The development of the women’s question at the ILO, 1919-1994
75 years of progress towards equality

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Foreword

This chronological analysis has been prepared in the framework of the "International Forum on Equality for Women in the World of Work: Challenges for the Future", Geneva, 1-3 June 1994. Its purpose is to recall the spirit and the development of the ILO's approach to the women's question since 1919.

This analysis aims to provide some points of reference both for the current debate on the role of women in the economy and society and for the definition of the policies destined to improve the situation of women in the world by the ILO and its tripartite constituents (governments, employers, workers), as well as by international organizations, women's organizations and other NGO.

In view of the long-lasting concern of the ILO about women workers, not considered as a separate group, but integrated into the world of work as a whole, such an analysis can only be a simplified one, guided by major events, the development of ideas, major texts or specific activities. Although other documents could have been quoted, this is the reason why the analysis is based on a selection of texts and documents chosen for their official nature (basic or normative texts, reports of the Director-General, solemn declarations); or conceptual nature (clarifying the problem); or strategic nature (fixing objectives, proposing policies, determining activities); or topical nature (reflecting current problems).

Six major periods have been selected, according to internal historic events, and to the external context which have influenced, since 1919, the women's question at the ILO, the approach to the issue, the objectives to be reached, the policies developed for promoting equality and related activities.

A selection of significant documents illustrates each period. The final part of the paper consists of some general remarks based on the analysis presented in the document as a conclusion.

We hope that this work will highlight the efforts made to reach the aim of equality between men and women at work and in society, however distant it may still appear.

The years 1919-1927

The years 1919-1927 were dominated by the internal historic events of the foundation of the ILO and the proceedings of the first international labour conferences and committees in which women took an active part, as technical advisers, or even as government, employer or worker delegates.

1 The documents quoted have been published by (or for) the International Labour Office.
The external context, in the case of a larger number of countries, was marked by appalling working conditions. The situation of women was particularly bad, hence the wave of social protest initiated by the International Federation of Women Workers, the women's sections of national workers' associations, the major international women's organizations.

The ILO approach to the issue was based on the solemn declaration of the Treaty of Versailles, establishing the Organization: the principle of equal remuneration, without distinction of sex, for work of equal value; the payment to workers of an adequate living wage; the principle that labour is neither a commodity nor an item to be bought or sold; the obligation to place the necessary restrictions on the labour of young persons of both sexes to enable them to continue their education and ensure their physical development; the organization by the Member States of a system of labour inspection, in which women should take part, in order to ensure the enforcement of the laws and regulations for the protection of workers.

The objective was maternity protection and social protection for women, as regards their health and employment, against the hazards and abuses arising from industrialization.

The policies advocated concerned the prohibition of night work and certain industrial processes that could endanger women's health in respect of their role as mothers (work in salt or lead mines); the protection of women workers before and after childbirth.

The activities were for the most part standard-setting; direct relations were established with the principal women's organizations and associations; ILO representatives took part in the major women's meetings (five-yearly Conference of the International Council of Women, Congress of the International Alliance for Women's Suffrage).

Significant documents:

1919

Conventions, recommendations and resolutions
- Maternity protection convention (No. 3).
- Night work (women) convention (No. 4).
- Lead poisoning (women and children) recommendation (No. 4).
- Resolution concerning protection for women after confinement (ILC, 1st session, Washington).


Treaty of Versailles.
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1921

Conventions, recommendations and resolutions
Maternity protection (agriculture) recommendation (No. 12).
Night work of women (agriculture) recommendation (No. 13).

International (The) protection of women workers (Studies and reports, series I, 1).


1926

Conventions, recommendations and resolutions
Migration (Protection of females at sea) recommendation (No. 26).

International (The) Labour Organisation and women’s work.

The years 1928-1943

The years 1928-1943 were dominated by the internal historic events of the creation within the ILO of a section responsible for women’s questions and the appointment, by Albert Thomas, of a woman (Marguerite Thibert, specialist in the French women’s movement) as its head.

The external context was marked by the health and safety problems arising from industrialization, the employment difficulties during the economic crisis and the effects of the Second World War. There was heated debate between advocates and opponents of special protective legislation for women.

The ILO approach to the issue was based on a new idea: women should be protected in respect of their specific condition as women (pregnancy, maternity), but they should not be excluded from enterprises by prohibitions (concerning dangerous occupations or processes, night work...). Occupational hazards should be eliminated for all workers, not just for one category. Social progress should be brought about for everybody including women.

Despite recognition of its importance, the objective of protective legislation for women against occupational hazards was extended to include the defence of equal rights, in terms of opportunity and treatment, for women in employment and in public life. A guarantee of these rights was progressively seen as essential to better protection of women against economic exploitation.

The policies advocated were in keeping with the extended scope of social progress for all: the concerned elimination of hazards for men and women, improvement of working conditions for both sexes, promotion of equality.

Standard-setting activities continued: Conventions and Recommendations were revised to allow for a certain flexibility; studies were conducted on women’s employment during the economic crisis, on labour legislation and women’s employ-
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ment, on women's employment during the war, on the status of women at the workplace. A mission in Egypt gave rise to a special recommendation to protect women.

Significant documents:

1929

Conventions, recommendations and resolutions

Resolution concerning employment of women and young persons underground (ILC, 12th session, Geneva).

Laws relating to the work of women: a comparative study of the legislation relating to the employment of women in the States members of the ILO.

Protection of women in industry and commerce before and after childbirth: a comparative study of legislation.

1931

Partial revision of the convention concerning employment of women during the night (ILC, 15th session, Geneva, report III).

Report of the Governing Body of the International Labour Office upon the working of the convention concerning employment of women during the night (ILC, 15th session, Geneva).

1932

"Employment (The) of women since the war." By A. Vallentin. International labour review, 25, Apr., pp. 480-498.

Women's work under labour law; a survey of protective legislation (Studies and reports, series I, 2).

1933


1934

Conventions, recommendations and resolutions

Night work (women) convention. Rev. (No. 41).

Employment of women in underground work in mines of all kinds (ILC, 18th session, Geneva).

Partial revision of the convention (No. 4) concerning employment of women during the night (ILC, 18th session, Geneva, report VII).
1935

Conventions, recommendations and resolutions
Underground work (women) convention (No. 45).

Employment of women in underground work in mines of all kinds (ILC, 19th session, Geneva).


1936

Conventions, recommendations and resolutions
Resolutions concerning the conditions of employment of women (Conference of American States Members of the ILO, 1st, Santiago, Chile).

1939

Conventions, recommendations and resolutions
Resolution concerning the right to work of married women (Conference of American States Members of the ILO, 2nd, Havana).
Resolution concerning home work (Conference of American States Members of the ILO, 2nd, Havana).
Resolution concerning conditions of work of women (Conference of American States Members of the ILO, 2nd, Havana).
Resolution concerning administration relating to the work of women and juveniles (Conference of American States Members of the ILO, 2nd, Havana).
Resolution concerning the preparation of statistics on women's work (Conference of American States Members of the ILO, 2nd, Havana).
Resolution concerning the protection of women employed in domestic service and agriculture (Conference of American States Members of the ILO, 2nd, Havana).
Resolution concerning women's right to representation (Conference of American States Members of the ILO, 2nd, Havana).
Resolution concerning women's general rights (Conference of American States Members of the ILO, 2nd, Havana).

"Employment (The) of women workers during the war." International labour review, 40, Dec., pp. 795-807.

Law (The) and women's work; a contribution to the study of the status of women (Studies and reports, series I, 4).
The years 1944-1949

The years 1944-1949 were dominated by the internal historic events of the 26th Session of the International Labour Conference in Philadelphia, chaired - for the first time - by a woman (Frances Perkins, Secretary of Labor under Franklin D. Roosevelt, USA), and by the adoption of what is known as the Declaration of Philadelphia revising the aims and purposes of the ILO.

The external context was marked by the reorganization of employment in the period of transition from war to peace. Numbers of economically active women were increasing. They were forming and joining trade unions and professional associations.

The ILO approach to the issue was henceforth based on the Declaration of Philadelphia (Clause IIa): “All human beings, irrespective of race, creed or sex, have the right to pursue both their material well-being and their spiritual development in conditions for freedom and dignity, of economic security and equal opportunity.

The objective was solemnly redefined: to ensure to all, men and women alike, a just share in the fruits of progress, in terms of wages and earnings, hours and other conditions of work; to provide child welfare and maternity protection; to guarantee equality of educational and vocational opportunity.

The policies advocated involved eliminating discriminatory treatment of women in various parts of the world, bearing in mind the specific problems arising from developments in industrial, economic and social conditions; organizing the redistribution of women workers in the post-war economy on the principle of complete equality between men and women, on the basis of their individual merit, skill and experience; providing women with equal opportunities in education, training and employment; recognizing the principle of equal work/equal pay; protecting maternity and the health, safety and well-being of women.

The activities became more operational. Standards were more practical and specific, so that they could be more broadly applied. A programme of study was initiated on the situation of women in the post-war years. The first meetings of the Committee of Experts on Women’s Work were organized. A mission on women’s employment was sent to Asia and the Near East.

Significant documents:

1944

Conventions, recommendations and resolutions

Employment (transition from war to peace) recommendation (No. 71).

Declaration concerning the aims and purposes of the ILO (ILC, 26th session, Philadelphia).
1946

*Conventions, recommendations and resolutions*

- Resolution concerning discrimination (Conference of American States Members of the ILO, 3rd, Mexico).
- Resolution concerning the increase of wages in the textile industry and the application in this industry of the principle of equal remuneration for work of equal value (Textile Committee, 1st session, Brussels).

*War (The) and women's employment* (Studies and reports, new series, 1).

1947

*Conventions, recommendations and resolutions*

- Resolution concerning the employment of women and the protection of maternity (Preparatory Asian Regional Conference, New Delhi).

1948

*Conventions, recommendations and resolutions*

- Night work (women) convention. Rev. (No. 89).
- Resolution concerning maternity protection (Textile Committee, 2nd session)
- Resolution concerning equal remuneration for work of equal value (ILC, 31st session, San Francisco).

*Partial revision of the convention (No. 4) concerning employment of women during the night (1919) and of the convention (No. 41) concerning employment of women during the night (rev. 1934) (ILC, 31st session, San Francisco).*

*Report of the working of the Convention (No. 41) concerning employment of women during the night (rev. 1934) and of the convention (No. 4) concerning employment of women during the night (1919) (CIT, 31st session, San Francisco).*

*Substitution for the provisions of the convention (No. 41) concerning employment of women during the night (rev. 1934) ... contained in the schedule to the convention (No. 83) concerning the application of international labour standards to non-metropolitan territories (1947) of the corresponding provisions of the revising conventions now proposed (ILC, 31st session, San Francisco).*

**The years 1950-1974**

The years 1950-1974 were dominated by the internal historic events of the development of a strategy of social progress based on the World Employment Programme, which placed considerable importance on women's status, roles and problems; by the initiation of a programme of special measures for women in accordance with the provisions of the Discrimination Convention (No. 111) and by the establishment of a Discrimination Branch.
The external context was marked by the achievement of full employment in the industrialized countries for the first time since the industrial revolution; by rapid technological development; by the emergence of a new way of living and working and by the entry in force of women into the labour market, especially women, married or otherwise, with family responsibilities. The independence movement in the Third World drew attention to the situation of women in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

The ILO approach to the issue corresponded to a new perception of labour in general and women's labour in particular: the female workforce was increasingly considered as an important means of achieving economic and social development.

The objective was the full utilization of the female workforce as an efficiency factor in the utilization of human resources. The attainment of equal opportunity and equal remuneration for the male and female workforce became a priority.

The policies advocated corresponded to the need to take full advantage of the resources represented by female labour. They involved the adaptation of vocational training to technical development and the improvement of women's status and employment opportunities. They recommended the establishment of services for working mothers (crèches, nursery schools). As regards the Third World, the advocated improvement in the economic and social status of women, education and training, better conditions and status for women in rural areas.

Activities centred on technical and advisory assistance to the member States on questions of legislation and administration. A special programme was initiated in pursuance of the Discrimination Convention (No. 111), involving an important educational component, the preparation of model administrative statutes and regulations, the establishment of an information and documentation department on discrimination in employment. A seminar was held in Latin America (Lima) on the utilization of the female workforce. A survey was conducted in 7 Asian countries to identify the most urgent problem arising in respect of female labour. Experts and consultants met to discuss the employment of women in general and that of specific categories (nurses, domestic employees). The African Regional Conference included the problems of working women on its agenda. Studies were conducted on the situation of working women with family responsibilities, on equal pay, on part-time employment for women.

Significant documents:

1950

Conventions, recommendations and resolutions

Resolution concerning the protection of women and young persons (Asian Regional Conference, 2nd, Ceylon).

Resolution concerning maternity protection (Governing Body, 110th session, Mysore).

Equal remuneration for men and women workers for work of equal value (ILC, 33rd session, Geneva, report V).

1951

Conventions, recommendations and resolutions
Equal remuneration convention (No. 100).
Equal remuneration recommendation (No. 90).
Resolution concerning the employment of women and children in the construction industry (Building, Civil Engineering and Public Works Committee, 3rd session).

“Employment of married women and mothers of families.” International labour review, 63, June, pp. 677-697.

Equal remuneration for men and women workers for work of equal value (ILC, 34th session, report VII).

“Facilities for women workers with home responsibilities.” International labour review, 63, Mar., pp. 287-301.

1952

Conventions, recommendations and resolutions
Maternity protection convention. Rev. (No. 103).
Maternity protection recommendation. Rev. (No. 95).

Revision of the convention (No. 3) concerning maternity protection, 1919 (ILC, 35th session, Geneva, report VII).

“Vocational guidance and training for women.” International labour review, 66, Jul., pp. 56-76.

1953

Memorandum concerning women’s employment in the textile industry (Textile Committee, 4th session, Geneva).


1954

“Conditions of employment of women workers in Asia.” International labour review, 70, Dec., pp. 542-556.

Employment services for women in Latin America (Latin American Technical Meeting on Utilisation of Women’s Work, Lima).

Problems of labour legislation concerning women in Latin America (Latin American Technical Meeting on utilisation on Women’s Work, Lima).
Vocational guidance and training of women in Latin America (Latin American Technical Meeting on Utilisation of Women's Work, Lima).


1955

Conventions, recommendations and resolutions
- Resolution concerning employment of women with dependent young children (ILC, 38th session, Geneva).
- Resolution concerning the part-time employment of women and the employment of older women (ILC, 38th session, Geneva).


1956

Conventions, recommendations and resolutions
- Resolution concerning abolition of discrimination based on sex in the field of remuneration (ILC, 39th session, Geneva).


1957

*Discrimination in the field of employment and occupation* (ILC, 40th session, report VII).


1958

Conventions, recommendations and resolutions
- Discrimination (employment and occupation) convention (No. 111).
- Discrimination (employment and occupation) recommendation (No. 111).

Discrimination in the field of employment and occupation (ILC, 42nd session, Geneva, report IV).

Report to the governments of Ceylon, India, Indonesia, Japan, Pakistan, the Philippines and Thailand on conditions of women's work in seven Asian countries.


1959

Conventions, recommendations and resolutions
Resolution concerning the problems of women non-manual workers (Advisory Committee on Salaried Employees and Professional Workers, 5th session, Cologne).

Problems of women non-manual workers (Advisory Committee on Salaried Employees and Professional Workers, 5th session, Cologne, report II).

1960

Conventions, recommendations and resolutions
Resolution concerning the protection of female workers against ionising radiations
Resolution concerning the living and working conditions of women and young workers in Africa (African Regional Conference, 1st, Lagos).

“Living and working conditions of women in the USSR.” By N. Tatarinova and E. Korshunova. International labour review, 82, Oct., pp. 341-357.


1962

Conventions, recommendations and resolutions
Equality of treatment (social security) convention (No. 118).


Discrimination in employment and occupation (ILC, 47th session, Geneva).

“Discrimination in employment or occupation on the basis of marital status.” I-II. International labour review, 85, Mar.-Apr., pp. 262-282, 368-389.


1963

Conventions, recommendations and resolutions
Resolution on discrimination (Tripartite Technical Meeting for the Food Products and Drink Industries, Geneva).
Resolution on problems of the employment of women (Tripartite Technical Meeting for the Food Products and Drink Industries, Geneva).

1964

Conventions, recommendations and resolutions
Resolution concerning ILO action to advance the economic and social status of women in Africa countries (Committee on Women's Work).
Resolution concerning the economic and social advancement of women in developing countries (ILC, 48th session, Geneva).
Resolution concerning maternity protection (ILC, 48th session, Geneva).
Resolution concerning women workers in a changing world (ILC, 48th session, Geneva).
Resolution concerning the employment and conditions of work of women in African countries (Committee on Women's Work).
Resolution concerning the conditions of employment of domestic workers (African Regional Conference, 2nd, Addis Ababa).


1965

Conventions, recommendations and resolutions
Employment (women with family responsibilities) recommendation (No. 123).

1967

Equality in respect of employment under legislation and other national standards.

1968

Conventions, recommendations and resolutions
Resolution concerning the vocational preparation of girls and women (ILC, 52nd session, Geneva).
Resolution concerning the wages of women employed in the textile industry (Textiles Committee, 8th session, Geneva).

Fighting discrimination in employment and occupation; a workers' education manual.

1969

ILO (The) and women.

1970

Equality of opportunity in employment in Asia : problems and policies. Report and documents of a regional seminar.
"Some demographic aspects of female employment in Eastern Europe and the USSR."

Summary of ILO standards relating to women's employment.

Vocational (The) preparation of girls and women.

1972

Conventions, recommendations and resolutions
Resolution concerning women workers (ILC, 57th session, Geneva).

1973

*Women workers in a changing world; preliminary report.*

1974


*Report and documents of a regional seminar on equality of opportunity in employment in the American region : problems and policies.*

*Report of the Panel of Consultants on the Problems of Women Workers.*

**The years 1975-1985**

The 1975-1985 period was dominated by such internal historic events as the appointment of a woman (Antoinette Béguin) to the post of ILO Deputy Director-General in charge of a new department for the promotion of equality; the establishment of the Office for Women Workers Questions; the nomination of women to chair the ILC (Anna-Greta Leijon, Minister of Labour, Sweden, 71st Session), the government group on the Governing Body (209th Session), the 3 most important ILC committees (66th Session): Structure, Application of Conventions, Health and Safety.

The external context was marked, in the industrialized countries, by the acceleration of technical change, the emergence of unemployment, the rapid increase in the number of economically active women compared with that of men. In the developing countries, women were supporting almost one-third of all families; unemployment was on the increase. In this period, a veritable revolution took place in
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collective consciousness with regard to women at work, led and supported by the International Year of the Woman; the United Nations Decade of the Woman; the international conferences in Mexico City, Copenhagen and Nairobi.

The ILO approach to the issue was in keeping with the universal debate on women's multiple roles, their place and functions in society, their needs and difficulties. The question of women was increasingly taken into consideration in the broader context of the future of the economy and society. From this point of view, the 1975-1985 period can well be seen as the decade of the woman.

The objective was the full and entire integration of women in the development process, at all levels and in all aspects.

The policies advocated involved incorporation of the problems of working women in the global effort to improve conditions for all workers; application of the principle of equality, including equality in respect of the right to work; detection and elimination of discriminatory practices on the labour market; improvements in social infrastructures; incorporation of women's employment into national development policies; development of new systems to provide training for women in rural areas; increased participation of women in the utilization of human resources.

Activities increased in number and variety, many of them conducted in collaboration with other international organizations within the context of the United Nations Decade for the Promotion of Women. They placed a new importance on assistance to women, by supporting grass-roots associations and co-operatives. They included collection of information and the economic and social situation of women throughout the world: studies and surveys on vocational training for women and income-generating activities, on new technologies and women's employment, the employment of women in highly skilled jobs, the integration of migrant women into economic and social life; pilot projects for the training and employment of women in rural areas and for the formation of their own organizations; programmes to promote creativity among female heads of firms in the urban informal sector, to help women to organize themselves; the initiation of a special training programme; research on population trends and the role of women in developing countries, on the economic and social role of women in low-income countries, on vocational training policies; working groups, symposia, regional and inter-regional seminars; inauguration of regional training centres.

Significant documents:

1975

Conventions, recommendations and resolutions

Resolution concerning a plan of action with a view to promoting equality of opportunity and treatment for women workers (ILC, 60th session, Geneva).

Resolution concerning equal status and equal opportunity for women and men in occupation and employment (ILC, 60th session, Geneva).

Declaration on equality of opportunity and treatment for women workers (ILC, 60th session, Geneva).
Equal remuneration (ILC, 60th session, report III, 4B).

Equality of opportunity and treatment for women in the ILO. By E. Hopkins and A. Korten.

Equality of opportunity and treatment for women workers (ILC, 60th session, Geneva, report VIII).


Plan of action with a view to promoting equality of opportunity and treatment for women workers (ILC, 60th session, Geneva).

Social security issues affecting women. By M. Grounin (Committee of Social Security Experts).


Traditional division of work between the sexes, a source of inequality. By E. Boserup, M. Chinery-Hesse and S. Farman-Farmaian (IIES).

Women and social security in Latin America (Committee of Social Security Experts, Geneva).


1976


Female labour supply in an urbanizing economy. By G. Standing (World Employment Programme. 2-21/WP 44).

Major trends in ILO activities for women workers.

Policies and practices related to working conditions and the working environment... (Inter-American Advisory Committee, 5th session, Quito).

Research symposium on women and decision-making: a social policy priority; a synthesis report. By F. Latour Veiga-Pinto (IIES).


Women workers and society: an international perspectives.
1977

Activities of the ILO which help to promote the participation and integration of African women in development.


Evaluation of progress made in implementing the principle of equality of opportunity and treatment for women: data to be collected.

General survey of the reports relating to equality of treatment (social security) (ILC, 63rd session, report III 4B).

Impact (The) of the recent economic slowdown on the employment opportunities of women (World Employment Programme 2-32/WP.4).

Improving ways of skill acquisition of women for rural employment in some African countries (World Employment Programme 2-18/WP.28).

1978

Conventions, recommendations and resolutions

Resolution concerning mothers employed in the textiles industry (Textiles Committee, 10th, Geneva).


Employment of women with family responsibilities. Summary of reports on recommendation No. 123 (article 19 of the constitution) (ILC, 64th session, Geneva, report III, 2).

General survey of the reports relating to the employment of women with family responsibilities (64th session, Geneva, report III 4B).

Participation of women in economic activities and their working conditions in African countries; statistical analysis.

Women and industrial relations; framework paper and analysis of the discussions of an international symposium. Par D. Gaudart and R.M. Greve (IILS, research series, 54).

1979

Conventions, recommendations and resolutions

Resolution concerning conditions of work, vocational training and employment of women (Conference of American States Members of the ILO, 11th, Medellin).
Activities of the ILO of interest to women workers in Europe, 1975-1980.

Conditions of work, vocational training and employment of women (Conference of American States Members of the ILO, 11th, Medellin, report III).

Increasing ILO technical cooperation activities on behalf of women workers in developing countries: briefing memorandum.

Technological change and rural women: a conceptual analysis. By A. Bhaduri (World Employment Programme 2-22 WP 46).

1980

Conventions, recommendations and resolutions
Resolution concerning working mothers employed in the clothing industry (Tripartite Technical Meeting for the Clothing Industry, 2nd, Geneva).

Diversification of women's employment: a fallacy or a real step forward? Analysis of the situation in selected industrial market economy countries.


Equality of treatment between men and women in employment: changes in the legislation in selected Western European countries.


Problems of women non-manual workers: work organisation, vocational training, equality of treatment at the workplace, job opportunities (Advisory Committee on Salaried Employees and Professional Workers, 8th session, Geneva, report III).

Report on mission to Copenhagen World Conference of the UN Decade for Women: questions relating to training.

Rural women: unequal partners in development. By M.F. Loufty.

Selected standards and policy statements of special interest to women workers adopted under the auspices of the International Labour Office.

Sex discrimination and sex segregation in urban labour markets of the Third World: institutional and familial consideration; case studies.


Training of women for entry into non-traditional occupations. By A.G. Mitchell.

"Women and work after Copenhagen." Women at work, (2).

Women's participation in the economic and social activities in the USSR and European socialist countries; statistical analysis.


Working women in Asia today. Par K. Ahooja-Patel.

1981

Conventions, recommendations and resolutions
Workers with family responsibilities convention (No. 156).
Workers with family responsibilities recommendation (No. 165).
Resolution concerning participation of women in ILO meeting (ILC, 67th session, Geneva).

Conceptual framework for the analysis of the effects of technological change on rural women (World Employment Programme WP.81).

"Diversifying women's employment : the only road to genuine equality of opportunity." By M. Janjic. International labour review, 120, Mar.-Apr., pp. 149-164.


Equality of treatment between men and women in employment : changes in the legislation in Australia, Canada, United States, Japan and New Zealand.

Field guide to research on seven roles of women: focused biographies. By C. Oppong and K. Church.


Problems of women non-manual workers : work organisation, vocational training, equality of treatment at the workplace, job opportunities (Advisory Committee on Salaried Employees and Professional Workers, 8th session, Geneva, report III).

Proposed strategy for coordinating vocational training of women. By M. Holch.

Research on women's roles and demographic change: survey questionnaires for households, women, men, and communities with background explanations. By R. Anker.

Rural development and women in Asia: proceedings and conclusions of the ILO Tripartite Asian Regional Seminar.
Situation of young women migrants of the second generation in Europe. Par L. J. Limage.

Survey of changes in legislation of European socialist countries members of CMEA related to women's labour, 1976-80.

Women at the youth training centres: a study of the achievements and problems in the provisions of practical skills training for urban women. By R. Eyben.


1982


Participation of women in training programmes in Asia and the Pacific (OIT-ARTEP).


Report of the International Labour Organisation on its activities of special interest to women.

Rural women workers in Asia: development strategies and action at the local, national and international levels; report of a workshop, Turin.


Women and development: the sexual division of labor in rural societies. By L. Beneria. (New York, Praeger.)

"Women workers and maternity: some examples from Western Europe." By C. Paoli. International labour review, 121, Jan.-Feb., pp. 1-16.


1983

Another development with women. By K. Ahooja-Patel.

Conclusions and recommendations of the ILO/UNITAR seminar on women, work and demographic issues.

Female labour force activity in developing countries: a critique of current data collection techniques. By R. Anker.


Impact of new technology on women in employment: some key issues. By M. Janjic.
Impact on women of technical co-operation activities. By M. Janjic.

Microelectronics and office jobs: the impact of the chip on women's employment.
  By D. Wernecke.

Proceedings and working papers of the workshop on management of welfare facilities for women workers in Asia and the Pacific.

Promotion of employment and incomes for the rural poor, including rural women, through non-farm activities (Advisory Committee on Rural Development, 10th session, Geneva, report II).

Raising women's incomes in developing countries. By A.G. Mitchell.

Regional high-level consultation on women workers (ILO-ARTEP).


Rural labour markets and employment policies: issues relating to labour utilisation, remuneration and the position of women (Advisory Committee on Rural Development, 10th session, Geneva, report III).


Training and retraining of men and women workers in the metal trades, with special reference to technological changes (Metal Trades Committee, 11th session, Geneva, report III).

"Women and working conditions: prospects for improvement?" By M.-C. Séguret.
  International labour review, 122, May-June, pp. 295-311.

1984


Identification of successful projects for improving the employment conditions of rural women: summaries of case studies. By S. Mutemba.

Improved village technology for women's activities; a manual for West Africa.

Labour situation of the women in Latin America. By R. Echeverria.


Rural development and women in Africa.

Rural women, their conditions of work and struggle to organise. By Z.M. Ahmad.


Work and training opportunities for women in Asia and the Pacific. By L. Lazo.

1985

Conventions, recommendations and resolutions

Resolution on equal opportunities and equal treatment for men and women in employment (ILC, 71st session, Geneva).

Draft guide of practice for equal opportunity and treatment in employment.

Equal opportunities and equal treatment for men and women in employment (ILC, 71st session, Geneva, report VII).

Growth and adjustment in Asia: issues of employment, productivity, migration and women workers. Report of the Director-General (Asian Regional Conference, 10th, Jakarta).


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The years 1986-1994

The years 1986-1994 were dominated by such internal historic events as the appointment of a woman (Mary Chinery-Hesse, Ghana) to the post of Deputy Director-General, in charge of the technical co-operation sector and external programmes; the elaboration of a Plan of Action on Equality of Opportunity and Treatment - a significant milestone in the uninterrupted sequence of measures to promote equality - and the implementation of the prospective action strategies for the promotion of women, as defined by the Nairobi International Conference, called to evaluate and examine the results of the United Nations Decade for the promotion of women; the appointment of a Special Adviser on women workers questions; and the creation of an Action group on equality at the ILO.

The external context was marked, on one hand, by economic crisis, industrial restructuring and escalating unemployment in the industrialized countries; by the negative effects of debt and structural adjustment programmes on women’s employment, earnings and living conditions in the Third World and, on the other hand, by the process of economic globalization and liberalization. These trends have influenced the employment, earnings and living conditions of women who were particularly exposed to unemployment, precarious situations, reduced career prospects, downgrading to ‘informal activities’, diminished social protection, economic exploitation.

The ILO approach to the issue took its inspiration from the Nairobi prospective strategies: women have the right to full integration in the development process, both as participants and as beneficiaries. They must be able to make their contribution to development and have a just share in its fruits; they are an integral part of the labour force; they should be accorded particular attention because, without their contribution, the major objectives of development will not be attained.

Objectives were clearly redefined along Nairobi line: to promote genuine equality between men and women, to improve working conditions for women, to increase women workers’ participation in decision-making.
The development of the women's question at the ILO, 1919-1994

The policies advocated involved the incorporation of women's concerns into all areas of economic development rather than dealing with them through minor, specific, short-term projects. They pressed for women's participation in economic and social structures, at decision-making, management and technical level; the provision of employment opportunities for women on an equal basis with men, regardless of economic growth rate or labour market situation; better working conditions for women in the informal, agriculture and service sectors; increased social security. They recommended, in particular, the application of the resolution on equality of opportunity and treatment as a means of obtaining concrete results in the field of equality; assistance to women's organizations; better access for women to training and employment.

Activities underwent appreciable modifications in accordance with the Plan of Action on Equality; the entire programme for workers was revised to include the problems of women workers at all levels of project planning and implementation. Activities were co-ordinated in all technical departments and intensified in the regions. They reflected the concern to help governments and employers' and workers' organizations to devise such policies as would improve women's status, employment and living conditions and establish complete equality between men and women. They represented the ILO contribution to the implementation of the Nairobi prospective action strategies for the promotion of women in respect of equality of opportunity and treatment for men and women. They were included in all programmes (standard-setting, advisory services, research, technical co-operation, labour education...). They involved advisory missions on the implementation of the resolution of equality between men and women; projects concerning homeworkers, women and technical occupations in Africa; aid projects on vocational training for women, on the improvement of their employment and training opportunities, on their access to income-generating activities, on the intensification of the productive activities of women in rural areas; the updating of the world study on women's role in development; surveys on the effects of structural adjustment on the situation of women, on women's rights to own land, on women's role in reafforestation, on women's economic activities, their role in the creation of small enterprises, their situation in the informal sector, programmes on self-employment for female heads of families, the effects of national laws and regulations on the living and working conditions on women in Latin America; technical workshops for women; tripartite regional and interregional symposia and seminars on the promotion of equality; the second stage of a regional project for female members of rural workers organizations; a series of national studies on women workers. A two-year Inter-departmental Project on Equality for Women in Employment was launched, culminating in an International Forum on Equality for Women in the World of Work which was held on the issue of women workers in a changing environment.
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Conclusion

This chronological analysis, drawn up on the basis of external context, internal historic events and a selection of significant documents, shows the evolution of the ILO approach, objectives, policies and activities concerning women from 1919 to the present day.

It gives rise to the following observations:

♦ As regards its approach to the issue, the ILO addressed the women's question at a time when there were two conflicting points of view. The first, that of the advocates of special protective legislation in respect of women, provoked intense opposition, even among certain major women's organizations, where it was feared that such an approach would further weaken the already unfavourable position of women in the labour market. The second realized the need for special protection for women but limited it to the specifically female aspect of maternity and to certain success, industries or jobs that might constitute a threat to their fertility. Since 1928, the ILO has subscribed to this second view.

The ILO has developed its approach in accordance with the ideas prevailing in the various periods and in line with advances in economic and social development, working conditions in general and improvements in the status of women.

♦ As regards objectives, the ILO has pursued two since 1919: the first is the protection of the role and maternal function of women; the second is the promotion of equality of opportunity and treatment for women, in accordance with changing needs of industrial societies.

These two objectives have been constant over the six periods covered.

♦ As regards policies and the activities to which they have given rise, the ILO has, since 1919, incorporated women's problems and needs within its general policy of improving the condition of all workers, male and female, without distinction. It
treats them separately only when they arise from conditions and needs peculiar to different countries or from specifically female situations, such as pregnancy and maternity. The reversal of economic trends that has so decisively marked the external context since the latter half of the eighties and its effect on women’s status, jobs and lives, do not appear to any great extent to have influenced the policies advocated or the activities conducted, nor have they been the subject of global studies.

The policies advocated have been, first and foremost, restrictive, protective (standards, laws and regulations, recommendation). Unlike the approach, which has developed in line with the ideas prevailing in various periods, they are very much in advance of the standards applying in most countries. They have become progressively more practical.

The activities in favour of women – standard-setting, legislative, educational, advisory, technical assistance and co-operation, promotion of equality – have usually been incorporated within the general activities concerning all workers, male and female, and represent only a small proportion of its total effort.

Moreover, while specific milestones make it possible to trace its course, it is difficult to isolate the women’s question from the all the various standard-setting, conceptual and practical work of the ILO, in order to evaluate it. However, the number of Member States that have ratified the relevant Conventions and Recommendations provide an indication of the progress made in protective legislation in respect of women since 1919. The continuity of activities to promote equality proves that the Organization - with its tripartite partners: governments, employers, trade unions - has contributed greatly to the general recognition of this principle. On the other hand, the situation of women throughout the world, while it has considerably improved, suggests that the standards and principles, even if generally admitted, are still insufficiently applied.


Employment deprivation and poverty: The ways in which poverty is emerging in the course of economic reform in Russia, by N. Tchernina. No. 60. 1993. ISBN 92-9014-545-5.


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