

Women and the economy

1. Global commitments

This chapter of the *Platform for Action* is concerned with the obstacles faced by women in gaining equitable opportunities and rewards in economic participation. There are six strategic objectives.

- (Promote women's economic rights and independence, including access to employment, appropriate working conditions and control over economic resources.
- (Facilitate women's equal access to resources, employment, markets and trade.
- (Provide business services, training and access to markets, information and technology, particularly to low-income women.
- (Strengthen women's economic capacity and commercial networks.
- (Eliminate occupational segregation and all forms of employment discrimination.
- (Promote harmonization of work and family responsibilities for women and men.

Article 11 of the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW) commits States parties to take "all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of employment in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, the same rights", and "to prevent discrimination against women on the grounds of marriage or maternity and to ensure their effective right to work."

The International Labour Organization (ILO) has adopted a number of Conventions of particular relevance to gender equality, in particular the four key gender equality Conventions. These are the *Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958* (No. 111), the *Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951* (No. 100), the *Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981* (No. 156) and the *Maternity Protection Convention, 2000* (No. 183).

The Commission on the Status of Women continues to emphasize the importance of achieving equality in employment and economic activities. In particular, with the ten-year review and appraisal of implementation of the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*, the Commission adopted a resolution that called for ratification and full implementation of the ILO Conventions ensuring women's rights to work and for other policy measures to support women economic equality for women.¹ In the same year, the 2005 World Summit Outcome reiterated the commitment "to promote gender equality and eliminate pervasive discrimination" by "...promoting women's equal access to labour markets, sustainable employment and adequate labour protection."²

ILO Conventions promoting gender equality and ratifications as of January 2007

Four key equality conventions:

- *Equal Remuneration Convention* (No. 100, 1951) – 163 ratifications, Recommendation No 90
- *Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention* (No.111, 1958) – 165 ratifications, Recommendation No 111
- *Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention* (No.156, 1981) – 37 ratifications, Recommendation No 165
- *Maternity Protection Convention* (No.183, 2000) – 13 ratifications, Recommendation No 191

Other conventions

- *Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention* (No. 182, 1999) – 163 ratifications, Recommendation No 190
- *Home Work Convention* (No. 177, 1996) – 5 ratifications, Recommendation No 184
- *Part-Time Work Convention* (No 175, 1994) – 11 ratifications, Recommendation No 182
- *Night Work Convention* (No. 171,1990) – 9 ratifications, Recommendation No 178
- *Minimum Age Convention* (No. 138, 1973) – 147 ratifications, Recommendation No 146
- *Abolition of Forced Labour Convention* (No. 105, 1957) – 167 ratifications
- *Right to Organise and to Bargain Collectively* (No. 98, 1949) – 156 ratifications
- *Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention* (No. 87, 1948) – 147 ratifications
- *Forced or Compulsory Labour Convention* (No. 29, 1930) - 171 ratifications, Recommendation No 35

Source: ILO, *Gender Equality and Decent Work* and the ILOLEX database³

Summary of key ILO Conventions promoting gender equality

States parties that have ratified the, *Equal Remuneration Convention 1951* (No. 100) agree to promote the principle of equal remuneration for men and women workers for work of equal value and its application through laws, wage-fixing machineries, collective agreements or a combination of these means.

The *Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958* (No. 111) provides a comprehensive statement on discrimination. MCID 36mEMC ghrounsive

Improvements in some aspects of the labour market

While the evidence on changes in economic opportunities is mixed, progress can be reported on the indicator on women's employment identified for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). This indicator is *women's share of non-agricultural paid employment*, which increased in all regions between 1990 and 2003. In 2003 it was 50.3 per cent in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), 46.4 per cent in developed regions, 43.5 per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean, and 40.0 per cent in Eastern Asia (40.0 per cent). However, women's share of non-agricultural paid employment remained low in Southern Asia, Western Asia and Northern Africa at 18.0, 20.2 and 21.5 percent in 2003, respectively.⁴

Women's share in the non-agricultural sector is one of the four indicators under the third Millennium Development Goal (MDG3), "promo

Strengthened framework of norms and laws for economic equality

Increased momentum for progress toward achieving the strategic objectives of the Beijing *Platform for Action* on economic equality has been provided 1998 adoption of the ILO *Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work*. The Declaration is evidence of a renewed commitment by ILO constituents (governments, employer and worker representatives), to promote and realise four categories of principles and rights, one of which is the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupations (the others are freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining, the elimination of forced or compulsory labour, and the abolition of child labour).

New annual reporting processes were established with the adoption of the Declaration, which both increases the momentum for action within reporting countries and provides the inputs for a database of information that can be used by other countries in formulating their own strategies. Annual reporting by countries reflects the four themes of the Declaration identified above. In comments on the elimination of discrimination theme in the 2006 Review of Annual Reports, the Expert Advisors welcomed the growing number of ratification of the Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100) and Discrimination (Employment and Occupation, 1958 (No. 111), both of which are among the most widely ratified of ILO Conventions. Ratifications of Convention 100 increased from 136—at time of the adoption of the ILO Declaration in 1998—to 163 in 2006; and ratifications of Convention 111 increased from 129 to 165 during the same time period. The Expert Advisors stated that the high number of new ratifications together with the intentions expressed by a number of governments, “means that the ILO can envisage a time of nearly complete ratification in the not too distant future.”¹¹

3. Gaps and challenges

Progress toward gender equality in economic participation and the labour market has been mixed. There have been increases in the number of women employed in all regions, and new opportunities have been provided in the service sector and as a result of new trade relationships. However, the increased numbers of jobs have not been matched with increased job quality or an improved position for women in the labour market.¹² Discriminatory patterns in the labour market have proved to be very persistent. Further, trends associated with recent economic growth—laws and policies favouring labour flexibility, outsourcing of production, increased numbers of temporary and part-time jobs—have led to insecurity in the workplace, particularly for women workers.¹³

Labour markets remain characterized by inequality

Persistent inequality in labour markets is evident in the factors outlined below.

- (*Occupational segregation remains firmly entrenched*, both horizontal segregation (men and women found in different sectors) and vertical segregation (men and women found at different levels in the hierarchy, with women more likely to be at the lower levels). A disturbing finding is that vertical segregation frequently increases as horizontal segregation decreases.¹⁴
- (*Women remain over-represented in insecure and lower-paid work*. Women are over-represented among part-time workers, and the upward trend in part-time work seems to be increasingly involuntary. Women are also over-repres

“A growing number of countries have moved away from a legal approach exclusively based on the imposition of the negative duty

were recommended by a government commission in India in 1944, and today a network of federal, private and voluntary preschool programmes in India provide child care to a large share of children. Institutionalized child care is provided in China, where 90 percent of young mothers are employed.²³

Although many countries have undertaken efforts, the conclusion of the 2005 review done by the UN Millennium Project was that “not one country provides the investment in care services that is required to fully meet the needs of women and their children. Filling this gap is essential for meeting Goal 3.”²⁴

4. Strategies to accelerate implementation

There is much still to be done to implement the commitments made in the Beijing *Platform for Action* commitments. National governments can take action in a wide range of areas. They can, for example:

- (bring national employment legislation into conformity with international norms on non-discrimination, equal pay, workers with family responsibilities, and maternity leave;
- (promote awareness among employers and the work force about employment rights, practical approaches that employers can take in implementing them, and steps workers can take when

most enforcement systems is that they are complaints-based and thus rely on individual workers or their representatives to activate the law, which can mean that they are unevenly applied and in particular deny protection to the more disadvantaged workers.²⁵

The report reviews a number of ways in which different countries have strengthened enforcement of the law through promotion and enforcement mechanisms. The labour inspectorate has been an important target in some countries, as

Women's disadvantage in relation to most of these aspects of job quality reflects

legislation to assist workers in coping with the competing demands of work and family responsibilities. Measures taken included parental leave and benefits, support for labour market re-entry, family-friendly working hours, support for child and dependent care and family-

Recent developments encouraging fathers to take up care-related leave

“Childcare leave entitlement is a policy area that has undergone significant changes in various countries in the past years. There has been a move towards encouraging fathers to take up care-related leave through the introduction of paternity leave or modifying parental leave.

“Recently introduced **paternity leave** entitlements, a short leave immediately after childbirth, can be optional or obligatory: in Italy fathers are entitled, but not obliged, to take two weeks’ post-natal leave, while in Portugal paternity leave is of 20 days, of which five days are compulsory. It can be of varied length (ranging from one day in Chile, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia to 90 days in Iceland and Slovenia) and paid or unpaid (although the latter is often the case), and financed by the employer, through social security or by a combination of both.

“In Iceland, since the 2001 law reform, no distinction is made between paternity and maternity leave, but a nine-month paid leave (at 80 per cent of salary) after childbirth is granted instead. This leave is split into three

Training and capacity building:

- (providing gender awareness training to decision-makers at senior levels – for all management, with particular attention to heads of core ministries such as finance, planning, personnel and justice;
- (ensuring equal opportunities for women and men to participate in training – including training courses and on-the-job training; and
- (establishing partnerships with NGOs and the academic community – drawing on women’s organisations as a resource and partner for both gender awareness training and the development of more equitable personnel policies.

Incentives and sanctions:

- (providing incentives for good performance and sanctions for practising discrimination – through performance appraisal systems that provide recognition and feedback and other non-financial rewards such as certificates or awards of merit.

Equal opportunities policy:

- (adopting and implementing a broad-based multi-pronged equal employment opportunities policy to address all the above issues.

The United Kingdom specifies a “Gender Equality Duty” for public authorities

The “Gender Equality Duty” effective from April 2007 requires public authorities:

“to promote gender equality and eliminate sex discrimination. Instead of depending on individuals making complaints about sex discrimination, the duty places the legal responsibility on public authorities to demonstrate that they treat men and women fairly. The duty will affect policy making, public services, such as transport, and employment practices such as recruitment and flexible working.”

An introductory guide sets out some gender issues to consider with respect to the employment practices aspect of the gender equality duty:

- “Is there a pay gap between men and women doing the same job or jobs of similar value?
- How could flexible working help staff and how will it benefit men and women?
- How do we recruit staff and are we likely to get a good gender balance of candidates?
- Do we have a gender imbalance? If so, how could we try and rectify the situation?
- Do we have a good return rate from maternity leave? If not, why and how can we improve?”

It also outline the benefits to the public sector employer of taking account of the points above:

- Improved recruitment – better ability to fill skill gaps in an organisation
- Happier staff and higher staff retention – as a result of flexible working and improved work

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- (European Commission website for EQUAL initiative: ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equal/activities/life_en.cfm (accessed 5 July 2007). See particularly the section on the Equal Opportunities theme (oriented toward “creating and promoting a European Model on Comprehensive Approaches to Equal Opportunities”): includes a set of policy briefs, success stories, and practical examples. There is also a searchable database by theme, type of guidelines and other factors (see under “activities and results”).
- (OECD website on Babies and Bosses: www.oecd.org/document/13/0,3343,en_2649_34819_33844621_1_1_1_1,00.html (accessed 6 July 2007). Focuses on the work-life balance for families and the series of country studies done on this theme, together with issue briefs the OECD recommendations. Also see the OECD website on family policies, www.oecd.org (follow links to topic, employment, family policy, publications) (accessed 5 July 2007).

Reports and tools

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- ¹¹ ILO (2006). *Review of annual reports under the follow-up to the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, Introduction by the ILO Declaration Expert-Advisers to the compilation of annual reports* (Geneva, March 2006), GB.295/5, 295th session of the ILO Governing Body, quote from para. 65, 1998 data from page 81. www.ilo.org/dyn/declaris/DECLARATIONWEB.DOWNLOAD_BLOB?Var_DocumentID=5939 (accessed 6 July 2007).
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