More and better jobs for women and men
Gender equality at the heart of the ILO Decent Work Agenda

The International Labour Organization is dedicated to the promotion of decent work for women and men in conditions of freedom, equality, security and human dignity. This “ILO Decent Work Agenda” is driven by four strategic and interconnected objectives:

- promoting fundamental principles and rights at work;
- generating employment, creating enterprises and developing human resources;
- enhancing the coverage and effectiveness of social protection; and
- strengthening social dialogue.

Cutting across all these objectives is a strong gender equality policy. Men and women must have equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities for work that guarantees an adequate standard of living for themselves and their families, ensures basic security in adversity and old age, respects human rights and allows for creativity and fulfilment. The promotion of gender equality is, in fact, enshrined in the ILO Constitution. The Declaration of Philadelphia which set out the aims and purpose of the ILO in 1944 states that:

“All human beings, irrespective of race, creed or sex, have the right to pursue both their material well-being and their spiritual development in conditions of freedom and dignity, of economic security and equal opportunity.”

To promote gender equality in decent work, the ILO has recently undergone some organizational restructuring. A strengthened Bureau for Gender Equality is responsible for coordinating the design and implementation of an integrated ILO-wide gender policy and strategy, including putting in place mechanisms to ensure the effective mainstreaming of gender in ILO work at all levels. A Gender Promotion Programme (GENPROM) has also been set up within the Employment Sector to enhance the technical activities for gender mainstreaming in employment creation, enterprise development and human resource development. GENPROM is also specifically responsible for the global programme on More and Better Jobs for Women.
With 54 per cent of working age women in the labour force as compared to over 80 per cent male participation, the world is not making the most of its female talents and potentials.

Poverty is increasingly feminized. Women constitute 70 per cent of the world’s 1.3 billion absolute poor.

Half of the world’s labour is in sex-stereotyped occupations, with women dominating those occupations which are lowest paying and least protected.

More and more women are entering paid work but more jobs have often not meant better jobs. In developed countries, most new employment has been in part-time jobs, while in developing countries women have gone mainly into the informal sector and home-based work. Globally, women earn 20-30 per cent less than men.

Women continue to be mainly responsible for the “care economy”. If the value of the unpaid, invisible work done by women – approximately US$11 trillion per annum – is included, global output would be almost 50 per cent greater.

Some women have breached glass walls and ceilings, but worldwide they hold only 1 per cent of chief executive positions. The majority experience the effects of the so-called “sticky floor” – on the bottom rungs of their occupation.

More women are creating their own businesses, which are important sources of employment. But the policy, regulatory and institutional environments are often unfriendly to women entrepreneurs.

Women are increasingly migrating, both legally and illegally, for employment. Female migrant workers are among the most vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. The international trafficking of women and children (boys and girls) is one of the most serious and fastest growing problems today.

Globalization has created both unprecedented economic opportunities as well as deepened social inequalities and personal insecurities. Both women and men have been affected. However, gender inequalities persist and it is overwhelmingly women who suffer the most:
• Women continue to have less access than men to investments in skills, knowledge and lifelong learning. In a world increasingly dominated by information and communication technology, gender inequalities lead to new forms of social exclusion.

• The gender gap is graying into a poverty trap: women face a much higher risk than men of a drastic drop in living standards when they retire. Yet, women account for the majority of the over-60 population in almost all countries.

• Men too are facing growing employment insecurity. In some countries, open unemployment rates are higher for men than for women, and new job opportunities are more women-friendly.
The GENPROM Approach

The Gender Promotion Programme (GENPROM) adopts an integrated multi-disciplinary approach to gender equality in decent work as:

- A matter of promoting more and better jobs and enhancing economic efficiency: Productive and remunerative employment is still the biggest challenge of economic and social policies. GENPROM is concerned not just with the creation of jobs, the quality of employment cannot be divorced from its quality. Equality for women and men in more and better jobs makes the most of human talents and potentials, promotes worker morale, reduces labour turnover, improves the socially responsible image of companies and means better business performance.

- A matter of promoting fundamental principles and rights at work: The elimination of gender discrimination in respect of employment and occupation is embodied in relevant ILO standards and the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. The elimination of gender discrimination cannot be separated from the elimination of discrimination on all other grounds, nor from other fundamental principles and rights, including freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining, the elimination of forced labour, and the elimination of child labour.

- A matter of ensuring secure and safe work and eradicating poverty: With changing work organization, intensified global competition and inadequate social protection systems, both women and men face heightened insecurity. Women are more likely than men to be without access to social safety nets and be among the poorest of the poor. Yet empirical evidence shows that women who are educated and earn incomes have a greater impact than men on family welfare and children’s education and health, including reduction of child labour. GENPROM also gives special attention to groups at risk, such as older women workers and those who are trafficked into exploitative forms of labour.

- A matter of social dialogue and partnerships: Women cannot be empowered unless they are able to organize themselves to have a voice in all aspects of society and to join in partnership with civil groups in the fight for equality and other social causes. GENPROM encourages and assists informal sector women, migrant women and other unorganized women to mobilize and organize themselves. It also promotes the practice of gender mainstreaming as a matter of social responsibility and good governance by a wide range of social partners.
The Objectives and Strategy of the Gender Promotion Programme

GENPROM aims to create greater, better and more equal opportunities for women and men to secure decent employment and incomes through:

Advancing knowledge:
providing ILO staff and constituents with the information base and the conceptual, analytical and operational tools for gender mainstreaming.

Direct action:
working with national governments and the social partners to design, implement and monitor special targeted interventions to promote more and better jobs for women and men.

Advocacy:
drawing attention to new or emerging areas of gender concern and especially vulnerable groups of female or male workers, so as to encourage and assist governments and the social partners to adopt more pro-active policies and programmes.
GENPROM is helping to ensure that policy-makers, planners and implementors have readily and easily accessible information and data to be able to conduct gender analysis and to design and implement gender-sensitive and responsive policies and programmes through:

- Research on innovative and effective policies and practices for enhancing opportunities for women in employment and enterprises, and promoting gender equality. The focus is on identifying and testing good practices, developing an extensive portfolio of policy and programme options, and indicating the factors for success or failure in different contexts.

- Preparation, dissemination and practical validation of user-friendly manuals of good practice. These manuals deal with, for example, the promotion of gender equality by trade unions within their own structures, at the workplace and in the wider community; the protection of vulnerable female migrants from debt bondage or exploitative forms of overseas employment; and promotion of the rights of older women workers.

- Establishment of an information base on equal employment opportunity policies and practices on a website and CD-ROM. The ILO is often approached by governments and the social partners for information that will assist them to translate international standards into effective national laws and company policies and practices, and to learn from the experience of different countries in promoting equal employment opportunities.

- Development of conceptual and analytical tools for gender analysis and gender mainstreaming. It is critical that policy-makers and planners understand the gender and employment implications of macroeconomic policies, especially in the context of globalization and the feminization of poverty.

GENPROM aims to eventually set up a "gender and employment help desk" which ILO staff and constituents can refer to for key sex-disaggregated employment and labour market statistics, guides on good practices, gender mainstreaming checklists, training packages, roster of experts and consultants, etc.
**Surf the Web for Equality**

Member States, employers’ and workers’ organizations, academic researchers and other interested organizations often seek advice from the ILO on the different approaches taken at the national level to give practical effect to gender equality principles. To meet this need, GENPROM is developing an information base which sets out, as completely as possible, the different policies, practices and institutional arrangements introduced by a range of governments, public and private sector enterprises and trade unions to promote equal opportunities for women and men in employment and occupation. By the end of 2000 it will be possible to access a GENPROM website with relevant hyperlinks not only to other ILO databases but also other equal employment opportunity sites. The information will also be available on CD-ROM.

Information found on the equal employment opportunity database includes:

- National affirmative action policies and laws
- Anti-discrimination legislation
- Ratification lists for each country of important ILO and other international instruments relevant to women
- National machinery and plans of action
- Corporate policies and codes of conduct
- Collective agreements
- Trade union policies
- Equal pay provisions
- Family-friendly policies and measures
- Health and safety and other protective provisions
- Policies and laws on education and training
- Provisions relating to atypical work, including home workers, part-time and temporary employment
- Sexual harassment laws and policies.
Promoting Gender Equality: A Manual for Trade Unions

In spite of their increasing participation in the labour force, women account for only about a third of global trade union membership and one per cent of the decision-making bodies of unions. To find out why, GEN-PROM, in collaboration with the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions and the ILO Bureau for Workers’ Activities, conducted in 1998-99 a survey and case studies of trade unions and national centres all over the world. The main reasons revealed by the survey are that, on the one hand, women do not understand how unions can benefit them, and, on the other hand, unions are often not sensitive to the needs of women workers or their entrenched rules and structures are not conducive to women’s participation and leadership.

To help unions attract and keep women members and become more relevant to women’s lives, seven booklets of good practice accompany the final survey report. The manual focuses on how unions can promote gender equality:

• within their own internal structures and policies;
• at the workplace through the collective bargaining process; and
• through community outreach and working with other civil groups to fight for gender equality and other social causes.

The manual also provides innovative approaches for organizing and protecting atypical workers, including migrants, workers in export-processing zones and domestic workers; and illustrates how trade unions can “share the table and create space” for youth, older workers, workers with disabilities, persons with different sexual orientations, and indigenous and tribal peoples.

Each booklet of the manual is structured to define the tasks and challenges facing trade unions in the promotion of gender equality and the protection of vulnerable workers; and to provide guidelines and practical tools for action. These include checklists and actual examples of action and operational strategies that have succeeded or failed and the identification of factors for success or failure in particular contexts.
Through the global programme, GENPROM is assisting a number of countries to develop and implement National Action Plans for More and Better Jobs for Women, with integrated and multi-faceted components for:

- Creating a supportive environment through strengthening institutional and legal frameworks and building the capacity of policy-makers, planners and implementers to design, implement and monitor policies and programmes for more and better jobs;
- Providing direct assistance – skills training, group organization, access to resources, support services and facilities, etc. – to help create employment and income earning opportunities for selected women workers;
- Systematically collecting and disseminating “lessons learnt” and good practices, training and awareness-raising materials developed, etc., so as to improve know-how and show-how and ensure wider and sustainable impacts.

GENPROM is responsible for the global programme on More and Better Jobs for Women, which is the ILO’s specific technical cooperation response to the successful implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women.
The distinguishing features of these national action plans are their:

- **Participatory approach.** All stakeholders – government agencies, the business community, workers' and employers' organizations, intended women beneficiaries and their families and communities, and NGOs and international agencies working with these groups – are actively involved in determining the priorities and strategies of the plans;

- **Rights-based focus.** The plans promote gender equality in employment with proper working conditions as a matter of human rights. Awareness raising, legal literacy training and employment creation efforts underscore the fundamental principles and rights at work;

- **Poverty eradication emphasis.** The plans are part and parcel of the country's poverty eradication programme, with target groups selected from among the poorest communities;

- **Insistence on economic viability and sustainability.** The plans incorporate a proper economic opportunity identification exercise – including assessment of local and export market potentials, production chain linkages and spread effects, availability of raw materials and other technical and financial supports – as the basis for action to create jobs. The exercise is closely linked to local and regional development initiatives, so as to ensure that the types of employment created for women are sustainable over the longer term;

- **Win-win message.** The plans aim to demonstrate in practical ways that more and better jobs for women benefit not only the women themselves but also their families, communities and economies. Particular attention is given to ensuring that employment and income-earning opportunities for women translate directly into improved family welfare and the reduction of child labour.
More and Better Jobs for Women in Estonia

Estonia has been experiencing dramatic increases in unemployment, which have impacted particularly severely on women. In this context, the Government of Estonia approached the ILO for assistance in developing a National Plan of Action for More and Better Jobs for Women. With financial support from the Government of Finland, implementation began in January 1999 with a series of gender sensitization and awareness-raising seminars to build the capacity of local policy-makers and planners to better implement policies promoting women's employment.

A pilot project in one of the poorest rural counties, Valga, has generated widespread local support. Women's organizations have been working closely with the local development authorities, trade unions and business groups to promote the economic revitalization of rural areas. Equipped with the training provided by an international expert, they have identified viable opportunities for employment creation and enterprise development, such as rural tourism and alternative agricultural products. To translate these potentials into actual opportunities, more than 400 women have been participating in skills and business development programmes. A micro-credit component is also being prepared to enable the women to take the next step and start their own enterprises.

The local women's active participation has made them feel “own” the project and has contributed to enhancing their self-confidence and empowerment. Regular dialogue between the network of women's organizations and the local authorities has given women a stronger voice in their community’s development.

As the project continues, targeted interventions are being extended to other poor counties and special attention is being given to especially vulnerable groups, such as older women workers and ethnic Russian speaking groups.

More and Better Jobs for Women in Mexico

“More and Better Jobs for Women” has become part and parcel of the Mexican Government's policy and programming, in which gender issues currently have a high profile. The National Plan of Action is the outcome of active collaboration between GENPROM, the Ministry of Labour, National Commission of Women, other national and state agencies and employers' and workers' organizations. Committed to the Plan, national and state governments have been using their own resources to launch implementation. Various committees have been established at national and state levels involving a wide range of stakeholders, who have undertaken gender capacity building activities with support from GENPROM and the ILO Office in Mexico. With external resources received from the Ministry of Labour and Social Security of Spain, the National Plan of Action for More and Better Jobs for Women is now able to target:

- About 4,000 salaried women workers in the “maquila industry” in Coahuila State. Some 17 factories are participating, and requests have been received from another 50 factories to participate, in training the workers in labour rights, occupational safety and health, and organizational and negotiation skills. The aim is to enable the workers to better organize themselves to represent their interests and to improve their working conditions.
- About 400 women in the urban informal sector in Guerrero State. Here the aim is to provide these women with entrepreneurship training and technical and financial assistance so as to enhance the profitability and viability of their micro-enterprises.

The aim of the Mexican Government is to extend these “model schemes” to other States and groups of beneficiaries.
Linking Women’s Employment to the Reduction of Child Labour

Current policies and programmes tend to address separately the promotion of women’s employment and the elimination of child labour. On the one hand, efforts to promote women’s employment often ignore related issues such as improved family welfare, children’s education and their protection from labour exploitation. On the other hand, measures to reduce child labour focus on the reduction of poverty through the promotion of adult employment, but information and experience of the most effective socio-economic alternatives to the use of child labour are still limited. Certain types of employment could, in fact, lead mothers to withdraw their children from school to join them in their jobs or to take over family responsibilities, or could set negative role models for their children. Female children are often in the greatest danger of being withdrawn from school to take over household responsibilities, pressured into hazardous and exploitative income generating activities, or sold into debt bondage.

With the financial support of the Netherlands Government, GEN-PROM has started projects in Bangladesh and Tanzania (and very soon in a country in Latin America) to promote the linkages between decent employment for women and the reduction of child labour. In close collaboration with the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC), action research, based on a specially designed survey questionnaire, is being conducted to shed light on the types of economic sectors, characteristics of women’s employment and working conditions and the kinds of support structures that positively or negatively affect child labour. Model schemes are also being tested. Awareness raising for women includes the rights of children and the importance of human capital investment in children. Group organization activities introduce women community watch groups to monitor vulnerable children. Programmes for skills training, access to credit or marketing facilities impose the condition that the women should ensure regular school attendance of their children and no involvement of child labour.
Eliminating discrimination against older women workers

Women make up the majority of the over 60 population in almost every country in the world. In addition to the increasing feminization of later life, ageist and sexist discrimination also appears to be becoming more prevalent, perhaps in response to the “youth and beauty culture” as portrayed in the media. Although the feminization of later life is currently more pronounced in the developed world, this phenomenon is expected to occur more rapidly and within a shorter time frame in developing countries. Within the next 25 years, three-quarters of all older women in the world will live and work in Asia. This demographic transition in developing countries is occurring, however, without the improvement in living and working standards nor adequate social security measures. GENPROM has prepared a report which explores the different aspects of discrimination experienced by older women workers, the recent gender-blind policy responses to an “aging population”, the framework for new policy reform focusing on a rights-based approach, and the role of the social partners in promoting decent work for older women workers.

Adopting a generational approach to gender equality

Equality of rights must be implemented over the entire life course - to enable girls and boys, women and men to progress from one stage of life to another and to ensure that discrimination encountered at one stage is not perpetuated or that gains made at one stage are not lost at later stages. In advocating a generational approach to the promotion of gender equality, GENPROM is focusing attention on:

- the different socio-cultural perceptions concerning the value of daughters and sons and human capital investments in children;
- the linked nature of economic and social reproduction and the particular problems faced by women attempting to combine career, marriage, family and civic responsibilities - hence, the importance of family-friendly policies;
- the growing likelihood in the twenty-first century that men and especially women will be having flexible working lives, moving in and out of the labour force and changing their work status several times over the course of their lives, and the need for lifelong learning and continuous training for such workers;
- the ageing of the population, with women accounting for the bulk of the older population but facing serious discrimination in the form of sexist and ageist stereotypes both within and outside the labour market.
Protecting vulnerable female migrant workers
More and more women, especially Asian women, are migrating legally or illegally for overseas employment. These women are among the most vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, mainly because they are outside the legal protection of their home countries and because they work in jobs - as domestic servants, prostitutes, entertainers, contract manual labourers - which are not covered by labour legislation. Their situation is made worse by the fact that they are usually young and poor, living in fear of losing their jobs, do not speak the language of the host country, are unaware that their rights are being infringed and normally do not know where to go for help. Many also end up in a situation of debt bondage, having borrowed money to pay for the costs of obtaining an overseas job or having been duped by unscrupulous agents or employers. In collaboration with the Migration Branch, GENPROM is developing a manual aimed at better preparing women for international migration and protecting them from exploitative and abusive forms of employment.

Combating the international trafficking of women and children
There has been an alarming increase in international trafficking with women and girls much more likely than men and boys to be human cargo, ending up in intolerable forms of employment, including forced prostitution, exploitative and abusive domestic service and manufacturing production under slavery-like conditions. The problem of trafficking is now high on the international political agenda, and a global instrument against trafficking is currently being negotiated under the United Nations auspices. GENPROM activities in this area are linked to its efforts to raise awareness of the potential dangers of illegal migration for employment. To practically demonstrate how the problem can be addressed, GENPROM is joining forces with the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) to organize both prevention and rehabilitation efforts in the countries of the Greater Mekong Sub-Region.

Assisting men to cope with changing gender relations
In the true spirit of gender equality, GENPROM is focusing attention on the problems of men. Men are facing a number of difficulties coping with the march of women into the labour force and changing gender relations in the workplace and society. In some countries, they are experiencing higher levels of unemployment than women, and with the loss of jobs men are also losing their marriage prospects and their traditional breadwinner role within families. In addition to coping with growing employment insecurity, men are also having to learn to deal with female co-workers, women bosses, working wives, dual earning couples and taking on an equal share of family responsibilities. GENPROM is organizing in 2001 an international seminar to highlight these issues and to encourage men to question and redefine their roles and responsibilities vis-a-vis women, and to help boys find new role models.
Central to the GENPROM strategy is partnership. To promote effective gender mainstreaming and given the multi-faceted nature of the employment challenge, GENPROM works with a wide range of partners within the ILO and at international and national levels.

GENPROM partnerships:
- **The Employment Sector of the ILO:** As part of the Employment Sector, GENPROM is routinely promoting gender analysis and planning in all programmes and activities. It directly involves relevant units in technical cooperation programmes at the national level, for example:
  - Infocus Programme on Boosting Employment through Small Enterprise Development on entrepreneurship development for women;
  - Social Finance Unit to assess credit arrangements for women;
  - Target Groups Unit for combating female youth unemployment;
  - Private Voluntary Initiatives Programme on equal employment opportunity policies for socially responsible companies;
  - Key Indicators of the Labour Market Unit on sex-disaggregated labour market information.
- **Other Sectors of the ILO:** GENPROM collaborates and coordinates closely with, amongst others:
  - Bureau for Gender Equality to give effect to the ILO’s gender mainstreaming policy;
  - Infocus Programme on Promoting the Declaration since gender equality is a fundamental workers’ right and cannot be separated from all other rights;
  - International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour to ensure that decent employment for women leads also to a reduction of child labour;
  - Bureau for Workers’ Activities to promote gender equality within unions, through collective bargaining and community unions;
  - Migration Branch on protecting vulnerable female migrant workers;
  - the Multidisciplinary Teams and ILO Area and Field Offices - without their support GENPROM would not be able to operate.
- **The international community:** GENPROM has established good working relationships with:
  - International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) on a survey of good practices by unions to promote gender equality;
  - United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women and United Nations Programme for Ageing, for information sharing and dissemination;
  - International Organization for Migration on issues of trafficking and migration;
  - AIESEC International in support of the activities of young people;
  - a wide range of women’s NGOs.
- **The donor community:** GENPROM is attempting to build up relationships based not just on funding but on closely involving donors in identifying priorities and formulating appropriate responses; and most importantly.
- **The ILO’s tripartite partners**
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