



# Women and the Future of Work

## Beijing + 20 and Beyond

*Despite significant progress since the 4<sup>th</sup> World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, women continue to experience widespread discrimination and inequality in the workplace. Twenty years later, and as we approach the ILO's centenary in 2019, the ILO has launched the Women at Work initiative alongside the Future of Work initiative, to place a spotlight on gender and drill down into some of the most crucial areas. The future of work means more women at work, and this future must deliver on gender equality.*

### Introduction

If international headlines were to announce “*Economic and social crisis looming: 2.7 billion people of working age affected*” or “*Pressure mounting to safeguard human and labour rights of 50 per cent of world's population*”, one would expect that such news would captivate public attention and raise major concerns. One would also hope that this would be followed by a willingness to address the issue at stake - overcoming discrimination against women in the world of work and harnessing their enormous potential. Yet because of the ubiquitous nature of gender inequalities throughout the ages and in all regions of the world, the enormity of the problem and the contributions to be made by women to sustainable development need to be driven home.<sup>1</sup>

As the world marks International Women's Day 2015, there is a need to re-focus attention on gender equality and women's economic empowerment as an issue of fundamental human rights and as a key driver for global progress. In most parts of the world, women are often concentrated in undervalued and low-paid jobs with poor working conditions. They suffer from lack of access to education, training, recruitment and equal remuneration, and have limited bargaining and decision-making power. Women have unequal access to productive resources, and are over-represented

in informal work and non-standard forms of employment. They undertake a disproportionate level of unpaid care work, and many are at risk of violence at home and at work.

None of this is new. In 1995, the 4<sup>th</sup> World Conference on Women in Beijing highlighted these issues and set out a bold agenda for advancing gender equality and women's empowerment. The ILO has a pivotal role to play in assisting its constituents in tackling gender gaps in employment and entrepreneurship development, social and labour protection, social dialogue and access to rights, and in ending occupational segregation and opening the way for women to excel in all sectors of industry and service. Pursuing decent work while providing and caring for family members, as well as fulfilling obligations to enterprises, communities and societies should be an attainable objective for women and men.

### More women in the labour market, but gender gap still wide

Since 1995, important progress has been made in the number of member States that have formally committed to promoting gender equality with a view to eliminating discrimination, and ensuring equal pay. In 1995, 126 member States had ratified the Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100) and 122 had ratified the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111). Now those

<sup>1</sup> See for example the Global Gender Gap Report, World Economic Forum, 2014.

numbers are 171 and 172 respectively. How has this commitment translated in terms of outcomes for women? Globally, the gap in participation rates between men and women has been decreasing since 1995, albeit extremely slowly. Currently the labour force participation rate for women is 50 per cent, compared to 77 per cent for men.<sup>2</sup> In 1995 these figures were 52 per cent and 80 per cent respectively. Thus while the gap has been reduced by one per cent (from 28 per cent to 27 per cent) a smaller percentage of both women and men are working than was the case in 1995, with a large portion of this decrease occurring since the onset of global financial crisis in 2008.<sup>3</sup> At the G20 meeting in Brisbane, Australia, the participating governments agreed to “the goal of reducing the gap in participation rates between men and women in our countries by 25 per cent by 2025...and to bring more than 100 million women into the labour force”<sup>4</sup>

### And quality of jobs remains a concern

The Beijing Platform for Action refers to the fact that women are concentrated in jobs with low pay and poor working conditions, often with lack of access to maternity protection. This remains the case, though there has been progress. In 1995, 58 per cent of women, and 53 per cent of men were classified as being in ‘vulnerable employment’.<sup>5</sup> These figures now stand at 46 and 44 respectively, i.e. an improvement for both, but a more statistically significant one for women. However, the overrepresentation of women in low-wage jobs seems to be a universal characteristic of labour markets. The gendered distribution of low-wage employment is, in itself, an important cause of gender pay gaps. The gendered distribution of low wage employment is also related to the vulnerability of women-dominated occupations to low wage risk.<sup>6</sup> Globally, women earn approximately 77 per cent of what men earn,<sup>7</sup> with the 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.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Figures for 2015 are projections. ILO: Trends Econometric Models, October 2014.

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<sup>4</sup> G20 Leaders’ Communiqué Brisbane Summit, 15-16 November 2014.

<sup>5</sup> Vulnerable employment – the share of own-account work and contributing family employment (World Employment and Economic Outlook (Geneva, ILO, 2015).

<sup>6</sup> ILO: *Global Wage Report 2010/2011: Wage policies in times of crisis* (Geneva, ILO, 2010). Across a sample of 14 countries, the share of women among low-wage employment ranged from about 49 per cent in the Philippines to about 69 per cent in Israel.

<sup>7</sup> ILO: *Equal pay, An Introductory Guide* (Geneva, ILO, 2013), p. 12.

<sup>8</sup> ILO: Director General’s Report to the International Labour Conference, 2011.

### Positive momentum on women in decision making and leadership

There is some positive momentum among ILO constituents. Today eight per cent of the member States of the ILO are headed by women (i.e. as heads-of-government), up from three per cent in 1995.<sup>9</sup> Likewise the percentage of women Members of Parliament (MPs) has doubled since 1995, but still amounts to only 22 per cent of parliamentarians worldwide.<sup>10</sup> There are wide variations across and within regions. In 38 ILO member States, women MPs account for less than 10 per cent, while in only one Parliament is there (or has there ever been) a majority of women, namely Rwanda at 63 per cent.<sup>11</sup>

A similar trend is evident in workers’ and employers’ organizations. Among delegates to the International Labour Conference in 2014, 19 per cent of workers and 23 per cent of employers were women, which compares quite favourably with 9 per cent of workers and 8 per cent of employers in 2001 (the first year the ILO began monitoring this statistic).<sup>12</sup> The International Trade Union Congress’ (ITUC) ‘Count Us in’ campaign aims to see 80 per cent of its affiliates with 30 per cent of women in their decision-making bodies by 2018, and in 2010 ITUC elected a woman as General Secretary. The International Organisation of Employers (IOE) works in partnership with the International Federation of Business Women to encourage workplace diversity, gender equality and women’s empowerment across the business community.

### Though obstacles persist for women in business and management

While there has been progress, a 2015 ILO report on “Women in Business and Management: Gaining Momentum” shows that there is still a dearth of women at the top of the corporate ladder. And the larger the company or organization, the less likely it will be headed by a woman. 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.

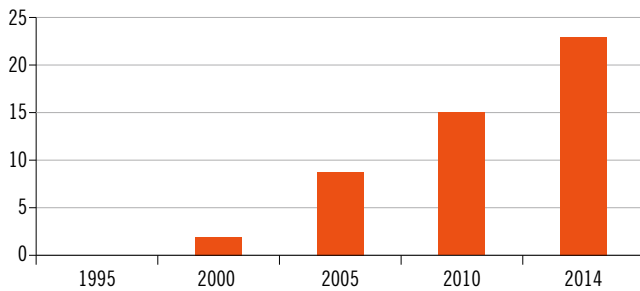
<sup>9</sup> As of March, 2015 there are 15 women heads of government out of 185 ILO member States. In 1995 there were 6 out of 175. The head of government is considered to be leader of the executive branch of government. (Authors’ calculations based on IPU and UNWOMEN: Women in Politics Situation).

<sup>10</sup> Facts and Figures: Leadership and Political Participation, UNWOMEN, 2014.

<sup>11</sup> Authors’ calculation based on UNWOMEN, Facts and Figures: Leadership and Political Participation.

<sup>12</sup> Gender Balance at the International Labour Conference, Working Conditions and Equality Department, ILO, 2014.

Number of Women CEOs in Fortune 500 companies (Year)



Source: Catalyst

The obstacles to women starting and growing a business include discriminatory property, matrimonial and inheritance laws and/or cultural practices, lack of access to formal financial mechanisms, and limited mobility and access to networks. However when the right enabling environment and policy frameworks are in place women entrepreneurs become an important source of economic growth and employment. The International Monetary Fund estimates that 853 million women worldwide have the potential to contribute more to their economies, and 812 million of these live in developing countries.<sup>13</sup>

### Issues of care need to be tackled if further progress is to be made

Changing demographics and gender roles will spearhead the need for solutions to care work if women are truly to have equal opportunities in the world of work. The “double burden” of working women can no longer be ignored as populations of all countries are ageing, and people are living longer. Provision of care for persons with short-term or with chronic sicknesses and/or disabilities also needs to be considered. As such, the care economy has enormous potential for employment generation in the coming years. Reshaping social protection policies and priorities as well as universal benefits will go a long way to prevent and to mitigate health and economic shocks to those most in need.

The Beijing *Platform for Action* highlights the limits that an unequal sharing of unpaid care-work places on women’s access to paid employment. Owing to stereotypical gender roles, women continue to shoulder the burden of household chores and family responsibilities, often excluding women from paid employment completely, or confining them to part-time positions, which are typically not as well paid.<sup>14</sup> These issues are as pertinent today as they were 20 years ago. For example, in the European Union (EU), women spend an average of 26 hours per week on care and household activities, compared with 9 hours for men.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Women, Work and the Economy: Macroeconomic gains from gender equality (IMF, 2013).

<sup>14</sup> Global Wage Report (ILO, Geneva, 2015).

<sup>15</sup> Report on Progress on equality between women and men, European Commission, 2013.

Globally, better maternity and paternity protection coverage, flexible working arrangements, sharing of family responsibilities and affordable child care are part of the solution, and there has been some progress over the last 20 years. In 1994, 38 per cent of countries surveyed provided at least 14 weeks of maternity leave. As of 2013 this figure had risen to 51 per cent. States are also increasingly recognising men’s care responsibilities. 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.<sup>16</sup>

### And so does violence

Nothing undermines as many fundamental human rights as violence. Violence in the world of work comes in many forms including harassment, bullying and mobbing, human trafficking, forced prostitution, and assault. Violence has a high cost for workers, employers and society generally.<sup>17</sup> It can lead to high levels of stress, loss of motivation, increased accidents, disability, and even death.

Wherever the violence takes place, it has negative repercussions in the world of work: it leads to lower productivity, increased absenteeism, and higher turnover. In some cultures the threat of violence has been a reason for limiting women to the home sphere.<sup>18</sup> Violence in some service sectors, notably in health, education and tourism, has been a cause for concern in protecting these workers. Confrontation also affects co-workers who step in to halt an altercation, as well as those witnessing an act of violence whether committed by a colleague, client or stranger.

The latest figures from the World Bank show that each year, more than 700 million women are victims of physical and/or sexual violence, often in a close relationship. In the Middle East and Africa, 40 per cent of women are affected, in South-East Asia 43 per cent.<sup>19</sup> Promoting laws and policies to prevent and protect against harassment and other forms of violence in the world of work, as well as establishing complaints and monitoring mechanisms to protect workers are integral parts of the solution. Social dialogue, including collective bargaining, is increasingly being recognized as a means to address such issues.

<sup>16</sup> Maternity and paternity at work, law and practice across the world (ILO, Geneva, 2014).

<sup>17</sup> A 2014 study from New Zealand for example estimates domestic violence costs employers 368 million (NZD) per year, with a projected cost of 3.7 billion over the next ten years. Similar studies have been undertaken in Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom.

<sup>18</sup> Globally, conservative estimates of lost productivity resulting from domestic violence range from 1.2 of GDP in Tanzania, to 1.4 per cent of GDP in Viet Nam. More importantly, estimated productivity loss due to violence indicates that women experiencing violence in Viet Nam earn 35 per cent less than those not abused, representing another significant drain on the national economy.

<sup>19</sup> Voice and Agency: Empowering Women and Girls for Shared Prosperity, World Bank, 2014.

An urgent need to accelerate progress on gender equality  
The overriding conclusion twenty years on from Beijing is that the situation of women in the world of work has improved, but not to the degree that had been hoped. There has been progress: there are fewer women in vulnerable employment, more women are in leadership positions; more women have access to maternity protection; and the pay gap is narrowing. However while the percentages are moving in the right direction, they are not moving fast enough. Though women represent half of the world's population, there is a ways to go until women enjoy the same benefits and rights as men.

As the ILO approaches its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary with “Women at Work” being one of the Director General’s centenary initiatives, there is a need to be innovative, to reframe the debate and to intensify the focus on promoting gender equality and women’s economic empowerment. It has not and will not happen organically, but requires specific, targeted policy interventions.

The ILO is committed to the challenge.

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