Equality at work for women and men in Asia and the Pacific

Mainstreaming gender in decent work promotion

What is gender equality?

Gender equality at work – or equal employment opportunities and treatment – is fundamental for enabling men and women to claim a fair share of the wealth they help generate, in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity.

“Eliminating gender discrimination is a matter of smart economics. Unlocking women’s productive capacity and creativity is a win-win game for enterprises, workers, governments and societies”.

Michelle Bachelet, Executive Director of UN Women

“Gender equality concerns us all – rich and poor, developed and less developed, male and female – because we cannot have balanced, sustainable recovery, or maximise the benefits of Asia’s next phase of development, without it”.

Sachiko Yamamoto, Regional Director, ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific

The challenge

Discrimination perpetuates poor labour market outcomes for women:

- All women work, but 45 per cent of working age women in Asia are outside the labour market, compared to 19 per cent of men.

- Women are concentrated in low-productivity occupations and vulnerable employment, such as contributing family work, contract, temporary or domestic work.

- Numerous women are micro-enterpreneurs. Only 1 per cent of women in the region ran their own businesses with paid employees in 2009.

- The gender pay gap in the region remains pronounced; women’s wages average 70-90 per cent of men’s.

- Violence against women at work is a significant problem.

- Women are under-represented in decision-making in government and company boardrooms.

Investing in gender equality

Successful strategies for promoting gender equality and decent work include:

Mainstreaming gender in employment, social and macro-economic objectives, policies and programmes geared at supporting job-rich, equitable growth by:

- Creating better quality jobs in urban services, agriculture and rural employment.

- Protecting young and migrant women from labour exploitation.

- Increasing women’s voices in decision-making.

Developing sound labour laws and active labour market policies in line with key international labour instruments for gender equality promotion, including:

- Elimination of discrimination in employment and occupation, and equal remuneration for work of equal value – both fundamental labour standards.

- Provision of adequate maternity protection and measures for reconciling work and family commitments.

- Decent work for home-based, part-time and domestic workers and those in hidden employment relationships.

- Prohibition of child and forced labour and promotion of safe migration.
Further investment in skills and enterprise development by:

- Designing gender-responsive labour supply measures that tackle assumptions that channel youth into a narrow range of “suitable” occupations.
- Improving women’s access to productive resources, business skills and networks, and creating a facilitating business environment for women entrepreneurs.

Extending social protection and safe work by:

- Building basic social protection services for all, including adequate maternity benefits.
- Taking measures to create a better work-family balance.
- Preventing and redressing sexual harassment in workplaces.

Putting gender equality on the Decent Work Agenda:

- Promoting equal employment opportunity action plans and institutional mechanisms.
- Increasing women’s representation at higher levels of labour institutions, and in employers’ and workers’ organizations.

Highlights of activities in the region

- Knowledge sharing and capacity building on equality and non-discrimination in employment in China, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Mongolia, Thailand and Viet Nam.
- Action against workplace violence and sexual harassment in Bangladesh, India, Indonesia.
- Increasing compliance with maternity benefit payment from 55 to 73 per cent in only one year, after awareness-raising in textile factories.

Resources

Women and labour markets in Asia: Rebalancing for gender equality  


Training manual  

Gender mainstreaming strategies in decent work promotion: Toolkit  

GEMS toolkit in brief  

Sexual harassment at the workplace - FAQ  

Work, income and gender equality in East Asia: Action guide  

Equality and discrimination resources  

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