



FACTS ON *Women at Work*

Today, women represent over 40% of the global labour force. Approximately 70% of women in developed countries and 60% in developing countries are engaged in paid employment. Worldwide, more women than ever before are completing higher levels of education. Better job opportunities have increased many women's independence and resulted in a new status and role in their families and society.

Yet progress on three key and inter-related indicators for gender equality is still inadequate: namely the "glass ceiling" (women in top management), the gender pay gap, and the "sticky floor" (women in the lowest paid jobs). The higher the position in an organization or company, the more glaring the gender gap – women hold only around a mere 1% to 3% of top executive jobs in the largest corporations. The critical role of unpaid work, largely done by women, continues to go unrecognised. Macro-economic indicators continue to ignore the "care economy" as fundamental to economic outcomes. Labour markets in all countries, both in the formal and informal economies, remain highly segregated by sex. The ILO's *Global Employment Trends* (2003) shows that women continue to have lower participation rates in the labour market, higher unemployment rates, and significant pay differences in most regions.

Many millions of women dwell in the so-called informal economy of the developing world: agricultural workers, those who work at home, domestic employees, the self-employed, unpaid family workers, and workers in unregistered enterprises. The expansion of the informal economy provides jobs for many women as well as men, but at the price of being unprotected and poorly-paid. This means that many remain beyond the reach and coverage of ILO Conventions and national labour laws. In India, for example, 93% of all workers are in the informal economy; other examples are 62% in Mexico and 34% in South Africa. Informal employment is generally a larger source of employment for women than for men.

Certain categories of women are especially vulnerable to inequalities in the labour market: rural women, those working in the informal economy, migrant women, the young, the older, and the disabled. At both ends of the spectrum, the young and the aged face particular disadvantages in labour markets. Girls are more likely than boys to be victims of the worst forms of child labour, such as slavery and prostitution. Young women tend to have higher unemployment rates than their male counterparts. The HIV/AIDS pandemic has also increased women's vulnerability given their limited access to social protection and economic security. Older women face continued discrimination in the labour market and often have to assume care-giving responsibilities within their families in addition to their work outside the home.

Key Statistics:

- Of the 192 countries in the world, only 12 have a female head of state.
- Seventy per cent of the world's 1.3 billion poor — those who are living on the equivalent of less than US \$1 per day — are women.
- Women spend twice as much or more time as men on unpaid work.
- Worldwide, women on average earn two-thirds of what men earn.
- Women make up the majority of the world's part-time workers – between 60% and 90%. In the European Union, 83% of part-time workers are women.
- In countries such as Australia, Canada, Thailand and the United States, over 30% of all businesses are now owned or operated by women, with Thailand topping the list at almost 40%.
- In some countries of sub-Saharan Africa, most of the female labour force is in the informal economy; for example, 97% in Benin, 95% in Chad, 85% in Guinea and 83% in Kenya.
- In Europe, women are the heads-of-household in 9 out of 10 single-parent families.
- At the end of 2001, the total number of people living with HIV/AIDS was estimated to be 40 million; just under half were women.

The Role of the ILO

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

Women's Employment Trends in Jordan

With increased global trade, Jordanian women are benefiting from greater job opportunities than ever before. This is one of the findings of ILO research on the impact of globalization with regard to women workers in the textile and garments industries in Jordan. The study, published by the ILO in 2002, was conducted with the Jordanian Ministry of Labour, the General Confederation of Jordanian Trade Unions, the Chamber of Industry, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Jordanian National Commission for Women.

Historically, women's participation in the formal labour economy in Jordan has been low and concentrated in traditional roles such as teachers, nurses or secretaries. However, the study found that over the past four decades the female participation rate rose from approximately 3 % in 1961 to about 15 % in 1999.

Recent economic reforms have led to an increase in employment opportunities for women, particularly in the textile and garment-making industries. More women are now able to achieve a degree of economic independence and freedom of mobility, as well as the unprecedented status of breadwinner in their families.

The majority of the women surveyed in the study had received secondary level education. Most of them were under 30 years old and came from a rural background. To these women, who grew up with the norms of gender segregation, having a job outside the home was a significant achievement.

However, the study also revealed continuing challenges to the achievement of gender equality, including the condition of catering and sanitary facilities in some factories and women's general unawareness of the existence of a textile workers' union and their rights at work. As a result, they were often perceived as meek and unlikely to assert their rights. Also, because women are considered unskilled cheap labour, work in the garment and textile industry offers few career development prospects for female workers.

In recognition of the vital role that working women play in family welfare and survival, many governments are now taking measures to overcome political, economic, legal, cultural and other forms of discrimination. Similarly, in realizing that women's skills and talent can be key for success in business, some private companies in both developed and developing countries are instituting programmes that promote the welfare, advancement and retention of their female workers.

For more information: www.ilo.org/gender

Relevant ILO Instruments

- 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)
- 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

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