

## **Multi-Stakeholder Forum 2017**

### **Panel 3: Implementing economic and social policies for women' s economic empowerment**

#### **Topic Introduction**

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Even though access to decent, good-quality paid work is critical for women' s economic empowerment, gender gaps in the world of work remain persistent and pervasive across all regions. Productive employment, decent work and entrepreneurship enhance women' s access to resources and decision-making in the household and in the wider community and economy.

Women' s economic empowerment in the changing world of work is fundamentally dependent on the employment opportunities in the private and public sectors and the terms and conditions of their paid and unpaid work. Despite some positive trends in closing gender gaps and improving women' s labour conditions over the past several decades, gender inequalities in labour markets prevail worldwide and inhibit women' s economic empowerment. These require policy action to strengthen opportunities and outcomes for women in the changing world of work.

The labour force participation of both women and men has decreased over the last two decades, but women' s labour force participation continues to be less than men' s worldwide – Women' s global labour force participation is less than 50 per cent, compared to men' s 76 per cent. Wide disparities also persist between young men and women, despite some progress in young women' s labour force participation in some regions. Occupational segregation persists in all sectors, with women typically occupying the lowest occupational categories, earning less and with fewer entitlements to social security and pensions.

Among the policy options available to Governments to encourage women' s labour force participation and discourage occupational segregation are: (a) elimination of legal restrictions on women' s economic participation; (b) policies that stimulate economic activity and increase demand for women' s labour; (c) investment in public services to create decent jobs in health, education, child and elderly care, infrastructure development, public administration and agricultural extension; (d) fiscal measures that avoid higher taxes on married couples of which both spouses work, and provide tax credits for low-wage workers, including women; (e) support for women' s educational attainment and skills development; and (f) measures that provide affordable or subsidized quality

childcare, parental leave and greater flexibility in working arrangements without reductions in labour and social protections.

Women are overrepresented among the 73 per cent of the world's population that has partial or no access to social protection. Strengthening social protection systems to support working, retired and unpaid women and their families is crucial to reducing poverty and inequality, supporting inclusive growth, and increasing gender equality.

Women's and girls' disproportionate burden of unpaid care and domestic work must be recognized, reduced and redistributed. The total value of unpaid care and domestic work is estimated to be between 10 and 39 per cent of GDP, and can surpass that of manufacturing, commerce, transportation and other key sectors. Women continue to subsidize the market economy through their unpaid care and domestic work, which often fills in for lack of public expenditures on social services and infrastructure. Policies that reduce the time and effort that women and girls spend on unpaid care and domestic work by providing social protection and infrastructure can create employment, improve women's labour force participation and increase retention of girls in school. Expanding public and private sector employment in paid jobs in the care economy can make a significant contribution to gender equality and women's economic empowerment, and should be seen as investments to narrow the gender pay gap, reduce overall inequality and redress the exclusion of women from decent jobs.

#### PROPOSED QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- What actions are governments taking to incentivize job creation and the promotion of women's full, equal and productive employment and decent work?

- What policies and measures have proven effective in increasing women's labour force participation and reduce the poverty rates among vulnerable groups of women?

How are national gender equality mechanisms and other relevant stakeholders contributing to these efforts?

- What steps are being taken to recognize, reduce and redistribute women's disproportionate burden of unpaid care and domestic work? What strategies are governments using to expand public and private sector employment in paid jobs in the care economy?