

Multi-Stakeholder Forum 2017

Panel 4: Expanding opportunities for women in the changing world of work (i.e. the growing informality of work, technological change and mobility)

Topic Introduction

Christine Brautigam, Director, Intergovernmental Support Division, UN-Women

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The topic of this panel is: Expanding opportunities for women in the changing world of work.

I would like to highlight three major trends – digital and technological transformations, growing informality and rising mobility; the risks these pose and opportunities that need to be seized for women in the world of work.

- First, work is indeed undergoing rapid transformations marked by innovations, especially in digital information and communications technologies, that are diffused around the world through globalization. Technological and digital changes and advances, such as automation, robotics, and internet connectivity, are transforming the world of work. They create new types of jobs, enable new forms of work, and shift the skills these jobs require. Digital connectivity can remove geographical barriers without requiring employers or workers to change location or migrate. They enable new forms of work. Technology and innovation are also key in emerging areas, such as the green economy and climate change mitigation and adaptation, and offer new opportunities for decent work for women.
- Second, the world of work is being transformed by increasing informality. Over the past two decades, the informal economy – where women are overrepresented around the globe – has come to dominate the world of work in both developing and developed countries.
- Third, mobility is expanding. The growing numbers of migrant women workers requires particular attention and concerted social and economic policy responses to create enabling environments for improved labour force participation, entrepreneurship, wage and working conditions, social protection and tackling unpaid domestic and care work.
- These transformations pose significant challenges for women's economic empowerment.
- Even as globalization has brought millions of women into paid labour, it has also reproduced gender inequalities by concentrating women workers at the bottom of the global value chain: in the lowest paid jobs, in piece-rate, subcontracted work, and insecure forms of self-employment, with little or no access to decent work and social protection.
- The challenges women face in the formal economy are mirrored in the informal economy: occupational segregation, gender wage gaps, unequal access to resources and social protection, disproportionate burdens of unpaid care and domestic work, violence and

harassment and even greater barriers to organizing and mobilizing. A defining feature of informal employment is the lack of social protection and labour rights.

- Risks need to effectively managed so that the dilemmas posed by disruptive technological change, namely job loss and expanding gender inequality, can instead be leveraged and turned into productive technological change in favour of women's economic empowerment. Likewise, informality and mobility needs to be harnessed for women's economic opportunities. This will require deliberate policy action, interventions and accountability measures.
 1. There is a need to ensure women's, particularly young women's, access to skills and training in new and emerging fields, especially science, technology, engineering and mathematical education and digital fluency, by expanding the scope of education and training opportunities. This includes closing the digital gender gap and increase broadband and mobile phone access for women.
 2. There is a need to design gender-responsive pathways out of informality. Women's informal employment in domestic work, home-based work and small and medium-sized enterprises must be more economically viable and social protection and minimum living wages must be extended to these sectors.
 3. There is a need for national migration policies to be gender-responsive, protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for women migrant workers. Policies should regulate the role of private intermediaries and labour brokers in migration, and enforce laws against trafficking of women workers.

The panel was asked to consider the following questions:

- What government actions have proven effective in making women's informal employment more economically viable and promoting the transition to formal employment?
- What strategies are governments and other relevant stakeholders implementing to ensure that technological change contributes to women's economic empowerment, and that women can take full advantage of new economic opportunities?
- What policies and actions have proven to be effective in promoting safe and secure working environments for women in the informal economy and for migrant workers?