



**Global KSP E-Discussion on Gender
Equality in the World of Work “Getting
to equal by 2030: The future is now”**

A summary

*April 2016
(DRAFT)*

Summary

Global KSP E-Discussion on Gender Equality in the World of Work “Getting to equal by 2030: The future is now”

Overview

To coincide with International Women’s Day, held on 8 March, the Global Skills for Employment Knowledge Sharing Platform (Global KSP) launched a month long E-discussion on 29 February on improving employability and access to skills training for women. The E-Discussion drew posts from people in a variety of countries including Guyana, India, Ireland, Mozambique, Mexico, Nepal, New Zealand and the United States. The comments and observations provided useful insights on how to move forward on promoting more inclusive and sustainable workplaces and societies.

Participants were provided with several ILO resource items¹, and asked to comment on a series of questions suggested by the organizers of the E-Discussion:

- What are some of the ways to increase gender equality in the workplace?
- What can be done at the country-level to ensure access to skills training for young women and girls?
- What are some of the barriers to their participation?
- How do existing laws and policies in your country help or hinder the increase in participation of women at all levels in the workforce? (*Responses obtained not sufficient to support summary*)
- How can the public and private sectors promote gender equality?
- What role does entrepreneurship play in terms of women’s economic empowerment?

Key messages and recommendations that emerged from the E-discussion include:

- **On ways to increase gender equality in the workplace:** greater access to education is not enough to reduce gender disparities in the world of work; promoting entrepreneurship among women helps to increase the participation of women in the labour force; and, improving negotiation skills is one of the most simple and yet frequently overlooked solutions for increasing gender equality in the workplace, particularly on wage matters.
- **On country-level measures to ensure access to skills training for young women and girls:** promote gender equality in school curricula; strengthen the participation of women as equals in the community and in dialogue forums with men; build capacity among government and large organisations to make stronger laws regarding non-discrimination against women; special welfare programmes to encourage the girl child in the family; within companies, a establish a minimum ratio of women-to-men workers; and, in the workplace, modify rules that encourage the return to work of women who have opted to have children.

¹ ILO resource items provided for the discussion included: “Young and female – a double strike? Gender Analysis of school-to-work transition surveys in 32 developing economies”; Policy Brief: The gender divide in skills development: Progress, challenges and policy options for empowering women; Women at Work Trends 2016 report; and Interactive map: Explore the gender labour gap around the world.

- **On barriers to participation:** At least two discussants pointed to the importance of awareness-raising campaigns targeting key decision-makers to positively influence access to education and skills development programmes, in particular, for disabled women and men. Many also concurred that role models are an effective means of overcoming barriers to equal opportunities for women and treatment in the labour market.
- **On how the public and private sectors can promote gender equality:** private and public sectors can help through implementing laws, promoting education and skills for all. In more traditional societies, both sectors must work together to change this public perception of education and training of women and help encourage them to become more active members of the labour force.
- **On the role of entrepreneurship in women's economic empowerment:** entrepreneurship training should be incorporated in core/compulsory courses at both secondary and tertiary levels of education to increase the participation of women in the labour market.

Part II: Detailed summary of the E-Discussion

The summaries provided below are excerpted from responses based on user comments on the E-Discussion topic. To see the original comments and views, please refer to this [link](#)

What are some of the ways to increase gender equality in the workplace?

Discussants representing several geographical areas and offering a broad range of personal and professional experience participated in the discussion. **Key messages** emerging from responses on this particular sub-theme were that: greater access to education is not enough to reduce gender disparities in the world of work; promoting entrepreneurship among women helps to increase the participation of women in the labour force; and, negotiation skills for women is one of the most simple and yet frequently overlooked solutions to improving gender equality in the workplace, particularly on wage matters.

Detailed comments on this topic:

One discussant observed that progress made in education of young women in recent years has not resulted in putting them on an equal footing with men for labour market absorption. The discussant cited regions such as the Middle East where young women still face unemployment rates of nearly 50 per cent, or double the 24 per cent faced by young men despite generally having higher levels of education. The writer said many educated young women would "cede" the few available jobs to their male compatriots and hope for a better future for their future daughters...or their daughter's daughters.

The same discussant also raised the issue of the content of education in connection to accessing work, adding that the outcome depends on the country. For example, in Egypt, a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) graduate would probably not be any better off - there are too many other factors on hand that block female access; in Serbia, a STEM graduate enjoys lower unemployment rates than a humanities graduate, but a female who specialized in education or agricultural studies could have an even lower unemployment rate. In Uganda, both male and female STEM graduates are snapped up by employers, given their short supply.

The commentator observed that while changing norms is difficult, we must remain hopeful that such change can eventually come through slow but steady efforts to 1) improve

legislation and enforcement of the law (including revisions of direct or indirect discriminatory provisions within labour laws); 2) better organize workers in female-dominated occupations (domestic workers, for example) to "fight the fight" for better wages and conditions of work; 3) community-based female empowerment movements; 4) measuring (and valuing) unpaid household work, and; 5) finding and scaling-up the effective bundle of services that allow young women to benefit equally with men from skills development, entrepreneurship and other labour market interventions.

Offering additional insights on avenues for getting closer to true equality in labour market access, and the utilization and empowerment of women, another commentator suggested:

Entrepreneurship skills: In many economies, the existing formal and government sectors aren't large enough to create sufficient decent jobs for school and university graduates, even if they have obtained STEM skills. Facilities directed specifically at women would-be entrepreneurs in school, university and beyond would help increase their participation in the labour force.

Workplace flexibility and part-time work: Non-transferrable maternal and paternal leave, as practiced in Nordic countries encourages men to assume more childcare duties and helps women avoid being automatically relegated to domestic work. Moreover, countries such as the Netherlands and Poland have laws guaranteeing the right to revert to full-time work following a period of part-time work/parental leave after childbirth. Part-time work also offers an interesting opportunity for women (and men) to retrain/study in parallel so as to change job path mid-career without having to fully exit the labour market temporarily, which would both boost labour market participation rates and reduce skills mismatch

Another participant suggested: 1) adopting computer-generated recruiting procedures where the name, sex and personal details of the candidate are automatically hidden from recruiters, potentially increasing the chances of more women being selected for positions; 2) incorporating entrepreneurial training in core/compulsory courses at both secondary and tertiary levels of education to increase the competence and confidence of women to start their own businesses; 3) listening to the concerns of women by creating anonymous surveys that give them the chance to highlight issues of inequality before and after entering the world of work, as well as practical suggestions on how such issues could be resolved; 4) encouraging more performance-based assessments in the workplace which could be objectively validated, and using such assessments to inform staffing positions and compensation packages, and; 5) funding third-party assessments of the performance of females versus males in varying sectors in order to have more informed policy making in the workplace.

Lastly, one discussant pointed to negotiation skills for women is one of the simplest and most frequently overlooked solutions to improving gender equality in the workplace, particularly on wages. The persistence of a gender wage gap, despite the variation in college majors, hours at work or personal profiles, points out that a solution may not imply only new labour policies or legislation, but a change in culture.

A study of Carnegie Mellon University graduates by Linda Babcock showed that only 12.5 per cent of women asked for more money when receiving a job offering, compared to 51.5 per cent of men. Furthermore, she also found that women are penalized for negotiating. In the United States, there are projects that address this. For example, WAGE and the American Association of University Women offer workshops to improve communication and

negotiation skills that allow women to feel more confident when asking for better initial wage offers and they learn to do it in a positive and persuasive way.

What can be done at the country-level to ensure access to skills training for young women and girls?

Participants reiterated that the issue of workplace gender equality differs considerably in developed and developing countries. Consequently, in offering views and opinions they provided recommendations and suggestions based on country-specific, personal experiences. **Key points** emerging from this sub-theme: promoting gender equality in school curricula; strengthening the participation of women in the community and in dialogue forums with men as equals; building capacity among government and large organizations to make stronger laws regarding non-discrimination against women; special welfare programmes to encourage the girl child in the family with offers of sponsorships and other support initiatives; within companies, a minimum ratio of women-to-men workers; and, in the workplace modified rules that encourage the return to work of women who have opted to have children.

Detailed comments on this sub theme:

A participant from Mozambique wrote that while the political commitment of the Government on gender equality and the empowerment of women is strong (*example provided: Government commitment to increasing female participation in decision making in all areas and at all levels to 50 per cent*), progress in reducing gender inequalities remains uneven. For example, women account for 87.3 per cent of the agricultural labour force, but only 25 per cent of landowners holding official user rights. This lack of land ownership rights, based on traditional cultural norms or practices, contributes to women's poverty. The empowerment of women, particularly in rural areas where difficulties in accessing education, TVET and employment present huge hurdles, is a crucial issue to be tackled.

A recently launched ILO project, led by the commenter, aims to foster the economic empowerment of the rural communities in Mozambique with special attention to women by, among other initiatives and interventions: promoting credit and savings programmes at the level of women's associations to help develop initiatives that promote enterprises, and income generating opportunities; encouraging networking among women and strengthening women's associations; empowering community leaders with regard to the rights of women; and, promoting the participation of women as equals with men in the community and in dialogue forums.

A discussant from Nepal suggested including the concept of gender equality in the primary level course (*of education*); providing quality and affordable education that promotes gender equality in the curriculum; strengthening capacities of government and large organizations to pass stronger legislation regarding non-discrimination against women; and educating everyone, especially parents in poor countries. He added that the private and public sectors can also help by properly implementing laws.

A researcher, originally from India, recommended special welfare programmes to encourage the girl child in the family with offers of sponsorships and other supportive initiatives; within companies, a minimum ratio of women-to-men workers; and, in the workplace modified rules that encourage the return to work of women who have opted to have children.

What are some of the barriers to their participation?

Key points: Several participants observed that tradition, culture and a lack of education are factors influencing the access of women to skills training and participation in employment, despite widely different circumstances. At least two discussants pointed to the importance of awareness-raising campaign targeting key decision-makers to positively influence access to education, skills development programmes, in particular, as it concerns disabled women and men². Many also concurred that role models are an effective means of overcoming barriers to equal opportunities of women and their treatment in the labour market.

Detailed comments on this sub theme:

A commentator from New Zealand wrote that the most significant barriers for women in the workforce are traditionally held beliefs that come from a time when people didn't see women working, and therefore believed that women couldn't work rather than that they weren't given the opportunity to work.

Agreeing with this commentator, a discussant from the United States added that much of what is preventing women from entering certain technical fields is related to traditional beliefs around these fields that affect the support and encouragement girls receive at a young age. He continued by sharing information on projects funded through the National Science Foundation designed to increase participation of underrepresented groups, in particular women, in STEM fields. Information collected on effective strategies used by these projects to improve women's participation in technical programs included introducing young girls to other female professionals in the field, offering particular programmes targeted at young women in secondary schools, and working directly with secondary schools to recruit women through targeted recruitment activities.

Picking up on this point, another discussant stressed the importance of understanding "what works" and building on it. Promoting more women into decision-making in enterprises and other organisations actually helped to open up jobs at all levels for other women. Citing "Lessons from the leading edge of gender diversity", a study published by McKinsey & Co. in 2013, there exist simple principles that any enterprise can use to jump-start or improve the representation of women on governing boards and in executive committees. For example, for top-diversity companies, the CEOs and executive teams "walk, talk, run and shout about gender diversity". Their consistent and visible commitment along with tangible actions catalysed other leaders in the company and teams, especially in human resources, to commit and engage fully in the company initiatives

How can the public and private sectors promote gender equality?

A number of suggestions were offered in this regard with some already presented in the summaries of the previous questions. **Key messages** and suggestions include that private and public sectors can help through implementing laws and promoting education and skills to all. They should also give special consideration to underdeveloped countries because they need to change more rapidly than developed countries. Other suggestions were that in many traditional societies, the education and training of women is still viewed as a waste of time and money. Therefore, the public and private sectors must work together to change this perception and encourage women to become more active members of the labour force.

Detailed comment on this sub theme:

² One discussant submitted comments via email.

A discussant from Mexico said that country has been open to cooperating not just with international partners but also the private sector in the area of skills development. Its dual system of training, for example, has already been implemented by some foreign companies operating in Mexico, and may help attract more women into the labour market. The latter not only reflects the importance of public-private partnerships on skills development, but also demonstrates the impact of knowledge sharing in this area.

What role does entrepreneurship play in terms of women's economic empowerment?

Several discussants observed that entrepreneurship could play an important role in promoting gender equality and the economic empowerment of women. **Key points** and recommendations include:

- Incorporating entrepreneurship training in core/compulsory courses at both secondary and tertiary levels of education so that more women have the competence and confidence needed to start their own businesses;
- Changing norms is hard but that it would eventually come with, among others, steady efforts to find and scale-up the effective bundle of services that put young women on an equal footing with men to benefit from skills development, entrepreneurship and other labour market interventions; and,
- Entrepreneurship and innovation present universal challenges to both genders in education, but women are often more systematically discouraged from acquiring such skills and creating their own enterprises. However, facilities directed specifically at women would-be entrepreneurs in school, university and later on, would help increase participation in the labour force.

The Global KSP would like to thank all those who participated in our E-discussion and encourages future involvement in upcoming global dialogues!