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## ***Gender Equality in the World of Work<sup>i</sup>***

### **Introduction**

Promoting gender equality is an indisputable mandate collectively endorsed across the UN system. The ILO promotes women's economic empowerment and gender equality as key development goals – as asserted in the International Labour Conventions and by the Millennium Development Goals. The ILO works to provide opportunities for women to benefit economically through labour force participation<sup>1</sup> which in turn brings gains to other areas of development including poverty reduction, declines in fertility, redistribution of responsibilities and rights within a household.

The ILO's vision of gender equality at work recognizes this goal not only as a basic human right only, but intrinsic to the global aim of Decent Work for All Women and Men. This vision is based on the ILO mandate on gender equality as stated in numerous Resolutions of the International Labour Conference, the highest policy-making organ of the ILO, as well as relevant International Labour Conventions. The ILO Policy on Gender Equality and Mainstreaming, which is made operational through the ILO Action Plan, supports a two-pronged approach of gender mainstreaming: systematically analyzing and addressing in all initiatives the specific needs of both women and men, and targeted interventions to enable women and men to participate in – and benefit equally from – development efforts.

### **Labour Market Indicators**

The rate of female labour force participation has increased from 50.2 to 51.7 per cent between 1980 and 2008, while the male rate decreased slightly from 82.0 to 77.7 per cent. As a result, the gender gap in labour force participation rates has narrowed from 32 to 26 percentage points. The increases in female participation were seen in all but two regions, Central and South-Eastern Europe (non-EU), and the CIS countries and East Asia, with the largest gain seen in Latin America and the Caribbean. In almost all regions, though, the rate of increase has slowed in recent years. It was in the 1980s and early '90s that gains in numbers of economically active women were strongest.

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\* The author is the Senior Regional Gender Specialist of the ILO Decent Work Technical Support Team, Regional Office for the Arab States. This Background Paper should not be reported as representing the views of the ILO. The views expressed in this Paper are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent those of the ILO or ILO policy. Background papers prepared for this event are made available to participants to elicit comments and to further debate.

<sup>1</sup> Labour force participation rate is a measure of the proportion of a country's working age population that engages actively in the labour market, either by working or looking for work, Women in Labour Markets: measuring progress and identifying challenges, ILO 2010, p.12.

At the same time, the share of women in wage and salaried work has grown from 42.8 per cent in 1999 to 47.3 per cent in 2009, and the share of vulnerable employment decreased from 55.9 per cent to 51.2 per cent. While there have been areas of improvement since the Beijing conference and more women are choosing to work, they still don't enjoy the same gains as men in the labour markets. There are still many more women than men taking up low-pay and precarious work, either because this is the only type of job made available to them or because they need to find something that allows them to balance work and family responsibilities. Men do not face these same constraints.

There are three basic areas of lingering gender imbalances in the world of work. First, nearly half (48.4 per cent) of the female population above the age of 15 remain economically inactive, compared to 22.3 per cent for men. In some regions, there are still less than 4 economically active women per 10 active men. Second, women who do want to work have a harder time than men in finding work. And third, when women do find work, they receive less pay and benefits than the male workers in similar positions. Labour markets and policies need to be much more attuned to a broader paradigm of gender equality, one that adapts and builds on the unique values and constraints of both women and men.

The initial impact of the global economic crisis was felt in sectors dominated by men, such as finance, manufacturing and construction, but the impact has since expanded to other sectors – including services – where women tend to predominate. The ILO estimates that the global female unemployment rate increased from 6.0 per cent in 2007 to 7.0 per cent in 2009, slightly more than the male rate which rose from 5.5 to 6.3 per cent. But in four of the nine regions, it was the male unemployment rate that rose more than the female. In 2009, female unemployment rates were higher than male rates in seven of nine regions, and in the Middle East and North Africa the difference was as high as 7 percentage points. Previous crises show that female job-losers find it more difficult to return to work as economic recovery settles.

As reported in the thematic paper on MDG3<sup>2</sup> presented to the 2010 Millennium Summit, women suffer multiple disadvantages in access to labour markets and often do not have the same freedom to choose to work as men. Gender differences in labour force participation rates, unemployment rates and gender wage gaps are a persistent feature of global labour markets. Close to two-thirds of all employed women in developing countries work either as contributing family workers or as own-account workers, extremely vulnerable employment which lack security and benefits.

The continuing global financial and economic crisis which continues to adversely affect labour markets around the world also hinders women's access to labour markets. In 2010 global unemployment remained at 205 million, unchanged from the previous year, with the number of unemployed men at 118.4 million and unemployed women at 86.5 million. The global unemployment rate stood at 6.2% with the unemployment rate for men at

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<sup>2</sup> Thematic paper on MDG3, Promote gender equality and empower women. UNDG, 2010.

6.0% and for women at 6.2%. Initially the sectors affected most by the crisis, finance, construction, transport and manufacturing were all male dominated, however as the crisis evolved the job losses equally affected both women and men<sup>3</sup>. Young women and men have been particularly affected by the crisis with ILO estimating that across 56 countries with available data, there are 1.7 million fewer youth in the labour market than expected, indicating a sharp rise in discouragement among youth<sup>4</sup>.

Investing in women's full economic potential is critical to increasing productivity and economic growth, and supporting the move towards a more balanced and sustainable development. However, in the wake of the global economic crisis, there has been a fear that the progress made in the past decades in advancing women's positions in the world of work is being undermined. According to ILO's *Global Employment Trends 2011*, the unemployment rate for men stood at 6%, whereas for women it was 6.5%. An increasing concern are low participation rates for female employment which currently stands around 53 per cent compared to 78 per cent for men. In other words, some 510 million women worldwide are of working age, but are not economically active. This translates into wasted talent, untapped ideas and loss of productive capacity.

ILO research indicates that women are increasingly migrating in larger numbers for work due to limited labour market opportunities at home. Of the 214 million international migrants on the move today, 50 per cent are women. Much of the work secured by women migrants is in the informal economy which provides a vital source of livelihoods for women and their families; however, this also puts them at greater risk of labour exploitation and abuses with little formal protection. In this regard, domestic work is an area of great impact on women's empowerment and gender equality and a focus of the ILO. There are an estimated 53 million domestic workers worldwide, of which nearly 83 per cent are women or girls, many of them migrant workers.

### **ILO Resolution on Gender Equality and Decent Work**

ILO's work on the advancement of women is furthered through research, knowledge sharing, and policy advice based on continual learning and application. In 2009 the International Labour Conference adopted a resolution and conclusions on Gender equality at the heart of decent work<sup>5</sup> which recognised that while progress had been made to advance gender equality in the world of work, major challenges remain. The conclusions noted that poverty had been increasingly feminized; the gender pay gap persisted; there was a lack of work in all its forms, including full time work. Discrimination related to pregnancy and maternity occurs, and horizontal and vertical segregation persisted in the labour market, women predominate in involuntary part time work, are over-represented in low-paying jobs; are under-represented in executive, management and technical positions;

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<sup>3</sup> Global Jobs Pact Policy Brief No 15. ILO Geneva 2010.

<sup>4</sup> Global Employment Trends 2011- The challenge of a jobs recovery. ILO Geneva, 2011.

<sup>5</sup> Gender Equality at the heart of decent work, International Labour Conference Provisional Record 13, 98<sup>th</sup> Session, Geneva 2009

[http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---gender/documents/meetingdocument/wcms\\_112288.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---gender/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_112288.pdf)

many women suffer poor working conditions and gender-based violence occurs at all stages of women's lives.

In relation to employment options, the conclusions make specific reference to economic empowerment of women. It found that "fostering SMEs and women's entrepreneurship is a key means of generating employment and can offer the opportunity for social and economic empowerment of women as well as men and their families. The conclusions concerning the promotion of sustainable enterprises, adopted by the 96th Session of the International Labour Conference (2007), propose some basic conditions generally considered to be essential: (1) peace and political stability; (2) good governance; (3) social dialogue; (4) respect for universal human rights and international labour standards; (5) entrepreneurial culture; (6) sound and stable macroeconomic policy and good management of the economy; (7) trade and sustainable economic integration; (8) an enabling legal and regulatory environment; (9) rule of law and secure property rights; (10) fair competition; (11) access to financial services; (12) physical infrastructure; (13) information and communication technologies; (14) education, training and lifelong learning; (15) social justice and social inclusion; (16) adequate social protection; and (17) responsible stewardship of the environment<sup>6</sup>".

### **Labour Market Situation in Arab States**

Women in the Arab region continue to have the poorest labour market outcomes in the world, whether in comparison with men or in comparison with women in other regions. According to global estimates, in 2009 the employment-to-population ratio in the Middle East was 20.5 per cent for women and 67.7 per cent for men, while in North Africa it was 23.4 per cent for women and 69.7 per cent for men. The world average was 49.2 per cent for women and 73.1 per cent for men. The limited quantity and quality of employment opportunities available in the region affects both women and men, particularly youth. But the low participation of women is also related to the specific obstacles they face in access to employment. In 2009 the unemployment rate in the Middle East was 17.3 per cent for women and 8.2 per cent for men, while in North Africa it was 15.3 per cent for women and 7.8 per cent for men. The world average was 6.5 per cent for women and 6.2 per cent for men.

The improvements registered in recent years in the labour market situation of women and men in the region may be slowed down or even reversed by the global economic crisis. The sustainability of increased employment in the region was uncertain even earlier. While deindustrialization took place in other parts of the world, the region was the only one witnessing an increase in women's agricultural employment, mainly as vulnerable workers. It is important to note that the availability, quality, and regularity of labour statistics is uneven across the region, and often remains insufficient or inadequate in capturing the real extent of women's employment, particularly in the informal economy, due to gender biases in the methodology.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid. Paragraph 20.

The analysis of existing national statistics suggests that in contrast with other developing regions, only a small share of women's employment outside agriculture is informal, as the public sector employment remains the main purveyor of employment for women, given its more favourable terms and conditions for women in comparison with the private sector, which are valuable in themselves and make the jobs more socially acceptable. Women in informal employment in the region are more likely to be contributing family workers than own-account workers, in contrast with other regions. Regional comparisons should not mask the fact that economic and social conditions vary widely across Arab countries, yet there is very little variance in women's economic activity rates within the region despite the wide differences between high-income oil-producing countries where the large majority of workers are migrants, countries enduring long term conflict, those promoting women in export industries, and those ridden with poverty.

The insufficient employment generation and the poor quality of created jobs, along with the deficiencies in the national frameworks for gender equality contribute to women's limited participation in the world of work. Women have limited participation in paid employment, in the ownership of enterprises, and in government, workers' and employers' organizations. Where they participate, they are often in lower positions. The promotion of women's entrepreneurship development and women's cooperatives are areas that can contribute to opening up spaces for women to earn an independent income in the absence of adequate paid employment opportunities. While in some countries women with university education have higher unemployment rates, technical and vocational education and training, where women remain underrepresented, provides interesting opportunities if there is a move towards life skills and technical skills for non-traditional occupations for women that are market-relevant.

### **Ways Forward**

The ILO's Member States with their worker and employer representatives overwhelmingly adopted the Convention on Domestic Workers (Convention 189) this year. The Convention is significant in that for the first time it extends to workers in the informal economy the same basic rights at work as those available to other workers. The Convention not only has wider implications for migration and gender equality, but also provides a stronger framework of support for all workers who aspire to decent work. This new convention adds an important dimension to existing international labour standards that promote equality in the world of work. The international framework to support the advancement of women at work is comprised of the Equal Remuneration Convention (No. 100), Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention (No. 111), Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention (No. 156) and Maternity Protection Convention (No. 183).

The ratification and application of ILO key gender equality conventions remains of crucial importance to improve the prospects of women in the region. Even where Conventions 100 and 111 are ratified, the legislative frameworks are not in line with

them. Convention 156 has only been ratified by Yemen, while Convention 183 has not been ratified in the region. With respect to maternity protection, moving towards social security-funded maternity benefits, as is the case in some countries in North Africa, will increase women's employment in the private sector.

With respect to family responsibilities, households have responded to the lack of adequate social care services by recruiting domestic workers, overwhelmingly women migrants, whereas those that cannot afford it typically rely on women of the family, as gender roles have changed little in that regard. Some national counterparts, particularly in the Gulf, have also expressed interest in promoting home work for women which also necessitates the promotion of rights in this work in the region in line with Convention 177.

The principle of equal pay for work of equal value remains often misunderstood and not applied and provisions for non-discrimination are typically insufficient or not appropriately enforced. Women migrant domestic workers typically bear the brunt of multiple discrimination, thus the standard-setting process on decent work for domestic workers is of particular relevance.

## **Highlight of ILO Tools on Gender Equality**

### ***Pay equity***

Around the globe, the gender pay gap still exists, with women's wages being on average 70-90 per cent of men's, and sexual harassment persists as a significant problem in workplaces predominantly for young, financially dependent, single or divorced women. Pay equity refers to the principle of equal remuneration for work of equal value. The undervaluation of women's work can be demonstrated and eliminated by assessing the economic value of different jobs through the use of gender-neutral job evaluation systems.

The methodology developed to promote pay equity includes national situation assessments, policy briefs, policy awareness workshops, and the formation of a national committee on pay equity with research, training, advocacy, and legislative change components. The ILO's Gender Neutral Job Evaluation Guide has also been translated into Arabic. To date Jordan is the only country in the region where the methodology has been initiated. A sub-regional project has been drafted, and search for funding is underway. There has been interest from Egypt and West Bank to be included in the sub-regional initiative.

### ***Gender equality and workers' rights in the informal economy***

The nature of employment is rapidly and dramatically changing around the world, including in Arab States. The increasing flexibility of labour markets at global and local levels has led to a rise of informal employment, self-employment and atypical forms of

employment. This process, termed as informalization, has been accompanied by an increase of insecurity and poverty.

The methodology developed includes expert group meetings, regional overviews of social protection and statistics, country-level studies, policy briefs, policy awareness workshops, training, and dissemination in research networks. The methodology has been initiated at the regional level and is at different stages of progress in different countries, with more engagement to date in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and Syria.

### ***Gender mainstreaming in labour statistics***

To usefully address gender concerns, and to understand more fully the labour market functioning, labour statistics should satisfy the following four requirements: they should be based on a political will at all levels; The data collection procedures for labour statistics must ensure that, as far as possible, all relevant topics for describing gender concerns are regularly included; The data collection and processing procedures for labour statistics programmes are designed to ensure that definitions and measurement methods cover and adequately describe all workers and work situations in sufficient detail to allow relevant gender comparisons to be made; and The resulting statistics will always be presented as part of regular publications in a way that will clearly reveal differences and similarities between men and women in the labour market and the factors that may influence their situations.

The methodology developed includes situation assessments, survey of institutional stakeholders, policy briefs, user-producer dialogues, and training on gender-responsive labour statistics. To date the methodology has been initiated only in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, although there was been engagement in other countries such as Lebanon, and collaboration at the regional level with ESCWA.

### ***Women entrepreneurship development (WED)***

Women entrepreneurs face gender-based barriers to starting and growing their businesses including discriminatory property, matrimonial and inheritance laws and/or cultural practices, limited mobility, voice and representation, and an unequal share of family and household responsibilities. These factors, combined with social exclusion based on sex mean that women entrepreneurs are in a less favourable position compared to men when it comes to accessing for example commercial credit from formal financial service providers, more lucrative markets, rather than the traditional local markets, technology and information to establish and grow their businesses, national incentives in small enterprise development through gender blind private sector development and fiscal policies and legislation and training and education for small enterprise development.

Women entrepreneurs are, however, not a homogenous group. Often treated as such, groups of women entrepreneurs with less power and voice are often overlooked in small

enterprise development initiatives. Women entrepreneurs operating micro and small businesses in the informal economy make a strong contribution to the economic well-being of the family and communities. As they remain outside the scope of SME development policies and programmes, their chances of developing lucrative businesses remain slim.

Responding to these challenges, the WEDGE project follows a development and rights-based approach which aims to satisfy the practical needs of women entrepreneurs, to remove the socio-cultural, legal and political barriers for women entrepreneurship and to advocate for an enabling environment for business development and gender equality.

A series of ILO WED tools have been translated, pilot-tested and adapted to the regional context. These tools (including the Get Ahead Gender and Entrepreneurship Together and the Women Entrepreneurship Development Capacity Building Guide) have been used in Iraq, Yemen, West Bank and Gaza Strip, Lebanon, Egypt and Sudan successfully. UNDP Libya and Syria have also utilized the materials via ILO regional trainers.

### ***Rural women cooperatives***

People in rural areas can establish cooperatives to share risks, pool resources, accumulate savings, and provide credit. Cooperatives have a special relevance for women who form a larger share of the agricultural labour force as contributing family workers. Cooperatives can empower women and raise not only their own standards of living, but also of the communities in which they live.

The methodology developed includes situation assessments and institutional mapping, policy briefs, policy round tables, technical committee meetings for training material development, training sessions for cooperative support institutions and women cooperative leaders. A number of ILO materials have been utilized including the Business Group Formation Guide, MATCOM and value chain analysis for the training. To date the methodology has been used in Yemen as well as in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

### ***Gender mainstreaming in technical and vocational educational and training (TVET)***

An important employment challenge is to tackle occupational segregation of traditionally accepted “male” and “female” jobs and to break the barriers in opening up professions to both young women and men. Unaware of their legal rights and often lacking enough role models, young women are only slowly penetrating into the professions traditionally dominated by men. Young women, particularly in developing countries, are often unable to take advantage of training opportunities due to barriers to entry, discrimination in selection and gender stereotyping.

The methodology developed includes situation assessments and institutional mapping, policy briefs, policy round tables, technical committee meetings for training material development, training sessions for administrators and trainers of TVET institutions,

campaign materials for parents, students and employers (TV spots, poster, documentary and brochures), and action briefs. Materials are available for Yemen and are under development for the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

### ***Participatory gender audit (PGA)***

PGAs are an interactive tool to promote learning at individual, work unit and organizational levels on how to mainstream gender practically and effectively. In 2001 ILO was the first UN system entity to use PGAs, which are voluntary at the request of a unit, office or organization. PGAs analyze whether internal policies, practices and related support systems for gender mainstreaming are effective and reinforce each other, by establishing a baseline for performance on gender mainstreaming. They identify good practices so that these can be reinforced and replicated, specify areas for improvement, and offer recommendations on how to increase effectiveness in addressing gender issues.

The ILO methodology has been translated, pilot-tested and adapted to the Arab regional context. Extensive work has been undertaken in Yemen as well as in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, where gender audits of the tripartite constituents have formulated recommendations for improving their gender-responsiveness. There has been interest expressed for the application of the methodology from GCC countries as well as Jordan.

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<sup>i</sup> This note was gathered from relevant ILO references that are available from the ILO website: [www.ilo.org/gender](http://www.ilo.org/gender) and [www.ilo.org/arabstates](http://www.ilo.org/arabstates)