



International
Labour
Organization

Women's empowerment: 90 years of ILO action!

The celebration of the ninetieth anniversary of the International Labour Organization presents an opportunity to salute the women who defended the principles of gender equality in the world of work and who were instrumental in spearheading ILO action. This occasion encourages reflection on the progress made, on the challenges that have been overcome in advancing equality of opportunity and treatment, and on what still remains to be done to empower women in the world of work. It is timely to recognize the significant leadership and participation of the many women in the annals of the past ninety years. These pioneers were key players in standing up for the rights of women in the workplace and for working closely with the men who supported their cause. Their personal stories bring the history of the institution to life.

WOMEN AND THE ORIGINS OF THE ILO

The issues of anti-slavery, temperance, and women's suffrage, combined with the exploitation of women and children in the Industrial Revolution, produced a dynamic set of women leaders in Europe and North America at the turn of the 20th century. Efforts were driven by the harsh conditions in which women had to work and the substantially lower wages they earned in comparison to men. In the late nineteenth century, "protective" laws were being adopted by governments in a number of industrialized countries. The need for international treaties to shield against unfair competition was also recognized.

A precursor to the ILO was the International Association of Labour Legislation, organized by individuals and governments concerned about working conditions. In its 1905 and 1906 meetings in Berne, Switzerland, the Association passed the Berne Declarations urging international agreements to protect women from exploitation, both in terms of night work and in terms of exposure to white phosphorous in the manufacture of matches. In 1913, additional agreements were drafted on prohibiting night work for young persons and limiting the hours of work for women and young persons. These were used as the basis for proposals developed by the British Ministry of Labour and the Home Office for the inclusion of a new international labour organization in the Paris Peace Conference and Treaty of Versailles at the end of World War I.

Women's delegations from Belgium, France, UK and the US were active at the 1919 Paris Peace Conference. The International Council of Women, for example, called for equality of opportunity for men and women, equal pay for equal work, limiting the working week to forty-four hours, and the suppression of night work for women. La Ligue Française pour le Droit des Femmes had a similar platform. Other issues were raised by women leaders, including ending child labour, providing pensions and maternity benefits and even minimum wages for housework. Many of these demands were seen as too radical for the day, while others focused on more pragmatic steps. For example, Margaret Bondfield (see box below) was able to persuade negotiators to include a provision requiring the participation of women whenever a question concerning women's labour was under discussion. Jeanne Bouvier, a union leader from France, was also active in presenting the views of French workers on social insurance. She represented the Federated Dressmakers' Union and later took a leadership role on working women's concerns.

GENDER EQUALITY AT THE HEART OF DECENT WORK



GENDER EQUALITY AT THE HEART OF DECENT WORK

Historical time line of gender equality in the world of work: Selected dates

1919	Constitution of the ILO Maternity Protection Convention (No. 3)
1944	Declaration concerning the aims and purposes of the International Labour Organisation (Declaration of Philadelphia)
1948	Universal Declaration of Human Rights Night Work (Women) Convention (Revised) (No. 89)
1951	Equal Remuneration Convention (No. 100)
1952	Maternity Protection Convention (Revised) (No. 103) and Recommendation (No. 95)
1958	Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention (No. 111) and Recommendation (No. 111)
1964	Employment Policy Convention (No. 122) and Recommendation (No. 122)
1974	Paid Educational Leave Convention (No. 140)
1975	First World Conference on Women (Mexico City) Declaration of Equality of Opportunity and Treatment for Women Workers Human Resources Development Convention (No. 142) and Recommendation (No. 150)
1976	Office of the Special Adviser for Women Workers' Questions (FEMMES) established
1977	Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy
1979	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (in force 1981)
1980	Second World Conference on Women (Copenhagen)
1981	Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention (No. 156) and Recommendation (No. 165)
1982	ILO Mid-Term Plan (1982–87) includes "women workers" as one of 6 global themes
1984	Employment Policy (Supplementary Provisions) Recommendation (No. 169)
1985	Third World Conference on Women (Nairobi) ILC 71 st Session resolution on equal opportunities and equal treatment for men and women in employment
1986	Governing Body evaluates women-specific technical cooperation (TC) programmes and recommends women in development (WID) approach
1987	Governing Body endorses Plan of Action on equality of opportunity and treatment of men and women in employment
1988	Guidelines for integrating women's interests in TC project design
1990	Night Work Convention (No. 171) and Recommendation (No. 178) Launch of Interdepartmental Project on Equality for Women in Employment
1991	ILC 78 th Session resolution concerning ILO action for women workers
1993	World Conference on Human Rights (Vienna) and Programme of Action
1994	Part-Time Work Convention (No. 175) and Recommendation (No. 182)
1995	World Summit for Social Development (Copenhagen) Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing) ILO Action Plan on Gender Mainstreaming for Gender Equality Office Circular on sexual harassment policy and procedures (No. 543)
1996	Home Work Convention (No. 177) and Recommendation (No. 184)
1997	Launch of TC project "More and Better Jobs for Women"
1998	ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work Job Creation in Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises Recommendation (No. 189)
1999	CEDAW Optional Protocol Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (No. 182) and Recommendation (No. 190) Bureau for Gender Equality (GENDER) established Office Circular on gender equality and mainstreaming in the ILO (No. 564)
2000	World Summit for Social Development and Beyond: Copenhagen +5 (Geneva) 23 rd Special Session of the General Assembly: Beijing +5 (New York) Millennium Development Goals Maternity Protection Convention (No. 183) and Recommendation (No. 191)
2001	First Participatory Gender Audit in the Office
2002	Governing Body examines report on first Participatory Gender Audit in the Office
2004	ILC 92 nd Session resolution concerning the promotion of gender equality, pay equity and maternity protection
2005	Governing Body instruction to include gender in technical cooperation
2006	Employment Relationship Recommendation (No. 198)
2008	ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization



The first International Labour Conference (ILC) was held in October 1919 in Washington, DC. Six conventions were adopted at this Conference; two involved women – prohibiting night work for women and ensuring maternity protection for working women; two involved children – a minimum age for employing young persons and prohibiting night work for young persons; and two involving general policies on hours of work and unemployment. The protective conventions were adopted with little debate, as their basic provisions tracked the work done by the International Labour Association. At this first Conference, 22 women attended as advisers, 13 for governments, one for employers and eight for workers. Jeanne Bouvier was among those who pushed for protectionist legislation and felt that the maternity protection standard should encompass mandatory protection of women for six weeks before and six weeks after maternity, whereas two advisers for Scandinavian governments, Kerstin Hesselgren from Sweden and Betzy Kjelsberg from Norway took differing positions.

Kerstin Hesselgren, the Chief Woman Factory Inspector and a member of the Swedish Senate, believed that standards should be ratifiable and not reach beyond what governments are prepared to adopt. Betzy Kjelsberg, who served many years as a full delegate to the ILC, was opposed to protectionist laws generally and favoured the principle of equality of treatment. These contrasting positions in the early days have continued to influence policy deliberations throughout the history of the ILO.



Betzy Kjelsberg

The women worker advisers to this first ILC stayed on in Washington, DC to participate in the first International Congress of Working Women. They were joined by others from Europe and the USA and established an International Federation of Working Women. The Federation operated only briefly as a separate entity and voted in 1924 to integrate into the International Federation of Trade Unions as a women's department. In subsequent ILCs throughout the 1920s and 1930s women's participation rarely exceeded 25, mostly as advisers. Betzy Kjelsberg was a full government delegate, and she was joined by Mary Fitzgerald from South Africa and Margaret Bondfield from the UK as Worker delegates. Margaret Bondfield also attended as a government delegate following her election to Parliament.

MARGARET BONDFIELD

Margaret Bondfield is considered one of the most outstanding women in the trade union movement. Born in Somerset, England in 1873 to a large working class family, she was forced to drop out of school and go to work as a draper's apprentice at the age of 14 when her father became unemployed. She received an informal education through a friendly customer and joined the National Union of Shop Assistants, Warehousemen and Clerks where she became a union researcher, investigator of conditions of exploitation, and ultimately an officer of the union. She was also involved in campaigns in addressing rights of women as home workers and in sweatshops. She became President of the Trade Unions Congress in 1923. At the ILO, she contributed to the policy direction of the early years, ensuring the participation of women. For example, during deliberations on the functions and powers of labour inspectors at the ILC in 1923, Margaret Bondfield was among those who insisted that women should be included with the same powers and duties as men in labour inspection.

In 1929, she was appointed Minister of Labour by Ramsay MacDonald and became the first woman in British history to serve as a Cabinet Minister.



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IMPACT OF THE DEPRESSION

Throughout the 1920s and into the 1930s, the emphasis on standard-setting was placed on sickness insurance, minimum wage-fixing machinery, underground work, protection against accidents and hours of work. While the Depression contributed to a backlash against working women, standard-setting was still oriented to a protectionist approach. Revisions of the night work conventions for both women and children were oriented to making them more flexible.



Women delegates at the 18th Session of the ILC, 1934



Women delegates at the 20th Session of the ILC, 1936

The Conference Committees in 1933 and 1934 on both Night Work and Underground Work were chaired by women: Kerstin Hesselgren from Sweden for the Night Work Committee and Gertrude Stenberg of the Netherlands for the Underground Work Committee. The rapporteur for the Underground Work Committee, was Bala Subbarayan of India, whose report to the plenary included a reference to the debate between those who endorse the need for protective legislation for women and those who assert "absolute faith in equality of rights for men and women".

Meanwhile, the entry of the USA and the USSR into the ILO in 1934 had a significant impact on the subsequent direction taken by the Organization. Frances Perkins played a major role in creating the domestic support for US entry into the ILO. The new administration of Franklin Delano Roosevelt was able to persuade

the US Congress, otherwise inclined to isolationism, to approve US membership in the ILO. An important outcome of US entry was the mobilizing of support among ILO constituents to re-examine the "principles which should govern the legal, social and industrial positions of women if they are to protect themselves against industrial exploitation..." Thus, in 1937, the US government delegates sponsored a resolution to re-examine the status of women on the grounds that "much protective legislation would be unnecessary if women enjoyed equal civil and political rights with men". The stage was set for the ILO to link its policies on protectionist legislation with its fundamental commitment to equal opportunity.

FRANCES PERKINS



Frances Perkins was the first woman President of the ILC in 1941. Born in 1885 in Massachusetts, she studied chemistry and later sociology and became a teacher and volunteer at settlement houses. An active member of the Consumers League in New York, she happened to witness the infamous Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire in 1911, in which 146 women died. This had a major influence on her, and she committed herself to working in industrial relations, leading to her appointment to the New York State Industrial Commission in 1918. When Franklin Delano Roosevelt was elected Governor of New York in 1928, he appointed her as New York's Industrial Commissioner. She concentrated on factory investigations, establishing the 48-hour work week for women, and introducing the minimum wage and unemployment insurance. President Roosevelt appointed her as US Secretary of Labor in 1934, the first woman cabinet official in the USA, and she served in this capacity throughout his administration until 1946. She was influential in building support for the public works programme, minimum wage, unemployment insurance and the Social Security Act of 1935. Frances Perkins was a strong supporter of the ILO and was active in the adoption of the Philadelphia Declaration in 1945.



THE POST-WAR TRANSFORMATION

In 1944, the ILC reaffirmed the ILO position through the Declaration of Philadelphia, which stated that "All human beings, irrespective of race, creed or sex, have the right to pursue both their material well-being and their spiritual development in conditions for freedom and dignity, of economic security and equal opportunity." Participation by women was relatively low at this pivotal Conference, with only 16 women from ten countries. The significant change, however, was the participation of strong women leaders from developing countries, including Bertha Lutz from Brazil, Pauloe Alegria Garza from Mexico and Crystal Bird Fauset from Liberia.

In 1947, the ILC passed a resolution to pursue equal pay. The Correspondence Committee on Women's Work, which had been established in 1932, became a key player, providing experts on equal pay at meetings to prepare for the adoption of a convention on the subject. A special conference of women worker experts met in 1950, prior to the 1951 ILC. Prominent experts included Tyne Leivo Larsson of Finland, Inga Thorsson of Sweden and Alva Myrdal, also of Sweden. L. Ebeling, a US employer representative, also joined the special Conference and attended the ILC in 1951. Others involved in the Equal Pay Committee included Frieda Miller of the USA, Gertrude Stenberg of the Netherlands and worker representative Indra Bose of India. Although many would agree with G.A. Johnston, a former Assistant Director-General and author of a 1970 history of the ILO, that the members of the ILO would never have agreed to such a standard before the war, the Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100) is a major landmark in ILO history of women's rights and has now been ratified by 166 member States.

Similarly, the issue of equality between men and women reached beyond wages or pay to encompass discrimination issues generally. Here again, an expert group was convened in 1956, with participants from a growing number of member States – Burma, India, the Federal Republic of Germany, India, Mexico, Peru, Poland, Sweden, Turkey, the UK, the USA and the USSR. This led to the adoption of the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111). At the committee concerned with this issue, eight women participated, including the Philippine Labour Attaché Felina T. Reyes and three East Europeans, Mileve Srnska from the Czechoslovak Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Ekaterina Korchounova from the USSR Institute of State and Law and Hanna Bokor-Szego, head of the International Law Department at the Hungarian Academy of Science. Three women workers were also on the Committee – Florence Hancock from the UK, Mirjam Nordahl from Norway and Maria Weber, from Germany.

ANA FIGUEROA

Ana Figueroa (Chile) was the first Assistant Director-General of the ILO. A key adviser to Director-General David Morse on Latin American affairs, Ana Figueroa was also active in women's issues. She came to the ILO by way of the United Nations, where she served on the Chilean delegation in 1951 and 1952, following leadership roles within Chile on the Women's Bureau in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and as general supervisor of the high school system. From 1954 to 1959, she was chief of the ILO women's service and served as Assistant Director-General from 1960 to 1967. A vivacious diplomat, Figueroa represented her country at UNHCR, the Commission on Human Rights, the Commission on the Status of Women, as well as the Economic and Social Council, the Security Council and the UN General Assembly.



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As the membership of the ILO started to expand dramatically in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the ILO added a substantial programme of technical cooperation to address the needs of the growing number of developing countries in its membership. This included specific attention to the needs of women in development, as illustrated by a resolution of the ILC in 1964 on the problems of women in developing countries. A year later, Director-General David Morse also established the position of a Coordinator for women and young workers, first filled by Elizabeth Johnstone in 1965. Women leaders from Asia and Latin America were breaking new ground for the broadened perspective of women with diverse experiences in the ILO.



Begum Ali Khan with CEACR

©ILO An important member of the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (CEACR) was Begum Ra'ana Liaquat Ali Khan. A prominent leader in Pakistan, she was the wife of the first Prime Minister of Pakistan (Liaquat Ali Khan, assassinated in 1951). She later became a university chancellor, the governor of the province of Sindh and a prominent leader in the All Pakistan Women's Association. She served with distinction on the Committee of Experts from 1955 to 1978. Among her other accomplishments, she was the first Muslim female ambassador and the first woman to receive the United Nations Human Rights Award.

NEW DIRECTIONS: THE INTERNATIONAL DECADE FOR WOMEN AND BEYOND

The resurgence of feminism in the late 1960s transformed the UN's commitment to gender equality. This was also a time of expansion and the increased participation of developing countries. The first major event of international significance regarding gender issues was the 1975 World Conference on Women in Mexico City, which launched the Decade for Women, from 1975 to 1985. The ILO gave its support to the process by adopting a convention and recommendation on human resources development, as well as a recommendation on gender equality at its annual conference in 1975. A coordinator of the Mexico City conference was Aida Gonzalez Martinez (see box below). A career diplomat, she became head of the Mexican delegation to the ILO in 1977 and continued in that position until 1982, at which time she was elected as the first woman to chair the Governing Body (1982-83). Only a year later in 1984, the ILC had its second woman president, Anna-Greta Leijon, the Minister of Labour from Sweden. On the occasion of her Presidency, Leijon is reported to have said, "Women account for two-thirds of all the work – in hours of work – performed in the world. Yet they receive no more than one-tenth of all the incomes in the world, and they own less than one percent of the world's riches."

AIDA GONZALEZ MARTINEZ

Aida Gonzalez Martinez came from a large family living outside of Mexico City. Her father was a rancher and businessman who died when she was still young. To help ends meet, Aida worked as a secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and earned a college degree while working there. She subsequently became an officer in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs while also continuing her studies for a degree in law. She combined a career in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and in the Labour Ministry and became Coordinator for international labor affairs and representative of Mexico for women's affairs. She served as Ambassador on labour and head of the Mexican delegation to the ILO Governing Body from 1977 to 1982. In 1979, she was elected to chair the government group in the Governing Body, and in 1982, she was elected to chair the Governing Body itself.



Nobuko Takahashi

In that same time period, Nobuko Takahashi became the second woman Assistant Director-General, serving a two-year term from 1976 to 1978. She had a distinguished career with the Japanese National Labour Insurance Appeals Board and was an active participant with the Japanese delegation to ILCs. She subsequently went on to become the Japanese Ambassador to Denmark. After a short hiatus, the Director-General appointed a third woman to serve as Assistant Director-General, Antoinette Waelgraem Béguin, who was the first woman to be appointed to this position from within the ILO (see box below).

Meanwhile, the Declaration adopted by the ILC in 1975 called for the promotion of equality of opportunity and treatment for women workers and for the development of a plan of action. The Declaration was submitted to the World Conference on Women in Mexico City, and work began on a plan of action within the ILO. This could be identified as the turning point from protectionist measures to equal opportunity priorities at the ILO.

The UN General Assembly approved a Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1979 that included reference to the relevant ILO standards. The ILO went a step further in 1981 by adopting the Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention No. 156 (1981). In 1981, the ILC also adopted a resolution on steps to promote the widest possible participation of women on the same footing as men in all the policy-making bodies of the ILO, and not just on questions specifically affecting women.

ANTOINETTE WAELBROECK BÉGUIN

Antoinette Waelbroeck Béguin from France typified the spirit of the 1970s. A third generation ILO official, she started her ILO career in 1945, rose up through the ranks and was the first woman to be appointed a department chief. She served as the head of the Employment Department and the World Employment Programme from 1976 to 1981, which promoted both research and technical cooperation on women's issues in developing countries. She was responsible for a groundbreaking report on *Women, Work and Development*. In 1981, she was appointed Assistant Director-General, with a mandate to focus on the elimination of discrimination and the promotion of equality. She chaired a joint working party with the Staff Union on positions and opportunities for men and women within the ILO Secretariat and prepared two key reports documenting the slower career development of women over men. She retired in 1983, having set the stage for the advancement of women in the ILO in the 1980s and 1990s.





In 1985, the ILC held a general discussion on *Equal Opportunities and Treatment for Men and Women in Employment* that led to an ILO Plan of Action. This helped the ILO to prepare for the Third World Conference on Women, which was held in Nairobi in 1985. ILO staff was also inspired to organize, founding the Action Group for Equality (AGE) in 1986.

Women's participation in the policy-making bodies of the ILO steadily increased throughout the 1980s and 1990s. From the employers' side, several women made their mark, including Diana Mahabir of Trinidad and Tobago, Lucia Sasso-Mazufferi of Italy, Cornelie Hak of the Netherlands and Anne Mackie of the United Kingdom, while the workers included Shirley Carr of Canada and Ursula Engelen-Kefer of the Federal Republic of Germany. Many women played significant roles as government representatives, including Lucille Caron of Canada and Dagmar Molkova of Czechoslovakia. In the 1990s, both the ILC and the Governing Body elected a woman to their top positions, as President of the ILC in 1997 (Olga Keltasova from Slovakia) and as Chair of the Governing Body in 1994-95 (Maria Nueves Confesor from the Philippines). The governments and social partners were being exhorted to increase the representation of women in their delegations, and the numbers started going up noticeably.

DIANA MAHABIR



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Diana Mahabir of Trinidad and Tobago played an instrumental role at national, regional and international levels as a spokesperson for the employers. Born and raised in Canada, she married a fellow student from Trinidad and Tobago whom she met at McGill University. Upon the completion of her studies, she started working for the Employers Consultative Association of Trinidad and Tobago and quickly became both its Director and subsequently the CEO of the Caribbean Employers Confederation. With four children and several foster children, she managed a career and family with the support of other women, who she in turn helped to start their own professional careers. In the newly independent Trinidad and Tobago, she participated in the negotiations for the new Industrial Relations Act and the National Insurance Act, established the Coalition against Domestic Violence, the Caribbean Centre for Human Rights and the Coalition

for the Rights of the Child, and also served as an Independent Senator. Along the way, she was an employer delegate to the ILC, serving twice as the Employer Vice Chair of the Committee on the Application of Standards and Recommendations in 1971 and 1978. At the ILO, she was a strong advocate for accommodating the specific circumstances of women in developing countries.

The 1980's witnessed a disrupted global economy and aggravated indebtedness in many developing countries. In 1989, then Director-General Michel Hansenne appointed the first woman Deputy Director-General (DDG), Mary Chinery-Hesse from Ghana, with extensive experience at the United Nations Development Programme, to oversee the technical cooperation programme of the ILO in developing countries. He also created the office of the Special Adviser on Women Workers' Questions in 1990. Then, in order to further establish a policy dialogue with the Bretton Woods institutions, the Director-General appointed a second woman at the DDG level, Katherine Hagen from the USA.

MARY CHINERY-HESSE

Mary Chinery-Hesse of Ghana was Deputy Director General of the ILO between 1989 and 1999. Educated in economics and law she has held a number of posts within the UN system as well as in Ghana. She came to the ILO from an extensive career with the UN Development Programme, including service as the UNDP Resident Representative in Sierra Leone, Tanzania, the Seychelles and Uganda.

During her tenure as DDG, she served as chairperson of various UN and of Commonwealth committees. After leaving the ILO, she continued her public service. In Ghana she has served as Principal Secretary at the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, and Secretary of the National Economic Planning Council. She is currently Vice-Chairman of the National Development Planning Commission and serves as a key member of a number of national bodies.



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The 1995 World Conference on Women in Beijing adopted the most Comprehensive Platform of Action of any of the women's conferences. Over 5,000 women participated in the official Summit and 27,000 more in the NGO Forum. Mary Chinery-Hesse represented the ILO and had lead responsibility for implementing the Platform in the ILO, while Katherine Hagen was involved in the Copenhagen Summit of the same year, in which the issues of poverty eradication, employment and social exclusion were addressed. The Beijing Summit led to the adoption by the Economic and Social Council of a resolution in 1997 embracing gender mainstreaming.

GENDER EQUALITY AT THE HEART OF DECENT WORK

The office of the Special Adviser on Women Workers' Questions operated throughout the 1990s to support ILO work on gender equality in the world of work. Christine Cornwell was first appointed to this position in 1990 and was succeeded by Maria Angélica Ducci from Chile who sensitized women attendees to the ILC and who edited a compendium of ILO policy documents on Women and Work. Later, this post was held by Jane Zhang from China, who coordinated the ILO's role in the Beijing Summit. Recent conventions adopted by the ILC such as the Part-Time Work Convention, 1994 (No. 175) and the Home Work Convention, 1996 (No. 177) are illustrative of the gender mainstreaming approach. The Copenhagen Summit, meanwhile, produced an articulation of core labour standards that included the right to freedom of association and collective bargaining, the elimination of child labour and forced labour and non-discrimination. These later came to be the basis for the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, adopted in 1998.

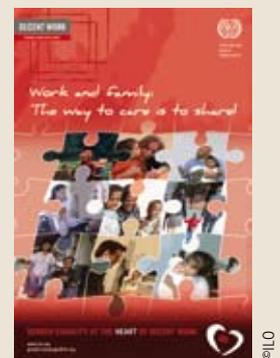
GENDER EQUALITY AND THE ILO IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM

There have been many positive developments in gender equality throughout the world over the past decades. Yet many world of work issues have not been adequately addressed over the years, and important gaps still exist today across the regions. That much discrimination persists after decades of national and international commitment to gender equality is an unfortunate reality. The ILO's efforts have concentrated on both empowering women and achieving progress on gender equality. In times of crisis, such as the current financial and economic downturn, fragile gains could be jeopardized.

One aspect that has certainly progressed is the level and intensity of the debate on gender equality within the ILO itself. The ILO's commitment to developing an evidence base despite the paucity of data, its promotion of the key equality Conventions, and its advice to constituents on policy and legal frameworks for equality have led to considerable advances over the last decades. Efforts to view the employment and social protection issues facing women and men through a gender lens have resulted in both internal capacity-building and outreach to constituents. The ILO International Training Centre in Turin has been working for more than two decades in developing and implementing gender training programmes for ILO constituents, development agencies and other stakeholders.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

The origins of International Women's Day can be traced back to 8 March 1857 when women garment workers in New York City demonstrated against poor working conditions. This day has become an occasion of awareness-raising and celebration of the story of ordinary women as makers of history. Over the past years, ILO headquarters and field offices have held highly regarded events commemorating this day, highlighting the role and/or achievements of women in a particular field of work, or associating the events with the ILO's ongoing work on gender equality and improving the situation of women in the world of work. Past speakers have included Mary Robinson, former President of Ireland and UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Gro Harlem Brundtland, former Prime Minister of Norway and Director-General of the World Health Organization, Shirin Ebadi, Iranian lawyer, human rights activist and Nobel laureate, and Carla del Ponte, former Chief Prosecutor for the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia.



Juan Somavia, ILO Director-General

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Positioning gender equality as a cross-cutting issue has given a solid boost to the incorporation of the gender dimension into all of the ILO's work. This is due to a better understanding of gender issues within the Office, resulting from a surge of support from the highest levels of management. Director-General Juan Somavia has been instrumental in defining the mission of the ILO, including a strong commitment to gender equality. In 1999, Mr. Somavia launched the Policy on Gender Equality and Mainstreaming with notable implications for both the Office and the tripartite constituents. The same year, Jane Zhang was appointed as the first Director of the Bureau for Gender Equality, established by the Director-General. Since then Linda Wirth, Evy Messell and Jane Hodges have also served as Director.

Increased ratification of the four key equality conventions; improved policies, legislation, programmes and institutions; and women's participation in ILO events and governance institutions are indicators for the strengthened ILO gender equality policy. There are now 166 ratifications of the Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100), including 24 since 2000, and 168 ratifications of the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111), including 28 since 2000. In terms of improved policies, legislation, programmes and institutions, in 2001, the Governing Body started the biennial review of an Action



Plan on Gender Equality and Gender Mainstreaming and the ILO Participatory Gender Audit was introduced. ILO researchers have tracked academic studies as well as conducted primary research on a wide variety of gender equality issues in the world of work. A commitment to gender equality by key ILO donors has led to technical cooperation projects and programmes being expanded beyond women-specific goals towards an approach that incorporates the implications for both sexes. The 2005 Governing Body decision on gender mainstreaming in technical cooperation was a manifestation of this commitment. The importance of social dialogue in making inroads for gender equality is both recognized and integrated into the means used and the end results of ILO action.

ILO'S PARTICIPATORY GENDER AUDIT

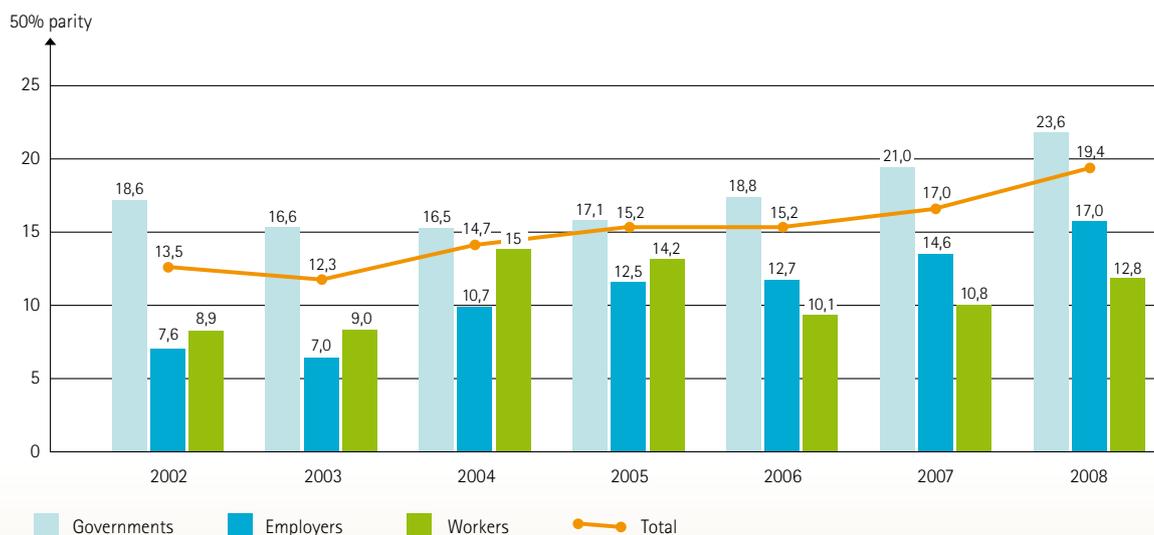
In the past decade, the ILO itself has gone through an institutional transformation regarding the mainstreaming of gender equality into all aspects of its mandate. Central to the effort is the ILO Participatory Gender Audit (PGA) - a unique tool for assessing and monitoring the achievement of gender equality both within the Organization and in the world of work. A PGA is a process based on an inter-active methodology to promote learning at the individual, work unit and organisational levels on how to practically and effectively mainstream gender. It considers whether internal policies, practices and related support systems for gender mainstreaming are effective and reinforce each other by establishing a baseline by diagnosing gaps as well as by identifying good practices.

In 2001, the ILO introduced the PGA - the first of its kind - to the UN system. UN agencies in Mozambique, Nigeria, United Republic of Tanzania and Zimbabwe have gone through the audit process. By 2007, the intensive Training of Facilitators (TOFs) on audit facilitation skills and methodology had been developed so that a multiplier effect is achieved by creating capacity among national gender experts and UN staff.



ILC resolutions in both 1981 and 1991 called for increased participation of women in ILO bodies. Nonetheless, the target of at least 30 per cent participation of women in all policy and decision-making bodies, set by the UN at large and embraced by the ILO leadership, remains a challenge to be realized. For the ILC, the gradual progression toward this target had depended on moral suasion and publicity. The figure below shows the upward trend in the higher proportion of women as registered participants. Governments have consistently been in the lead in improving the gender balance.

WOMEN DELEGATES AT THE ILC BY GROUP (2002-2008)



The participation of women in ILO events and governance institutions is also on an upward path. Only four women have served as President of the ILC in its entire history - Frances Perkins (USA) in 1941, Anne-Greta Leijon (Sweden) in 1984, Olga Keltosova (Slovakia) in 1997 and P.A. Santo Tomas (Philippines) in 2001. Women Vice Presidents have also been relatively few, including five from Governments five from Workers; and only one from Employers. Increasingly, though, women are part of the leadership of ILC Committees, and the Credentials Committee is now tracking the number of women who speak on behalf of their countries or organizations in the Plenary. In addition, a number of high-level female political figures have recently addressed the ILC, further boosting women's visibility in leadership roles.

GENDER EQUALITY AT THE HEART OF DECENT WORK



H.M. Queen Rania of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, ILC 2003



Ms. Helen Clark, Prime Minister of New Zealand, ILC 2004



H.E. Ms. Tarja Halonen, President of Finland, ILC 2004



H.E. Ms. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, President of the Republic of Liberia, ILC 2006



H.E. Michelle Bachelet, President of Chile, ILC 2007



Most Hon. Portia Simpson-Miller, Prime Minister of Jamaica, ILC 2007

The Governing Body, too, has shown steady improvements, although only two women have chaired the GB, Aida Gonzalez-Martinez (Mexico) in 1982-83 and Maria Nieves Roldan-Confesor (Philippines) in 1994-95, who subsequently served as an expert adviser in monitoring the follow-up to the 1998 Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights. Another development is the first all-women officers of a subsidiary of the GB, the Subcommittee on Multinational Enterprises. The Chair of this Subcommittee has been a woman since 1997 (Jean Perlin and Deborah Robinson, both of Canada, Fiona Kilpatrick and Marie Niven, both of the UK, and Fausta Guarriello and Mariangela Zappia both of Italy). Women have been Vice-Chairs since 2002 (Cecilia Brighi of Italy and Sharan Burrow of Australia for the Workers, and Renata Horning-Draus of Germany for the Employers).

There have also been significant improvements for women in the Secretariat of the ILO. The current ILO administration has also been in the forefront of working for parity between men and women in career development within the ILO. Maria Angélica Ducci is the first ever woman Executive Director of the Director-General's Office in the ILO's history. Five of the twelve Executive Directors are women, in contrast to only two in the 1990s and only an occasional Assistant Director-General in the years before that. The numbers have come close to parity at the Director level, where just under 50 per cent are women, up from 31 per cent as recently as 2005. For all professional positions, the percentage is now 35 per cent, in contrast to the low percentage of 16 per cent in 1980. The efforts of the ILO Human Resources Department, supported by the Bureau for Gender Equality, to open up career development opportunities on an equal footing for men and women is bearing fruit.

In the context of the Decent Work Agenda and the clarity of vision articulated by the ILC in the 2008 Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization, the ILO has embraced gender equality and non-discrimination as cross-cutting issues. The 2009 ILC general discussion *Gender equality at the heart of decent work* offers a unique opportunity to move to further action and guide the Organization's future aspirations for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in the world of work. Taking into account the evolution of leadership from the outstanding, courageous and persistent women in the history of the ILO, it is fitting to look to the future with anticipation and confidence.



Maria Angélica Ducci, Executive Director of the Director-General's Office



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This background brochure has been prepared as part of the ILO public awareness raising campaign on "Gender equality at the heart of decent work".

Please contact us on gendercampaign@ilo.org for information on additional ILO themes addressed by this gender equality campaign.