

Gender and Employment

The Challenge

Women constitute 40 per cent of the global workforce, and their active engagement in productive employment contributes not only to faster economic growth, but also its long-term sustainability. Yet, despite the progress made in advancing towards gender equality in the world of work during the last few decades, women continue to be over-represented in more precarious, informal and less remunerated work than men. This is largely due to slow progress in social change in many societies, burden of unpaid care work that mostly women continue to undertake, and gender blindness of macroeconomic and development policies.

In 1995 the United Nations 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, women's equal access to resources, employment, markets and trade, improved training, the elimination of occupational segregation and all forms discrimination in employment and occupation, and a better sharing of family responsibilities between women and men.

Much progress has been made towards achieving these goals, but today, gender disparity both in terms of opportunities for and quality of employment persists:

- 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 key resources in development;
- Nearly one-fourth of women work as unpaid contributing family workers, meaning they receive no direct pay for their work;
- Entering formal employment, women receive less pay and benefits than men workers in similar positions;
- Women continue to face higher barriers for access to education and training due to persisting gender bias in many societies;
- There is a clear sex segregation in occupations and sectors that are generally characterized by low pay and precariousness, often in informal employment arrangements. In some countries the share of women in vulnerable (own account and unpaid family work combined) employment is over 75 per cent;

- More women than men take up part-time and often precarious work, either because this is the only type of jobs made available to them or because it allows them to balance work and family responsibilities.



The ILO Response

Promoting full, productive and freely chosen employment, including equal access to employment, is stated in the Employment Policy Convention, 1964 (No. 122). This is further articulated in the Global Employment Agenda (2003), and reaffirmed in the ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization (2008), as well as the Conclusions concerning the recurrent discussion on employment (2010). Key equal rights and principles at work¹ guide ILO's Policy on Promoting Gender Equality (1999). Furthermore, the Resolution concerning 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 in employment through a rights-based and life-cycle approach, as well as from an economic perspective. To ensure that women will enjoy an equal share of fruits of development (particularly the most vulnerable – young and older women, those in rural and informal economies, and migrants), gender sensitive and cross-cutting approach is essential. This implies mainstreaming gender concerns across all the ILO's work on employment promotion, including areas of macroeconomic policy-making.

¹ The key Conventions are Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100) and Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111).



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 the burden of unpaid work on women;
- **Research** on gender dimensions of the impact of macroeconomic change on the world of work in the aftermath of the global economic crises; which contributes to the formulation of employment policies and programmes, following up on Global Jobs Pact (2009);
- **Technical assistance** for ILO constituents on women's entrepreneurship development, skills development for young women and men, and the gender dimensions of microfinance, employment intensive programmes, and employment policies, including gender responsive employment oriented budgeting;
- **Capacity building and awareness raising** for ILO constituents, in cooperation with the International Training Centre of the ILO, Turin, Italy, on the gender dimensions of various employment intervention areas at the international, regional and national levels;
- **Development of tools, advocacy and knowledge sharing of good practices** on gender and the promotion of productive employment, income and decent work;
- **Creating synergies** to promote the inclusion of gender concerns in productive employment and decent work at the international, regional and national levels through partnerships with United Nations agencies, international and regional financial institutions and bilateral donors, in particular, in **Decent Work Country Programmes** and **United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks**.

Key Tools and Resources

In addition to the above-mentioned ILO standards:

International Labour Office (ILO). 2009. *Guidelines on gender in employment policies: A resource book* (Geneva).

http://www.ilo.org/employment/Whatwedo/Instructionmaterials/WCMS_103611/lang--en/index.htm

—. 2010. *Women in labour markets: Measuring progress and identifying challenges* (Geneva).

http://www.ilo.org/empelm/pubs/WCMS_123835/lang--en/index.htm

—. 2012. *Gender equality and decent work - Selected ILO Conventions and Recommendations that promote gender eEquality as of 2012* (Geneva)

http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/--ed_norm/---normes/documents/publication/wcms_088023.pdf

Programme on Women's Entrepreneurship Development (WED).

<http://www.ilo.org/empent/areas/womens-entrepreneurship-development-wed/lang--en/index.htm>

On-line information resources gender equality in the world of work.

<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/support/lib/resource/subject/gender.htm#more>



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