

A Guidance Note Concerning ILO Gender Focal Points

The ILO Gender Network is one of the key institutional arrangements identified to operationalize the 1999 *ILO Gender Equality and Mainstreaming Policy*. The network consists of Senior Gender Specialists based in some regional offices, headquarters-based Gender Coordinators for each sector as well as some key units, and Gender Focal Points in both headquarters units and field offices. The network, which comprises approximately 130 women and men, is coordinated by the Bureau for Gender Equality (GENDER).

Together the network – as a global team – helps contribute to 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. The team promotes gender equality as integral to achieving the ILO vision by identifying strategic opportunities to incorporate and highlight gender issues in the its objectives, as well as in flagship products and activities.

Role of Gender Focal Points

The main role of a Gender Focal Point (GFP) is to act as “catalyst” to assist the process of gender mainstreaming in a respective office or unit. While GFPs may be directly involved in implementing certain gender-specific activities including with constituents, their contribution should focus on aiding colleagues and management to identify strategies and work methods that will enable and build further capacity of colleagues to integrate gender concerns into their own areas of work. This is critical to avoid all gender-related work assigned only to GFPs.

Managerial Issues:

1. Appointing Gender Focal Points

The manager of the office or unit is responsible for appointing a Gender Focal Point or team. At headquarters, consultation with GENDER and relevant Gender Coordinators is useful, while in field offices this can include the regional Senior Gender Specialist. GENDER needs to be informed by the Director of the office or unit about a newly-appointed GFP or team, so that timely and necessary information, briefings and other support can be provided.

The GFP position can be rotated about every two years in order to share the responsibility among more colleagues. Effort should be made to alternate between men and women officials, and to avoid consistently appointing young junior women. GFP teams – which can be considered especially in larger units or offices – allow for appointing a mix of male and female, junior and senior, and professional and general staff. For example, there could be one member who is a GFP for programming and budget issues, and another for substantive issues. Should a team be appointed, a coordinator needs to be identified.

2. Allocating Time and Resources

The manager needs to ensure that adequate time, conditions and financial resources are allocated so that the Gender Focal Point can perform the tasks required. It is also important that managers bear in mind that these functions are not be regarded as a add-on to an already-full workload.

3. Activities and Capacity Building

Ideally, GFPs should be systematically involved in meetings and decision-making processes related to programming of activities of the office or unit, as these are critical entry points for gender mainstreaming. The relevant work should be included in the work plan of the GFP and

reflected in their performance appraisal. Opportunities to acquire expertise on gender concepts, gender analysis and other skills required for advocacy work on gender needs to be provided to each GFP. The unit or office manager, as well as the Human Resources Development Department (HRD) and GENDER have a responsibility in this regard, for example in cost sharing, tools availability and allowing time for training.

Terms of Reference

The following are lists from which some possible tasks can be identified and agreed by the manager and GFP in their TORs.

Responsibilities for All Gender Focal Points

- Participate in preparing the office or unit's regular budget programming activities, and work with the manager to encourage colleagues to develop gender-sensitive objectives and workplans.
- Act as a "help desk" of the office or unit on where to find information and materials on gender issues related to ILO's mandate.
- Assist in organizing capacity building for colleagues on gender concepts and gender equality and Decent Work issues.
- Encourage colleagues to promote parity of women and men participants in events, trainings and projects coordinated by the unit or office, as well as gender balance among the unit or office staff.
- Act as liaison with GENDER, which coordinates participatory gender audits, if the unit or office is undertaking an audit.
- Contribute to sharing of knowledge and promote the unit or office's relevant good practices by contributing to – and forwarding to all staff – periodic GENDER requests for articles and resources to include in the trilingual *ILO Gender News*, as well as sharing information messages from GENDER with all colleagues.

Additional Responsibilities for Gender Focal Points in Field Offices

- Help colleagues identify processes and contacts in order to strengthen links with gender equality machineries and expertise at the country level and contribute to inter-agency, civil society, academic and other relevant networks.
- Propose – and encourage staff to identify and suggest – gender-related issues on internal and public meeting agendas, in trainings, and other events with constituents.
- Encourage inclusion of gender-specific objectives, outcomes and indicators, and activities in the programmes of offices, in conjunction with headquarters units.

Gender Network Support

All GFPs will receive information, access to ILO gender-related tools and resources, and technical support from the ILO Gender Network – especially from the Gender Bureau, Gender Coordinators and Senior Gender Specialists. Opportunities should be given for GFPs to participate in meetings of the Gender Network, its thematic panels at headquarters or in regions, as well as in ILO inter-regional strategic consultations on gender. If trainings for gender audit facilitators are available, GFPs should also be given the opportunity to participate in them, as well as in a facilitation team for a gender audit.

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