

Commission on the Status of Women
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PANEL I

Enhanced participation of women in development: an enabling environment for achieving gender equality and the advancement of women, taking into account, inter alia, the field of education, health and work

This statement focuses on the importance of creating a favorable policy environment and specific action to promote decent work in the context of globalization, that includes fundamental rights at work, social protection, representation and voice for the poor and especially women in the informal economy.

Employment patterns for poor women and men in the fast-changing world of work

1. In an increasingly integrated global economy, rapid changes in production processes have radically changed the nature of work and employment, in both the formal and informal economies, for women and men all over the world. While the liberalization of trade and investment has opened up opportunities for employment, particularly for those with appropriate skills, it has also put pressure on sectors and workplaces exposed to increasing global competition, leading to job losses, work disruption, labour market adjustments and work informalization for most of the world's workers. The opportunities and costs of globalization are often not being equitably distributed among workers within and between countries.

2. As highlighted by the ILO's Director-General at the January 2006 World Economic Forum, these are the symptoms of a world that is slipping into an 'unprecedented global job crisis' where economic growth is failing to counteract the global decent work deficit. For the vast majority of the world's working men and women, the economic gains from globalization have failed to improve their working conditions and incomes. They have also increased their risk of not finding decent work –

economy, labour markets remain highly segregated, with many women trapped in traditionally 'female' jobs which tend to be more low-status, insecure, unsafe, poorly paid, and without opportunities for advancement than those held by men. Such inequalities are not only based on sex differences, but may be amplified by discrimination based on age, ethnicity, class and migrant status. Even for similar work, women are still paid on average 20–30 per cent less than men in both industrialized and developing economies.⁴

5. Women still experience higher unemployment rates, represent a disproportionate share in the informal economy, and contribute more to the unpaid care economy than men. Worldwide, over 60 per cent of people working in family enterprises without pay are women, who thus have little or no control over the income they generate.⁵ Women's employment in the informal economy as a percentage of women's total non-agricultural employment is generally estimated to be higher than the corresponding rate for men.⁶ Since the urban informal economy has increasingly become a new source of employment for poor workers, more women than men tend to be found there.⁷

6. In fact, women still represent the majority of the working poor in all world regions, accounting for 60 per cent—an estimated 330 million—of the world's 550 million working poor.⁸ And while proportionately more women than men are unemployed worldwide, the difference is more pronounced among young women under the age of 25 in Latin America and the Caribbean, in Southern and Western Asia and in Northern Africa.⁹ Adding up the 330 million female working poor and the 77.8 million women who are unemployed, we see that at least 400 million decent jobs would need to be created to counter the female decent work deficit.¹⁰

7. Moreover, evidence is emerging that the opportunities opened up by increased global integration may not even represent sustainable gains for women. Recent studies by the United Nations Development Fund for Wo

little or no access to health insurance, disability benefits, maternity protection or pension schemes. In the formal sector, women tend to be concentrated in jobs which attract fewer benefits than receive men, and have different work patterns from men.

- **Political, programming and financial commitments to gender equality is essential for accountability**

Equality of opportunity in education, training and employment

17. Reducing discrimination in employment, occupational segregation and gender wage gaps begins with equal access for all girls and boys, women and men to free basic education and to training, with an emphasis on technical education and training in non-traditional skills for girls. Equitable education is the bedrock of decent work. In employment itself, equality of opportunity and treatment includes innovative measures at the workplace to achieve gender equality, including, for example, affirmative action where appropriate, the elimination of occupational segregation, and work–family balance for both women and men. Given that women are over-represented among the world’s working poor and in the informal economy, supporting equal access to better working der equality, incl

20. An enabling environment for most poor working women would be created by extending national social security systems much more widely, especially as regards access to health care and maternity protection, but also pension and invalidity schemes. Social protection systems must be adapted and developed to meet the new needs thrown up not only by demographic change but also by globalized, flexible, and informal work, in which women workers predominate in conditions of precariousness and inadequate or non-existent protection. States need to give financial and technical support to existing, viable, alternative social security systems (covering, for instance, health micro-insurance and pension provisions) that are often set up by women's cooperatives, trade unions, or civil society groups.

Opening space for dialogue and partnership, creating an enabling environment for representation and voice

21. The ILO firmly believes that action to strengthen the capacities of its tripartite constituents—governments, employers' organizations, and workers organizations—to promote positive change for gender equality effectively hinges on men's and women's equal participation in meaningful social dialogue and on improved gender balance in decision-makers in their respective structures. Social dialogue also means creating partnership, encouraging networking and collaboration with local, and national women's associations and women's machineries that actively promote women's empowerment and employment rights in the formal and informal economies.

22. Poor working women and men on the margins of the labour market have few channels through which to engage in social dialogue. They are still in a minority as members of most trade unions and employers' organizations world-wide. However, trade unions and employers' organizations increasingly see the need to make sustained efforts to increase women's representation at all levels, and especially in policy-making and leadership positions. The ILO advocates consistently and tirelessly for such efforts.

23. Organizing is an essential empowering tool enabling women workers to gain confidence, increase their representation and acquire a voice in local, national and international employment policy making. In particular, organizing is vital among informal-economy women workers, since it can help women to obtain credit for setting up their business, to access healthcare and other services, and ultimately to make the leap out of the informal economy.

Advancing gender equality in development through both gender mainstreaming and gender equality through both

setting up of a knowledge management sharing system on gender equality and employment has enabled the consolidation and expansion of the ILO's knowledge base on the practice of gender mainstreaming in the different employment-related areas that the ILO's development aid programme tackles.

25. The ILO also recognizes that if historically entrenched discrimination against women in the world of work is to be confronted, specific action in favour of women is often required, and the ILO promotes, when necessary, the use of gender-specific policy action. Explicit gender equality measures are needed to accompany more gender-sensitive policies for employment generation, particularly in the context of human rights issues such as reproductive health rights.²¹

Applying an integrated approach to gender equality

26. Given the cross-sectoral nature of the Decent Work Agenda, its effective

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- ¹ Chen et al. *Progress of the World's Women 2005: Women, Work and Poverty*. New York: UNIFEM, 2005.
- ² In India, for example, the Deputy Director of the Confederation of Indian Industries estimated that women held about 40 per cent of the new jobs created by the outsourcing of Information Technology Enabled Services (ITES), covering a wide range of jobs including back-office work, transcription, and support services in call centres. [Mitter, Swasti. Offshore Outsourcing of IT Enabled Services: Implications for Women. Development Gateway website]
- ³ In Latin America, for instance, women account for 40–60 per cent of labourers in commercial farm fields and the vast majority of workers in packing houses. [UNRISD. *Gender Equality: Striving for Justice in an Unequal World*. Geneva, 2005]
- ⁴ Mainstreaming Gender Equality in the World of Work, A Policy Brief, ILO Bureau for Gender Equality, forthcoming
- ⁵ Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Statistics Division. Progress towards the Millennium Development Goals, 1990–2005.
- ⁶ The difference is particularly evident in sub-Saharan Africa, where 84 per cent of women's employment outside agriculture is informal, compared to 63 per cent of men's. In Latin America, the percentages are 58 and 48 for women and men respectively. [United Nations. *The Millennium Development Goals Report, 2005*. New York: United Nations, 2005.]
- ⁷ In Bolivia and Ecuador, for example, a recent survey revealed that 80–82 per cent of workers in low-income urban communities were informally employed and that men represented the majority of those with jobs in the formal economy. [UNRISD, op. cit.]
- ⁸ ILO. *Global Employment Trends for Women 2004*, Geneva, March 2004.
- ⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰ Ibid.
- ¹¹ Employment data for Taiwan, Korea, Hong Kong and Singapore has shown that the decline in the share of female employment in this sector has ranged from three to five percentage points for 1991 - 2000. Similarly, research on Mexico's female labour force in export manufacturing has also shown that women's share of employment in *maquiladoras* has fallen from 63 to nearly 54 per cent between 1998 and 2004. [UNRISD, op. cit; Chen et al, op. cit.]
- ¹² In Mexico, for example, the manufacturing sector has been increasingly moving away from the production of textiles towards a more male-dominated production of transport equipment and electronics. The high mobility of firms in search of lower labour costs also contributes to this trend [Ibid.]
- ¹³ *Time for Equality at Work, A Global Report*. Geneva: ILO, 2003
- ¹⁴ A recent ILO study in the context of the ILO/NPP aid programme has shown that in the Pacific Island countries, for instance, women taking 'time off' for reproductive responsibilities, including care of children, the sick and the elderly as well as maternity leave, receive either reduced or no remuneration, resulting in lower pension entitlements. Where benefits such as family allowances and childcare subsidies exist to cover unpaid care work, these are usually less generous than those based on paid employment, often because of limited national budgetary resource for the social sectors. [Social security in Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu: Final gender report on social security programs. Suva, December 2005]
- ¹⁵ United States Department of State. *Trafficking in Persons Report: June 2005*. Washington, DC: US Department of State, 2005.
- ¹⁶ UNFPA 2005 – State of World Population 2005, *The Promise of Equality: Gender Equality, Reproductive Health & the MDGs*.
- ¹⁷ Office of Human Resources Management, 31 December 2005.
- ¹⁸ World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization: A fair globalization: Creating opportunities for all. ILO, Geneva 2004. www.ilo.org
- ¹⁹ United Nations World Summit 2005 Outcome Document, paragraph 47.
- ²⁰ In Morocco, for example, quotas have proven successful: 35 women have been elected since the electoral law was amended in 2001–02 reserving 30 seats for women. However, for such participation

to be meaningful, certain political conditions must be in place to equip women to assume leadership roles and play their full part in promoting positive change. Also, men must also be seen as partners on the road towards gender equality [United Nations Statistics Division:
http://unstats.un.org/unsd/mi/goals_2005/goal_3.pdf]

²¹ Rubery, Jill. Mainstreaming gender into the global employment agenda, UK, European Work and Employment Research Centre, Manchester Business School, University of Manchester, August 2005.

²² See

http://www.ilo.org/dyn/gender/genderevents.details?p_lang=en&p_category=REC&p_event_id=102&p_str=&p_count=0&p_selection=&p_min=1&p_incr=30