

# A QUANTUM LEAP FOR GENDER EQUALITY

For a Better Future  
of Work For All



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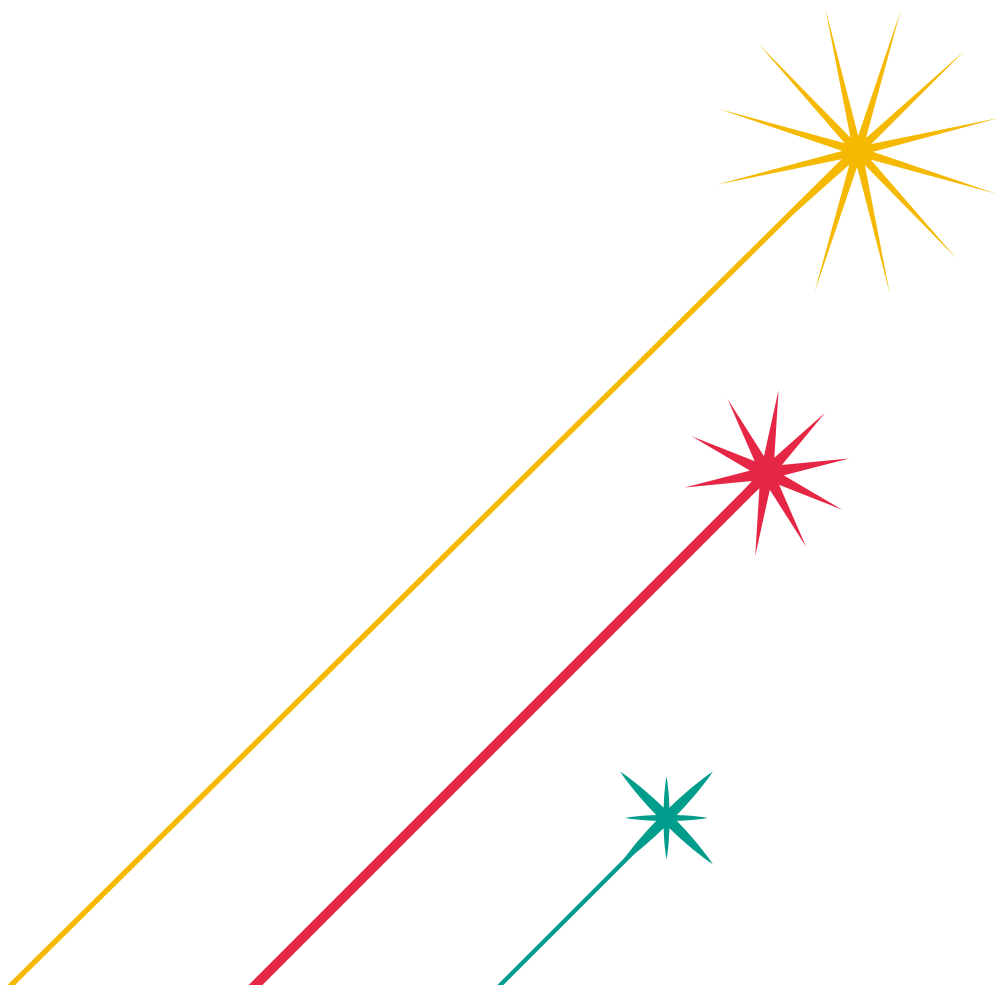
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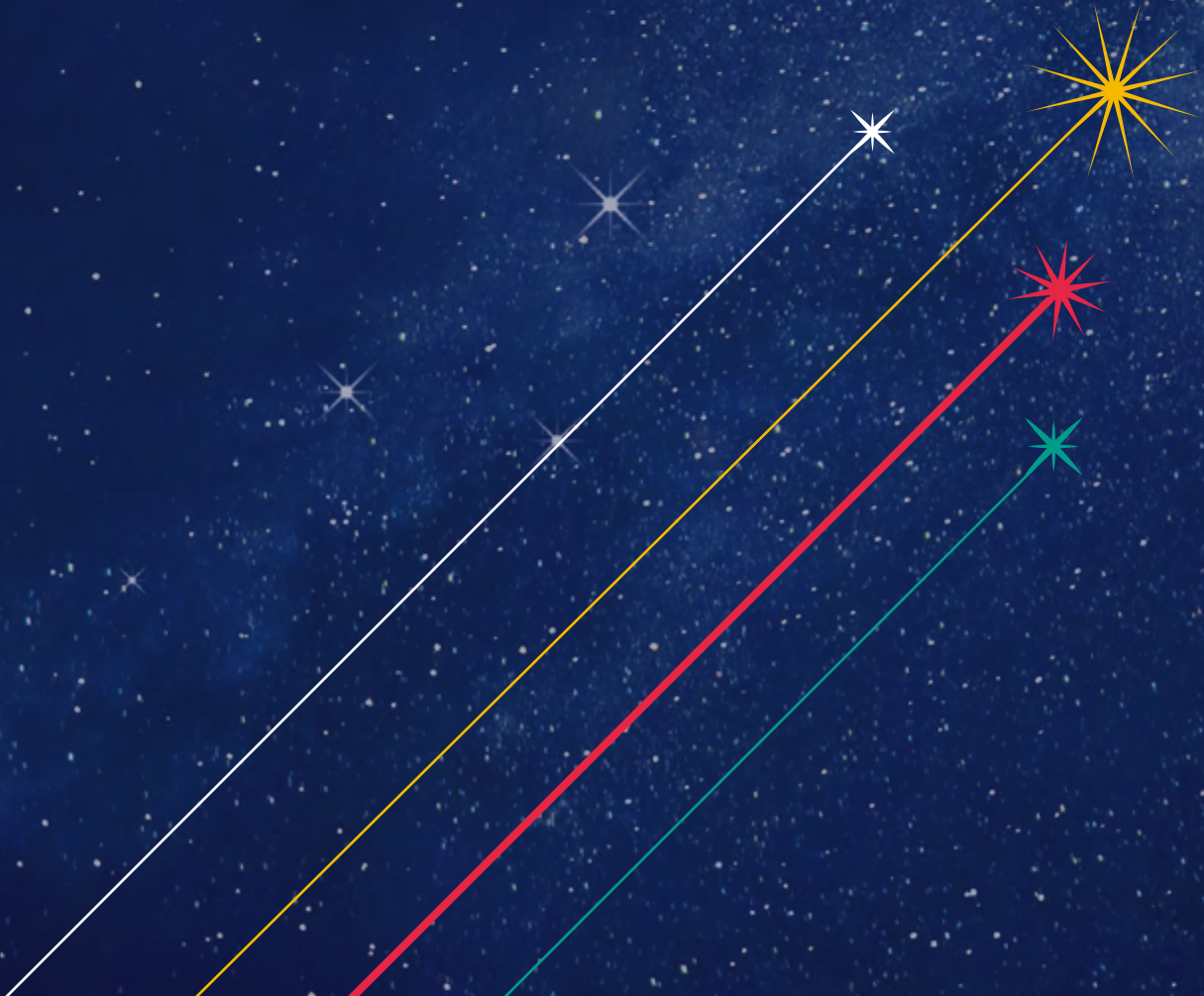
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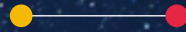
**“THE WORLD OF THE  
FUTURE IS IN OUR MAKING.  
TOMORROW IS NOW.”**

**ELEANOR ROOSEVELT**





# PREFACE



In 2013, we embarked on the Women at Work Centenary Initiative, with the support and guidance of the ILO Director-General. This “culmination report” brings together the research and data undertaken and the learning and insights gained in the context of the Initiative. All the findings of the Initiative indicate that, while there are many paths to addressing gender equality in the world of work, they must ultimately all unite to reinforce each other. Reaching this significant point in the journey is both rewarding and humbling. It is rewarding since today we know much more about the gender gaps in the world of work and what fuels them. We wanted to better understand why progress for women in the world of work was so slow and what could be done to accelerate it, and we have learned a considerable amount in this respect. We know more about what women want in the world of work, and why they are not getting it, through listening to their voices. With what we know now, the often heard excuse that women do not want to work or do not find work meaningful is no longer credible, and no longer acceptable anywhere.

Women want to work at paid jobs. But it is the unpaid part of their work that essentially holds them back. Looking at the various gender gaps and the range of obstacles, the road consistently comes back to care. Social norms reinforce the roles of women as caregivers, men as breadwinners. Care needs must be addressed in an intentional and meaningful way – for both women and men – through laws, policies and services. The implications of the unequal distribution of unpaid care work are far-reaching: women are more vulnerable to violence and harassment at work, to low and unequal pay, to lack of voice and representation. The current imbalance also means that men work long hours for pay and miss out on family life. A transformative and measurable agenda for gender equality and the future of work must take these factors into account. Whether women work in the fields, the boardroom or through digital platforms, whether they are own account workers or managers, the care and paid work conundrum needs to be addressed. Otherwise the future of work for women will simply replicate the past.

This stage of the Initiative is also humbling, since it is clear that mindsets still need to change and there is a long way to go in this regard. The journey is far from over. What comes into sharp focus, however, is that it is no longer possible for governments, workers and employers or international organizations to claim that they are advancing gender equality in the absence of a proactive and courageous agenda and unwavering political will. Transformation will not happen organically or by tentative and disjointed steps. Choices need to be made now, and they may not always be popular ones, to ensure a better future of work for all.

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