



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
9 December 2005

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women

Fiftieth session

27 February-10 March 2006

Item 3 of the provisional agenda

**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women
and to the special session of the General Assembly
entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development
and peace for the twenty-first century”**

Economic Advancement for Women

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report has been prepared in response to Commission on the Status of Women resolution 49/8 on economic advancement for women, in which the Commission requested the Secretary-General to submit to its fiftieth session a report on the issue. The report examines issues relating to the status of women in the labour market, including occupational segregation, wage gaps, economic decision-making, harmonization of work and family responsibilities, and pensions and taxes. It highlights women's access to information and communication technologies, rural women's income-generating potential and the employment opportunities of migrant women. The report provides recommendations for future action for the consideration of the Commission on the Status of Women. The report draws on the responses from Member States and on inputs from entities of the United Nations system on actions taken to support the efforts of Member States.

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I. Introduction

1. At its forty-ninth session, the Commission on the Status of Women adopted resolution 49/8, which called for actions to promote economic advancement for women at the national level and requested the Secretary-General to report to the fiftieth session of the Commission on the implementation of the resolution.

2. The report, which has been prepared in response to that resolution, reviews the status of women in labour markets, employment and the workplace; access of women to information and communication technology-based economic activities; rural women's income-generating potential; and the employment opportunities of migrant women. The report is based on information provided by Member States in 2004 in response to a questionnaire on the 10-year review and appraisal of implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (see E/CN.6/2005/2 and Corr.1), as well as on inputs from Member States to update that information.¹ Examples of activities of the entities of the United Nations system in support of economic advancement for women at the national level are also provided.² The report does not attempt to provide a comprehensive account of activities at the national level but rather provides examples to illustrate those activities.³

II. Status of women in the labour market

3. Economic activity rates for women have been rising in most parts of the world since 1989, with the exception of Eastern and Central Europe, where women's participation in the labour force was already high, and the Middle East and North Africa, where women's economic activity rates remain low by global standards.⁴

4. Although the number of women employed has increased, in some parts of the world the increased female participation in the labour market has been paralleled by higher unemployment rates and lower wages for women than men, as well as a deterioration in the terms and conditions of employment, including insecure contracts, benefits and social protection. Low-skilled female workers are particularly vulnerable, owing to job instability, low incomes without employee benefits, heavy workloads, long hours and hazardous and exploitative working environments. Many home-based workers, for example, receive low wages, are unprotected by labour laws and do not receive social welfare benefits.

5. According to recent International Labour Organization (ILO) statistics, informal employment — employment without secure contracts, worker benefits or social protection — constitutes 50 to 75 per cent of non-agricultural employment in developing countries and tends to be a larger source of employment for women than for men in all developing regions except North Africa. Women dominate in part-time work and unpaid care work and lack many of the benefits that full-time paid workers enjoy. Temporary labourers, the self-employed in the informal sector and small-scale entrepreneurs are also mainly women.⁵ As a consequence, women constitute a higher share (60 per cent) of the number of working poor in the world — those who work but do not earn enough to lift themselves and their families above the poverty line of one dollar a day.⁶

6. Several countries have undertaken targeted interventions to support women's access to employment at critical points in their lives: young women making their first career plans; mothers re-entering the labour force; women wishing to change

professions; and unemployed women. Many countries promoted employment of women whose circumstances require particular attention: young women; older women; indigenous women; women from ethnic minorities; migrant women; women in remote and rural areas; women heads of household; single women; pregnant teenagers; victims of abuse; ex-offenders; homeless women; alcohol and drug addicts; and women with disabilities.

7. In 2005, for example, Brazil issued a presidential decree to ensure equal access of women and men to the labour market and to avoid discrimination based on gender, race or ethnicity. The Federal Ministry for Social Security and Generations of Austria took measures to improve the occupational integration of women with disabilities by, among other things, providing women with training on computers and in business administration.

8. Most countries used education, training and retraining and counselling to improve women's skills and professional mobility. Several countries concluded that equal access to education, training and upgrading of skills of women and girls was crucial to avoid their exclusion from fast-growing sectors, such as the information and communication technology (ICT) sector. Uruguay reported that 66 per cent of the women involved in a pilot programme on women's employability became more aware of their potential and the constraints they faced in gaining employment. The Russian Federation implemented a retraining programme to address the high level of female unemployment (46 per cent in 2004), reaching 64 per cent of all unemployed women. Ethiopia carried out a pilot project to train women who had been retrenched owing to privatization.

9. Some countries reported that more women than men were unemployed. The transition period in Kyrgyzstan, for example, caused massive unemployment. Women were particularly affected, partly as a result of the elimination of social sector jobs traditionally held by women and the inability of businesses to provide childcare. Slovakia made special efforts to reduce long-term unemployment of Roma women. Jordan reported that the unemployment rate for educated women was higher than that for uneducated or less-educated women.

10. Recognizing the problem of involuntary part-time work, Norway appointed a committee to investigate the scope of the problem and the reasons behind it and, if necessary, to put forward proposals to reduce it. Turkey reported that the difficulties experienced in finding employment in the formal sector pushed women into the informal economy.

11. Some countries developed job-searching manuals, guidebooks and checklists to facilitate women's access to employment. Iceland developed a booklet to encourage women to consider their future earning potential before choosing careers.

12. Governments collaborated with the private sector to promote a change of management culture regarding women's employment. The Republic of Korea, for example, designated a "Gender employment equality emphasis week" to raise corporate awareness of gender equality in employment. Costa Rica introduced labour market certification for private and public organizations that develop gender-sensitive management systems. The National Institute of Women in Mexico worked with over 5,300 business leaders to create a culture of equal opportunity.

13. A growing body of laws, policies and programmes addressed discrimination in employment. The Act on Equality between Women and Men enacted in Finland, for

example, obliges every employer with more than 30 employees to incorporate measures for gender equality in their annual personnel or training plans or in their occupational safety and health action plans. Monitoring of such plans is made in connection with occupational safety and health inspections at workplaces.

A. Occupational segregation

14. Both horizontal and vertical segregation persist across the world, relegating women to certain types of work and/or preventing them from reaching managerial positions.⁵ The extent of the problem varies from country to country and from sector to sector. The main factors contributing to occupational sex segregation include cultural and social attitudes towards what constitutes “male” or “female” employment and gender inequality in education and training. In many parts of the world, women choose occupations where there is more work flexibility in order to balance the needs of work and family, which contributes to occupational segregation.⁷

15. Several countries made specific efforts to guide women into such traditionally male-dominated sectors as science and technology, engineering, industry, medicine, carpentry, auto-mechanics, building and park maintenance, armed forces and the police. As a result of efforts made in Mauritius, 41 per cent of students enrolled in the University of Technology in 2004/2005 were women. Some countries attempted to challenge gender stereotypes in education and training and to influence workplace culture. Cuba reported a trend towards the feminization of the technical workforce as a result of such activities. In 2003, Israel conducted surveys to assess the status of women in science and academia and sponsored an extensive public awareness campaign. Samoa increased the recruitment and representation of women in the police force.

16. France, Iceland and Malawi, for example, encouraged men to enter such female-dominated studies or occupations as childcare, nursing, home economics, midwifery and social work.

17. In the Eastern Mediterranean region, the World Health Organization (WHO) is developing vocational curricula to allow women and men to gain access to non-traditional spheres of work. The International Maritime Organization (IMO) carried out regional sensitization seminars as a means of enhancing the visibility and impact of women in the maritime industry.

B. Wage gaps between women and men

18. Gender wage gaps persist in all sectors throughout the world, largely owing to occupational segregation and women’s high rate of participation in part-time work. Research by the International Labour Organization has also shown that vertical and horizontal occupational sex segregation, as a result of sociocultural attitudes and gender inequality in education, training and recruitment, is the principal reason for the persistent gaps between men and women’s earnings. An additional factor is that women are likely to have shorter careers than men of the same age because they may not work full-time throughout their working lives. Data on pay differences among managers showed that earnings gaps were wider at the more senior management positions.⁷

19. There has, however, been a narrowing of wage gaps in some countries that is largely attributable to the decline in educational qualification gaps between women and men.⁴ Norway reported a further possible explanation: women are increasingly involved in the same types of work as men. In 12 European Union countries for which data were available, the average pay gap between men and women's earnings was 15.3 per cent in 2000 and was reported to be narrowing.⁷ However, the scarcity of wage data disaggregated by sex makes a thorough assessment of gender wage gaps difficult.

20. Many countries moved to close income gaps between women and men by, for example, legislating against pay discrimination; promoting equal pay standards through negotiations with trade unions; and increasing public awareness. The 2001 amendment to the Equal Opportunities Act of Sweden, for example, required employers and trade unions to assess wage differentials and rectify the differences. The Government of Norway compared wages across occupations and collective wage agreements to determine the types of work that were of equal value. Denmark commissioned an in-depth study on gender segregation of the labour market and wage gaps, including "sliding" gender segregation (the employment of women and men with the same qualifications and education in different job functions with different levels of wages). Denmark also established a website and a good practice report with concrete advice on working to eliminate gender wage gaps.

C. Decision-making

21. Recent global statistics show that women continue to increase their share of managerial positions but the rate of progress is slow and uneven. Lack of comparable data remains a problem. In countries for which data were available, there was little or no change and, in some, the percentage rates were even in decline. Lack of access to decision-making positions was found both in professions dominated by men and in female-dominated sectors, where, despite the fact that more managers were women, a disproportionate number of men rose to the more senior positions.⁷

22. The data show that, in general, countries in North America, South America and Eastern Europe have a higher share of women in managerial jobs than countries in East Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East. For the period 2000-2002, women's overall share of managerial positions was between 20 and 40 per cent in 48 out of the 63 countries for which data were available.⁸

23. Relatively few countries reported on specific actions to overcome discrimination and strengthen women's participation in economic decision-making. Among the positive examples provided, Uruguay eliminated provisions that prevented female police officers from reaching senior positions. Finland and Norway implemented a quota to increase the number of women on the boards of directors of State and public limited companies to 40 per cent. In Norway, an estimated 600 companies have been affected by the regulation. A similar initiative was carried out in Denmark, Estonia, Greece and Sweden through a project, "women to the top", which aims to ensure at least 40 per cent women on the boards of private sector companies.

24. Within the United Nations system, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) collaborated with academic researchers,

representatives of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, the International Labour Organization and women trade unionists in developing a research and advocacy network to support the involvement of women in trade union decision-making.

D. Harmonization of work and family responsibilities

25. Some employers have begun to recognize that family-friendly policies not only benefit male and female employees by encouraging a better balance between work and family or personal life, but also improve overall business productivity. Voluntary codes of conduct with built-in monitoring and verification systems have been introduced by some employers to ensure workers' rights in this respect. The codes have the advantage of extending and strengthening the application of labour standards across national boundaries, government jurisdictions, and international corporations. However, some doubts have been expressed as to the value of voluntary codes of conduct, and the need to find ways to establish the accountability of the private sector with respect to globally endorsed rights and standards articulated in International Labour Organization and United Nations conventions and declarations has been emphasized.⁷

26. Among measures reported by Member States to assist both women and men to reconcile family and work responsibilities were parental leave and benefits; support to parents re-entering the labour market; establishment of family-friendly corporate culture and working hours; support for child and dependent care; and family-friendly pensions and tax schemes. Some countries also conducted research and training on work-life balance strategies. Finland, for example, carried out a project, "space for children, space for family", to support the reconciliation of work and family life by, inter alia, changing attitudes towards children and family life in the workplace.

27. Part-time work, flexible shifts and concentrated working hours are increasing in many countries and can facilitate women's participation in the workforce. Increasing use of information and communication technology has created new forms of employment that allow women to work from home. For example, flexible working shifts were implemented by the University Medical Centre in Utrecht, the Netherlands, which created two additional operating room teams so that the work schedules of parents with children would coincide with school hours.

28. Some countries have encouraged public and private sector employers to introduce flexible working arrangements. The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland reported on a marked improvement following a new law giving parents the right to apply for flexible working arrangements and obliging employers to give such requests serious consideration.

29. Several countries reported on measures to eliminate discrimination against pregnant and nursing women. Suriname made it possible for pregnant women to claim redress for dismissal. Algeria, Qatar, Slovenia and Tunisia reported that women could take time off for breastfeeding. Brazil stated that it requires companies with more than 30 female employees to create a specific area for breastfeeding. The International Labour Organization prepared a report that examined the impact of maternity protection and family policies on gender relations in the labour market and women's and men's employment choices and patterns, and

published a handbook entitled *Reconciling Work and Family Responsibilities: Practical Ideas from Global Experience*.⁹

30. In many countries, parental benefits, which had been introduced as schemes for mothers before and after confinement, developed into periods of paid leave available to both parents. A wide variety of arrangements exist, for paid and unpaid leave of varying lengths. In the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, for example, women are entitled to maternity leave 60 days before and 90 days after childbirth, irrespective of length of service. The maternity benefit corresponds to 100 per cent of the basic monthly salary. As part of the 480-day paid parental leave in Sweden, parents can work one hour less per day until the child is 8 years old.

31. Involving men in childcare facilitates women's equal participation in paid employment and guarantees children time with both parents. With growing awareness of the importance of the father's role, several countries gave fathers more opportunities to share childcare. El Salvador, for example, held conferences and seminars to help men become responsible fathers.

32. Several countries made efforts to improve access to affordable childcare. Jordan and Malaysia gave employers responsibility for providing workplace childcare centres. The Netherlands offered fiscal incentives to employers who contributed to the cost of childcare. The Ministry of Family and Integration in Luxembourg provided Government-funded after-school care. The Government of Bangladesh issued a directive obliging employers with more than 10 female employees to have a childcare facility close to the working place.

33. Some countries made it possible for workers to stay home to care for other dependants. Workers in Malta, for example, can take unpaid responsibility leave of one year at a time to care for dependent parents or disabled children or spouses. Social programmes in Cuba provide full salary and employment guarantees for all working mothers with disabled children requiring constant care.

E. Pensions and taxes

34. Limited access to and low benefits from old age retirement pensions challenge women's economic independence. Earnings-related pensions are lower for the many women in poorly paid sectors or part-time work and for women whose careers were interrupted by family responsibilities. A number of countries took steps towards setting up gender-sensitive pension plans. Countries reported two main approaches to facilitating security for women in retirement. The first approach, as illustrated by practices in Austria, Canada, Luxembourg and Switzerland, is to make up some or all of women's contributions to pension funds during periods of child-rearing. The second approach, used in Ireland, Jordan, Poland, Slovenia and the United States of America, is to introduce "catch-up" contributions to enable women to qualify for a pension.

35. A few countries — Cyprus, Jordan, Malaysia and Turkey — reported on specific measures to promote equality between women and men with respect to income tax contributions. Malaysia and Turkey, for example, made it possible for married women to file tax returns independently of their husbands. Japan created a credit line with tax privileges and an exemption from collateral fees for women entrepreneurs.

36. Within the United Nations system, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) carried out an innovative project on pension system reforms and its impact on gender equality. In 2004, the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) collaborated with HomeNet India in launching a social security scheme for informal sector workers above the age of 60 and with income under a certain level, to be piloted in 50 districts.

III. Increasing access to information and communication technologies

37. Information and communication technologies have contributed to increased employment and economic opportunities for women in many countries. New forms of employment have emerged. In some countries in Asia, women are earning significant livelihoods in business process outsourcing through, for example, medical and legal transcription work, software services and the maintenance of daily accounts for small businesses located in other countries. The flexibility of teleworking has also opened up new opportunities for women by enabling them to work from home. However, this new organization of work has some less-than-positive implications for women since they telework in addition to their existing domestic tasks. They receive low wages relative to those working in the organized sector and have insecure employment contracts, if contracts exist at all. Very often women have to make substantial investments to secure their work, including the purchase of computers and payment for electricity and Internet connectivity. The ILO, in the 2001 *World Employment Report*, warned that, as teleworking was emerging as an important mode of working in the information economy, existing inequalities — particularly gender inequalities — would be reinforced unless proper policy measures were implemented.¹⁰

38. The ILO report also observed that patterns of gender segregation were being reproduced in the information economy, with women concentrated in end-user, lower-skilled ICT employment related to word processing and data entry and with men dominating in more senior managerial and administration positions and in the design of networks, operating systems and software. New inequalities are therefore emerging between women with information and communication technology-related job skills versus those without.¹⁰

39. Women are underrepresented in ICT policy and regulatory institutions and in ministries responsible for information and communication technologies. Men still hold most of the management and decision-making positions in telecommunication companies and regulatory or policymaking bodies.¹¹ Stereotypical views of the roles of men and women remain barriers to their full participation.

40. A number of countries recognized that access to information and communication technologies was an effective way of promoting women's economic participation. The Netherlands, for example, reported on substantial progress made in providing women with access to the Internet. While in 1995 80 per cent of Internet users were men, by 2004 as many women as men were using the Internet. The Tonga Broadcasting Commission, for example, promoted women's increased access to ICT, including by training women in key positions. Egypt undertook a Microsoft super-users training programme, specifically targeting young female graduates. The Act on Closing the Digital Divide (2001) of the Republic of Korea, which includes

women as a target group, provides free or low-cost access to information technology networks and equipment. The Samoa Association of Women Graduates hosted the Pacific Graduate Women's Network conference in 2005, which focused on increasing women's access to ICT.

41. Member States also emphasized the importance of building women's capacity to use ICT effectively. The Tashkent University of Information Technologies in Uzbekistan set up a centre to enhance women's skills in ICT. Brunei Darussalam provided training for women in both the public and private sectors to enhance their ICT skills. The Ministry of Science and Information and Communication Technology in Bangladesh carried out subsidized training for women on introduction to computers and application packages. Egypt encouraged women to take the International Computer Driving Licence, and supported women entrepreneurs through "business online" and e-marketing projects. A three-year initiative for women in rural and less developed areas in Lithuania included the development of a women's information portal on the World Wide Web, with such features as a digital library; a database of women's groups and mailing lists; provision of equipment to women's organizations; and development of training and an ICT handbook. The Government of Malaysia established a website to assist women to market their products and services, especially handicrafts.

42. Entities of the United Nations system provided assistance to Governments in the area of information and communication technologies by organizing training to build ICT capacity and by developing ICT methodologies and tools. For example, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) set up 65 women's programme centres that, inter alia, provide capacity-building in the use of computers. UNESCO used information and communication technologies to promote women's economic empowerment. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) provided training for women in developing electronic networks. The Commission also implemented a multi-country project on women's sustainable e-business to enable women to capture a niche market in "green" or organically grown products. The Division for the Advancement of Women provided capacity-building for national machineries in Africa to ensure that they take full advantage of new information and communication technologies to strengthen networking, information-sharing and knowledge management and to enhance their effectiveness in national policymaking and planning processes for gender equality.

IV. Enhancing the income-generating potential of rural women

43. Agriculture is still the most important sector for female employment in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia.¹² Rural women produce more than half of the food grown worldwide.¹³ In sub-Saharan Africa, women contribute 60 to 80 per cent of the labour in food production both for household consumption and for sale.

44. Women diversify to sustain their livelihoods, working on farms and engaging in off-farm activities. Without secure land rights, women farmers have little or no access to credit or other agricultural infrastructure and services. Land and property ownership increases women's food security, their bargaining power within the household and their social status in the community. In many countries, customary laws and practices allow women to have access to land and engage in and benefit

from agricultural, livestock and forest-based production. However, when land becomes a marketable asset, women's access rights to land may be ignored by family and community members, particularly in the case of widowed and divorced women.¹⁴

45. Resource-poor producers, especially rural women, receive only a minor share of formal agricultural credit even in countries where they are major producers. As land is the major asset used as collateral, women have limited access to credit facilities.⁴ Withdrawal of government credit support in rural areas, resulting from increased liberalization and privatization of the financial sector, can hinder access to credit for women.¹⁵

46. Over the past decade considerable attention has been given to microcredit interventions for women. However, mixed results have been noted in South Asia, one of the most active regions in promoting microcredit for women. Some studies showed that women's bargaining position within the household had been strengthened by access to credit and control over income and assets. Assessment of credit programmes in Bangladesh, however, showed that men often controlled the credit women brought into the household and that loans were used for purposes different from the ones applied for.¹⁶ For microfinance interventions to be effective, it is crucial to combine them with, inter alia, equal access to markets, training and extension services and new technologies.

47. The spread of agro-industry and rural industrialization has increased the possibilities for women to earn cash income. Wage employment allows women to get out of the relative isolation of the home and communities and gain self-esteem.¹⁷ A survey conducted in two townships in China showed that women's role in decision-making strengthened as their incomes increased.¹⁸

48. Several countries addressed the specific needs and challenges of rural women. Colombia, for example, developed a plan to address the political, socio-economic and cultural obstacles rural women face. In 2005, Japan adopted the Basic Plan for Food, Agriculture and Rural Areas to support women as farm managers. Bangladesh initiated a project, ABASHAN (poverty alleviation and rehabilitation), for assetless people, to rehabilitate landless poor families through self-employment and to promote the economic advancement of women. Monaco reported supporting a cooperative of rural women in Morocco to facilitate the production and marketing of local oil-based products.

49. Several developing countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean, promoted gender equality in access to land and property. Some countries legislated to secure women's equal rights by ensuring, for example, that the names of both husband and wife appeared on land use certificates, whether they were legally married or not. The National Union of Eritrean Women, for example, trained 50 legal officers from various parts of the country to advocate for women's right to land ownership. The plan of action for gender equality and equity of Cape Verde (2005-2009) called for an in-depth study on the reasons for the differing access of women and men to economic resources. The law on contracted land leasing in rural areas in China protected women's rights to leased land in the event of marriage or divorce. The revised agricultural sector law of Honduras promoted gender mainstreaming to increase women's access to land.

50. Entities of the United Nations system took steps to promote the economic advancement of women in rural areas. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), for example, carried out a project to assist Cambodian women to improve household food security and increase family income. The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) provided small grants to non-governmental organizations working to strengthen women's property and inheritance rights at national and community levels. The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) supported efforts in Kyrgyzstan to promote women's land ownership by amending the law on land management. UN-HABITAT carried out a study on Islamic land law, to identify innovative approaches to address women's inheritance and property rights.

51. Several countries supported enterprises run by rural women in the areas of agriculture, food processing, fishing, small trading, handicrafts and services. The Agricultural Bank of Namibia, for example, provided low interest loans to women farmers. In Estonia, the Ministry of Social Affairs was developing programmes to increase the number of women's businesses, in particular in rural areas. The Government of Colombia carried out a microenterprise programme for female heads of household, in collaboration with local governments, universities, banks and non-governmental organizations.

52. Several United Nations entities promoted women's access to microcredit in rural areas. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) supported a women's microcredit scheme on biodiversity conservation in upland ecosystems in China.

53. United Nations entities also supported Governments in building the capacity of rural women entrepreneurs. The United Nations Volunteers (UNV) worked with 225 women in Malawi to enhance their business skills and promote appropriate technologies and techniques for processing and preserving food and cash crops. The International Labour Organization and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) provided vocational training courses in trade and business to improve women's productive activities and income-generating potential, within the framework of the strategy for the fight against illicit drug trafficking of Bolivia. The World Food Programme (WFP) provided "food-for-training" on functional literacy, numeracy, leadership skills and income-generating skills.

54. The United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) developed a programme for women entrepreneurs in agro-industry, including food processing, leather and textiles, in countries in Central America, Africa and Asia. Experience from programmes supported by UNESCO in rural Burkina Faso and Nigeria revealed that women's literacy programmes enhanced women's capacity to both manage microcredit activities and participate in decision-making.

V. Enhancing the employment opportunities of migrant women

55. The *World Survey on the Role of Women in Development*, 2004, indicated that women are increasingly involved in various types of migration.¹⁹ As of 2000, 49 per cent of all international migrants were women or girls, up from 46.6 per cent in 1960.²⁰

56. An increasing number of women migrate independently of men for work purposes. Lack of access to resources, particularly productive land, is a factor that pushes women to emigrate from rural areas, while labour market opportunities at potential destinations work as a pull factor. Those movements include rural to rural migration, as young women join the agro-industry workforce; rural to urban migration, where girls and adult women enter the service and manufacturing sectors in urban areas, including export processing zones (EPZs); and international migration, where women leave for employment in other countries.²¹

57. The impact of migration on the division of labour and on gender relations varies significantly, depending on whether women or men are migrating. In spite of increasing women's time and work burdens, male migration may lead to women's empowerment as women acquire new skills and capacities by taking on the responsibility for households and seeking employment outside the home.

58. Remittances providing additional family income constitute further benefits of migration. The impact of remittances on the well-being of households depends on who controls remittance income and how it is spent. Some evidence suggests that migrant women remit more of their income to their families than male migrants, although they typically earn less than men and have less to remit. Remittances may also depend on contributions from migrant women who are not investing enough in their own living conditions, health care, nutrition and education.¹⁹

59. Voluntary migration of women in search of new job opportunities may also contribute to their empowerment as they develop skills and experience. However, there is an increase in undocumented migrants, including through trafficking in women and girls for the purpose of exploitation, such as for prostitution and forced labour. Women smuggled by traffickers may be led to believe that they will work in legitimate occupations but find themselves trapped into domestic work, sweatshops and types of exploitation that constitute a contemporary form of slavery.¹⁹

60. Several distinct categories of women migrate for work purposes, differentiated by their skills, the permanence of their residence in the host country and their legal status. At the lower end of the skills spectrum, migrant women, for example, pick fruit and vegetables, manufacture garments and other items, process food, work as nursing home and hospital aides, and clean restaurants and hotels. The low value accorded to much of that work and the lack of social protection in irregular occupations mean that many women migrants are vulnerable to exploitation. Recent trends show that, although migrant women may be making more money than they would in their home countries, they may be marginalized in low-paid positions.¹⁹

61. At the higher end of the skills spectrum, migrant women engage in equally diverse activities, requiring specialized skills. They run multinational corporations, teach at universities, supply research and development expertise to industry and academia and design, and build and program computers.²² Many highly educated women from developing countries, however, undertake unskilled or semi-skilled work, resulting in a de-skilling of women migrant workers.

62. An analysis of work permit data of the United Kingdom for 2000 showed that sectors with high proportions of female workers constituted some of the fastest-growing sectors of migrant employment. Many migrant women work in the health sector, particularly as nurses and physical therapists.²³ Such jobs in the health sector

tend to follow well-recognized stereotypical gender patterns and to have lower earnings relative to typical male employment.

63. Few responses were received from Member States on efforts to increase access to employment and improve the situation of women migrant workers. The Ministry of Health, Social Welfare and Family of Andorra, in collaboration with the Association of Migrant Women of Andorra and the Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Services, reported on a project to facilitate the access of women migrants to employment. The Republic of Korea enacted an act on employment and management of foreign workers in July 2004, according to which foreign women workers are entitled to 90 days of maternity leave, fully covered by social and employment insurance for those working in companies designated by the Employment Insurance Act. Some countries, including Austria, Canada, Sweden and Thailand, addressed high illiteracy rates among women migrants through literacy programmes. Kazakhstan amended its employment legislation and carried out capacity-building activities to ensure employment, social development and protection for migrant women.

64. Several United Nations entities also reported on their efforts to promote the equal rights of women migrant workers. The International Labour Office, for example, published *An Information Guide — Preventing Discrimination, Exploitation and Abuse of Women Migrant Workers* (2003) and provided technical advisory support to Costa Rica, Honduras and Nicaragua to address the concerns of female migrants. UNIFEM developed minimum standard contracts for migrant women in both destination countries, including Jordan, and countries of origin, including Indonesia, Nepal, the Philippines and Sri Lanka. UNIFEM also assisted the Ministry of Labour and Transport Management in Nepal in drafting the new amendment to the Foreign Employment Act.

65. The United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) conducted research on the gender dimensions of remittance flows with the objective of highlighting the economic contribution of migrant women to the economies of countries of origin and destination. The Division for the Advancement of Women prepared the *World Survey on the Role of Women in Development, 2004*,¹⁹ which specifically focused on gender equality perspectives in international migration, and distributed it widely to countries in all regions.

66. According to data provided by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), women and girls constituted 49 per cent of the 9.7 million refugees at the end of 2003. UNHCR and ILO carried out gender-sensitive assessments of microfinance, vocational and skills development and local economic development to promote sustainable livelihoods of refugees and returnees in Benin, Burundi, Eritrea, Kenya, Liberia, Serbia and Montenegro, Somalia, the Sudan, Togo and Uganda and in the North Caucasus.

VI. Statistics and information

67. Reflecting the importance of gender-sensitive statistics and information for informed decision-making on the economic advancement of women, some countries reported on steps taken to collect, disseminate and use employment data and indicators disaggregated by sex. The National Sample Survey of India on

employment and unemployment (1999-2000) yielded new data on the size and characteristics of home-based workers. Censuses in Germany and Nepal generated gender-specific information on enterprise start-ups and on the ownership of resources respectively. South Africa developed a set of short- and long-term performance indicators that addressed women's employment and contribution to the national economy. Portugal prepared data on computer use by women and men in the age group 16 to 74. Argentina provided training on methodologies for measuring the use of time from a gender perspective, targeting both technical personnel working on gender issues and statisticians. The Syrian Arab Republic updated indicators and statistics used to monitor progress towards gender equality in the formal and informal sectors.

68. Time-use surveys in several countries documented time spent by women and men in paid and unpaid labour. Benin, for example, carried out a time-use survey in the preparation of a national report on sustainable human development. Mexico undertook a study on domestic unremunerated work in 2002 which revealed that women's unpaid work contributed as much as 21.6 per cent of the gross national product, surpassing the contributions of other economic sectors.

69. Some countries, including Austria, Mexico and Spain, reported on studies carried out on gender discrimination in the labour market. For example, Austria prepared a handbook based on gender analysis of 39 collective agreements among metal and textile workers. Argentina took steps to collect data, through a periodic survey, on the contribution of women's unremunerated work to the economy. Spain carried out a study on women in the underground economy, with special reference to domestic employees.

VII. Conclusions and recommendations

70. **Most countries have made progress in promoting the economic rights and independence of women. A wide range of gender-sensitive legislation, policies and programmes has facilitated women's participation in both wage employment and self-employment. Many countries support women entrepreneurs, including by increasing their access to credit, training and markets. Recognizing the importance of men's participation in enhancing women's role in the economy, countries have increasingly encouraged men to share the unpaid work in the family.**

71. **However, progress has been slow and uneven. The problems related to women's over-representation in part-time work and in the informal sector need to be addressed. Increased attention has to be paid to inequalities in participation in economic decision-making, including persistent gender stereotypes that prevent women from reaching senior positions in both the public and private sectors.**

72. **Further efforts are required to utilize fully the potential of information and communication technologies for the economic advancement of women. Understanding the employment situations of and opportunities for rural women and migrant women requires further research and strengthened data-collection efforts.**

73. The Commission on the Status of Women may wish to encourage Governments, with the support of the United Nations system, civil society and other stakeholders, to take the following steps:

- Eliminate occupational segregation and gender pay gaps, including by broadening career prospects for women and girls for work in non-traditional sectors, inter alia, through technical education and vocational training
- Provide training to enable women to meet the demands of the knowledge-based economy, including through ICT
- Develop or strengthen strategies to promote women's upward mobility in the labour market and enhance their participation in managerial positions
- Encourage and support employers in providing opportunities for both women and men to balance work and family responsibilities, including by improving parental leave, creating awareness among men about their responsibility to share tasks within the family, and increasing access to childcare facilities
- Mobilize resources for increasing women's access to existing savings and credit schemes and to targeted programmes as necessary
- Develop or strengthen monitoring and evaluation methods that identify women's contributions to economic development and the gender-based discrimination that prevents their full participation
- Collect gender statistics and sex-disaggregated data for all sectors and all levels of employment on a regular basis
- Ensure that national implementation of the outcome of the World Summit on the Information Society in Tunis takes gender perspectives fully into account and pays particular attention to the constraints faced by rural women
- Promote and protect women's equal rights to property and inheritance through legislation, promotion of legal literacy and legal assistance to rural women, awareness-raising campaigns and training of government officials
- Support remunerative non-agricultural employment of rural women, inter alia, by improving working conditions and increasing access to productive resources
- Develop indicators and benchmarks on the impacts of new forms of employment, such as outsourcing and teleworking, on the situation of women and monitor progress regularly
- Develop and implement policies and programmes aimed at eliminating gender-specific barriers to migration and improving the situation of women migrant workers, inter alia, by providing information on human rights protection and further developing remittance procedures.

Notes

- ¹ Responses were received from Algeria, Argentina, Austria, Bangladesh, Brazil, Brunei Darussalam, Cape Verde, Colombia, Costa Rica, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Denmark, Egypt, Estonia, Finland, Honduras, Japan, Kazakhstan, Lebanon, Luxembourg, Mauritius, Mexico, Monaco, Netherlands, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Samoa, Slovakia, Sweden, Syrian Arab Republic, Tonga and Turkey.
- ² Inputs were received from the Statistics Division and the Development Policy and Planning Office of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs; and from the Department of Public Information, ECLAC, ESCAP, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, FAO, the International Labour Organization, IMO, INSTRAW, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, UNAIDS, UNDP, the United Nations Environment Programme, UNESCO, the United Nations Population Fund, UN-HABITAT, UNHCR, the United Nations Children's Fund, UNIDO, UNIFEM, the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, UNODC, UNRISD, UNRWA, UNV, WFP, WHO and the World Intellectual Property Organization.
- ³ More detailed information provided through the responses of Member States is available from <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw>.
- ⁴ United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), *Gender Equality: Striving for Justice in an Unequal World* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.05.III.Y.1).
- ⁵ International Labour Organization, *Global Employment Trends for Women 2004* (International Labour Office, Geneva, 2004).
- ⁶ International Labour Organization, *Women and Men in the Informal Economy: A Statistical Picture* (International Labour Office, Geneva, 2002).
- ⁷ International Labour Office, *Breaking through the Glass Ceiling: Women in Management: Update 2004* (Geneva, 2004).
- ⁸ International Labour Office, *Yearbook of Labour Statistics*, on the share of women in managerial jobs in 1996-99 and 2000-02 (Geneva, 2003).
- ⁹ Catherine Hein, *Reconciling Work and Family Responsibilities: Practical Ideas from Global Experience* (International Labour Office, Geneva, 2005). Available from <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/condtrav/publ/wf-ch-05.htm>.
- ¹⁰ International Labour Office, *World Employment Report: Life at Work in the Information Economy* (Geneva, 2001).
- ¹¹ Sonia N. Jorge, "Gender-aware guidelines for policy making and regulatory agencies", paper presented to the International Telecommunication Union, Telecommunication Development Bureau Task Force on Gender Issues, Geneva, 27-28 September 2001.
- ¹² FAO, *Filling the Data Gap: Gender-Sensitive Statistics for Agricultural Development* (Rome, 1999).
- ¹³ FAO, *A Fairer Future for Rural Women* (Rome, 1995).
- ¹⁴ FAO, *A Gender Perspective on Land Rights* (Rome, n.d.).
- ¹⁵ FAO, *Gender and Food Security: The Role of Information — A Strategy for Action* (Rome, 2000).
- ¹⁶ D. Hulme and P. Mosley, "Finance for the poor or poorest? Financial innovation, poverty and vulnerability", in *Who Needs Credit? Poverty and Finance in Bangladesh*, Geoffrey D. Wood and Iffath A. Sharif, editors (Dhaka, The University Press, Ltd. 1996).

- ¹⁷ P. Paul-Majumder and A. Begum, “The gender imbalances in the export oriented garment industry in Bangladesh”, Policy Research Report on Gender and Development, Working Paper Series No. 12 (Washington, D.C., World Bank, 2000).
- ¹⁸ Lin Zhibin, “Capacity or opportunity: women’s role in decision-making in household and the community: case studies in China”, paper presented at the expert group meeting on the situation of rural women within the context of globalization, Ulaanbaatar, 4-8 June 2001.
- ¹⁹ See *World Survey on the Role of Women in Development 2004: Women and International Migration* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.04.IV.4).
- ²⁰ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, *Trends in Total Migrant Stock: 2003 Revision* (New York, 2003).
- ²¹ A/56/268, para. 38.
- ²² A. Spieldoch, *GATS and Health Care — Why Do Women Care?* Economic Literacy Series, General Agreement on Trade in Services, No. 3 (Washington, D.C., International Gender and Trade Network, 2001).
- ²³ Marina Durano, *Women in International Trade and Migration: Examining the Globalized Provision of Care Services* (International Trade and Gender Network, 2005).
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