

## Gender and Employment

### The Challenge

Women constitute 40 per cent of the workforce in the world, and their active engagement in productive work contributes not only to faster economic growth but also to its long-term sustainability. Yet despite the progress made in moving towards gender equality in the world of work in the last few decades, the circumstances of female employment – the sectors where women work, the types of work they do, the relationship of women to their jobs, and the wages they receive – continue to bring fewer gains monetarily, socially and structurally for women than the circumstances of male employment do for men.

In 1995 the UN Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing set global objectives for action in the world of work. These included the promotion of women's economic rights and independence, equal access for women to resources, employment, markets and trade, improved training, the elimination of occupational segregation and all forms of employment discrimination and a better sharing of work and family responsibilities between women and men.



Much progress has been made in achieving these objectives, but still in 2010 gender disparity both in terms of opportunities for and quality of employment continues:

- Female employment-to-population ratios have generally increased over time but remain at levels well below those of men, thus missing out on the productive potential of women as a key resource in development.
- Nearly one-fourth of women remain in the category of unpaid contributing family workers, meaning they receive no direct pay for their efforts.
- When women do enter formal employment, they receive less pay and benefits than male workers in similar positions.
- Women continue to face higher barriers for access to education and training because of the persisting gender bias in many societies.
- There is a clear segregation of women in sectors that are generally characterized by low pay, long hours and often informal working arrangements. In some countries the share of women in vulnerable employment is over 75 per cent.
- More women than men take up low-pay and precarious work, either because this is the only type of job made available to them or because it allows them to balance work and family responsibilities.

## The ILO Response

All ILO work on employment derives its current mandate from the Global Employment Agenda (2003) and the ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization (2008). Key equal rights and principles on access to employment and pay at work guide the ILO's Policy on Promoting Gender Equality (1999). The Resolution on gender equality at the heart of decent work adopted by the International Labour Conference in 2009 reaffirms the ILO's pivotal role in promoting gender equality in access to decent and productive employment and income.

The ILO promotes equality through a rights-based and life-cycle approach as well as from the economic perspective. To ensure that women will enjoy an equal share of the fruits of development (particularly the most vulnerable – young and older women, those in the rural and informal economies, and migrants) a gender-sensitive and cross-cutting approach is necessary. This implies mainstreaming gender concerns across all the ILO's work on employment promotion, including in the area of macro-economic policy-making.

The ILO's work on gender and employment therefore focuses on:

- **integrating gender equality concerns** into national, regional and international employment policies and dialogues, taking into account all thematic areas of employment and also the burden on unpaid work on women;
- **research** in response to the 2008 global economic crisis: the specific gender dimensions of the impact of the crisis on the world of work are analysed as a contribution to policy-making and programme formulation, specifically giving effect to the 2009 Global Jobs Pact;
- **technical assistance** to ILO constituents on women's entrepreneurship development, cooperative development, skills development for young women, and the gender dimensions of microfinance, employment-intensive programmes and employment policies, including gender budgeting where appropriate;
- **capacity building and awareness raising** for ILO constituents, in cooperation with the ILO International Training Centre, Turin, Italy, on the gender dimensions of various employment intervention areas at the international, regional and national levels;
- **advocacy and knowledge sharing on good practice**, in cooperation with the ILO Bureau for Gender Equality, on the promotion of decent employment and income opportunities for both women and men;

- **creating synergies** to promote the inclusion of gender equality in decent and productive employment at the international, regional and national levels **through partnerships** with United Nations agencies, international and regional financial institutions and bilateral donors;
- addressing gender and employment concerns **at the national level** in Decent Work Country Programmes (DWCPs) and United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAFs).

## Key Tools and Resources

In addition to the above-mentioned ILC Resolution:

ILO. 2006. Gender Equality and Decent Work - Selected ILO Conventions and Recommendations Promoting Gender Equality, ILO Geneva. <http://www.ilo.org/dyn/gender/docs/RES/309/F946263477/WEB%20Promoting%20Gender%20ANG.pdf>

ILO. 2009. Guide on Gender in Employment Policies (Geneva). [http://www.ilo.org/employment/Whatwedo/Instructionmaterials/lang--en/docName--WCMS\\_103611/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/employment/Whatwedo/Instructionmaterials/lang--en/docName--WCMS_103611/index.htm).

ILO. 2010. Women in labour markets: Measuring progress and indentifying challenges (Geneva). [http://www.ilo.org/empelm/what/pubs/lang--en/docName--WCMS\\_123835/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/empelm/what/pubs/lang--en/docName--WCMS_123835/index.htm)

— . Programme on Women's Entrepreneurship Development (WEDGE). [http://www.ilo.org/empent/Areasofwork/lang--en/WCMS\\_093870/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/empent/Areasofwork/lang--en/WCMS_093870/index.htm)

— . On-line information resource guide on gender equality in the world of work. <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/support/lib/resource/subject/gender.htm>



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