection against low or declining standards of living; and

Promoting dialogue and conflict resolution – people in poverty understand the need to negotiate and know dialogue is the way to solve problems peacefully. Social dialogue, involving strong and independent worker's and employers' organizations, is central to increasing productivity and avoiding disputes at work, and to building cohesive societies.

The role of the ILO

The ILO's approach is to place gender concerns in the mainstream of all its policies and programmes in order to create employment, promote training, develop entrepreneurship and improve access to the labour market under fair and equal conditions for both women and men.

Key Gender Equality Conventions

1951: Equal Remuneration Convention (No. 100)

1958: Discrimination Convention (Employment and Occupation), (No. 111)

1981: Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention (No. 156)

2000: Maternity Protection Convention (No. 183)

Other Relevant ILO Instruments

1994: Part-time Work Convention (No. 175)

1996: Home Work Convention (No. 177)

1999: Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (No. 182)

1975: Declaration on Equality of Opportunity and Treatment for Women Workers

1998: Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work



International Labour Office
4 route des Morillons
CH-1211 Geneva 22
Switzerland

Tel. +4122/799-7912
Fax +4122/799-8577
www.ilo.org/communication
June 2006