

»» Gender equality in the world of work: still plenty to do, despite progress!

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From a social, political and economic perspective, women and girls are still discriminated compared to men and boys in almost every society. While there have been improvements in some areas, e.g. gender gaps in primary and secondary education have decreased significantly, the world is still miles away from gender equality. However, the economic participation of women is a prerequisite for sustainable development. Experts agree that there are rarely objective reasons for the discrimination of women; it is rather primarily traditional gender roles and power relations that are instrumental. The discrimination of women in the world of work is particularly apparent, both in the case of paid and especially unpaid work.

Lower salary for the same work

Studies show that women

- earn roughly 24% less than men worldwide; in Latin America, top female managers earn only 53% of the salary of their male colleagues.
- are overrepresented in poorly paid jobs (especially paid care work, 83% of which is carried out by women).
- are mainly employed at lower levels of the job hierarchy, despite having the same education and experience.
- are less likely to set up or lead companies (in Africa some 40% of companies have no female managers, while in Latin America it is around 55%).

Part of these discrepancies can be traced back to "objective" factors such as wage differences between sectors of industry, working-hour models, professional experience and level of education (yet these are often just the result of social discrimination, too).

That said, even if these structural factors are removed from the statistics, a significant part of the wage difference can only be interpreted as economic gender discrimination. What is more, many studies demonstrate that female business owners have poorer access to financial resources, benefit less from networking effects, and are even subject to certain legislative limitations on how they carry out their business in some cases. Economic and social discrimination are mutually reinforcing: wage differences for example also impact decision-making powers in the household and the perpetuation of traditional role patterns. Consequently, women reach management positions more rarely or work more often in low-wage industries.

Additional burden from unpaid work hampers personal and professional development

Women carry out the majority of unpaid work (chiefly household work and caring) for their families but also for their communities. As a consequence, they have less time than men for their own personal development. In developing countries the discrepancy is particularly high, with men spending 30% more time on social life and leisure than women. If women have to give priority to unpaid work their professional development is hampered their opportunities and options limited.

Valuing unpaid work is an economic and social challenge

How unpaid work (that is largely carried out by women) can be valued more is the topic of global discussion. Among the solutions discussed are a valuation of unpaid work in real or theoretical terms, a transformation shift to paid work in real or at least theoretical terms (e.g. with compensation payments), or the introduction of unconditional basic

incomes. But including unpaid work as a component of gross domestic product (GDP) and a measure of economic output can also encourage a re-think: for example, in India, unpaid work is estimated at 39% of GDP, and 15% in South Africa.

Changes in social norms are the key to gender equality ... and achievable!

Ultimately, prevailing social norms are instrumental in the recognition and realisation of equal gender potential in the world of work. Changing them is a difficult and lengthy task, but not impossible. The social, political and economic role of women has fundamentally improved in many economically advanced countries in recent decades (notwithstanding the persistent deficits). This process is slowly getting under way in many developing countries, too, starting with the better-educated middle classes. International development cooperation can help accelerate this change through measures related to political dialogue and empowerment, but also by adopting a gender-sensitive focus for development measures. ■

Literature:

UNDP. 2015. Human Development Report 2015: *Work for Human Development*.