



Media Update

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ILO

NEWS RELEASE

ILO: Progress on gender equality at work remains inadequate

While there have been many achievements on gender equality since the Beijing Declaration on women rights was signed by 189 governments in 1995, many challenges remain, including a motherhood pay gap.

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GENEVA (ILO News) – Two decades after the world’s largest gathering of women adopted a far-reaching agenda for advancing gender equality and women’s empowerment, women are only marginally better off with respect to equality at work.

“Are working women better off today than they were 20 years ago?” asked ILO Director-General Guy Ryder. “The answer is a qualified yes. Has this progress met our expectations? The answer is decidedly no. We need to be innovative, to reframe the debate and to intensify the focus on ensuring the rights of women at work, and promoting gender equality and women’s economic empowerment.”

Progress in realizing the Declaration and Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 has been mixed, the ILO said in a briefing note prepared for International Women’s Day .

At the same time, the ILO also published a new working paper on the “motherhood pay gap” that imposes a wage penalty often over and above the wage gap already experienced by women worldwide. According to “The motherhood pay gap: A review of the issues, theory and international evidence”, mothers often earn less than women without children, depending on where they live and how many children they have.





Some progress, many challenges

In terms of policy, legislation, and the ratification of international labour standards, there has been notable progress. For example, in 1995, 126 ILO member States had ratified the Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100) and 122 had ratified the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111). Those numbers are now 171 and 172 respectively.

Yet women continue to experience widespread discrimination and inequality in the workplace. In most parts of the world, women are often in undervalued and low-paid jobs; lack access to education, training, recruitment; have limited bargaining and decision-making power; and still shoulder responsibility for most unpaid care work.

Globally, the gap in labour market participation rates between men and women has decreased only marginally since 1995. Currently about 50 per cent of all women are working, compared to 77 per cent of men. In 1995, these figures were 52 per cent and 80 per cent respectively. It is estimated that reducing the gap in participation rates between men and women by 25 per cent in G20 countries by 2025 would add more than 100 million women to the labour force (See G20 Leaders' Communiqué from Brisbane Summit).

Access to maternity protection has improved, though many women are still left out. While the percentage of countries offering 14 weeks or more maternity leave has increased from 38 per cent to 51 per cent, more than 800 million women workers globally, or 41 per cent of all women, still don't have adequate maternity protection.

At the same time, states are increasingly recognizing men's care responsibilities (See Maternity and paternity at work: Law and practice across the world - 2014). In 1994, 28 per cent of countries surveyed provided some form of paternity leave. As of 2013, this figure had increased to 47 per cent.

Today women own and manage over 30 per cent of all businesses, but tend to be concentrated in micro and small enterprises. Women sit on 19 per cent of board seats globally, and only five per cent or less of the CEOs of the world's largest corporations are women.

While men are beginning to take on more care responsibilities, women continue to shoulder most of the responsibility for family care, often limiting



their access to paid employment completely (See Global Wage Report 2014/15), or confining them to part-time positions, which are typically not as well paid. For example, in the European Union (EU), women spend an average of 26 hours per week on care and household activities, compared with nine hours for men (See Progress on equality between women and men, European Commission, 2013).

Violence remains a major factor undermining women's dignity and access to decent work. Some 35 per cent of all women are victims of physical and/or sexual violence that affects their attendance at work.

A gender pay gap persists, both for women with and without children. In general, women earn on average 77 per cent of what men earn, with the absolute gap widening for higher-earning women. The ILO has noted that without targeted action, at the current rate, pay equity between women and men will not be achieved before 2086, or at least 71 years from now (See Equal pay, An Introductory Guide, ILO, 2013).

In addition, the ILO says it appears that the unadjusted motherhood gap tends to be larger in developing than developed countries. Globally, the motherhood pay gap increases with the number of children a woman has; in many European countries, for example, having one child has only a small negative effect, but women with two and especially three children experience a significant wage penalty. In developing countries, evidence suggests that the sex of the child may matter as daughters may be more likely than sons to help with household and caring tasks, thereby reducing the motherhood gap.

“The overriding conclusion 20 years on from Beijing is that despite marginal progress, we have years, even decades to go until women enjoy the same rights and benefits as men at work,” said Shauna Olney, Chief of the Gender, Equality and Diversity Branch of the ILO.

“The ILO has launched the women at work centenary initiative to accelerate its efforts to support global action to meet this challenge and deliver on the transformative agenda on gender equality and women's empowerment called for in the proposed UN Sustainable Development Goals. This change won't happen organically. It requires specific, targeted, and courageous policy interventions.”

For more information on International Women's Day 2015 please visit ilo.org/iwd





WFP

STATEMENT

7 March 2015

ON INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY, PICTURE THIS: A WOMAN ON TOP OF THE WORLD

Statement from Ertharin Cousin, Executive Director of the UN World Food Programme

ROME/Islamabad - Picture it -- a Nepali schoolgirl on the top of Mount Everest. At primary school, where she received WFP school meals, Nimdoma used to dream of doing extraordinary things. She made her dream come true and didn't stop at Everest, which she conquered when she was 17 years old. Nimdoma, a wonderful example of women's empowerment, went on to climb the highest mountain on every continent with a Nepali, all-woman, climbing team.

On International Women's Day (March 8) this year, I want to pay tribute to the girls and women who dream big. Empowering women empowers humanity. At the World Food Programme, we believe that women and girls who are empowered will lead to our ultimate goal, a world with zero hunger. Women and their work – paid and unpaid -- are central to the production, preparation and provision of food, so are essential to food and nutrition security.

While every March 8 we celebrate the many images of women, there is another picture that comes to mind, of women's hunger and deprivation. A WFP gender assessment of one of the poorest countries in the world in 2014 found women had half the time that men had to rest in the course of a day. At 7am, when men woke up to have their breakfast, women had already worked



for two hours to prepare the food, fetch water and get the children washed and they also went to bed later.

We will only achieve a zero hunger world when women, girls, men and boys have equal opportunities, equal access to resources, and a regular voice in the decisions that shape their world. Picture the future.

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WFP is the world's largest humanitarian agency fighting hunger worldwide, delivering food assistance in emergencies and working with communities to improve nutrition and build resilience. Each year, WFP assists some 80 million people in around 75 countries.

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