

“Making the crisis recovery work for women!”

ILO to mark 100th international women’s day

GENEVA (ILO News) – The International Labour Organization (ILO) will mark the centenary of International Women’s Day on Monday 7 March with a panel discussion which will highlight the role of gender equality in securing a sustainable and equitable recovery.

Focusing on the theme – “Making the crisis recovery work for women!” – a panel of experts will discuss how policy measures in the wake of the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression can ensure equal opportunities and treatment for women and men when it comes to jobs and working conditions. The panel will emphasize skills development and training policies, contributing to the UN theme for this Day: “Equal access to education, training and science and technology: Pathway to decent work for women”.

The first official International Women’s Day was celebrated in 1911 following a decision of the International Conference of Working Women held in Copenhagen the year before. By that time, in countries such as Austria and Germany, the main claim was the right to vote, while in the United States, women demonstrated against poor working conditions that led to a fire in a garment factory, which killed 146 workers, most of them women of immigrant origin.

One hundred years on, despite some progress there is still much to be done to achieve gender equality in the world of work. “The crisis has served to underscore and aggravate pre-existing inequality. Achieving gender equality remains a major challenge. Securing a sustainable and equitable recovery and a fair globalization demand gender-aware responses”, said ILO Director-General Juan Somavia.

According to the latest ILO data, both women and men continue to feel the impact of the economic crisis, with the global unemployment rate for men standing at 6 per cent in 2010 and 6.5 per cent for women.

Jane Hodges, Director of the ILO Bureau for Gender Equality points to the persistence of a clear segregation of women in sectors generally characterized by low pay, long hours and informal working arrangements. This is reflected in the bigger percentage of women who are trapped in vulnerable employment globally (51.8 per cent) compared to men (48.9 per cent). Women also fall behind men when it comes to access to training and education, especially in the developing world.

The ILO has upheld the principles of equal remuneration for work of equal value and of non discrimination since its founding in 1919. In 2009, the International Labour Conference passed a resolution on Gender Equality at the Heart of Decent Work guiding efforts towards a labour market in which all women and men can participate freely and actively. That same year the ILC adopted the Global Jobs Pact to help mitigate the social impact of the crisis. Amongst other measures, the Pact calls for recovery packages to take into account gender equality concerns.