

Preface

As the world undergoes deep changes and global challenges which affect both women and men, urgent and transformative action is needed in order to translate commitments into reality. There can be no excuse for discrimination and other violations of fundamental human rights. Countries, whether high or low income, cannot any longer afford to lose out on the social and economic potential of gender equality. Ambitious policies that succeed in transforming gender norms and relationships in society and at work, and hence in addressing structural inequality, are required. More jobs – and quality jobs – for women, universal social protection and measures to recognize, reduce and redistribute unpaid care and household work are indispensable to achieving the substantive equality called for in a number of the Sustainable Development Goals.

To mark the commitment of ILO constituents to gender equality and as the Organization approaches its centenary in 2019, I have launched the Women at Work Centenary Initiative with the objective of taking stock of the status and conditions of women in the world of work, and identifying innovative action that could give new impetus to the ILO's work on gender equality and non-discrimination. It aims to engage ILO constituents, civil society and all women and men in concerted action to achieve full and lasting gender equality and non-discrimination. The Women at Work Centenary Initiative is therefore key to delivering on the transformative agenda called for in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted by the United Nations in 2015.

This report is an important contribution to this centenary initiative. It gives a picture of where women stand today and how they have progressed in the world of work over the last 20 years, and of the root causes of inequalities and how they should be tackled based on what works and the guidance provided by international labour standards. It shows that, despite some encouraging advances, major gender gaps at work remain. Increasing gender parity in educational attainment does not prevent women from being concentrated in middle to lower-paid occupations that reflect traditional gender stereotypes and beliefs about women's and men's aspirations and capabilities.

While sectoral and occupational segregation and differences in working time contribute to the gender wage gap, the report turns the spotlight on the role of the discrimination that further exacerbates labour market inequalities, including the persistent differences in access to social protection between women and men. The report also discusses the extent to which measures to recognize, reduce and redistribute unpaid household and care work in families and societies affect women's access to quality work and social protection. It shows how work-family policies aligned with international labour standards can help to remedy inequalities and to transform the gender-based division of labour at home.

I hope that this report will support a renewed and reinforced global commitment towards gender equality at work, as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It is also my hope that the report will be of use to ILO constituents in their efforts to identify, in their specific contexts, the policies that are most conducive to the attainment of substantive equality between women and men, combining increased economic growth with decreased income inequality.



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