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Global Wage Report 2018/19

What lies behind gender pay gaps



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International Labour Organization

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Preface

Gender pay gaps represent one of today's greatest social injustices, and I am glad to see that eradicating this injustice has taken on significant momentum in recent times. Central to this effort is Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target 8.5 which calls, among other things, for equal pay for work of equal value within the framework of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. To reinforce the achievement of SDG target 8.5, the ILO, together with UN Women and the OECD, established the Equal Pay International Coalition (EPIC), an initiative to accelerate the closing of the gender pay gap across the world. The success of our efforts is crucial because inequalities within and among countries, including wage inequality, continue to be a significant obstacle to achieving a better and more sustainable future for all.

This year's ILO *Global Wage Report* – the sixth of its series – therefore provides a detailed examination of gender pay inequalities so as to better understand the gender pay gap as a form of unacceptable inequality in the world of work. The report further continues the tradition of previous editions by providing comparative data and information on recent global and regional wage trends. It shows that global wage growth in 2017 was not only lower than in 2016, but fell to its lowest growth rate since 2008, remaining far below the levels observed before the global financial crisis. This remains something of a puzzle given the recent recovery in economic growth and the gradual reduction in unemployment in major countries around the world. And although possible explanations have been offered to solve that puzzle – slow productivity growth and the intensification of global competition, among others – what is now widely recognized is that slow wage growth has become an obstacle to achieving sustainable economic growth. The growing consensus is that improving wages, reducing income inequalities and promoting decent work opportunities continue to be challenges that play a central role if we are to succeed in achieving the UN 2030 Agenda.

The second part of this year's report is devoted to the gender pay gap. Much has been written on the topic and a huge amount of research is aimed at explaining the reasons why men continue to be paid more than women across the world. So why another report? First, this report provides a critical assessment of the standard measures commonly used to estimate gender pay gaps. That assessment leads to a proposal for a new, complementary and simple way of measuring gender pay gaps that we hope will be a useful tool for the purposes of policy-making and for monitoring the evolution of the gender pay gap. Accordingly, the estimates in Part II, which cover some 70 countries and about 80 per cent of wage employees worldwide, show that on average women currently continue to be paid approximately 20 per cent less than men. Second, the report analyses and breaks down gender pay gaps to better understand what lies behind this figure. The evidence shows that, in fact, much of the gender pay gap cannot be explained by any of the

objective labour market characteristics that usually underlie the determination of wages. In high-income countries, for example, almost all of the gender pay gap remains unexplained.

So what could then be the factors that lie behind gender pay gaps? The report shows that education is not, in most countries, the main issue: women wage employees across the world have just as good – if not better – educational attainments than men. However, occupational segregation and the polarization by gender of industries and economic sectors stand out as key factors. Women continue to be under-represented in traditionally male-occupied categories and within similar categories women are consistently paid below men, even if women's educational attainments are just as good or better than those of men in similar occupations. Gender polarization is also an important factor: the report shows that in Europe, for example, working in an enterprise with a predominantly female workforce can bring about a 14.7 per cent wage penalty compared to working in an enterprise with similar productivity attributes but a different gender mix. This 14.7 per cent gap can translate into a loss of about €3,500 (approximately US\$4,000) in salary per year for those who work in feminized sectors. Finally, the report shows that motherhood brings about a wage penalty that can persist across a woman's working life while the status of fatherhood is persistently associated with a wage premium.

Part III of the report suggests a number of policy measures to achieve pay parity between women and men. It is my hope that together with the empirical evidence presented earlier in the report, Part III will provide policy-makers, social partners, academics and key stakeholders with a valuable source of information to contribute to eradicating pay inequalities across the world.



Guy Ryder
ILO Director-General

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