NHO | LO Norway

SOCIAL DIALOGUE EQUAL RIGHTS

How social dialogue ensures gender equality in the world of work

Did you know?

We've gathered bite-sized facts and figures about gender equality - from workplace statistics to social trends.

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Women's rights are human rights

Gender equality was made an international human right by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted by the UN General Assembly on 10 December 1948.

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Unite against sexual harassment and violence

The Trades Union Congress Ghana (TUC) and the Ghana Employers' Association (GEA) have joined forces to fight against violence and sexual harassment in the workplace.

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Collective bargaining agreements for equality

In Ghana, an increasing number of collective agreements include provisions on sexual harassment and violence. Comfort A. Agambaa, General Secretary of the General Construction Manufacturing and Quarries Workers' Union, has bargained for this for many years.

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14 Work environment for all

Once women are in the workforce, the working environment can help boost their productivity and well-being, and it can do the opposite. Management, shop stewards and colleagues have a responsibility through their respective roles to create a work environment that is welcoming to both men and women.

Gender equality barriers

Employment provides autonomy and economic independence. To progress, we must identify obstacles to gender equality in the world of work.

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Welfare – a prerequisite for gender equality

Over the past 100 years, "social contracts" and "dialogue" have become frequent calls around the world. In Norway tripartite cooperation is considered crucial for the management of welfare, the labour market, and our economy.

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Gender equality is a righteous goal. Is it profitable too?

The short answer: Yes.

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Advancing gender equality: A social partner's duty

Gender equality is both a fundamental human right and a catalyst for societal prosperity. As we strive to build a more just and equitable world, it is imperative that employers and employees alike recognise the pivotal role we play in advancing gender equality in our workplaces, and our communities.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) stresses that gender equality in the workplace is not merely a lofty ideal but a tangible goal that yields significant benefits. By ensuring equal opportunities, fair compensation, and balanced representation across all levels of an organisation, we uphold the basic human rights of dignity and respect for all individuals, regardless of gender. Our goal is economic freedom for all, both men and women.

UN Sustainable Development Goal 5 underscores the importance of gender equality and women's empowerment as key drivers of sustainable development. This goal recognises that when we empower women and girls, we unlock a powerful force for economic growth, social progress, and innovation.

Achieving true gender equality may require more than just equal treatment. While equal treatment is a fundamental principle, it may not always suffice for addressing deeply rooted disparities, traditions and cultural norms. In many cases, levelling the playing field requires tailored solutions and targeted support. We have to acknowledge that different individuals may need different resources or opportunities to reach the same outcome. By embracing this nuanced understanding of equality, we can develop more effective strategies to overcome historical disadvantages, address systemic barriers, and create genuinely inclusive environments where all genders can thrive on their own merits.

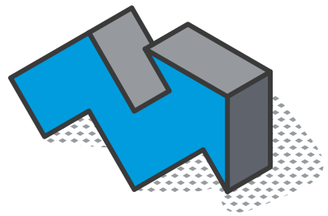
The case for gender equality extends beyond moral imperatives. Numerous studies have shown that diverse and inclusive workplaces are more productive, innovative, and profitable. Companies with gender-diverse leadership teams outperform their less diverse counterparts, demonstrating that equality is not just ethically sound but also economically advantageous.

The interplay between welfare systems and gender equality is crucial. Robust welfare policies can help women participate in the workforce. For instance, childcare services, parental leave, and elderly care support can help balance caregiving responsibilities that are traditionally shouldered disproportionately by women. Gender equity cannot happen without men. They can use their power to be effective advocates for gender equality and take their part of the responsibility. This facilitates greater workforce participation and career advancement for women, which in turn strengthens both the family's economy and the country's GDP.

As representatives of employers' and employees' organisations, we hold the power to effect real change. By implementing policies that promote equal pay, combat discrimination, and foster inclusive work environments, we contribute to a more equitable society and a more robust economy.

Advancing gender equality is not only the right thing to do—it's the smart thing to do.

Did you know?



Did you know that If women's unpaid work were assigned a monetary value, it would exceed up to 40 percent of the GDP in some countries based on conservative estimates? Even women who live with a partner bear most of the responsibility for caregiving, both for children and increasingly, other adults.

Sources: ILO, Measuring unpaid domestic and care work, 2023.
Deloitte, Women at work, 2024.

Did you know that when more women work, economies grow? Women's economic empowerment increases economic diversification and income equality for shared prosperity. It is estimated that closing the gender gap could give the global economy a USD$7 trillion boost.

Sources: International Monetary Fund, Pursuing Women's Economic Empowerment, 2018.
Moody's Analytics, Close the Gender Gap to Unlock Productivity Gains, 2023.

Did you know that companies with more than 30 percent female executives are 48 percent more likely to outperform their counterparts financially? This is largely due to diverse leadership fostering better decision-making and innovation.

Sources: World Economic Forum, Gender-balanced companies outperform less equal ones. McKinsey, Diversity wins: How inclusion matters, 2020.

Did you know that women were disproportionately affected by job losses during the COVID-19 pandemic? Many women were employed in sectors such as hospitality and retail, which were hit hard by the crisis.

Source: ILO, An uneven and gender-unequal COVID-19 recovery: Update on gender and employment trends 2021.

Did you know that nearly half (47%) of women say they are worried about their safety when at work or when travelling to or for work?

Source: Deloitte, Women at work, 2024

Did you know that a third of women who have experienced sexual harassment at work didn't report it to their employer? Many fear that reporting such behaviour can damage their careers.

Source: Deloitte, Women at work, 2024

Did you know that two-thirds of companies surveyed by the ILO agreed that diversity initiatives improved their business outcomes?

Source: ILO, Beyond The Glass Ceiling: Why Businesses Need Women At The Top, 2019.

Did you know that women's economic equality is good for business? Companies greatly benefit from increasing employment and leadership opportunities for women, which is shown to increase organisational effectiveness and growth. It is estimated that companies with three or more women in senior management functions score higher in all dimensions of organisational performance.

Sources: UN Women, Progress of the World's Women, 2015-2016.

Did you know that women are less likely than men to have access to financial institutions or have a bank account? The gender gap in bank account ownership dropped in 2021 after years of stagnation, although rates vary across economies. In developing countries, the gender gap stands at 6 percent while globally it sits at 4 percent with 78 percent of men reporting having an account at a formal financial institution compared to 74 percent of women.

Sources: The World Bank, The Global Findex Database 2021: Financial Inclusion, Digital Payments, and Resilience in the Age of COVID-19.

Women's rights are human rights

Gender equality was made an international human right by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted by the UN General Assembly on 10 December 1948.

That milestone document in the history of human rights recognized that "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights" and that "everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, … birth or other status."

The ILO sees gender equality as integral to the strive towards a better world of work. Despite significant advances in workplace gender equality over the past century, progress in closing gender gaps remains slow. For many, true equality is still far from reality. Recognising this ongoing challenge, the ILO is working with its constituents, UN agencies, and development partners, focusing on several key areas:

- Promoting gender equality, non-discrimination, and inclusion in the workplace.
- Reducing the gender pay gap to ensure equal pay for work of equal value.
- Promoting decent work conditions in the care economy, a sector where women are often overrepresented.
- Ending violence and harassment in the world of work.

The ILO recognizes that achieving equality is not just a matter of fairness, but also crucial for creating more productive and innovative workplaces. By tackling these issues, the ILO seeks to accelerate progress towards a world where gender equality in the workplace is not just an ideal, but a reality for all workers, regardless of their gender.

Sources: UN/ILO

FACTS

24 %
countries have achieved gender parity in upper secondary education.

Source: UNICEF

49 %
of countries have achieved gender parity in primary education.

At the current pace, it will take
140 years to achieve equal representation in leadership
in the workplace.

Source: UN SDGS

Women earn 20 % less than men for the same work.

Source: ILO https://www.ilo.org/resource/news/closing-pay-gap-actress-judy-greers-urgent-call-equal-pay

Foto: Johanne Hovland

"The focus on the well-being of the worker's, both men and women, made a big impression.

Lina María Montilla Diaz, Director of the youth department, CUT, Colombia, after visiting the Freia chocolate factory in Oslo in March 2024. The visit was part of a round table conference on social dialogue where employer associations and union confederations from Ghana, Colombia, Tunisia and Vietnam participated. The conference marked the start of the Social Partners for Decent Work programme.

5 GENDER EQUALITY

UN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 5:
ACHIEVE GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWER ALL WOMEN AND GIRLS SUB TARGETS:

5.1 End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere

5.2 Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation

5.3 Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation

5.4 Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate

5.5 Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life

5.6 Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences

5.A Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws

5.B Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women

5.C Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels.

Gender equality barriers

Employment provides autonomy and economic independence for both genders and is a goal shared by social partners. To progress, we must identify obstacles to gender equality in the world of work. In the following pages, we'll examine some of these barriers and possible strategies to overcome them.

Barriers that keep women from joining the workforce

CAREGIVING RESPONSIBILITIES

Women disproportionately shoulder domestic duties, including childcare and care for elderly or ill relatives. According to ILO research, unpaid care work is the main reason why women remain outside the labour force and plays the biggest role in hindering women's progress in the world of work.

DISCRIMINATION, TRADITION, AND BIAS

Historically it has been expected that women take care of the family and the home. Breaking this mould can stigmatise both the woman and her family. Even in purportedly "egalitarian" societies, stereotypes about women's competence or dedication persist.

EDUCATIONAL AND TRAINING DISPARITIES

Girls often receive less education than boys. Only half of the world's nations have achieved gender parity in primary education, with merely a quarter reaching parity in upper secondary education.

LEGAL OBSTACLES

Discriminatory laws or insufficient legal protections. Some nations impose strict limitations on the types of work women can perform.

UNDERREPRESENTATION IN LEADERSHIP

Women may lack role models, mentors, and networking opportunities for leadership positions.

INADEQUATE INFRASTRUCTURE

Unreliable or unsafe transportation presents a significant barrier for many women seeking employment.

WORKPLACE INFLEXIBILITY

Environments that don't accommodate work-family balance often deter women from formal sector employment.

Barriers women encounter at work

VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT

An alarming proportion of women experience harassment or violence at work, perpetrated by colleagues, superiors, or third parties such as clients, suppliers or partners.

DISCRIMINATION

Unequal treatment manifests in various forms, including biased recruitment practices and disparate career advancement opportunities, as well as lower salaries.

GENDER-SEGREGATED LABOUR MARKET

"Women's jobs" and "men's jobs" aren't innate; they are a result of attitudes, stereotypes, unequal opportunities, and early childhood choices.

WORK ENVIRONMENT

Organisational structures and psychosocial conditions significantly impact women at work. In addition, workplaces are not always adapted for both genders, for example uniforms, equipment, training, and sanitary facilities.

FAMILY-UNFRIENDLY POLICIES

Given their disproportionate family responsibilities, women require workplaces and legislation that facilitate work-life balance, including pregnancy protection, maternity leave, regulated hours, and allowances for childcare during illness.

INSUFFICIENT ENFORCEMENT AND PROTECTION

Many women lack robust safeguards and accessible resources to address discrimination, harassment, and other workplace issues. In addition to employers' responsibility to ensure a safe workplace for everyone, effective legislation, enforcement bodies, accessible complaint mechanisms, and education for both genders are needed.

Employers' association and trade union unite against sexual harassment and violence

The Trades Union Congress Ghana (TUC) and the Ghana Employers' Association (GEA) have joined forces to fight against violence and sexual harassment in the workplace.

At a workshop on ILO Convention 190 on harassment and violence at work Dr. Della S. Agbelie, who is a council member of the Ghana Employers' Association, reiterated the need to build a common front with the Trades Union Congress to fight harassment and violence at the workplace.

Joshua Ansah, Secretary General of TUC agrees with Dr. Agbelie's words and adds: "Together we will push for the government to ratify ILO Convention 190."

International treaty

ILO convention 190 is the first international treaty to recognise the right of everyone to a world of work free from violence and harassment. Ghana is yet to ratify the convention, but Dr Agbelie and Mr Ansah agree that social partners can initiate the principles of the convention at workplaces.

"The social partners in Ghana have a long tradition of social dialogue, which is a tool to build capacity among both unions and business leaders. We can train shop stewards and business leaders and create common policies against sexual harassment and violence at work," says Mr Ansah.

Law enforcement

Women in Ghana face significant challenges related to workplace violence and harassment. Despite existing laws, enforcement is weak, and cultural norms often discourage reporting. Enhancing legal protections against gender-based discrimination and harassment, in line with ILO Convention 190, and ensuring these laws are enforced is another important step towards gender equality.

Social partners are ambassadors

Mr Ansah and Dr Agbelie believe they have important roles as ambassadors on the national level to encourage unions and business leaders around the country to cooperate to end sexual harassment and violence at their workplaces.

"We can arrange common activities like workshops, radio, and TV announcements. When social partners are visible, it gives credibility to the work," Mr Ansah and Dr Agbelie agree.

At the workplace level the collective agreement is the most important tool for preventing violence and sexual harassment, according to the social partners.

"Through the shop stewards and structures like collective agreements, we can ensure implementation of the policies," Mr Ansah says.

Tripartite cooperation

Dr Agbelie underlines that it is important to modify the policies and campaigns to different sectors.

"Different sectors have different challenges and different cultures; we have to adjust the policies against sexual harassment and violence accordingly," she says.

GEA and TUC wish to engage the government to create a tripartite cooperation on the issue of ILO Convention 190.

"When the bipartite cooperation is strong, the tripartite cooperation will be stronger," Joshua Ansah concludes.

FACTS
HARD TO MEASURE

Prevalence of violence and harassment in the workplace is difficult to measure. An ILO report found that only half of victims worldwide have disclosed their experiences. Still, more than one in five people in employment have experienced violence and harassment at work, whether physical, psychological or sexual. Young women are twice as likely as young men to have faced sexual violence and harassment, and migrant women are almost twice as likely as non-migrant women to report sexual violence and harassment.

As social partners, both employee and employer organisations are major contributors towards reducing and eliminating violence and harassment.

Sources: ILO/SSB

Photo: Nina Monsen/ILO

Dr. Della S. Agbelie, who is a Council member of the Ghana Employers' Association and Mr. Joshua Ansah, Secretary General of TUC Stand together in their support for ILO Convention 190.

CONVENTION ON VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT

Adopted in June 2019, ILO Convention No. 190 (C190) is the first international treaty to recognize the right of everyone to a world of work free from violence and harassment, including gender-based violence and harassment.

The ILO Convention No. 190 on Violence and Harassment defines these issues broadly, covering physical, psychological, sexual, and economic harm. The convention's scope is comprehensive, encompassing all sectors and work arrangements, from formal to informal, urban to rural. Notably, it extends beyond traditional workplace boundaries, covering work-related communications and commutes. The convention highlights gender-based violence and recognises the impact of domestic violence on work. It requires member states to implement laws, preventive measures, and enforcement mechanisms to combat violence and harassment.

What can social partners do?

To combat violence and sexual harassment in the workplace, social partners can:

… raise **AWARENESS** about violence and harassment in the workplace, and advocate for legal protections and policies.

… collaborate to develop **WORKPLACE POLICIES** that address violence and harassment, including prevention strategies and reporting mechanisms.

… include provisions on preventing and addressing violence and harassment in **COLLECTIVE AGREEMENTS**.

… develop and implement **TRAINING PROGRAMMES** for workers and managers on recognising, preventing, and responding to workplace violence and harassment.

… identify and promote **BEST PRACTICES** in preventing and addressing workplace violence and harassment.

… establish or improve **SUPPORT SERVICES** for victims of workplace violence and harassment.

… engage in **ONGOING SOCIAL DIALOGUE** and cooperation to address these issues effectively.

Collective bargaining agreements for equality

In Ghana, an increasing number of collective agreements include provisions on sexual harassment and violence. Comfort A. Agambaa, General Secretary of the General Construction Manufacturing and Quarries Workers' Union, has bargained for this for many years.

When ILO adopted a new convention to combat violence and harassment in the workplace in 2019 (ILO convention 190), Agambaa made her union members, other workers, and business leaders aware of it.

"I immediately started to draft a suggestion for additional provisions for our collective agreements," Agambaa, says. Unions and employers have a joint duty to make sure that workplaces are free of discrimination and harassment.

Collective agreements are an important tool employers and unions can use to lead the way and introduce provisions on gender equality that are not yet covered by national laws and regulations, but that eventually can become a right for all workers.

Positive employers

"Collective agreements which cover topics on harassment and violence will help businesses not only to follow their own policies, but actually enrich their policies," Agambaa explains. According to Agambaa it can take months to bargain on areas in the collective agreement such as salary and pension, but provisions on sexual harassment and violence are agreed on quite easily. "ILO Convention 190 covers both the boss and worker, men and women. Everyone benefits," she says.

She is advocating for Ghana to ratify the convention and domesticate it in the country's national laws."Ghana is a member of ILO, we are part of it," she says.

Improved social dialogue

According to Agambaa, bargaining on collective agreements on issues related to ILO Convention 190 has improved the bipartite cooperation in general. "After we started cooperating on how to prevent sexual harassment and violence at work, more and more employers call me on other issues they wish to solve together with the union," she says.

Making history

Agambaa started her union career as a typist in a local union, and later made history by becoming the first female to be elected as the Deputy General Secretary of that union. In 2016, she was elected as the first female General Secretary of the General Construction Manufacturing and Quarries Workers' Union. She is also the first woman to be re-elected as General Secretary in one of the affiliated unions of the Trades Union Congress Ghana.

In her years as head of the union she says she has witnessed more and more women taking up work in the construction, manufacturing, and quarry sectors.

"It helps that the General Secretary is a woman. Today we have three women to four men in the leadership of our union, and women are active in leadership in the local unions," Comfort A. Agambaa concludes.

COLLECTIVE AGEEMENTS ARE ESSENTIAL

Collective agreements have played an important role in advancing gender equality in Norwegian workplaces, often preceding and influencing legislation. Key examples include:

Paid breastfeeding breaks were included in collective agreements before becoming law.

Rights for part-time workers to increase their hours were negotiated in collective agreements before being included in the labour law.

Paid paternity leave in connection to the birth of the baby was established through collective agreements in the public sector and later spread to private sector collective agreements.

Source: FAFO: Gender Equality in Collective Agreements Fafo-notat 2024:13

READ MORE

The chapter 'Social dialogue and gender equality' (p 239-244) in the ILO guide for improved governance "National Tripartite Social Dialogue".

Photo: Nina Monsen/LO

Comfort A. Agambaa, General Secretary of the General Construction Manufacturing and Quarries Workers' Union, has experienced that bargaining on collective agreements related to the ILO convention 190 has opened other doors: "Employers call me on other issues they wish to solve together with the union", she says.

LO NHO

FACTS GENDER EQUALITY EMBEDDED IN THE WORKPLACE

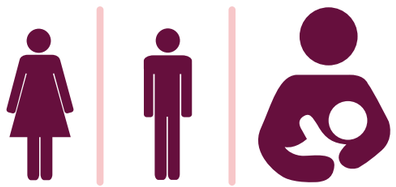
LO and NHO share a common goal of achieving equality in the workplace. The basic agreement between them, dating back to 1935, was supplemented by a framework agreement on equal pay in 1961. In 1982 gender equality was included in the basic agreement, and highlighted gender equality as a topic on the agenda for social dialogue at national and local levels.

> "Even though employers are obligated by Norwegian law to work for equal pay, it binds the parties even more strongly if it is also included in the collective agreements.
>
> Former Equality and anti-discrimination Ombud in Norway, Hanne Bjurström

Foto: Johanne Hovland

Work environment for all

Once women are in the workforce, the working environment can help boost their productivity and well-being, and it can do the opposite. Management, shop stewards and colleagues have a responsibility through their respective roles to create a work environment that is welcoming to both men and women.



How to get started

- Create a **physical work environment** that is comfortable and safe for all genders.
- Ensure **women's voices** and representation in decision-making bodies.
- Establish **employee resource groups** or networks for women to provide peer support and networking opportunities.
- Create **mentorship programs** pairing senior women leaders with junior female employees to support career development.
- Facilitate appropriate **restrooms** and private spaces for nursing mothers.
- Provide training on **unconscious bias** for all employees, especially those involved in hiring and promotion decisions.
- Implement **transparent promotion** criteria and processes to reduce potential gender bias in career advancement.

Representation matters! The Norwegian housing cooperative OBOS got a lot of attention for picturing a pregnant woman in their job ad searching for a C-level executive.

Family friendly workplaces

Implementing family-friendly policies and practices at the workplace can help employees balance work and family responsibilities more easily. Good examples:

1. Family leave policies like maternity, paternity, and parental leave that are inclusive and accessible to all workers.
2. On-site childcare facilities, subsidies for childcare, or other forms of support for working parents.
3. Equal treatment: Ensuring that workers with family responsibilities are not discriminated against in terms of career progression, pay, or other work-related aspects.
4. A work environment where using family-friendly benefits is encouraged and not penalised.
5. Gender-neutral policies. Family-friendly policies are available and encouraged for both men and women.
6. Long-term care policies: Providing support for workers who need to care for family members with long-term illnesses or disabilities, or are elderly.
7. Work-life balance: Overall policies and practices that recognize and support workers' lives outside of work.

The ILO emphasises that these family-friendly policies are not only beneficial for workers but also for businesses, as they can lead to increased productivity, better employee retention, and improved worker satisfaction.

Relevant ILO-conventions

ILO Convention No. 111
Discrimination in Employment and Occupation

This ILO Convention was adopted in 1958. The convention defines discrimination as any distinction, exclusion, or preference based on race, colour, sex, religion, political opinion, national extraction, or social origin that impairs equality of opportunity in employment. It requires member states to pursue national policies to promote equality and eliminate discrimination in employment and occupation. The convention also specifies measures to be taken, including enacting legislation, repealing discriminatory laws, and ensuring observance in vocational guidance and training. It allows for special measures to assist certain groups without being considered discriminatory.

Want to learn more? ILO has created a free self-learning on the conventions covering discrimination, violence and harassment, C111 and C190:

ILO Convention No. 156,
Workers with Family Responsibilities

The convention from 1981, aims to promote equality of opportunity and treatment for workers with family obligations. It covers both men and women who have responsibilities for dependent children or other immediate family members. The convention requires member states to implement policies that enable these workers to engage in employment without facing discrimination. It stipulates that family responsibilities alone should not be grounds for termination. The convention calls for the development of community services like childcare and family services, as well as providing vocational training and guidance for these workers. It also emphasises the importance of public information campaigns to promote understanding of the issues faced by workers with family responsibilities.

Overall, the convention seeks to help workers balance their professional and family lives without facing discrimination in the workplace.

Women earn less than men and face imbalances in the world of work

- Women are often overrepresented in certain sectors and occupations, typically those with lower pay and fewer career prospects, such as care-related and service sector jobs.
- They are under-represented in leadership roles. In many low- and middle-income countries, women are more likely than men to be in informal employment, which often lacks social protection and decent working conditions.
- In addition, there is a higher prevalence of women doing part-time work, as well as a greater burden of unpaid care work.

ILO states that women and men should receive equal pay for the same work or work of equal value. It sounds obvious. But, in practice it isn't. Equal pay has been on social partners' agendas for decades, and already in 1951 the Equal Remuneration Convention was adopted (see fact box for more information). Progress has been made, and in many countries both collective agreements and laws have been introduced to bridge the gap.

Five steps towards equal pay at enterprise level

WAGE POLICY
Create a policy stating the principles and criteria for wage setting in your enterprise.

DEFINE ROLES
Describe the roles in your workplace in terms of tasks, responsibilities, level of training and skill set needed. Define corresponding salary levels. This way you avoid involving personal bias in wage setting.

GENDER-NEUTRAL JOB EVALUATION
Use gender-neutral job evaluation methods to ensure that jobs of equal value are compensated for equally, regardless of whether they are typically held by men or women.

TRAINING
Provide training for managers, shop stewards and Human Resources on recognizing and addressing unconscious biases in hiring, promotion, and pay decisions.

MONITOR AND DOCUMENT
Regularly monitor and document gender pay gaps within the organisation to maintain accountability and track progress.

Photo: Marcus Tveit Karkash, Forte Digital

Female future

NHO's Female Future programme was established in Norway in 2003. It supports businesses with their long-term efforts to get more women into management teams and on boards, and enable growth of female talent. Since 2010, via NHO's collaboration with its sister organisations around the world, the Female Future programme has been set up and implemented in six countries in Africa and the Middle East. The results have been impressive: 46% of the responding alumni say they have accessed a leadership position or moved to a higher leadership position, and a total of 27% state they have joined a board, after graduating from the Female Future programme. Read more on page 19.

Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100):

This convention was adopted by the ILO in 1951, establishing the principle of equal pay for men and women for work of equal value. It defines remuneration as including all compensation arising from employment, whether direct or indirect, cash or in-kind. Member states are required to promote and ensure this principle through appropriate means, including laws, wage determination mechanisms, and collective agreements. The convention calls for objective job appraisal methods and cooperation between employers and workers' organisations. It outlines procedures for ratification, implementation in territories, and potential modifications or denunciations. The convention aims to eliminate gender-based pay discrimination globally.

Read more:
Check out ILO's infostory on pay equity here.

Promoting gender equality in Colombia

Maria Camila Agudelo, Director of Public Affairs at the National Business Association of Colombia (ANDI), shares how their initiatives in gender equality and inclusion have led to positive changes in the Colombian workforce. As a leading organisation representing Colombian businesses, ANDI has been a key advocate for advancing gender equality.

What are key challenges for achieving gender equality in the workplace?

There are several major challenges. Sexual harassment in the workplace is one of the most pressing issues. Many women are reluctant to report harassment for fear of losing their jobs or being judged. We're currently working with the Danish industry to create protocols that help companies address and prevent harassment. Another critical issue is the gender pay gap. While we have seen some progress, there's still a lot of work to do to ensure equal pay for equal work. Additionally, many women in Colombia do unpaid work, especially in caregiving roles, which puts further strain on gender inequality.

Maria Camila Agudelo,
Director of Public Affairs at ANDI.

What are some initiatives ANDI has implemented to address these challenges?

One of our key initiatives is the "Impact Women" mentoring programme, which pairs women with experienced mentors to help them develop their careers. The programme aims to build confidence and leadership skills in women, helping them advance within their companies and narrow the pay gap. We've also been working on a recognition programme for companies that excel in preventing sexual harassment, awarding them with a special certification for their efforts. Additionally, ANDI has been working on increasing the representation of women in leadership roles. We have partnered with a local university to provide training for women to qualify for board positions, and we've set targets for female representation on our own board.

You emphasise the need for both external and internal surveys. Why?

Surveys are essential tools when working to promote gender equality. Internally, companies need to gather data to understand their own gaps and challenges. This can provide critical insights and is invaluable in helping organisations identify areas where they need to improve, whether it's addressing harassment, pay inequality, or representation. Companies should use these surveys to inform their strategies and ensure that their initiatives are addressing the most pressing issues.

How have businesses contributed to promoting gender equality through ANDI?

ANDI has played a significant role in raising awareness and fostering discussions around gender equality. We organise regular meetings with our member companies and collaborate with international organisations like the ILO to share best practices. Our goal is to create an environment where businesses are proactive in promoting equality and addressing issues like sexual harassment. Recently, we supported the passing of a law in Congress focused on preventing sexual harassment, and we are continuing to push for the ratification of ILO Convention 190.

What advice would you give to others awaiting the ratification of ILO Convention 190?

While the ratification is important, real change happens when businesses start taking action. It's essential to implement strategies and create awareness around gender issues, regardless of whether a formal convention is in place. Because in the end it is just words on a piece of paper. Companies must be active in creating safe environments for their employees, and the focus should be on implementing practical solutions that address harassment and inequality, not just relying on laws or policies.

Why is this work important to you personally?

As a woman, I've experienced firsthand some of the biases and challenges that women face in the workplace. I've been in situations where male colleagues were taken more seriously than me, despite me being in a higher position. It's important to me to create a workplace culture where women can be themselves and be respected for their talents, without having to conform to stereotypes of leadership. This is where I believe awareness is key.

What do you wish more employers understood about gender equality?

That women often bring different perspectives and skill sets that complement those of their male colleagues, leading to better decision-making and more innovative solutions. Businesses thrive when they embrace diversity and create environments where everyone feels safe and empowered to contribute.

Photo: Anna Häggblom

Female future in Tunisia

Several countries launch initiatives to promote women's roles in the world of work. NHO's Female Future programme was established in Norway in 2003. The programme facilitates businesses to work long-term on getting more women into their management teams and boards, and to enable growth of female talents. In 2010, NHO began to cooperate with sister organisations to implement their own Female Future programmes. Tunisia was first introduced as a pilot in 2019. Implemented in collaboration with the Tunisian Union of Industry, Trade, and Handicrafts (UTICA), the programme aims to enhance gender equality in leadership positions by developing female talent. Since its launch, it has been impactful in building the leadership capacities of women and promoting their participation on company boards and management teams. The programme focuses on empowering women through modules on board competence, communication, and leadership development, giving participants the confidence and skills needed to advance in their careers. Many Tunisian alumni have described it as transformational, contributing to both personal and professional growth. Additionally, it has helped create a strong professional network, fostering collaboration among women in leadership roles.

Drawing the line

In Norway, social partners and the Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud in Norway have teamed up for the “Draw the line” campaign, which is directed at employers and employees in restaurants and bars.

Their suggestions for employers are:
1. Asses risks - together with employees
2. Codes of conduct - together with employees
3. Standard operating procedures
4. Violation must lead to consequence
5. Clarify management’s responsibility
6. Talk about sexual harassment

Source: The Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud

Photo: Johanne Hovland

“Colombia’s ratification of ILO Convention 190 is a unanimous decision by employer, worker and government representatives. Companies have for a long time worked to promote gender parity and prevent harassment in the world of work, as demonstrated by the tripartite submission of C190 to Colombia’s Congress for ratification. We want to prevent harassment in the workplace and this must be a joint effort by employers and workers.” Juliana Restrepo, Legal Assistant, National Business Association of Colombia, speaking at the roundtable conference in Oslo in March 2024.

Welfare – a prerequisite for gender equality

Welfare systems play a pivotal role in enabling women to enter and remain in the workforce, creating a beneficial cycle that strengthens both women’s economic participation and the welfare system itself.

By providing essential services like affordable childcare, paid parental leave, and eldercare support, welfare systems remove significant barriers that often prevent women from pursuing careers. These services allow women to balance work and family responsibilities more effectively, increasing their labour force participation.

As more women enter the workforce, they contribute to economic growth and increased tax revenues. This expanded tax base, in turn, helps finance the very welfare programmes that support their participation. Women’s increased earnings support their own families, and impact their communities, further bolstering the welfare system’s sustainability.

The result is a win-win scenario: women gain economic independence and career opportunities, while the welfare system benefits from a broader contributor base and increased financial sustainability. This positive cycle demonstrates how well-designed welfare policies can simultaneously promote gender equality and economic stability.

Sources: UN Women, ILO, A quantum leap for gender equality: For a better future of work for all (ILO)

Read more:
ILO Infostory:
What is holding women back?

Photo: LO/MCTU

Paternal leave in Malawi – a milestone for workers’ rights

The introduction of paternal leave in Malawi in 2021 is a milestone for workers’ rights in the country. Two weeks of paternal leave and improved rights for pregnant and breastfeeding women were introduced through amendments in the Employment Amendment Bill.

The Malawi Congress of Trade Unions (MCTU) has through many years of social dialogue with employers and the government put a lot of effort to reach this achievement.

The Norwegian experience with high degree of gender equality has been shared with MCTU through its Norwegian partner LO. The practice of institutionalising both maternity and paternity leave and social protection, and welfare systems that make it possible to combine work with family life, has been shared between LO and MCTU.

Gender equality is a righteous goal. Is it profitable too?

THE SHORT ANSWER: Yes!

THE LONG ANSWER: Gender equality does not simply create a better world of work for everyone, research shows it is more profitable in the long-term: Both for businesses and for a nation's economy as a whole. These are some of the ways diversity benefits companies and countries:

INNOVATION: Companies with above-average diversity on management teams report 19% higher revenues from innovation.

Source: Boston Consulting Group (BCG), "How Diverse Leadership Teams Boost Innovation" (2018).

DECISION-MAKING: Companies with more women on their executive teams outperform those with less diversity with up to 25% higher likelihood of above-average profitability.

Source: McKinsey & Company, "Diversity Wins: How Inclusion Matters" (2021)

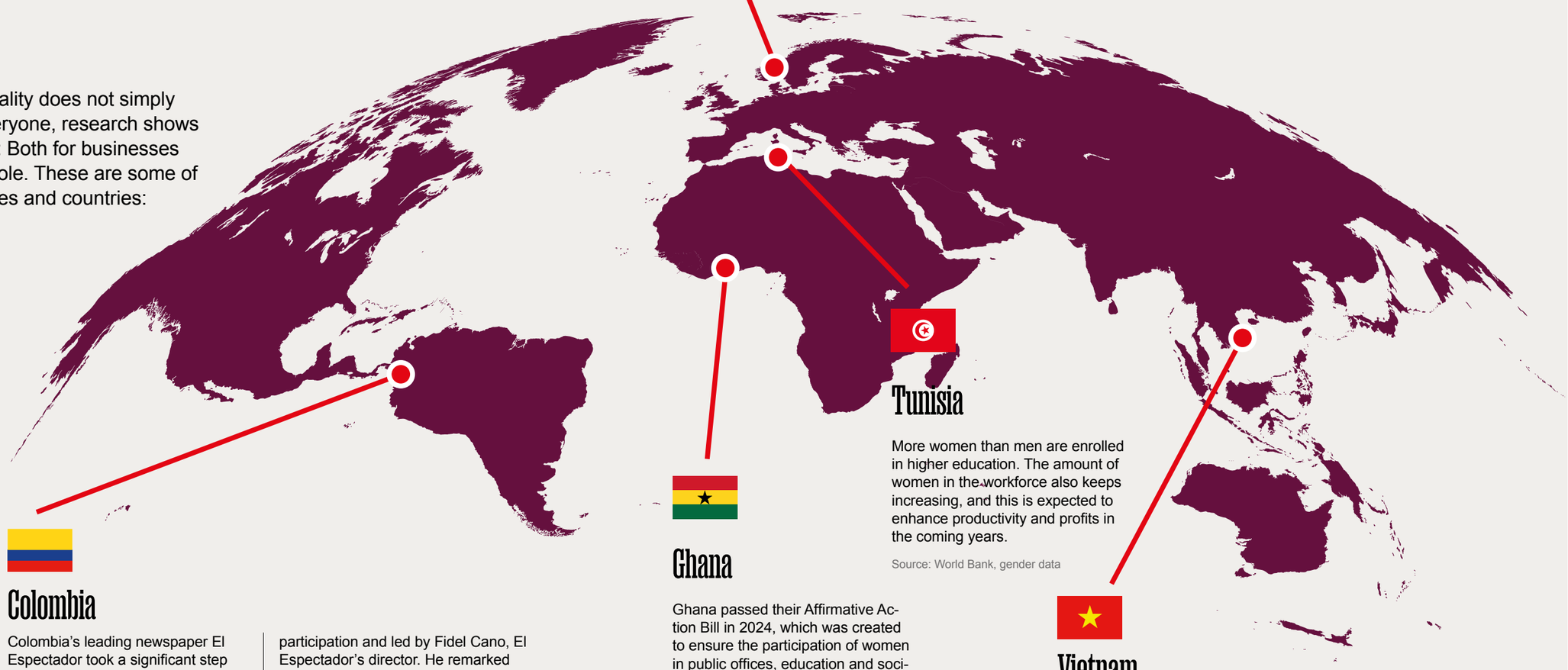
FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE: Companies with gender diversity in their management teams report an increase in profits of up to 20 %, with the majority seeing an increase between 10-15%.

Source: ILO "Women in Business and Management: The Business Case for Change".

The ILO has looked at companies from 1991-2017 and found that higher gender diversity and female employment is linked to greater GDP growth. McKinsey noted, following the beginning of the pandemic in 2020, that closing the gender gaps in workforce participation could boost global GDP by 12 trillion by 2030.

But only if we do the work.

Here are some examples of the work being done in partnering countries



Norway

Since 2018, Norway has provided new fathers and new mothers with 15 weeks of paid leave each. In addition, they have around 16 weeks that can be shared between the parents. In total, parents in Norway have 49 weeks of parental leave with their new born child. The aim is to ensure that both parents have time off work to be with their newborn and to see to it that mothers can return to work when fathers take their leave. Family-friendly policies like this result inhigher productivity and profitability.

Source: OECD, Nordic Institute for Studies in Innovation

Colombia

Colombia's leading newspaper El Espectador took a significant step toward workplace gender equality in 2020 by implementing the SCORE Gender Equality Model. Working with ILO, the company established a comprehensive Protocol on Prevention and Response to Gender-Based Violence, created a dedicated prevention committee, and conducted organization-wide training. The initiative was welcomed by enthusiastic employee participation and led by Fidel Cano, El Espectador's director. He remarked that "we were able to bring gender equality into the corporate culture of a large company renowned as a leader in its field by Colombians".

Source: https://www.ilo.org/resource/news/colombian-media-commits-gender-equality-ilos-protocol-prevention-and

Ghana

Ghana passed their Affirmative Action Bill in 2024, which was created to ensure the participation of women in public offices, education and society with a goal of equality and equity in decision-making spaces.

Source: https://moi.gov.gh/newsroom/2024/08/affirmative-action-act-2024-gender-equity-passed-by-parliament/

Tunisia

More women than men are enrolled in higher education. The amount of women in the workforce also keeps increasing, and this is expected to enhance productivity and profits in the coming years.

Source: World Bank, gender data

Vietnam

The Better Work Vietnam programme focuses on improving working conditions in the garment and textile industries, which employ a lot of women in the country. Through education, training and assessments of the factories involved in the programme, the factories have reported an increase in income of 8% in only one year.

Source: Better Work Viet Nam Annual Report 2023, Geneva: International Labour Office and International Finance Corporation, 2023
Gender Equality and Returns (GEAR)

SOCIAL DIALOGUE
GENDER EQUALITY

The Social Partners for Decent Work programme

The Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions (LO) and the Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise (NHO) are joining forces to support ILO's decent work agenda. In a cooperation programme called Social Partners for Decent Work, funded by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad), LO and NHO aim to contribute to strengthening the social dialogue and negotiations among social partners in Colombia, Ghana, Tunisia, and Vietnam. The main goals of the programme are decent work, sustainable economic growth, and strengthened social dialogue. LO and NHO are cooperating with their respective sister organisations, and with other stakeholders such as the state and state institutions.

The programme's activities will be carried out in the partner countries in the form of studies, workshops, and the like during 2024 and 2025.

LO and NHO have produced four pamphlets as part of the programme.

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Norway

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SOCIAL DIALOGUE
THE BIG PICTURE
What is social dialogue, who are the parties and what is it good for? We zoom out and look at the big picture, highlighting the Norwegian model as an example.

SOCIAL DIALOGUE
AT YOUR WORKPLACE
How can we use social dialogue to create profitable enterprises with fair working conditions? We look into social dialogue in the workplace, and share ideas on how to get started – or how to strengthen the social dialogue.

SOCIAL DIALOGUE
GENDER EQUALITY IN THE WORLD OF WORK
Gender equality in the world of work isn't only the right thing to strive for – it is the smart thing to strive for. How can social partners push for equal rights and conditions for men and women?

SOCIAL DIALOGUE
TALK WITH A COMMON VOICE
Before there is dialogue, we need representative organisations to participate in the dialogue. Employers and employees need sound, strong and democratic organisations. We look at how we can organise and build our organisations.

NHO | LO Norway