

An integrated policy framework is needed to promote women's access to more and better quality jobs

Despite their recent advancement in educational achievement – in many countries there are now more women than men graduates – women face multiple barriers to their equal access, participation and progress in the labour market. Institutions and policies are established based on traditional gender roles, including on the expectation that men should be the sole or the main earner in a household and the continued undervaluation of care work. This continues to shape and inhibit labour market opportunities and incentives for women.

The achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development requires the implementation of an integrated framework of transformative measures guided by ILO Conventions and Recommendations, which places the elimination of discrimination and the achievement of gender equality at home and at work at the heart of policy interventions. This blueprint is also embedded in the ILO Women at Work Centenary Initiative, with the aim of marking the constitutional commitment of ILO constituents to gender equality as the ILO moves towards its second centenary in 2019.

Efforts must be made to tackle sectoral and occupational segregation

Gender stereotypes of women and expectations by society that they will shoulder larger care responsibilities, lack of role models, a work culture that expects long working hours, the undervaluation of traditionally “feminine” skills and inadequate work-family measures limit the possibilities for women to overcome segregation and participate on an equal footing in political, social and economic life and decision-making and reach top-level positions. In this regard, affirmative action policies, including the setting of targets, goals or quotas, represent an important measure that can be applied by governments, trade unions, employers’ organizations and companies to help remedy the severe underrepresentation of women and their concerns in decision-making in business and societies. Moreover, education, outreach and training programmes must be designed to encourage and enable girls, boys and young women and men to venture more into non-stereotypical fields of study and work. In particular, to reduce sectoral and occupational segregation, training and education systems should encourage young men to enter into care-related professions, while promoting women’s access to and prominence in both the study and professional exercise of science, technology, engineering, mathematics and related skills.

The gender wage gap must be closed

The high burden of care activities borne by women, and systems whereby take-home pay and social benefits increase with the length of seniority in a job conspire still further to widen the gender wage gap. In particular, mothers who often face additional care responsibilities suffer from a significantly reduced earnings capacity, contributing to a negative motherhood wage gap and to a fatherhood pay premium. Policies to promote the better sharing of care responsibilities can also help to reduce gender wage gaps. In this regard, more determined efforts to eliminate outright discrimination and to embed the principle of equal opportunity and treatment between women and men in laws and institutions constitute a key first step. Further progress can be made by promoting equal remuneration for work of equal value through wage transparency, training and gender-neutral job evaluations. These measures will help significantly in identifying discriminatory pay practices and unfair pay differences. In addition, countries need to support adequate and inclusive minimum wages and to strengthen collective bargaining as key tools in efforts to address low pay, improve women’s wages and hence reduce gender wage gaps.

Adoption of the principle of equal treatment of part-time workers and ensuring access to contributory, employment-related social and labour protections on a pro-rata basis offer means of promoting good quality part-time work and normalizing it for all workers. In addition, in order to encourage a fairer division of unpaid care responsibilities between men and women, countries need to pass and enforce legislation to limit long paid hours and overtime, as these inhibit both women and men from breaking out of traditional gender roles.