

SPCCMUN

ECOSOC Chair Report 2

Committee: Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)

Topic 2: Improving girls' and women's access to employment

Chair: Agnes Yip

Table of Contents

Introduction	2
Definition of Key Terms	3
Important Bodies Involved	4
Issues to Consider	5
Questions for Debate	6
Further Readings	7
References	8

Introduction

While many are fighting for gender equality, women in many nations face numerous constraints in gaining full employment. It is a fact that girls and women, even after completing high schools, universities or even professional training, do not get equal access to job opportunities.

In 2010, women's labour force participation rates in places such as Northern Africa and Western Asia remained below 30%. Southern Asia was slightly better with 40%, and the Caribbean and Central America with less than 50%. Despite a slight convergence in the gap between participation rates of the two genders, the difference is still somewhat alarming. Projections show no significant improvement even by 2017.

One obvious cause of this situation is the gender-based education system. Existing social values and attitudes tilt towards the boys, putting emphasis on educating young men but putting young women aside. Their lack of education makes them much less productive economically, hence increasing the difficulty of getting jobs. For the lucky few who complete higher education, factors such as the lack of childcare facilities stop mothers from working. Women are also extremely under-represented in fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics, which are the major growth areas of the future.

Problems arise when employment favors men alone. The unbalanced workforce has been found to hinder economic development, affect productivity and innovations, and limit the base of taxpayers. According to a calculation done by UN Women, women could increase their income globally by up to 76% if the employment participation gap and the wage gap between men and women were closed. This means a global value of USD 17 trillion. Increasing women's leadership opportunities in companies means increasing organizational efficiency, and it is estimated that companies with three or more women in senior management roles score higher in all dimensions of organizational efficiency. Yet with all the challenges present today, this is impossible to achieve unless something is done.

To remove the barriers faced by women when entering the labour market, different countries have made different attempts. India has introduced a National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, and Turkey has started subsidizing employed women, to name a few. Solutions and actions to be taken are country-specific but the UN has also proposed resolutions and established UN Women to express concerns about the issue.

Reducing persistent gender inequalities is necessary not only to achieve fairness and equity for women, but also to benefit economic development.

Definition of Key Terms

Gender gap: The discrepancy in opportunities, status, attitudes, etc., between men and women

UN Women: a UN organization dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. It supports inter-governmental bodies such as the Commission on the Status of Women in their formulation of policies and global standards. Also, it leads and coordinates the UN system's work on gender equality and promotes accountability.

International Labour Organization: Abbreviated as ILO, it is an organization that promotes rights at work, encourages proper employment opportunities, enhances social protection and discusses work-related issues. It allows workers, employers and even governments to voice opinions so that everyone's views can be reflected in the setting of labour policies.

Important Bodies Involved

Below are a few examples of countries which have some of the highest or lowest female employment rates in the world:

China has one of the highest female employment rates in the world. However, many of these female workers are engaged in low-paying and unstable jobs, and many are migrant workers without rights or labour protection. For example, the ratio of women to men for migrant workers is 2:1. While China has hosted groundbreaking conferences in setting up the rights of women in the past, it is an example of a country where headline employment rates do not translate into better protection for women.

Germany's female employment rate is far above the EU average, and the female employment rate has risen continuously over the last two decades, reaching 72.5% in 2013. It has repeatedly raised the issue at the G20 Labour and Employment Ministers' Meeting.

Saudi Arabia's women make up 70% of the students in Saudi institutes of higher education, but only 18.6% of the native labour workforce. Most women are only allowed to work in jobs where they will not come in contact with men, and full-time work is very difficult to obtain. However, in cities such as Jeddah, social restrictions on female employment opportunities are gradually beginning to loosen.

Key UN Documents / Agreements

Below are the previously agreed conclusions on access and participation of women and girls in education, training, science and technology, including for the promotion of women's equal access to full employment and decent work, and recognizing the importance of improving women's access to employment:

i) United Nations General Assembly resolution 63/311 — blueprint for UN Women with countries agreed to 'strengthen the institutional arrangements for support of gender equality and the empowerment of women', 'strengthen governance of operational activities for development of the United Nations system for enhanced system-wide coherence' and 'improve the funding system of operational activities for development of the United Nations system for enhanced system-wide coherence'.

ii) Beijing Declaration September 1995 — reaffirmed the participating countries' commitment to the equal rights and inherent human dignity of both women and men, recognized the relationship between women and the economy, the problem of sexual discrimination in the labour market, and urged actions to be taken to facilitate women's equal access to resources.

iii) World Summit for Social Development Copenhagen 1995 Agreements (Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development Chapter 3 44, 47) — recognized women's limited access to employment and stressed the empowerment of women.

iv) Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Commission on the Status of Women — review of progress made in implementing the Beijing Declaration in 1995; includes results of the first five-year assessment emphasizing further actions; suggested improving gender equality and the empowerment of women.

v) UN Women Secretary-General's Report on Gender Mainstreaming E/2010/57 (English) — recognized gender mainstreaming as a strategy in achieving gender equality; summary of previous efforts and future plans on incorporating gender perspectives when implementing policies.

Questions for Debate

Can we change the mindsets of people in order to improve women's access to employment?

By training teachers and workers to be gender sensitive, respectful or simply by increasing the number of females in an institution, women can feel at ease at work as they feel valued and respected. Sensitizing parents to realizing young women's talents in the science and technological fields, as well as encouraging women to join such institutions also helps to balance the working population. Educational reforms to remove gender stereotyping in the curricula and to introduce a wider range of skills also help in preventing women from being left out. The fundamental cause of discrimination in the workplace is education, so if women are able to receive proper and high quality training or education just like most men do, and if people are taught that both genders should be granted equal opportunities because of the unique traits they possess, then gender equality could be enhanced.

What struggles do women face in trying to balance their lives at work and at home?

A large percentage of women quit their jobs after giving birth because of simple reasons such as the lack of breast-feeding facilities and time, the lack of nurseries and the difficulty of taking care of their children in the workplace. The needs of mothers are often overlooked by companies and governments, and numbers show that public facilities that favor mothers are not even close to enough. By increasing the number of mother-friendly facilities, giving birth will no longer be a push factor, forcing people to stop working and stay at home all day.

Can infrastructural investment solve the issue at hand?

Besides trying to change present social norms and attitudes, governments and institutions can also pay more attention to the hardware they provide. Governments should ensure a sufficient number of childcare centers, and enforce better regulations to ensure the safety of women as well. Reviewing existing rules, making sure that institutions do not discriminate against women or do not set up rules that are unfavorable to women are also crucial.

Further Readings

UN Women

<http://www.unwomen.org/en>

OECD Report on the Gender Initiative

<http://www.oecd.org/education/48111145.pdf>

The World's Women 2010

http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/Worldswomen/WW_full%20report_color.pdf

Actionaid The Cost of Inequality in Women's Work

http://www.actionaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/womens_rights_online_version_2.1.pdf

Women, Business and the Law 2014 (WB)

http://wbl.worldbank.org/~/_media/FPDKM/WBL/Documents/Reports/2014/Women-Business-and-the-Law-2014-Key-Findings.pdf

References

The United Republic of Tanzania “Improve Women’s Access to Education, Training and Employment”

http://www.mcdgc.go.tz/index.php/issues/improve_womens_access_to_education_training_and_employment/

United Nations “Agreed conclusions on access and participation of women and girls in education, training and science and technology, including for the promotion of women’s equal access to full employment and decent work”

http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/csw55/agreed_conclusions/AC_CS55_E.pdf

OECD: Report on the Gender Initiative: Gender Equality in Education, Employment and Entrepreneurship

<http://www.oecd.org/education/48111145.pdf>

The World’s Women 2010 Trends and Statistics

http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/Worldswomen/WW_full%20report_color.pdf

Global Employment Trends for Women (ILO)

http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_195447.pdf

Facts and Figures: Economic Empowerment

<http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/economic-empowerment/facts-and-figures>

Commission on the Status of Women, UN Women

<http://www.unwomen.org/en/csw>