



# **FACTS ON *Investing* in Decent Work for Women**



International  
Labour  
Organization

*“We take another step towards globalizing social progress when we champion gender equality as a matter of rights and social justice as well as efficiency and good business sense.”*

Juan Somavia, ILO Director-General

More women are participating in labour markets throughout the world today than ever before. However, increases in labour force participation have not resulted in a substantial narrowing of gender gaps in the world of work. For instance, women are still less likely than men to hold regular wage and salaried positions. They also continue to be over-represented in occupations with low pay, and low productivity with little protection. The progress to date is not sufficient to ensure decent and productive work for all as long as women continue to face unequal access to employment, unequal pay, and limited access to social protection and positions of leadership. To this end, the ILO marks International Women’s Day in 2008 by focussing on the importance of investing in Decent Work for women.

## **Women within the Decent Work Agenda**

Decent work embodies the integration of social and economic goals including the promotion of rights, employment, security and social dialogue within a framework that supports both investment and economic growth. Embracing this concept, the ILO and its constituents – governments, and employers’ and workers’ organizations, formulated the Decent Work Agenda to effect positive change within the world of work. Central to this Agenda is the recognition of gender equality as a prerequisite to progress. It is incorporated as a crosscutting objective within ILO’s goals.

### **KEY STATISTICS**

The percentage of working women in wage and salaried employment increased from 41.8% in 1997 to 46.4% in 2007.<sup>1</sup>

Unemployment among women continues to increase at a faster rate than among men, up 13.7 million since 1997 as compared to 11.4 million for men.<sup>1</sup>

In 2007, some 52.5% of women of working age were looking for work or working, in comparison to 78.8% of men.<sup>1</sup>

Global female employment-to-population ratios have decreased since 1997 from 49.5% to 49.1%, although there have been strong gains in this period in the Middle East. Latin America and the Caribbean, from 20.8% to 28.1% and 42.1% to 47.1%, respectively.<sup>1</sup>

According to the European Commission, the pay gap in the European Union between men and women has remained virtually unchanged at 15% across all sectors in recent years and has narrowed by only one percentage point since 2000.<sup>1</sup>

According to UNESCO, almost 800 million cannot read and write, with two-thirds of these are women. In addition, 60% of school drop-outs are girls.<sup>2</sup>

As of 2007, ten Fortune Global 500 companies are run by women – up from seven in 2006.<sup>3</sup>

Globally, women account for only 17.2% of parliamentarians.<sup>4</sup>

The struggle for equal labour market access is marked by slow progress. Worldwide, only 67 women are economically active for every 100 men.<sup>1</sup>

1 ILO. Global Employment Trends for Women, March 2008. Geneva.

2 ILO. Global Employment Trends for Women Brief, March 2007. Geneva.

3 [www.money.cnn.com/magazines/fortune/fortune500/womenceos](http://www.money.cnn.com/magazines/fortune/fortune500/womenceos)

4 Inter-Parliamentary Union. “Women in Parliament 2008.” Geneva.

## Investing in Decent Work for Women: The role of the ILO

Increasing evidence shows that gender inequality is bad economics. It has been shown that businesses benefit from the promotion of women in leadership, as well as a gender balanced staff. Investment in gender equality, women's empowerment and decent work for women is vital for improving economic, social and political conditions. Equality of opportunity and treatment for women and men is at the forefront of the ILO's Decent Work Agenda, and is seen as a pillar of sustainable development. This imperative dovetails with the Organization's four strategic objectives in promoting rights at work, creating greater employment and income opportunities, enhancing the coverage and effectiveness of social protection, and strengthening representation through social dialogue and tripartism. The ILO has continued to position itself as the leader in promoting gender equality in the world of work and has supported its constituents and international partners through many efforts.

This is achieved through various means, including:

- Promoting gender equality in the world of work, as enshrined in the ILO Constitution and reflected in relevant international labour standards, in particular the four key gender equality conventions<sup>1</sup>. While initially the standards on equality directed specifically at women aimed at providing protection, a marked shift in emphasis from special protection to the promotion of equality in the standard-

<sup>1</sup> The four key ILO gender equality Conventions are: Convention No. 100 on Equal Remuneration (1951), Convention No. 111 on Discrimination in Employment and Occupation (1958), Convention No. 156 on Workers with Family Responsibilities (1981) and Convention No. 183 on Maternity Protection (2000). Conventions 100 and 111 are also among the eight fundamental Conventions of the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. Other relevant ILO instruments include Convention No. 175 on Part-time Work (1994), Convention No. 177 (1996) on Home Work, Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (1999), the Declaration on Equality of Opportunity and Treatment for Women Workers (1975) and the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (1998).

setting activities of the ILO occurred when the Declaration on Equality of Opportunity and Treatment for Women Workers was adopted in 1975. International labour standards are one of the ILO's primary means of action to improve working and living conditions of women and men, and promote equality in the workplace for all workers.

- Researching and disseminating information on issues concerning gender equality in the world of work. This is a key activity for the ILO, covering a wide range of themes including child and forced labour, the roles of men and women in the formal and informal economy, women's entrepreneurship, gender equality issues in post-conflict reconstruction, youth employment, workers with disabilities, social security, the gender dimensions of HIV/AIDS and migration.
- Giving advice and guidance on gender equality and gender mainstreaming to constituents aiming to effect positive changes in their policies, legislation, programmes, and institutions.
- Facilitating and implementing technical cooperation programmes to support implementation of Decent Work Country Programmes at the national level, which are the distinct ILO contribution to the "Delivering as One" strategy of the UN. The goal of the ILO is to adequately mainstream gender into all of its 1,000 technical cooperation programmes, which are taking place in over 80 countries.

For further information, please visit the following:

- [www.ilo.org/gender](http://www.ilo.org/gender)
- <http://www.ilo.org/>



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