

2. Promoting equal pay for work of equal value through wage transparency, training and gender neutral job evaluation methods

The principle of equal pay for men and women for work of equal value, as set out in the Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100), is a concept in the domain of action to combat discrimination. This principle has also been reaffirmed in target 8.5 of Sustainable Development Goal 8 on promoting inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all, which stipulates that, by 2030, countries should “achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value”.

This principle, however, is often not well understood. In some countries, laws and regulations refer only to equal pay for “identical” or “similar” work rather than for work “of equal value”. The lack in many countries of reliable sex-disaggregated data on wages conceals the existence of a gender pay gap, thus making it difficult to monitor trends in the size and underlying causes of the gender pay gap. Underlying gender biases in wage structures and remuneration practices could lead to the undervaluation of women’s jobs. It is essential to provide training and practical guidance on applying the principle of equal pay for work of equal value in national law and practice, with a view to assisting national equality bodies, wage-fixing institutions and social partners when negotiating equal pay provisions in collective agreements or in developing workplace policies (ILO, 2015c).

A key means of addressing the issue of equal pay is provided by job evaluation methods that are gender-neutral. Job evaluations help to determine the value of different jobs in an objective and non-discriminatory way (Oelz et al., 2013). This is essential, given that women and men remain segregated in different occupations. For instance, a caring profession, which is typically considered “feminine”, may be perceived as requiring low skills and the range of skills required for caring professions may often be overlooked. By contrast, construction work that is considered “masculine” may be easier to evaluate because the skills needed are obvious – those working in this area are required to do heavy lifting. By making a proper assessment of skills, responsibilities, working conditions and effort, an objective job evaluation method would ensure that the many characteristics and skills required for more female-dominated occupations are not undervalued. Added to which, gender-neutral job evaluations can ameliorate the effects of sectoral and occupational segregation, as seen in the case of the catering services in Portugal (box 7).

To properly implement the equal pay principle, key target groups must have access to specialized information and training on equal pay, including employment officials, officials in equality or human rights bodies, judges, labour inspectors, resource managers and consultants, workers and employers and their organizations and women’s organizations. One way to provide specialized information is through the establishment of transparency of pay and promotion structures (Oelz et al., 2013; ILO, 2012c). For instance, the Equality Ombud in Sweden has published a brochure on pay surveys, designed to explain the difference between equal work and work of equal value. In addition, the Ombud has taken steps towards the conduct of pay surveys and analysis (Oelz et al., 2013). Similarly, under its national action plan for gender equality in the labour market, Austria has made it compulsory for companies to submit an equal pay report with staff income every two years. Companies have to provide sex-disaggregated data on different categories of staff and their average or median pay after adjusting for working time (European Commission, 2014b).

Box 7 Re-valuing a female-dominated sector in Portugal

In Portugal, catering services are largely female-dominated. The majority of the enterprises in this sector are small and are associated with low earnings, low productivity, high turnover and high levels of absenteeism. Given the prevailing working conditions, the majority of the workers in this service are young migrant women from Brazil and Portuguese-speaking African countries.

In a 2005–08 project financed by the European Commission and the ILO, a job evaluation method that is free from gender bias was used to combat the undervaluation of these female-dominated jobs in the restaurant and beverage sectors. Working with social partners, the concerns of both workers and employers were captured. The experience and tools from the project provided a model of a 25-hour training course in the national catalogue of public training for different sectors. In addition, the Portuguese trade union federation in the footwear sector produced a training guide on equal pay for those of its union members involved in collective bargaining.

Source: ILO, 2015c.