

Expert Group Meeting on
'Women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work'
UN-Women
Geneva, Switzerland
26 – 28 September 2016

CONCEPT NOTE

EGM/CWW/INF.1
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ENGLISH only

I. Background and objectives

1. In accordance with its multi-year programme of work (2017-2020), the sixty-first session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in 2017 will consider ‘Women’s economic empowerment in the changing world of work’ as its priority theme. The Commission will consider the theme in the context of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (E/CN.6/2015/3), relevant International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1).
2. In order to take stock of current research and assist the Commission in its deliberations, UN-Women will convene an expert group meeting (EGM) on ‘Women’s economic empowerment in the changing world of work’ at the International Labour Organization Headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland on 26 – 28 September 2016. In its deliberations, the EGM will be informed by the work in progress of the UN Secretary General’s High Level Panel on Women’s Economic Empowerment and by the theme of the 2017 High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing world (A/70/L.60). The EGM will discuss *inter alia* the following topics:
 - Examine the changing world of work and its challenges and opportunities for fostering greater economic empowerment and independence for women and girls;
 - Identify policies and programmes that promote women’s economic empowerment, women’s right to work and rights at work along the continuum from informal to formal decent work;
 - Explore roles and responsibilities of governments, international bodies, the private sector, including financial institutions and pension funds, workers’ and employers’ organizations, and civil society, including women’s organizations and gender equality advocates, in shaping and influencing the world of work;
 - Develop action-oriented recommendations that support gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development based on the commitment to gender equality and women’s economic empowerment, and to the protection, promotion and realization of women’s and girls’ human and labour rights.
3. The EGM will focus on the priority theme by assessing key issues such as:
 - Enabling macroeconomic environments for employment creation and access to decent work for all
 - Global gender gaps in work and employment
 - Gendered pathways from unpaid to informal to formal decent work
 - Care economy and paid and unpaid care and domestic work
 - Violence at work
 - Social protection floors and measures

- Rights to form, join, and mobilize through trade unions

II. Global legal and policy framework

4. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the General Assembly in 1948, sets out fundamental human rights to be universally protected. The Declaration states that ‘everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.’ The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) further established a set of rights that State Parties must respect, protect and fulfill without discrimination on the basis of sex. According to the ICESCR, rights at work are fundamental to the very definition of work, which must be decent and states that ‘the characterization of work as decent presupposes that it respects the fundamental rights of the worker’, including ‘respect for the physical and mental integrity of the worker’ and remuneration that allows ‘workers to support themselves and their families’(E/C.12/GC/18).
5. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) Article 11 requires that States Parties eliminate discrimination against women in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, the same rights, in particular, the right to work as an inalienable right of all human beings. Specifically, the rights to work include: (a) fair wages and equal remuneration for work of equal value; (b) safe and healthy working conditions; (c) equal opportunities and non-discrimination, including in relation to hiring, promotion and training; (d) rest, leisure and reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay; (e) right to form and join trade unions for the promotion and protection of worker’s economic and social interest; (f) social security, including social protections such as paid leave and adequate benefits for women before and after childbirth.¹
6. The Beijing Platform for Action’s critical area of concern F, on women in the economy, calls attention to the need to promote and facilitate women’s economic rights and independence, and to the key linkages between women’s economic empowerment and women’s voice, agency, and decision-making in the private and public spheres. The Platform addresses equal access to resources and employment under appropriate working conditions, the elimination of discrimination and segregation at work, and the harmonization of work and family responsibilities for women and men. The 20-year review of its implementation in 2015 has brought renewed attention to the situation of women in the world of work, and to the need to accelerate the closing of gender gaps therein (E/CN.6/2015/3).
7. International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions and Recommendations related to women’s economic empowerment in the changing world of work address discrimination, equal remuneration for work of equal value, maternity protection and work and family measures, including access to parental leave and affordable social care services for dependent family members, promoting decent work, including for part-time workers,

¹ UN-Women (2015), *Progress of the World’s Women, 2015-2016: Transforming Economies Realizing Rights* (New York).

home-based workers, migrant workers, and domestic workers, together with the extension of social security and the building of social protection floors and transitions from the informal to the formal economy. Key ILO gender equality Conventions include the Equal Remuneration Convention (No. 100), Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention (No. 111), Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention (No. 156) and Maternity Protection Convention (No. 183), and the Domestic Workers Convention (No. 189).

8. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development affirms the crucial importance of gender equality as both an integrated means and goal of its implementation. It offers a framework for the realization of gender equality and women's empowerment and sustained, inclusive economic growth, full and productive employment, decent work for all, and equal pay for work of equal value through Sustainable Development Goals 5 and 8, respectively. Together with the interconnected and mutually dependent goals and targets on ending poverty in all its forms (Goal 1), basic services (Goals 1 and 11), education and skills development (Goal 4), and infrastructure (Goal 9), this represents a comprehensive and transformative agenda for women's economic empowerment. More quality jobs for women, universal social protection and measures to recognize, reduce and redistribute unpaid care and domestic work are indispensable to delivering the sustainable development agenda, upholding and protecting the rights of women and achieving gender equality and the economic empowerment of women around the globe. Decent work, employment creation, social protection, rights at work and social dialogue represent integral elements of the 2030 Agenda.

III. Background on meeting and key issues

9. Over the past three decades the world has experienced important gains towards gender equality, women's economic empowerment and poverty reduction. Yet more than 1 billion people still live in unacceptable conditions of poverty. Job-less growth, the growing informality of labor, and stagnant, fluctuating, and precarious incomes are the broader context within which women's economic empowerment has to be addressed.² While globalization has led to an increase in women's participation in wage work, the deregulation of capital flows across borders has tended to have dampening effects on the conditions of work, wages and work benefits. The terms and conditions of women's integration into the workforce has varied by country, region, race/ethnicity, and class; for most women it has involved either first-time entry into wage labor or a transition from intermittent to continuous participation in paid work. Women's opportunities continue to be limited by structural barriers as well as discrimination embodied in economic and social institutions. The kind of work women do, the conditions under which they work, and even where they work, are often a function of prevailing discriminatory social and economic norms.³

² James Heintz (2012), "Informality, Inclusiveness, and Economic Growth: An Overview of Key Issues," SIG Working Paper 2012/2, IDRC.

³ Sheba Tejani and William Milberg (2010), "Global Defeminization? Industrial Upgrading, Occupational Segmentation and Manufacturing Employment in Middle-Income Countries," Working Paper 2010-3, Schwartz Center for Economic Policy Analysis, The New School.

10. Current processes and patterns of economic growth have not always been conducive to supporting women's economic empowerment and gender equality. In developed and developing countries alike, the dampening effect of prevalent macroeconomic policy stances means that labour markets fail to create sufficient jobs of decent quality.⁴ Consequently, women continue to work in the most vulnerable segments of the informal economy with little or no access to decent work, adequate remuneration, pensions, social protection and healthcare, leaving women at great risk of falling into or remaining in poverty, experiencing workplace violence and unable to fulfill their economic rights. The analysis of women's empowerment in the changing world of work recognizes the need for gender-responsive fiscal, monetary, and trade policies as macroeconomic factors affecting the world of work. In many countries, trade and financial globalization as well as domestic macroeconomic and labor market policies have largely contributed to rising income inequality. Monetary policies that emphasized price stability over growth, fiscal policies that prioritized fiscal consolidation at the expense of social expenditure and progressive taxation, trade and financial globalization processes that weakened the bargaining position of labor versus fully mobile capital, have all played a role in driving inequalities, including gender inequalities.⁵
11. Globally, gender gaps in labour force participation are persistent and striking as half of women are in the labour force compared to more than three quarters of men, reflecting the stagnation of women's labour force participation since the 1990s.⁶ Moreover, those in the labour force experience sectoral and occupational segregation and differences in working time which contribute to the gender wage gap.⁷ Women's weaker bargaining position in labour markets has made it especially difficult for them to access decent work in this changing, challenging environment of work.⁸ Women's disproportionate time in unpaid care and domestic work remains a constraint on women's capacity to engage in paid work. Marginality and precarious jobs are an integral part of the labor market experience for a large share of the female working population.
12. Investments in decent work and quality jobs have proven to drive sustained growth in emerging and developing countries. Investments in gender equality have also proven to have positive impacts on economic growth. Yet globalization, technological and digital revolutions, large movements of migrants and refugees, political unrest, economic recessions and austerity measures around the globe, among other factors, continue to transform the world of work in ways that often do not benefit or protect men and women equally. The existing linkages among poverty eradication, full and productive employment and decent work for all requires concerted multi-stakeholder approaches to redress the global challenge of access to decent work and universal social protection along the continuum from informal to formal employment.

⁴ UN-Women (2015), *Progress of the World's Women, 2015-2016: Transforming Economies, Realizing Rights* (New York).

⁵ UNDP (2013), *Humanity Divided: Confronting inequality in Developing Countries* (New York).

⁶ UN-Women (2015); cf. Stephanie Seguino (2016), "Global Trends in Gender Equality," *Journal of African Development* 18:1-30.

⁷ International Labour Organization (ILO) (2016), *Women at Work: Trends 2016* (Geneva).

⁸ UN-Women (2015).

13. Despite some advances, persistent significant barriers to the full realization of women's economic, social and cultural rights remain. Gaps in social and labour protections within legal and policy frameworks to protect the massive numbers of women in informal and vulnerable employment must be filled by promoting gendered pathways out of informality.⁹ Good governance that fosters enabling macroeconomic environments and ensures workers – both formal and informal – access to a safe, violence-free and productive working environment with the protected right to form and join labour unions is essential for sustainable development and the achievement of gender equality and women's economic empowerment. Sound economic policies, including counter-cyclical fiscal policies, democratic institutions responsive to the needs of all people, and investments in social protection and sustainable services and infrastructure are the basis of gender equitable growth, poverty eradication and decent employment creation.

IV. Profile of participants

14. The EGM will be attended by approximately 20 relevant experts appointed by the Under Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN-Women. In selecting the experts, the criteria of geographical balance will be taken into consideration. Experts will include academics and practitioners from relevant fields, as well as representatives from networks and associations, in accordance with the objectives identified above. UN-Women will provide travel and daily subsistence allowance to appointed experts.
15. Observers from the United Nations system, inter-governmental organizations, non-governmental organizations and academia are welcome to attend the EGM at their own expense.

V. Documentation

16. The documentation for the meeting will include:
 - Draft background papers commissioned by UN-Women as follows:
 1. 'Gender, Migration, Work and Care Deficits: What role is there for the SDGs?' Authored by Sarah Gammage, Director of Gender, Economic Empowerment and Livelihoods, International Center for Research on Women.

This paper will conceptualize the changing world of work and the macroeconomic determinants which have led to a collapse of the rights to decent work for all against the backdrop of collective commitments to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals. This will set the scene for analysis of the nexus of gender, migration and work to explore macroeconomic and regulatory conditions, in both migrant sending and receiving countries, which compel women and families to migrate. The paper will explore the gendered dynamics between occupational segregation, recognizing and valuing unpaid care work with the sustained labour demand for women migrant care workers. This section will also examine the relationship between domestic labour market policies and social

⁹ ILO (2016).

protection. Finally, the background paper will suggest recommendations for policy and programmatic interventions at the international, regional and national levels for the application of several of the Sustainable Development Goals and targets and their linking to existing labour rights norms and conventions in order to address care deficits and protect the labour rights and access to decent work for all.

2. 'Women's Labor Rights and Economic Power, Now and in the Future,' authored by Lisa McGowan, Senior Specialist on Gender Equality, Solidarity Center - AFL-CIO and Krishanti Damaraj, Executive Director of the Center for Women's Global Leadership at Rutgers University.

This paper will analyse the changing world of work and discuss the gendered effects of the current economic policy framework looking particularly at macroeconomics and trade policy. Then it will look at gendered dynamics of the labour market such as labour force participation, gender pay gaps, occupational segregation, gender-based violence and organizing along the continuum from unpaid to paid work. The paper will provide a frame for how to advance thinking and action on securing women's economic empowerment.

- Expert papers: Short written contributions prepared by experts on specific issues in line with their expertise

VI. Organization

17. The EGM will be convened by UN-Women from 26-28 September 2016. The meeting will be held at the headquarters of the International Labour Organization in Geneva, Switzerland.
18. The EGM will be conducted in English and all documentation will be in English.
19. The EGM will meet in plenary and, as needed, in working groups. Presentations by the experts in plenary will create the framework for discussions. Experts may work in small working groups to discuss specific issues and draft policy recommendations targeted at various stakeholders. These recommendations will be reviewed and finalized in plenary.
20. Two co-chairs will be appointed by the experts at the beginning of the EGM to oversee the meeting and the preparation of the EGM report.

VII. Expected outcome

21. The outcome of the EGM will be a report, containing a summary of the discussion and recommendations directed at Member States and other stakeholders. The report will be made available at the sixty-first session of the Commission on the Status of Women and on the website of UN-Women.