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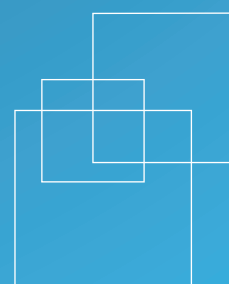
A series of black silhouettes of people of various ages and ethnicities walking from left to right across the middle of the page. The background is a blue geometric pattern of interconnected lines and dots.

The Women at Work initiative:

The push for equality

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL

INTERNATIONAL LABOUR CONFERENCE
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Report I (B)



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The Women at Work Initiative: The push for equality

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Preface

The ILO has a long record of commitment and achievement in the cause of gender equality at work and in society. It is a cause which is central and essential to our Organization's mandate for global social justice.

Yet we are still a long way from the goal of equality, and progress towards it is slow, uneven and uncertain. This was the reason for the launching of the Women at Work Centenary Initiative, one of seven such Initiatives through which the ILO will mark its first 100 years and prepare for the future. Because, despite the notable progress made by the ILO and its member States, it is increasingly evident that we need to supplement the tried and tested policy instruments for the promotion of equality with new and innovative approaches. Simply carrying on with what we have done in the past will not be enough to overcome deeply entrenched structural obstacles to equality.

This Report addresses these obstacles and suggests how they can be tackled in a new push for equality. The views of Governments, Employers and Workers on these proposals – and the further ideas that they will certainly add – will be of great value in providing new momentum to the ILO's work for gender equality as it enters its second century. I am encouraged that in addition to the plenary debate on this Report, this session of the Conference will begin the task of negotiating much-needed international standards to guide the fight against violence and harassment at work. This will be a major contribution to the broader push for equality.

I want to encourage all delegates to engage actively in the debate on this key issue. Your ideas, your commitment and your criticisms will be of the greatest value in advancing the ILO's Women at Work Initiative and gender equality.

Guy Ryder

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Chapter 1

Why is the world of work unfair to women?

1. Women's contribution to national economies is apparent in rich and emerging economies alike, and attracting and retaining more women in the labour market is considered to be "smart economics". In industrialized countries, women are overtaking men in tertiary education, while in many developing countries they have attained gender parity in secondary education.
2. Yet women continue to be left behind – being a woman is associated globally with 30 per cent less chance of being in the labour force and with often being at the bottom of the economic ladder. Only a handful have made it to the top of the corporate world; just 32 women are chief executives in the Fortune 500 companies. The majority are in low-paying jobs and are over-represented in informal and non-standard forms of employment. During the past 15 years, women's employment has become increasingly concentrated in specific, generally low-paying, occupations in the services sector. As a result, women's earnings have contracted still further.
3. Women continue to be paid approximately 20¹ per cent less than men per month across the world, even when they do the same work or work of equal value. They are also more likely to be subjected to violence and harassment at work. Cases of sexual harassment against women have made the headlines in the past months. They have shown that violence and abuse are endemic, that no single country or industry is spared, and that all women, regardless of their place in the hierarchy, are vulnerable to unfair and abusive treatment at work. They reveal how pervasive and tolerated violence and abuse are and demonstrate what many women around the world have to endure to obtain or keep a job, to get their salary paid, to be promoted and when commuting to work. In addition to the harm done to the direct victims, the overall effect is to create a widely pervading context of hostility and discomfort for women at work.
4. When these realities are recognized, as they increasingly are, rather than denied, they confront us with a very fundamental question: why is it so?
5. Is it because men do not want to relinquish power? Or because general acceptance of the principle of gender equality goes with a fatalistic acceptance that it is a long-term aspiration and that slow progress is part of the normal hiccups that accompany any process of change? Is it because we simply do not know how to improve the situation? Or has a sense of fatigue stepped in, given the limited impact of the myriad of laws, policies and institutions established in the name of women and gender equality?

¹ This is a preliminary estimate of the weighted average based on the mean of 71 countries, which comprise 79.7 per cent of the world's wage earners (forthcoming ILO *Global Wage Report 2018/19*).

6. Irrespective of the answer, what is clear is that today's world of work is unfair to women and there is no reason to expect that the future will be more benign to them, unless we take a conscious decision to halt this hostility.
7. In any case, women are angry, and more and more are expressing that anger. This is shown by the large demonstrations against gender-based violence seen in Latin America with the Ni Una Menos campaign, or the viral #MeToo and Time's Up campaigns to protest against sexual harassment and rape. Recent cases of prominent women media personalities who, on learning that they were paid considerably less than their male peers, resigned because they would not settle for less than equal pay, show how intractable pay inequity is. But they also show that women are increasingly less willing to tolerate these unacceptable practices. There is widespread sentiment that we are at a turning point on the long road to gender equality. But that will depend upon our turning indignation into action, particularly at workplaces and in labour markets.
8. For the ILO and its constituents that means acting more effectively and more properly on the principle that in the future of work that we want, there is no space for violence and harassment against women, or indeed anybody else, nor for unfair treatment or unequal opportunities because of gender. We simply cannot afford this and will not tolerate it. If we fail to deliver on gender equality, the attainment of decent work for all will be illusory. Equality of treatment and opportunities is a founding value of our Organization and at the heart of social justice. It is a goal in its own right and a key means to counter rising inequalities in general. The continued relevance and legitimacy of our Organization will be assessed against our resolve and capacity to devise innovative ways of realizing gender equality in the changing world of work.
9. Many complex factors contribute towards making the world of work unfair to women in varying degrees according to circumstances.
10. First, over the past 50 years, when women started entering formal labour markets steadily and in large numbers, the world of work did not adjust to women, but rather required women to adjust to it – a world originally shaped by men for men. At the same time, paid employment was simply added to the women's "to-do list". The traditional "gender order", which saw women as the "caregivers" and men as the "breadwinners", was not questioned. Women's time was regarded as "elastic", unlike that of men, and their time less precious than men's. This still continues to be very much the case, 50 years later.
11. Second, and consequentially, women were, and still are, regarded as "secondary" workers, even when they are the only or main source of household income. A corollary is that women can also be regarded as disposable workers to be called upon and stood down as required. Women can also be subjected to low-pay competitive strategies, in which their perceived docility, manual dexterity and work ethic are seen as competitive assets.
12. Third, gender equality is typically characterized as a women's issue and not of concern to all. Often the policies and measures put forward to enhance women's status in the workplace are directed at "fixing" women. To take an example, a recurrent mantra these days is that more girls should enrol in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) disciplines or break into male-dominated occupations if they want to obtain better-quality jobs. One seldom hears calls for boys to pursue careers in traditionally female jobs, such as nursing. This consolidates a view of women being of lesser worth, with their low market value taken as proof of intrinsic inferior value rather than of a biased assessment of the responsibilities or competencies their jobs entail. Incentives have consequently been generated for both men and women to choose "male" over "female" occupations and the concomitant fields of study. The flipside has been continued devaluation and underpayment of predominantly female occupations as well as

constraints on men's and women's choices regarding the type of life and work trajectories they should pursue. As a result, transformations in gender relations in workplaces, families and societies have been one-sided and uneven.

13. Fourth, despite many welcome exceptions, men's commitment to gender equality is tenuous and uneven. This is consistent with the belief that it is women who "are to be fixed", not men or the economic systems and institutions that shape our lives and work. As John Stuart Mill wrote 150 years ago in his denunciation of the subordination of women: "[W]as there ever any domination which did not appear natural to those who possessed it?" For some this is still the case. Some men simply do not see gender inequality as a problem or may believe it concerns individual cases rather than being a societal problem that demands political commitment to changing unjust structures and behaviours. Others may be convinced that gender gaps at work should be closed. However, they may not realize that certain behaviours and practices, including in the home, reinforce and perpetuate the very injustices they want to undo, or they may be unclear as to what should be done. Yet others may consider attaining gender parity a zero-sum game in which women's gains are men's losses. This is especially so where labour market prospects are bleak and competition fierce. But even when economies thrive, the efforts of highly skilled and experienced women who aspire to reach the top still evoke resistance and resentment. Assertiveness, perceived to be a natural and desirable feature in men, is often made synonymous with aggressiveness in women. Women's loneliness in the corporate world has spurred a number of initiatives, such as the Rockefeller Foundation "100 x 25" campaign, which aims for 100 women CEOs in the Fortune 500 companies by 2025.

14. Against this backdrop, it is less surprising that the pace of change and the speed at which gender gaps have been closing in labour markets have been so slow and uneven. Images of women as "second-class" workers are entrenched, despite evidence that women want to engage and remain in paid employment, including after giving birth, that women CEOs are as effective as their male peers or that younger generations of fathers wish to partake more in the upbringing of their children and to spend more time with their families.

15. It is these systemic or structural obstacles to equality at work which are the most intractable and the most resistant to the many formal legislative and institutional measures to promote equal treatment that have been introduced over the past half century or more. There is good reason to suppose that simply persisting with the approaches of past decades, despite the real progress they have generated, will not be sufficient. There is a need to shine a spotlight on those often hidden barriers and apply innovative approaches to overcome them.

16. This was the thinking behind the proposal to the 102nd Session of the International Labour Conference (2013) for the Women at Work Initiative to constitute one of the seven ILO Centenary Initiatives. Significantly, this Initiative received fewer comments from delegates in plenary than any of the other Centenary Initiatives. Perhaps this reflected the inconvenient reality that only 65 of the 291 speakers were women or perhaps it was because commitment to gender issues at work was so well-established among ILO constituents that it did not require restating. The subsequent support for the Initiative would indicate the latter, but requires us to reflect further on why we continue to fail to translate this commitment into decisive results.

Chapter 2

New opportunities and old problems

17. The facts regarding the uneven and disappointing progress in women's work status globally are well established. Reports recently released by the ILO, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the World Economic Forum converge in depicting a troublesome picture: there has been little change in outcomes for women on the ground in the past 15 years or so, despite advances in laws and policies. This is also the sobering reality that led the former United Nations (UN) Secretary-General to establish in 2016 the High-Level Panel (HLP) on Women's Economic Empowerment, which last year adopted a roadmap for gender equality. It is also why gender equality and women's empowerment is one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda), and why achieving decent work for both genders and equal pay for work of equal value by 2030 is a target of Goal 8 on sustainable and inclusive growth and decent work.

18. These ambitious commitments – which are in reality a necessary restatement of long-standing but unmet ambitions – have been taken at a time when the world of work is in the midst of profound changes, occurring at unprecedented speed. While we grapple with the full range of opportunities and risks of these changes, it is essential that we build into our responses an explicit agenda for equality. Accelerated change in the world of work needs to be addressed for accelerated progress towards equality. Failure or neglect in this will inevitably condemn us to a future of work which remains gender unequal.

19. With this in mind it needs to be recognized that slow progress, stagnation and even setbacks in women's employment outcomes have been characteristics of buoyant economies just as they have of economies recovering from serious and prolonged crises.

20. In the Asia and the Pacific region, perhaps the most dynamic in the world, women's engagement in the labour force has either dropped or stagnated, even though women have never been as well educated or had fewer children than today. They also live in more urbanized economies than in the past. All countries in the region, regardless of their level and pattern of growth, have experienced the same trend. This suggests that the relationship between economic growth and transformation, on the one hand, and women's education and participation in labour markets, on the other, is not as straightforward as one would imagine. Certainly, it is not just through growth and improved living standards that gender inequality at work will dissipate. Recent ILO research has pointed to a number of other factors and their interplay. In addition to women's educational achievements, these include the nature and course of economic development under the influence of technology and globalization, the types and quality of jobs offered to women, and the availability of adequate family and public support for girls and women to work outside their home.

21. This raises the question of what is required to ensure that economic transformation and growth benefits women.

22. In Europe and the United States, the financial crisis of 2008 initially hit more men than women, as construction and manufacturing, male-dominated industries, were the first to contract. But the subsequent fiscal consolidation policies have had a greater toll on the demand for female labour and on the quality of women's jobs. Additionally, austerity measures have affected publicly-provided child and elderly care services, of which women are primary providers and users. This has been coupled with growing reliance on work arrangements that give fewer labour and social protections to workers engaged in the provision of these services. As a consequence, the capacity of women to enter or remain in paid employment has been compromised. But the ramifications are broader and deeper. There is a real risk that long-term social investment in support for care, which began well before the outbreak of the financial crisis in 2008 in many European countries, not least in response to their rapidly ageing populations, has stalled or been reversed. If this were to become permanent it would have major detrimental implications for individual and societal well-being and thus for economies.

23. Care is essential for the reproduction of the current workforce and for the development of children so that they can grow, learn and acquire skills in appropriate conditions. It is also crucial for people in older age. As life expectancy and the number of older persons increase in both industrialized and emerging economies, they are more likely to suffer from chronic ailments and infirmity, which will require dedicated care. As working populations shrink, increased labour force participation of women will be needed to compensate for the overall decline in labour supply. But their engagement will depend on how much unpaid household and care work they will be able to delegate, and how decent the available paid employment in the care economy will be. If the quality of the latter is too low, there is little incentive to work outside the home, at least for those women who can afford not to, nor is there an incentive for men to take on such jobs. This, in turn, will generate serious care deficits.

24. There is, then, clear need to focus on the design of the care economy of the future. Provision of high-quality care by workers in decent conditions will respond to an evermore pressing global social need while offering decent employment opportunities to women and men alike, and in so doing enable women to overcome one of the chief obstacles to their broader entry into the labour market.

25. The digitalization of the economy and technological innovation are also identified as a source of promising employment opportunities, especially for women. For instance, technology, by making it possible to perform with ease tasks that in the past used to require considerable physical strength, can help break down the walls keeping women away from certain "male" jobs, thus reducing occupational gender segregation. Also, teleworking and other work arrangements, such as those enabled by digital platforms, could allow work to take place anywhere and whenever most convenient for the worker. Arguably, this would go a long way towards accommodating women's and men's care responsibilities and their need for an income. Indeed, available evidence shows that women who engage in teleworking or crowdwork do so to juggle work and family and are happy to be able to earn an income that otherwise they would not be able to obtain. But if these work arrangements give workers greater freedom to decide when and where to work, they can also present new problems. On the subject of teleworking, a recent joint ILO–Eurofound study shows that both women and men who telework greatly appreciate the flexibility associated with it. However, women, unlike men, report often being sleep-deprived and feeling isolated. Paid employment is in fact an occasion for women to interact with people other than their family, to make friends, share views and compare notes. Work outside the home can also help women quit an abusive partner. Working from home reduces all such opportunities.

26. There is as yet little empirical evidence on the gender impact of crowdwork or on-demand work. But the limited evidence available seems to suggest that they are not immune from gender inequalities either. ILO research comparing the earnings of women and men crowdworkers on mini-gig platforms found that men earn more than women. The finding was particularly interesting as digital platforms do not identify the sex of the worker so there is no risk of employer bias. It appears that the reason for the identified gender pay gap, after accounting for education and years of crowdworking and offline work experience, is that women typically choose tasks that are less demanding in terms of continued concentration, and that are not paid as much as more complex gigs. Women's "preference" for less complex tasks was due to the fact that, unlike men, they had to juggle gigs and household chores, which meant frequent interruptions. Simpler gigs are therefore the only possible option for many women, unless their care responsibilities are somehow lessened. This suggests that devising effective ways to balance unpaid care work and paid employment, including through public policies, is key for all women, regardless of whether the workplace is home, a location provided by the employer or elsewhere.

27. Discrimination also seems to be at play in the platform economy, despite the apparent anonymity that workers often enjoy. A study examining how women and men fare in online product markets reveals that women earned less than men for the same product and considerably less when they sold the same new product. Apparently, buyers were able to detect the seller's gender by the information supplied in postings, and were less willing to pay women the same amount of money they would pay to men for the same products.

28. Gender differences also appear to exist in the ways women and men participate in the platform economy. According to a study recently released by one of the world's biggest insurance companies, men are more likely to juggle three to five gig economy jobs at a time, while women tend to hold only one. A considerably smaller percentage of women than men engage in the gig economy according to the results of forthcoming government surveys conducted in Germany and the United Kingdom.

29. While more in-depth work is required to understand the causes of these findings, they challenge the assumption that the platform economy has per se the potential to level the playing field between women and men. The need is to identify what is required to ensure that the opportunities and risks offered by the digital economy are managed so as not to perpetuate occupational gender discrimination and lower earnings for women and, on the contrary, to reduce and eliminate pre-existing disparities.

30. Nor should the examination of the gender implications of new and emerging forms of work distract attention from the long-standing and widespread realities of casual employment, own-account work, and contributing and unpaid family employment, which remain the lot of many low-income women in developing countries, especially in the agricultural sector. At the same time, "on-call work" is acquiring growing prominence in sectors such as retail, hospitality, health and education, which employ large numbers of women everywhere. These forms of employment are characterized by short advance notice of schedules, broad fluctuations in working hours and little or no input from workers into the timing of work. This makes it difficult to plan family and life commitments and also has detrimental effects on personal relationships. Earnings are low and unpredictable and social protection inexistent or insufficient.

Chapter 3

The time–money–agency conundrum

31. These are some of the trends concerning women at work. But when asked, what do women say they want in the world of work and what do they think prevents them from getting it? In the framework of the Women at Work Initiative, the ILO joined forces with Gallup to launch a world survey to answer these questions.¹

32. Nearly 149,000 adults in 142 countries and territories were interviewed in 2016. The results are revealing and challenge some common assumptions that have served as pretexts for not taking meaningful action. The findings show clearly that across the globe, in all regions, women want to work in paid jobs. Whether women are working, unemployed or out of the workforce, they want to be in paid employment. Men also want them to work in paid employment.

33. So if it is not choice that is holding women back, what is it? Is it the family that is setting the rules and reinforcing social expectations? The survey asked about the acceptability of women working outside the home. The findings were striking – 83 per cent of women and 77 per cent of men said it was perfectly acceptable for the women in their families to have a job outside the home if they wanted one. So we cannot assume that women do not want to work at paid jobs or it is not considered “acceptable”. It is just not true. The focus must shift to what needs to be done to bridge the gap between women’s aspirations and their labour market reality.

34. Work is an important source of well-being for women – even more so than for men: according to the Gallup–ILO report, not only are employed women more likely to feel fulfilled than women who are not employed, they are also more likely to do so than men who are employed.

35. But when it comes to work, women everywhere confront the same three main interconnected constants: time, money and agency, which are interconnected. Whether or not a woman can work for pay, and how much time will be left for rest and leisure, depends on how much family and housework she will need to carry out. Household and care responsibilities will also influence the type of paid work she will be able to take on and under which conditions. The level of her paid employment, in turn, will determine whether or not she will earn enough money to make ends meet and whether she will have agency and so enjoy some autonomy and control over her work, time and life.

36. The dynamics of this conundrum explain why time and income poverty is so common among women and why parenthood has different consequences for working mothers and fathers.

¹ Gallup and ILO: *Towards a better future for women and work: Voices of women and men* (Geneva and Washington, DC, 2009).

37. The Gallup–ILO survey shows that both women and men, in all regions, identified work–family balance and affordable care as one of the biggest challenges women face in the world of work.

38. Unequal pay also came up as a key challenge in some regions, which also feeds back to care responsibilities. Research shows that motherhood carries a wage penalty resulting from the interruption of the career trajectory and the tendency to regard mothers as being less ambitious and available for work than men. The reverse is the case for fathers, who are perceived as being in greater need of an income and therefore as more loyal and hard-working and worthy of a wage premium. No matter what a woman’s job is, what she earns or what her preference is, she remains primarily responsible for household work and family responsibilities, with more educated and better-paid women more able to outsource these tasks, at least in part.

39. The challenge to be addressed is to make this time–money–agency puzzle work so as to ease women’s time and income poverty. Men, too, need to be emancipated from excessively long working days so that they can devote more time to their families and partake in housework. This rebalancing act is connected to broader contemporary debates about the value that work, family, leisure and community should have in a meaningful life, and the role that States should play in this regard. This concern was very much at the origins of the ILO and has gained renewed significance 100 years later. The perennial idea that part of social progress is that evermore productive methods of work should free women and men from long working schedules and allow them more time to devote to other chosen activities is at the heart of the ambition of full equality at work.

Chapter 4

Are we moving in the right direction?

40. Is the ILO adequately equipped to address the time–money–agency challenge and deliver on the ambitious commitments of the 2030 Agenda?

41. During its 100 years of existence, the ILO has conducted a great deal of work in support of women and gender equality of which it can be proud and which will remain relevant in the years to come.

42. Indeed, women and gender issues are not a recent concern – they have been at the heart of this Organization since its early days. Two of the first three Conventions that the Organization adopted in 1919, namely the Hours of Work (Industry) Convention, 1919 (No. 1), and the Maternity Protection Convention, 1919 (No. 3), were aimed at addressing the often unacceptable living and working conditions of workers, especially women and children.

43. Over the decades, the ILO’s approach has shifted from an initial narrow focus on women workers’ protection towards one which embraces gender equality as both a goal in itself and a means to achieve social justice. This is mirrored in the evolution of the ILO’s body of international labour standards and in the resolutions adopted periodically by the International Labour Conference since 1975, which had been proclaimed International Women’s Year. The Conference marked its contribution to the Year through the adoption of a Declaration on Equality of Opportunity and Treatment for Women Workers, which set forth a number of principles “as targets to be achieved progressively in relation to the integration of women in economic life”. The Declaration acknowledged that women’s status in the world of work cannot be changed without also changing the role of men in society and in the family. It also recognized that the solution to women’s problems at work lies in addressing them within the same general framework of economic and social development as those of men.

44. In many ways, the ILO has been in the vanguard of the advancement of gender equality at work, with equal remuneration for work of equal value being a prime example. One of the principles set out in the ILO’s founding Constitution of 1919, and considered of “special and urgent importance”, is that men and women should receive equal remuneration for work of equal value – not just for the same work. This principle was then embedded in the Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100), in 1951. The Convention gave treaty status to the innovative concept already affirmed in the ILO Constitution. This principle allows the examination of gender biases in the way in which labour markets are structured and is fundamental to fair evaluation of “women’s jobs” and to tackling occupational gender segregation. In 1958, the International Labour Conference, recognizing that equal remuneration could not be achieved in a general context of inequality, adopted the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111). This Convention requires ratifying member States to promote equality of opportunity and treatment in law and in practice in order to eliminate discrimination

against all workers and in all aspects of employment and occupation on the basis of sex and other stated criteria.

45. The equal pay for work of equal value principle was established almost 25 years later, in 1975, by the European Community Equal Pay Directive, and in 1979 by the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). However, despite the fact that Conventions Nos 100 and 111 are today among the most ratified of ILO standards (with respectively 173 and 175 ratifications), pay differentials remain one of the most persistent forms of inequality between working women and men. The persistence of gender stereotypes and sex-biased job classification systems and pay structures is a serious obstacle to equal pay for work of equal value. To address these challenges, two complementary ILO guides: *Equal Pay – An introductory guide* (2013) and *Promoting equity: Gender-neutral job evaluation for equal pay: A step-by-step guide* (2009) were widely disseminated, together with good practices from ILO technical assistance, and used as the basis for capacity building and policy debate. An interactive infographic tool, *Tackling sex discrimination through pay equity*, with interactive data visualizations, videos, maps and case studies, has also been developed to appeal to a wider and younger audience.

46. The next edition of the ILO *Global Wage Report* (November 2018) will focus on trends in gender pay gaps across regions, occupations, sectors, enterprises and education levels. It will also explore which measures might be more effective in reducing these gaps in different socio-economic contexts. Its findings and policy recommendations will also inform the Equal Pay International Coalition (EPIC), a key component of the Women at Work Initiative. Launched at the UN General Assembly in September 2017, EPIC is a multi-stakeholder coalition, spearheaded by the ILO, UN Women and the OECD to galvanize partnerships and campaigns to help achieve SDG target 8.5 and Goal 5, which is to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. EPIC will work at the global, regional and national levels to tackle the challenge through peer-to-peer exchanges, dissemination of good practices and country-level interventions.

47. To advance a gender-equal approach to work–family reconciliation, the ILO adopted the Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156). The Convention frames the reconciliation of work–family responsibilities as a tool to improve the working conditions and quality of working life of all workers. It challenges the traditional image of men as just shelter and food providers and champions their right to also partake in child and elderly care. A number of modular *Work and Family* training packages and books, such as *Workplace solutions for childcare*, were produced and widely disseminated. They documented the range of family-friendly measures that can be adopted at the national and workplace levels, including through public–private arrangements. They highlighted how different policy combinations may either narrow or exacerbate gender inequalities in employment outcomes and may also help to arrest or reverse falling fertility rates in some countries. The potential of Convention No. 156 has not been fully exploited and it has to date received 44 ratifications. But its obvious relevance to the contemporary debates on equality and care provides real opportunity to relaunch it. This can address the equalizing of care rights between women and men, and so neutralize the perceived “high cost” of motherhood compared to fatherhood.

48. A prerequisite for work–family balance and gender equality at work is that all women workers enjoy adequate maternity protection. But, globally, about 71 per cent of working mothers do not receive any contributory or non-contributory cash benefits because they are self-employed, work informally or in small-sized enterprises, work in such forms of employment as temporary agency employment, or work under short, part-time contracts that are often excluded from the scope of social security schemes. Moreover,

becoming a mother remains an important source of disadvantage at work for many, as they may be demoted or given tasks that either surpass or fall well below their level of competence and responsibility in order to force them out.

49. In some countries, it is employers who shoulder maternity protection costs, making hiring a woman more costly than hiring a man. As a consequence, many women delay the age at which they have their first, and often only, child, or do not have children at all, contributing to dropping fertility rates and shrinking populations. The most recent ILO standard on maternity protection, the Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183), has sought to prevent maternity-based discrimination by, inter alia, shifting the onus of financing income replacement for mothers away from employers to social insurance or general taxation. The ILO produced the *Maternity protection resource package: From aspiration to reality for all* in 2012, which has been regularly used in training courses organized by the International Training Centre of the ILO (Turin Centre), as well as in national policy workshops. It unpacks the myths surrounding motherhood costs; explains why societies and economies should care about maternity protection; and provides practical guidance on different possible approaches to making it a reality, especially for low-income women in low-income countries. More recently, the ILO has been working with a number of member States to gradually extend social security coverage to self-employed women and domestic workers, as part of broader efforts to formalize the informal economy.

50. ILO work on women's employment and gender equality has also helped address other types of work and to promote inclusiveness. The adoption of the Home Work Convention, 1996 (No. 177), and the Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189), generated recognition that the home can also be a workplace, and afforded home-based and care workers equality of treatment in employment with other workers, including the right to organize and bargain collectively. This meant putting an end to the invisibility of the historically undervalued work performed by over 67 million women domestic workers around the world. Through knowledge-sharing initiatives and policy assistance at the country level, practical guidance is being provided to a large number of member States on how to measure hours of work, to design non-discriminatory minimum wage policies, and to organize domestic workers and their employers in representative organizations.

51. With the rise in crowdwork and on-demand work, which enables work to be performed in the worker's home or in any other location of their choice, Convention No. 177 has acquired new relevance to contemporary labour debates, including in the context of current discussions on how to deliver decent working conditions at the lowest tiers of global supply chains.

52. Similarly, by providing for equality of treatment for part-timers, the Part-Time Work Convention, 1994 (No. 175), is an instrument for the promotion of gender equality, since many part-timers are women. The growing demand from both employers and workers for working hours and schedules that are better adapted to their specific preferences, needs and circumstances would seem to argue for review of the ILO's early hours-of-work instruments, Convention No. 1 and the Hours of Work (Commerce and Offices) Convention, 1930 (No. 30), as they constrain variations from the template of the eight-hour day and 40-hour week. This is highlighted by the General Survey concerning working-time instruments, *Ensuring decent working time for the future*, which will be discussed by the Committee on the Application of Standards at this session of the Conference. It might be opportune for the ILO to think about supporting a "framed flexibility" for quality jobs and quality family and personal life, which I will elaborate on in the next chapter.

53. Women's work realities also inspired the 19th International Conference of Labour Statisticians which, in 2013, adopted a resolution concerning statistics of work, employment and labour underutilization. The resolution is groundbreaking in many respects. First, it defines unpaid care work as a form of work, thereby attributing value to women's unpaid domestic work. Second, in so doing, it makes it possible to capture the work women undertake more comprehensively, and to measure their contribution to economies, household livelihoods, and individual and societal well-being. Third, it makes the need for a more comprehensive and fair approach to hours of work – paid and unpaid – that is compatible with a meaningful life, even more pressing. Fourth, it introduces a fundamental shift in policy thinking by broadening the scope of those who are entitled to work-related rights and benefits.

54. Gender-based violence and harassment, both at home and in the workplace, is a major human rights violation and impediment to women's access to decent work and economic empowerment. Failure to address it effectively undermines the credibility and sustainability of any action in favour of gender equality at work. The theme of violence and harassment in the world of work has been the subject of research in the ILO since the late 1990s, with support for policy development being backed up by programmes and publications. The preparations for the adoption of possible new international standards on violence and harassment in the world of work are an example of the commitment of ILO constituents to making the future of work better for all – especially women, who are disproportionately affected.

55. To deliver more gender-equal workplaces, the workings of international organizations need to be gender-responsive, and that includes the ILO. The first ever gender audits in the UN system were launched in 2001 by the ILO and this tool is now used as an indicator for the UN System-Wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. The goal of gender audits is to review the structures, processes and policies of organizations to identify and address possible conscious and unconscious bias that may be built into their modus operandi. Hundreds of ILO-inspired gender audits have since been conducted, with constituents and other stakeholders following up on the audit recommendations. To take an example, in Malawi, seven agencies changed the way in which they worked together, set baselines for monitoring progress, and developed a UN gender mainstreaming strategy and action plan.¹ Since 2009, the Turin Centre has maintained an international database of more than 80 certified audit facilitators it has trained.

56. Women still have to deal with a significant number of hurdles to reach senior positions, despite measures taken in the last decade to shatter the glass ceiling. An ILO global survey of companies, launched in early 2015, shows that initiatives are urgently needed to reconcile work and family responsibilities, and to challenge gender stereotypes and corporate cultures. A series of reports were drafted and conferences were held in all regions to highlight the business case for gender diversity, the obstacles women still face and ways to move ahead. Although the statistics and trends on women in business and management vary across regions, the barriers to women's advancement are similar, with difficulties in reconciling work and family responsibilities ranking high in all the studies.

57. This outline of the ILO's activities and orientations concerning women's work and gender equality over the last nearly 100 years shows that it has not been a passive spectator, but, in many respects, a precursor. However, those efforts have not always produced the country-level results that might have been expected or hoped for. This, despite the fact

¹ U. Murray: *Gender Mainstreaming in DFID–ILO Partnership Framework Agreement (2006–09)*, Final Evaluation Report (Geneva, 2009).

that there has been no shortage of laws, policies and action plans among member States. Understanding the reasons for this disconnect has been one of the objectives of the Women at Work Initiative, as a key to engineering effectively the future of work we want.

58. There is no single explanation for the unsatisfactory record of progress. Lack of, or dwindling opportunities for, quality paid jobs, as well as the pervasiveness of violence and harassment against women at home and at work, are important obstacles to women's equal role in the labour force. Under-resourced specialized bodies and programmes, which are often narrow in scope, not sustained over time, nor subjected to regular monitoring or impact assessment are also part of the problem. That, in turn, is a reflection of the fact that, while discrimination may be regarded as wrong and inefficient, opinions diverge about how to combat it. In addition, the cost of promoting gender equality is often seen as outweighing potential benefits, especially in the short- and medium-term, which explains why, in periods of economic recession or stagnation, such measures may face a backlash and be discontinued.

59. Further, while the law is vital in empowering women in labour markets, legislation alone, as currently conceived, may be insufficient or ill-adapted to the task. This is due in part to the fact that legislation is often designed with formal, and often large, workplaces and full-time, regular employees in mind. This has the effect of excluding from the protection of the law millions of workers in small-sized enterprises, the self-employed, the dependent self-employed and workers in other forms of non-standard employment, in which women are over-represented. But enforcement of the law is also critical. During an ILO panel on International Women's Day in 2014, the late Sir Bob Hepple called for not only individual complaints mechanisms, but also for governments to legislate a positive duty for employers to advance equality and accessible dispute resolution systems. He also proposed that consideration be given to how ILO equality Conventions could better support transformative equality, including buttressing paid parental leave and valuing unpaid labour.² To further explore these issues the ILO, as part of the Women at Work Initiative, partnered with the Oxford Human Rights Hub and the University of Kent in the United Kingdom at a conference in May 2017 entitled "A Better Future for Women at Work: Legal and Policy Strategies". The conference concluded that the law needs to be rebuilt on a number of consensus-based principles and goals leading to a better future for women at work. These included the notion of "participatory parity", namely the individual woman's ability to choose her life and have an equal say, and the principles of representation, collective action and emancipation. The conference also discussed new approaches to regulation, focusing not only on equality of treatment and opportunities, but also equality of outcomes, closely interlinked with enforcement mechanisms.

60. It is also necessary for the Office to reflect on its own responsibilities. The action it has carried out in support of gender equality has not always managed to avoid fragmentation and work in silos. Where this has happened it has reduced its effectiveness because the structural barriers that hold women back are interconnected and need to be dealt with as such. The launch of the Women at Work Initiative and the reforms introduced in 2013 to the structure, substance and modus operandi of the ILO in this area sought to address these challenges. But it is apparent that further, concerted efforts are needed. It is imperative that we address the time–money–agency conundrum effectively and that we put an end to violence and harassment at work. This implies that, collectively, we need to move beyond "business as usual".

² The intervention was later published as "The Key to Greater Gender Equality", in *The Equal Rights Review*, Vol. 12 (2014).

Chapter 5

Beyond “business as usual”

61. A combination of obvious need and genuine opportunity make this, the eve of the ILO’s Centenary, the right moment for a renewed push for gender equality at work. The formal commitments made in the 2030 Agenda remain to be realized, but can benefit from the unprecedented build-up of public opinion in many countries where outrage at the growing evidence of inequality, discrimination and mistreatment of women at work is finding expression in evermore insistent calls for real progress. Add to this the growing acceptance that equal treatment of women at work is a matter of good economics as well as basic justice, and the case for grasping the opportunities of the transformative changes in the world of work to serve the cause of a future of work with full equality, becomes powerful indeed.

62. The 2030 Agenda also reminds us of the interconnected nature of all the Goals it contains, be they economic, social or environmental. That means that the push for equality must necessarily be embedded in the broader effort to align the world of work with the multiple facets of sustainable development for all. Moreover, the fact that the Agenda is avowedly “transformative” in its ambitions argues strongly for a break with the frustratingly slow pace of accretional progress recorded through the use of established instruments, and for going beyond “business as usual”. That is not to say that the experience and tools of the past should be jettisoned; they have brought important gains and can contribute to more of them. But they certainly need to be complemented by new and innovative approaches. Five building blocks for a new push for equality are set out below and speakers on this Report at the Conference are invited to comment on and add to them.

(a) A high road to a new care economy

63. There are several interconnected reasons why building a new care economy grounded in decent work can contribute significantly in the push for equality. The absence of accessible care facilities and the obligation falling on women to shoulder disproportionately responsibility for unpaid and unvalued or undervalued care provision are widely recognized as crucial obstacles to the advancement of women at work. At the same time, care sectors are already major employers of women; globally, one fifth of employed women are in the health, education and domestic work sectors. Valuing care occupations fairly and upgrading them to meet decent work requirements would bring a major improvement to women’s working lives and also attract more men to those occupations. Moreover, a new care economy will be a necessary response to the rapidly growing needs of ageing societies, which are already feeling the strain of meeting current demands. The fact that the care economy is apparently less susceptible to automation underlines its potential as a source of large-scale future employment.

64. But the care economy needs to become better, as well as bigger. The necessary investment in care will require the creation of corresponding fiscal space and a careful rethinking of spending priorities and tax systems. Governments will also need to make strategic decisions about the extent and terms of private sector involvement in care provision.

65. Significantly, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank have been vocal among the proponents of increased investment, particularly in child care, as part of the “good economics” of increased female labour force participation. In this propitious context, the ILO can contribute strategically by making quality care an integral component of comprehensive national social security systems. That implies going beyond cash transfer programmes to encompass public care services, work-related facilities such as worksite and community crèches, and well-designed family leave policies. The aim should be to re-engineer or upgrade social protection systems and floors on the basis of a “universal carer model” in which both women and men perform unpaid and paid care work.

66. These ambitions start from the reality of the poor, and in some cases deteriorating, terms and conditions of paid care workers, among whom migrants, as well as women, are so numerous. Reversing this reality and upgrading care work to the requirements of decent work needs to be front and centre in the push for equality.

(b) Strengthening women’s control over their time

67. The clear evidence that reconciling work and non-work responsibilities stands for very many women as the most important obstacle to advancement in work throws into sharp focus the need to enable them to exercise greater control over the use of their time. On top of the risk of material poverty resulting from the gender pay gap, women are also vulnerable to time poverty as a consequence of the accumulation of the tasks attributed to them in and outside work. An adequate response requires a fairer sharing of tasks between men and women, but also concrete measures to boost women’s time sovereignty.

68. The global debate on working-time arrangements is long-standing and has proven controversial, touching as it does on key issues of labour market flexibility and worker protection. But it also has major implications for the push for equality, and discussion of the General Survey concerning working-time instruments, *Ensuring decent working time for the future*, offers timely opportunity to draw them out.

69. Viewed from the specific perspective of gender equality, there are strong arguments in favour of women – and men – having the right to request and to be granted working hours which correspond with their individual needs and preferences. Indeed, such diversification of work arrangements should then extend to place as well as time, enabling work to be done where, as well as when, desired. Such considerations, backed by the high take-up by women, are cited as major advantages of part-time and other flexible work forms and, prospectively, of the emerging gig economy. Beyond the point that women’s over-representation in part-time work can be considered as much a symptom of inequality as a remedy to it, there are nevertheless a series of issues which need to be addressed if innovative working arrangements are to help the case of equality rather than reinforce existing disadvantages.

70. Most obviously, the concept of time sovereignty presupposes that it is workers who are able to determine, or at least have a substantial role in determining, the hours to be worked. Such choices might be made from a menu of preset options or tailored to specific individual needs. In either case, such arrangements stand in stark contrast to the

unpredictable availability of work that can characterize fragmented time systems or on-call or casual arrangements, which erode rather than reinforce time sovereignty.

71. In addition, given the time–money–agency conundrum already referred to, and the fact that non-standard forms of work are frequently associated with penalties in respect of pay, pensions, training and career development, and access to social security benefits, it is important that the arrangements to promote women’s workforce participation are consciously designed to avert or eliminate such decent work deficits. That would necessarily involve guaranteed and predictable minimum hours of work.

72. This approach to the organization of working time points strongly to the role of social dialogue and collective bargaining. It is unlikely that one-size-fits-all solutions could be identified that would meet the requirements of very varied circumstances, and highly probable that the combined efforts of those directly concerned, employers and workers, would generate the best fit for their respective needs. There is clearly a role for government in promoting such processes and setting the parameters within which they are carried out, for example by establishing the right of workers to request specific working-time arrangements.

73. For millions of women in the developing world, particularly in low-income rural settings, the most potent way of strengthening time sovereignty would be through investment in road, energy, water and communications infrastructure, which could dramatically reduce the time that they are often required to spend on household chores – fetching water, gathering fuel – or on commuting to work. Similarly, the formalization of the work activities which they frequently undertake in conditions of chronic informal underemployment would help to address situations in which the imperative of generating even a subsistence livelihood may occupy practically all working hours.

74. The much publicized collective agreement concluded recently in the German metal sector, which provides for varied working-time and leave options, is an encouraging and innovative example of how pay and working-arrangement combinations can be determined through negotiations so as to meet the needs of the enterprise and of workers. By granting workers considerable autonomy to adjust hours of work, and employers the possibility to require longer or rescheduled hours at certain times, the agreement offers a prospect of breaking the binary employer-oriented/worker-oriented perception of working-time flexibility which has long hindered progress. “Framed flexibility”, pursued with the explicit aim of promoting quality working–personal life balance, and pursued through dialogue and negotiation, can be a further key component of the new push for equality.

(c) Valuing women’s work fairly

75. The historic undervaluation – or straightforward non-recognition – of work undertaken by women has been addressed for several decades by mechanisms for the objective attribution of value to work, which was the necessary and logical concomitant of the establishment of the fundamental principle of equal pay for work of equal value. To make these mechanisms fully effective they need to be better understood and applied. They should be supplemented with two complementary approaches.

76. The first is centred on the development of statistical methods for the accurate recording of the contribution of women’s work to the economy and society and can be advanced in line with the innovative work, previously referred to, of the International Conference of Labour Statisticians. If the maxim holds true that “if you can’t measure it, it doesn’t count”, then steps to measure the value that women add through work, of

whatever type, would constitute a vital platform for innovative and effective policies for equality. They can interlock, too, with the evidence to be presented in the ILO *Global Wage Report 2018/19*, and the activities of the Equal Pay International Coalition (EPIC).

77. The second approach would focus on transparency with regard to pay differences between women and men. Aggregated national data on the gender pay gap in member States has been published regularly for many years and commands considerable attention. But more recently the reporting of such pay differentials at the enterprise level has attracted new interest and, in some instances, has been made mandatory. This demonstrates the clear advantages of zoning in on the specific causes and consequences of pay inequality, and how they can be remedied. If complemented by requirements that companies take action to bring about concrete improvements, this offers the prospect of combining public policy and private sector action in a broad front in the push for equality.

(d) Raising the voice and representation of women

78. Since the decision was made to devote this Report to the Women at Work Initiative, there has been an extraordinary global upsurge of protest against the mistreatment of women, at work and beyond. What has been remarkable has been the way women's voices, amplified and spread via social media, have been raised and heard and brought change. It is a powerful reminder that women's agency matters and of the ILO's responsibilities to promote it.

79. Schematically, those responsibilities can be grouped under two headings: exterior, meaning the promotion of women's voice and representation in the world of work in general; and interior, referring to voice and representation in the ILO itself.

80. In respect of the first category, the point of departure must be the ILO's historic and ongoing work to promote full and universal respect of fundamental principles and rights at work, on which exercise of voice and representation depend. This year's 20th anniversary of the ILO's Declaration on this subject can be the occasion to give renewed impetus to this crucial area of the Organization's activity, with particular emphasis on those violations of, and obstacles to, the exercise of these principles and rights by women. From that platform, and in conformity with the cross-cutting policy driver on gender equality and discrimination, which underpins all ILO programme work, the ILO needs to reinforce its efforts to have women's views, perspectives and interests taken up across the whole range of its activities, including those undertaken through technical cooperation.

81. Inside the ILO, targets have been set for women's participation, and action plans adopted to ensure their full presence in the Office. These are the result of a shared, tripartite conviction about the need to do more to achieve greater involvement of women in the life of the Organization. Monitoring reveals, however, that while progress has been made in some areas, if unevenly, from a general perspective results have fallen short of ambitions, sometimes by a long way. Certainly the Office needs to be accountable to constituents for its own performance, and it is equally true that the constituents need to review their own performance with regard to the nomination of women to participate in ILO events and activities. The ILO Constitution and the applicable rules place constraints on the scope of action for constituents to be obliged to respect any given gender requirements in their representation at the ILO, and views on quotas are, in any case, likely to be divided. Nevertheless, a new push for equality would be incomplete if it did not address again the situation inside the ILO, in line with the lead given by the Secretary-General in his UN System-Wide Strategy on Gender Parity.

(e) Ending violence and harassment

82. Recent high-profile revelations of the nature and extent of violence and harassment of women, and the worldwide reactions they have generated, have come soon after the ILO took the decision to place on the agenda of the current and the 108th Session (2019) of the Conference a standard-setting item aimed at eradicating such abuses at work. The issues at stake are set out in the reports submitted to the Conference for this discussion, and its outcome is for delegates to determine. But it is to be expected that at next year’s Centenary Conference, when the future of work will take centre stage, the ILO will equip itself with new instruments which, if used to their full potential, can be central to the challenge of ensuring that that future will be free of the type of abuse of which women are the primary victims. And that will add considerable force to the new push for equality.

Chapter 6

The ILO Centenary and the new push for equality

83. The delegates taking part in the plenary debate on this Report have the opportunity to guide the ILO's continuing contribution to the advancement of women at work and the onward journey on the road to full gender equality. In particular, they are invited to express their views on the launching of a new push for equality and what its key components should be.

84. The undeniable reality is that the disadvantages that women continue to face at work, notwithstanding the real progress that has been recorded, including through the ILO, constitute perhaps the most flagrant and the greatest offence to social justice.

85. It is this that makes the case for a new push for equality such an urgent and central priority for the ILO as it approaches its Centenary and looks to the future beyond it.

86. The inputs to discussion at this session of the Conference will be presented to the ILO Governing Body, and will no doubt also be of considerable interest to the ILO Global Commission on the Future of Work as it completes its activities by the end of 2018. In this way, and with the contribution and commitment of all of its tripartite constituents, the ILO can enter its Centenary well placed to fulfil a key responsibility of its mandate to realize a fair and better future for all women and men.