

## *Research Report*

COMMITTEE: ILO 1

ISSUE: How can we ensure the integration of gender equality in companies?

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# ***HOW CAN WE ENSURE THE INTEGRATION OF GENDER EQUALITY IN COMPANIES?***

## **INTRODUCTION**

In recent centuries, only a few women were active in the labour industry. The role of the housewife and the stereotypes associated with their working abilities were factors that inhibited their ability to pursue a professional career.

Here we are in the 21st century and times have changed: women now have a much more important place in the world of work than ever before, the companies that work only with male employees are almost non-existent. Many laws have been introduced to limit gender pay inequalities.

However, this does not prevent gender inequality from persisting in many companies around the world. This goes against the values of the International Labour Organization (ILO), which recognizes the importance of social justice as a basis for universal and lasting peace. The ILO is a specialized agency of the United Nations (UN), which is also concerned by the problem of gender inequality. In particular, discrimination against women runs counter to the achievement of the 4th goal of sustainable development: gender equality.

In order to ensure a more egalitarian future, we need to ensure the integration of gender equality in companies.

## **KEY WORDS**

**Integration:** To make someone, a group, no longer a stranger to a community, to assimilate into it.

**Gender equality:** Absence of inequalities between the two sexes, inequalities that are most often to the advantage of men, in political or economic matters; the principle that men and women should receive equal treatment and should not be discriminated because of their gender, except where a difference in treatment is justified by a valid biological difference.

**Discrimination:** The act of distinguishing and treating someone or a group differently (usually worse) from the rest of the community or from another person.

**Equal pay:** Equal pay means that women and men have the opportunity to receive equal pay for work of equal value.

**ILO (International Labour Organization):** The ILO brings together representatives of governments, employers and workers from 187 member states to establish a dialogue to promote decent work for all men and women worldwide.

The ILO's main objectives are to promote rights at work, encourage the creation of decent work, develop social protection and strengthen social dialogue in the field of work.

**Company:** An agricultural, commercial or industrial enterprise, run by a person to produce goods or services for the market.

## GENERAL OVERVIEW



## ECONOMY

The proportion of working women has drastically increase in developed countries in recent decades (in France, for example, in 1962, only 40-45% of women between 30 and 50 years of age were professionally active, whereas the proportion of working women at these ages is now 80%, according to the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies). However, we are still a long way from achieving gender equality.

According to the World Employment and Social Issues: Global Overview of Trends for Women 2018 (published on 22 January 2018 by the ILO), the global labour force participation rate for women, at 48.5 per cent in 2018, is still 26.5 percentage points lower than that of men. Moreover, the global unemployment rate for women in 2018, at 6 percent, is approximately 0.8 percentage points higher than for men. In concrete terms, this means that for every 10 men in employment, only 6 women have a job.

Not only are women less present than men in the economy, they also hold far fewer leading positions in companies. While women represent almost 44% of the European workforce, they hold only 33% of managerial positions in companies or public administrations (executive directors, directors and managers of small companies). Their under-representation at the top of the professional hierarchy is even more pronounced in large companies, where almost 90% of board members in listed companies are men. For example, in 2007, less than 3% of leading companies in the 27 EU Member States had a woman at the head of their highest decision-making body.

The gender pay gap is one of the most important examples of gender inequality in companies. It is more or less strong depending on the country: the gender pay gap is 5.6% in Italy and 23.5% in Japan according to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

## SOCIETY

Achieving gender equality is essential to achieving a more equitable society. Much progress towards equality has been made in recent years.

According to the Global Gender Gap Report 2020 ([Global Gender Gap Report](#)) published by the World Economic Forum, the areas of education and health are closest to gender equality, with 96.1% and 95.7% parity respectively. Politics, on the other hand, is one of the areas where equality seems most difficult to achieve, but progress is still being made. For example, the percentage of women parliamentarians in the world peaked in 2020 at 24.9%. In addition, women's economic participation is lower than men's. Indeed, only 55% of the world's women (aged 15-64) are in the labour market, compared to 78% of men of the same age. Moreover, in many countries, women have difficulties in obtaining an identity card and are therefore unable to carry out certain actions, such as opening bank accounts.

One of the main obstacles to equality is gender-based violence. According to WHO estimations, about 35% of women have been physically and/or sexually assaulted. In addition, it is also

estimated that in 2017, 87,000 women have been murdered and more than half of them were killed by their spouse or a family member. Gender-based violence affects millions of women every day and all are likely to become victims of such violence. In 2017, the world witnessed the rise of the #MeToo movement, which has led many celebrities to talk about the sexual assaults they have experienced and, more generally, about sexism in the entertainment industry. The movement has crossed the screen, and millions of people have joined it to tell their stories.

Women make up half of the world's population, half of the world's potential. It is necessary to reduce the inequalities that prevent them from developing their capacities to the maximum, to try to exploit this potential and thus promote our development as a society.



Cover of Time magazine, 2017, *Person of the year "The Silence Breakers"*

## GENDER EQUALITY IN POLITICS

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which took place in 1979 at the UN Assembly, is often described as an international bill of rights for women. In accepting it, the Member States present at the Convention committed themselves to take measures to abolish sex discrimination in all its forms.

Some progress has been made. Many countries have passed laws against gender discrimination, more girls are attending and completing school, more women are represented in public office and women have more opportunities and chances to participate in the economy.

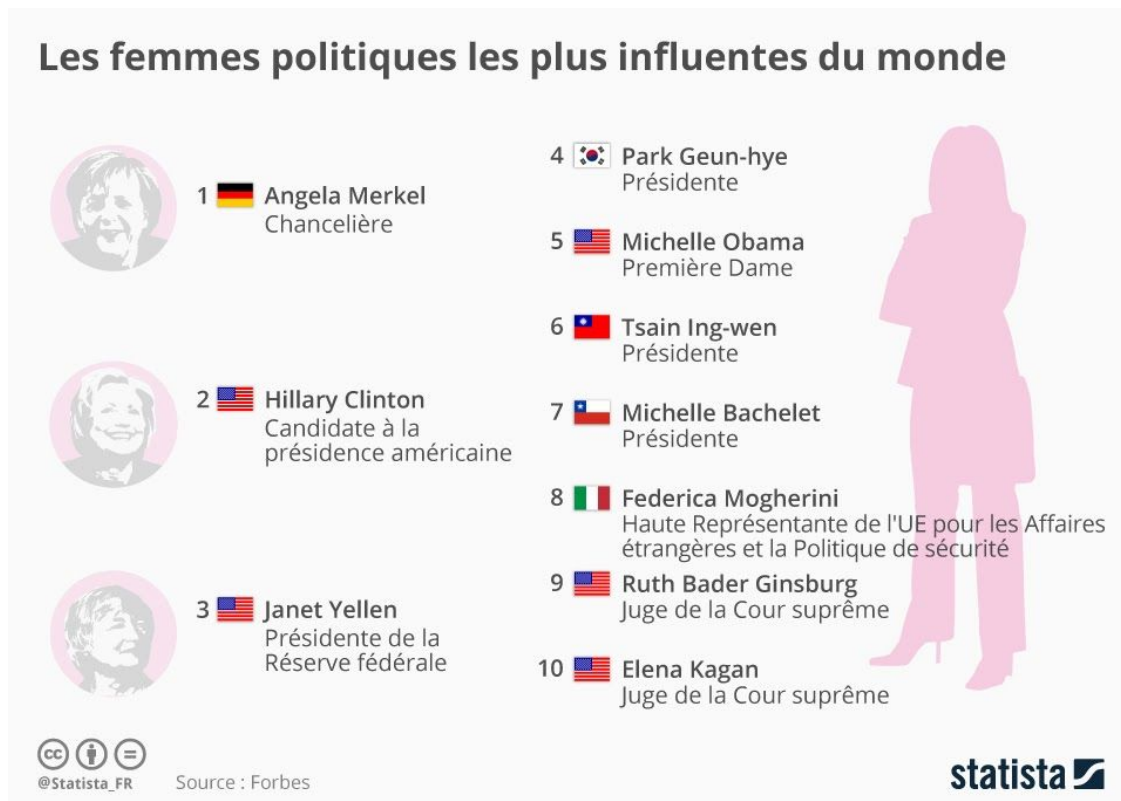
But around the world, girls and women are still disproportionately affected by poverty, injustice and discrimination.

Among the 144 countries surveyed by the World Economic Forum in its report published in 2016, the presence of women elected to parliaments or appointed to ministerial positions is

higher than for state responsibilities. The report also revealed that more than 95% of governments include women, with only 15% of countries having women in the highest positions.

Worldwide, governments are on average 20% female, and in 2017 only 68 countries were headed by a woman.

All these figures show us that although the status of women is improving in some countries and governments, progress needs to be made to ensure that women are more represented and present in roles of great responsibility.



## MAIN INTERNATIONAL PLAYERS

## Les inégalités hommes-femmes dans le monde

Le Forum économique mondial a mesuré le fossé hommes-femmes dans 144 pays sur un index regroupant 4 critères : économie, éducation, santé et politique



### JAPAN

Gender equality in companies remains an area for improvement in Japan. Indeed, Japanese women must resign after their marriage or at the latest after their first child. This explains why the rate of employed women with a child under the age of 3 is 30%. Moreover, there are no women on boards of directors in the banking sector and very few in other sectors. However, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has made the increase in the activity rate of women one of the objectives to revive the country's growth, promising to raise the proportion of women in decision-making positions to 30% by 2020.

### INDIA

In India, women's daily earnings are on average 25% lower than those of men, though the minimum salary set by India's central government is already very low. The minimum wage is 160 rupees (\$2.63), which is well below the living wage and is not enough to provide a decent life. The "Sumangali" system, a symbolic case of violations of working conditions in the textile industry, is still in place in India. It promises employment for girls from poor families. However, young women are often exploited, abused and locked into deplorable living conditions. This type of contract has been significantly reduced thanks to the actions of international and local NGOs, but it still persists.

### NORWAY

Many laws support gender equality in business in Norway, including the 1979 Gender Equality Act, which combines protection against discrimination with actions by authorities and employers to ensure equality. Norwegian law provides protection against discrimination on the



basis of sex, so the country has a strong family and social policy with generous and equal maternity leave for the mother and father of the child and a care system that facilitates family life and work, while promoting men's participation in childcare.

## UN WOMEN



UN Women is the United Nations entity dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. UN Women supports Member States in the adoption of international standards for achieving gender equality and works with governments and civil society to design the laws, policies, programmes and services needed to ensure that these standards are effectively implemented and that women and girls benefit from them, worldwide.

### **EPIC (Equal Pay International Coalition)**

The International Coalition for Gender Equality includes the ILO, UN Women and the OECD. EPIC acts at the global, regional and national levels to help governments, employers' and workers' organizations and other relevant actors to take concrete steps to reduce the gender pay gap. The Coalition also provides support to improve legislation, develop skills and strengthen monitoring and enforcement mechanisms. In its view, women and men should receive equal pay even when they perform completely different work, as long as it can be demonstrated by objective criteria that it is of equal value. These objective criteria take into account factors such as skills, qualifications, working conditions, levels of responsibility and effort required by the job.

## CHRONOLOGY

### **29/10/1919**

On this date, the ILO holds its first International Labour Conference. During this Conference, Convention No. 3, focusing on maternity protection, is adopted. The Convention gives a worker compulsory prenatal leave of 6 weeks and optional postnatal leave of 6 weeks, and provides for the payment of "adequate compensation for the maintenance of herself and her child in good hygienic conditions". This is the first time that the ILO has discussed the rights of women in enterprises and adopted regulations in an international convention. As the forerunner of an international movement to mainstream gender equality in enterprises, the ILO is opening the doors to gender justice in the workplace.

**17/12/1999**

During the 20th century, the ILO has been a major player in the field of gender equality integration in enterprises. On 17 December 1999, the International Labour Office (ILO), which is the permanent secretariat of the International Labour Organization, focused on gender integration in all ILO technical cooperation projects. The Office follows the 1999 circular on Gender Policy in Project Development, which defines its strategy as "aiming to incorporate the concerns and experiences of women as well as men in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and social spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated". The Office also coordinates a range of technical cooperation projects to promote gender equality and women's economic empowerment. Thus, in December 1999, the ILO took a major step forward in integrating gender equality in the workplace and demonstrated its position as a strong supporter of working women on the eve of the 21st century.

**17/06/2004**

From 1 to 17 June 2004, the ILO is holding the 92nd Session of the International Labour Conference. For more than two weeks, a resolution based exclusively on the integration of gender equality in companies was debated. Such attention, on the part of all the States participating in this Conference, to a problem focused on gender equality, demonstrates strong support for women on the international scene. The final resolution deals with the promotion of gender equality, equal pay and maternity protection, which demonstrates this support for the advancement of a more equal situation between the sexes in companies.

**08/03/2019**

The 42nd International Women's Rights Day on 8 March 2019 will be marked by lots of actions and demonstrations in several European capitals: a public holiday in Berlin, a feminist strike in Spain, demonstrations in France and Belgium, while in Istanbul the police will use tear gas to disperse the demonstrators. These demonstrations aim at occupational inequalities among other gender discrimination and violence against women. The most notable of these demonstrations remains the one in Madrid, which brings together more than half a million people and continues day and night. Maria Nuñez, a demonstrator, denounced: "How many women hold high positions? Very few. And it's not because they are not well trained, it's because equality still doesn't exist". The Spanish slogan, "If we stop working, the world stops", is supported by more than six million workers who are on strike across the country. March 8 is the symbol of a world that is revolting against gender inequality in the workplace, and will continue to revolt until a situation of lasting equality is achieved.

## **IMPORTANT UN AND ILO TREATIES AND EVENTS**

ILO Conventions are drawn up by representatives of the governments of member countries, as well as by workers' and employers' representatives. Conventions are adopted at the International Labour Conference, held annually in Geneva. When a convention is adopted,



states study it with the intention of ratifying it. If the convention is ratified, it will in most cases come into force within a year. Countries that have ratified the Convention must send regular reports to the International Labour Office (ILO) to check its application.

### **23/05/1953**

The Equal Remuneration Convention (No. 100) is one of the first ILO regulations on gender equality that is still in force. It is one of the eight fundamental ILO Conventions. The Convention focuses on wages and the importance of equal pay for men and women doing the same work in the public and private sectors. This convention has paved the way for gender equality in the world of work.

### **03/09/1981**

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1979. This convention is often referred to as the "International Bill of Rights for Women". The 1970s were crucial for the development of the modern women's movement, and it was in this context that the Convention was conceived and adopted. The document highlights the importance of eliminating discrimination against women and achieving gender equality in all aspects of society. Article 11 of the Convention goes into detail about work, including companies. There is also a committee responsible for ensuring that the Convention is properly implemented. This is the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (or CEDAW), which consists of 23 experts on women's rights.

### **07/02/2002**

This is the most up-to-date international labour regulation on maternity protection. Maternity is a source of hardship for female employees who may face unfair treatment if they become pregnant. The Maternity Protection Convention (No. 183) puts in place measures to minimise discrimination against women in relation to maternity. These measures include, among others, the prohibition of dismissal of a female employee during pregnancy, maternity leave and even for a period after returning to work, except for reasons unrelated to maternity.

### **25/06/2021**

The Violence and Harassment Convention (No. 190) deals with these issues in the world of work. It is the most up-to-date international standard on this subject and the first to explicitly recognize the right to a world of work free from violence and harassment, but **it has not yet entered into force**. The Convention was adopted on 21 June 2019, countries are in the process of ratifying it and it will enter into force on 25 June 2021. The Convention includes many aspects of the problem, for example it refers to the consequences that domestic violence and gender-based violence have in the workplace. It directs companies to take measures to ensure that victims of such violence are able to keep their jobs and end their situation.

Every year on 8th of March the UN and other international bodies commemorate International Women's Day. It is a very important event that in 2020 took place under the theme: "I am from Generation Equality: Stand Up for Women's Rights". The "Generation Equality" campaign aimed to bring together people of all genders, ages, religions, countries to mobilise for gender equality.

## POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

One of the most common problems encountered by women in their working life is reconciling work and family life. Several measures could be put in place to reduce this conflict. For example, introducing maternity and paternity leave to allow both parents to spend time with their children and to ensure that work does not only fall on women. However, this is only useful during the first few months after the birth of the child. It is therefore important for States to develop other projects, such as accessible childcare services during working hours or the adaptation of school hours to working hours. These measures need to be well adapted to different family models and take into account different methods of reproduction as well as adoption processes.

Testimony of an American woman on maternity leave:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ME64x4YxlZQ>

In order to reach gender equality, it is very important that first and foremost there is a good level of representation in companies. That is to say, that there are women present at the different structural levels of the company, including on the board of directors. A study carried out by Mercer in 2020 in a thousand companies around the world shows that the higher the level of responsibility of a job, the lower the percentage of women in it. The study shows that the presence of women in support staff is 47%, while in management positions it is 23%. Various measures can be taken to increase the number of women in senior positions, one of which is to encourage companies to implement projects and programmes so that their female workers can develop and exploit their skills. One example is The Aspiring Women Project, a Deloitte Australia programme that has achieved excellent results. Between 2015 and 2019 the percentage of women in the management team increased from 15% to 38%, and the percentage of female business partners increased from 22% to 30%.

Although these measures are in place and are producing visible results, they are not enough; the root of the problem must be addressed. For example, it is essential to ensure that all girls have full access to education so that they can achieve the level of education they want and in their preferred fields, as the problem lies not only in the lack of access to university education, but in the under-representation of women in many fields of study, particularly in science (telecommunications, mathematics and engineering). Indeed, less than 30% of researchers are women. This is why the United Nations celebrates the International Day of Women and Girls in Science every year on 11 February to promote the presence of women in scientific fields. In order to improve the situation, both States and companies must take action in this regard. For example, creating scholarships or grants for women who want to access

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