

Box 3 Promoting women's entrepreneurship through skills development and training

Providing women entrepreneurs with skills development and training could improve their market access and encourage their businesses to grow and become more stable. Since 2002, the ILO's Women's Entrepreneurship Development (WED) programme has built the institutional capacity of ILO constituents and other stakeholders and partners in women's entrepreneurship development such as public and private service providers, women entrepreneur's associations and non-governmental organizations to meet the needs of women in terms of financial literacy and entrepreneurial skills to manage household and small business budgets, along with start-and-run small-scale businesses. The programme has been successful in improving profits for women-led businesses. In the Lao People's Democratic Republic, an assessment conducted in 2010 showed that, after receiving training and support from the WED programme, women-led businesses saw a 50 per cent leap in profits, from \$180 to \$270 a month, and their sales quadrupled from \$490 to \$2,150. Women entrepreneurs were more likely to engage in formal bookkeeping (increasing from 22 to 38 per cent) and provide full-time employment (ILO, 2014e).

In addition to training and skills development, the provision of support to agricultural extension services to enhance access to agricultural inputs, services and markets, is also an important means of increasing women farmers' productivity and incomes (ILO et al., 2014). Moreover, the provision of rural infrastructure, including water, electricity, clean stoves, sanitation, roads, safe transport, in addition to health care and other social services, to reduce women's unpaid care and household work (see Chapter III), are a precondition for women's business creation and development (UN Women, 2015).

4. Supporting women's participation and leadership in decision-making

Women should be central actors in influencing and shaping their workplaces. Affirmative action policies are of particular importance in correcting occupational segregation and promoting women's participation and leadership in decision-making. Affirmative action to counter sex discrimination comprises special – usually temporary – measures to redress the effects of past or continuing discrimination in order to establish equality of opportunity and treatment between men and women in practice (ILO, 2007a). Article 5(2) of the ILO Convention on Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) (No. 111) lists legitimate grounds for special measures designed to meet particular requirements, which include sex, age, disablement, family responsibilities or social or cultural status. Such measures are deemed not to be discriminatory but rather form part of a broader effort aimed at ensuring equality of opportunity in practice, taking into account the diversity of situations of the persons concerned, so as to halt discrimination, redress the effects of past discriminatory practices and restore a balance. These measures, which should be grounded on consultations and the consent of the stakeholders, including workers' and employers' organizations, should also genuinely pursue the objective of equality of opportunity, be proportional to the nature and scope of the protection or assistance needed or of the existing discrimination, and be examined periodically in order to ascertain whether they are still needed and remain effective (ILO, 2012c).

Among the wide range of measures that affirmative action for women may encompass, setting targets, goals or quotas for women's participation in activities or sectors, or at levels from which they have previously been excluded and in which they are still underrepresented (in particular leadership positions), represent an important measure, which can be applied in the context of governments, trade unions, business organizations and companies. The implementation of electoral gender quotas has proved to be an effective way to achieve gender equality in political institutions. While quotas were a rare occurrence before 1995, they have steadily gained popularity and are now applied in over 120 countries across the world.

In many countries in Latin America, quotas are mandated by law, under which political parties are required to nominate a certain percentage of female candidates. Whereas the quotas in Latin America were set at 30 per cent in the early 2000s, by the end of the first decade, Costa Rica, Ecuador and the Plurinational State of Bolivia had increased their quotas to 50 per cent. The impact of quotas is most significant in Ecuador, where more than 40 per cent of the parliamentarians in the country's National Assembly are now women, including a woman speaker. Similarly, in sub-Saharan Africa, women's representation in parliament has increased significantly over the last two decades. In 2012, Senegal amended its electoral laws to ensure that all party lists have equal numbers of women and men, requiring the lists to alternate women and men. Parties that do not conform to this law are not allowed to compete in the elections. As a result, the share of women in the country's parliament increased from 11.7 per cent in 1995 to 42.7 per cent in 2015.