

Multi-Stakeholder Forum 2017

Panel 1: Strengthening normative and legal frameworks for full employment and decent work for all women

Topic Introduction

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Thank you, Madame Chair.

I would like to highlight two aspects of this panel's theme - Strengthening normative and legal frameworks for full employment and decent work for all women:

First, what do we understand about the gaps in the normative and legal frameworks that act as barriers to women's economic empowerment and the realization of full employment and decent work for all women?

Second, how can we strengthen the normative and legal frameworks to address these persistent gaps?

First the gaps.

- The Secretary General's report on the priority theme of the 61st session of the Commission of the Status of Women emphasized that, while the world of work is changing, structural barriers to substantive gender equality and gender-based discrimination persist within and across countries. The SG report analyzed the stubborn gender gaps in labour force participation and pay, occupational segregation, unequal working conditions and women's burden of unpaid domestic and care work that characterize the formal and informal economies.
- Yet there is no shortage of normative and legal frameworks that support women's rights to and at work, women's economic empowerment, decent work, full and productive employment, non-discrimination and equal pay. These are reflected in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform for Action.
- Furthermore, relevant International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions and Recommendations address a broad range of labour rights and protections, and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development aims to achieve full and productive employment, decent work for all, and equal pay for work of equal value through SDGs 5 and 8.
- Notwithstanding these robust normative and legal frameworks, no country has achieved substantive gender equality, women's economic empowerment, nor universal access to decent work. Despite some progress, gender gaps remain stubborn. A few examples: Women's labour force participation continues to be less than men's worldwide – currently

just under 50 per cent compared to men's 76 per cent. Women are still systematically paid less than men for work of equal value - the gender pay gap is estimated to be 23 per cent globally. Women are overrepresented among the 73 per cent of the world's population that has partial or no access to social protection.

- Violence and harassment in the world of work affects women regardless of age, location, income or social status. The cost to the global economy of discriminatory social institutions and violence against women is estimated to be approximately \$12 trillion annually. Such violence signifies high costs to women in lost earnings and wellbeing, stifles the voice and agency of women workers and compounds gender inequalities.
- It is evident that gender inequality is rooted in historically unequal power relations between women and men in the household and in the economy. The World Bank report, *Women, Business and the Law*, which compares legal differences for women and men in the market and the household, highlights that in 155 out of 173 economies, at least one gender-based legal restriction exists on women's employment and entrepreneurship.
- Even where legal protections are in place, compliance and accountability by public and private employers are often non-existent. **Urgent policy action is required to address structural barriers and discrimination to strengthen opportunities and outcomes for women.**

So, coming to second part of my remarks, how can we strengthen the normative and legal frameworks to address these persistent gaps?

- Realizing women's economic empowerment and transforming the world of work will require the elimination of structural barriers, discriminatory laws and social norms. It requires political will and partnerships to develop and implement policies that integrate gender equality perspectives in labour institutions and programmes at local, national and global levels.
- It means we must work hard to achieve universal ratification and full implementation of CEDAW and relevant ILO conventions and recommendations. It means strengthening national gender machineries and labour institutions to effectively support and monitor implementation of labour and sustainable development policies.
- It means we must strengthen laws and regulations on women's entry into the labour market and terms and conditions of employment. We must strengthen laws and workplace policies that support equal recruitment, retention and promotion of women in the workplace, and provide means of redress in cases of non-compliance.
- To *leave no one behind*, policies must target the elimination of inequalities in women's labour force participation, entrepreneurship, pay and working conditions, social protection and unpaid domestic and care work. Policies must strengthen education, training and skills development to enable women to respond to new opportunities in the changing world of work.

The questions that this panel was asked to consider are as follows:

- First: What legislative and policy actions are necessary and effective in addressing structural barriers to women's economic empowerment and eliminate gender-based discrimination and violence in the world of work?
- Second: What measures are governments taking to reduce and eliminate gender inequalities and gaps in the world of work, and what roles do workers' and employers' organizations have to help in effectively implementing relevant laws and policies?
- And third: How are countries integrating these efforts into their national strategies and policies for implementing the 2030 Agenda, in particular Goals 1, 5, 8 and 10? How are national mechanisms for gender equality supporting these efforts?

I look forward to stimulating discussion and solutions from the panelists.