

United Nations  Nations Unies

Commission on the Status of Women

Work and family responsibilities: Background

Profound changes in the world of work and in families have placed increasing strain on families in balancing their family caring responsibilities with their economic activities. The last several

Tensions between work and family are likely to worsen in the present crisis. Past experience demonstrates that financial downturns tend to hit women harder than men, because pre-crisis gender inequality in the home and in the labour market place women in already vulnerable positions. Women's lower employment rates, weaker control over property and resources, concentration in informal and vulnerable forms of employment with lower earnings, and less social protection all place women in a weaker position than men to weather crises. The quality and availability of social services also tend to decrease with financial crisis and the fiscal austerity measures that result, devolving greater care responsibilities to the family and adding to the household work of women and girls. Women's coping strategies during crisis include engaging in more paid work and working longer

Recommendation (No. 165). ILO member States have also recognized the importance of ensuring that women's reproductive roles in childbearing do not compromise the objectives of gender equality in employment, and have adopted three Conventions on maternity protection (No. 3, 1919; No. 103, 1942; No. 183, 2000), which have progressively expanded the scope and entitlements of maternity protection at work to ensure that women's employment security, as well as safety and health, are guaranteed throughout maternity. These two Conventions, together with the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111), and Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100), form the wider framework of measures adopted by ILO member States to promote gender equality.

The Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention marked the recognition that gender inequality is deeply intertwined with the gender division of productive and reproductive work and that both women and men need support for their roles in the world of work and in the family. The Convention calls for policies and measures to better enable men and women with family responsibilities to prepare for, enter, advance and remain in employment.

The working conditions in domestic work are longstanding concerns of the ILO as well. Already in 1948 the ILO adopted a Resolution concerning the conditions of employment of domestic workers; in 1965, it adopted a Resolution calling for normative action in this area. In 1970, the first survey ever published on the status of domestic workers across the world made its appearance. Existing international labour standards do not offer adequate guidance on how to address the specific circumstances of domestic work. In March 2008, the ILO Governing Body agreed to include a standard-setting activity on decent work for domestic workers on the agenda of the 99th Session (2010) of the International Labour Conference (ILC), at which point the ILC will decide on the form of the draft instrument(s)—whether a Convention and/or a Recommendation. In 2011, the ILC will discuss the standard(s) with a view to adopting or rejecting them.

Policy measures to reconcile work and family responsibilities and reduce gender inequality in the labour market and in the home

Work-family measures are policy solutions intended to facilitate all workers' access to decent work by explicitly and systematically addressing and supporting their unpaid family responsibilities. ILO Convention No. 156 and Recommendation No. 165 provide considerable policy guidance and represent a flexible tool to support the formulation of policies that enable men and women workers with family responsibilities to exercise their right to engage, participate and advance in employment without discrimination. Work-family measures can be taken at the national, community and workplace levels, and are intended to make family responsibilities more compatible with paid work and to make working conditions more compatible with unpaid family responsibilities.

Government has a leadership role to play in setting policy orientation and creating a social climate that is conducive to dialogue and change for improving work-family reconciliation. In doing so, government also has the key responsibility for establishing a policy orientation that challenges the gendered division of paid and unpaid work. Much will also depend on measures

provide guidance and strengthen capacities to effectively put into practice the principles of Convention No. 156 and Recommendation No. 165, and to promote gender equality in all aspects of work, including paid domestic and other caregiving work.

Guidance from the supervisory process. In 2006 and 2007, ILO members that have ratified the Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156) submitted reports to the ILO on the measures taken to give effect to the Convention. The ILO Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (CEACR), which is charged with examining such reports, issued a series of comments addressed to these countries. As found by the CEACR, most countries that have ratified the Convention have continued to strengthen its application, often through the introduction of new rights and entitlements of workers with family responsibilities (e.g. family related leaves, temporary reduction of working time, childcare facilities). The CEACR welcomed that the principles of the Convention are often explicitly acknowledged in gender equality policies, and also in the area of employment policy. A continuing concern of the CEACR in some countries is that certain family-related entitlements are not available to men and women on an equal footing. In some cases, the CEACR's comments called for the revision of legal provisions that do not appear in conformity with the Convention, as they are based on such stereotyped assumptions which are contrary to the principle of equality. It also emphasized the need to ensure that new measures that facilitate the participation of workers with family responsibilities in employment do not reinforce stereotyped assumptions concerning women being considered as bearing the primary responsibility for family and household-related tasks. More generally, the comments promote measures to encourage a greater sharing of family responsibilities between men and women.

Work and family issues are also being addressed in the supervision of other ILO Conventions, such as Conventions No. 100 and 111. With a view to achieving genuine gender equality in the labour market and to reduce wage inequalities between men and women, the ILO supervisory bodies have indeed regularly recommended ratifying States to adopt measures to facilitate reconciliation of work and family and to encourage a more equitable sharing among family members of household tasks and family responsibilities.

Strengthening capacities on gender mainstreaming and building knowledge on the needs and problems of workers with family responsibilities. Tools and training on gender mainstreaming are essential to developing gender-sensitive policies and programmes and achieving gender equality. The Participatory Gender Audit is an ILO flagship tool, designed to build ILO's internal capacities to mainstream gender equality objectives in all activities. It has steadily gained momentum in promoting gender responsiveness among ILO partners in government, employers' organizations and trade unions who are using the tool to build capacities for gender-mainstreamed policies and programmes. The tool has been used not only by ILO field and HQ offices, but by ILO constituents and UN agencies in a number of countries.

A strong understanding of the needs and problems of workers with family responsibilities and the impact on workers, families, employers and communities is similarly essential to building commitment and strong platforms for action. The ILO provides support in building knowledge, tools and capacities on work and family conflict and reconciliation. At the global level, the Office coordinates with representatives from the International Organization of Employers, the International Trade Union Confederation, the Global Union Federations, as well as other actors, such as the Inter-Parliamentary Union, for sharing of knowledge and practical experience and to promote greater understanding of the problems and priorities for action in realizing the principles of the Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156).

The ILO has worked with constituents in a number of countries to build research and analytical capacities on the topic of work and family and to improve understanding of the dimensions and impacts of the problems. Research has been undertaken in Azerbaijan, Brazil, Cameroon, China, Costa Rica, Egypt, Japan, Kenya, the Republic of Korea, Mauritius, the Philippines, Thailand, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia and Zambia. The ILO is also collaborating with UNDP and member States to prepare a regional report on work and family in Latin America. In Mozambique and the United Republic of Tanzania, the ILO is providing support to strengthen capacities of national institutions in developing and implementing statistical surveys and legal reviews of working conditions which include attention to the dimensions of unpaid work and the work-family constraints of workers.

Building capacity on the instruments, policies, measures and practices that can be taken to promote work-family reconciliation and gender equality. Understanding the problems of work-family conflict for employers and workers is essential for moving toward solutions. Building from understanding to action requires considerable investments in capacities of policy-makers and the social partners to design gender-mainstreamed policies and programmes that respond effectively to the problems. The ILO engages ex

strengthen capacities of Women's Committee representatives from more than 20 countries from around the world on work-family policies and measures as a means to address gender equality in the world of work. It has also supported the capa

of which stand to support the reconciliation of work and family