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International
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Towards a better future for women and work: Voices of women and men



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ISBN
English edition

978-92-2-128961-6 (print)
978-92-2-128962-3 (web PDF)

Acknowledgments

The report is the result of collaboration, in the context of the ILO Women at Work Centenary Initiative, between the Gender, Equality and Diversity (GED) Branch of the Conditions of Work and Equality Department (WORKQUALITY) and Gallup, under the overall supervision of Shauna Olney and Susan Maybud for the ILO and Jon Clifton, Andrew Rzepa and Faith Gaines for Gallup.

Neli Esipova was the research lead for this ILO-Gallup project. Esipova and Cynthia English led the qualitative research and survey questionnaire development. Dato Tsubutashvili undertook extensive data analysis. The report was co-authored by Julie Ray, Esipova and Anita Pugliese from Gallup, with valuable content and insights provided by Maybud from the ILO.

The two organizations offer their appreciation to the external members of the Technical Advisory Group of the ILO-Gallup project for their assistance in identifying the conceptual areas for designing the additional questions for the Gallup World Poll: Ronnie Goldberg (United States Council for International Business), Barbara Byers (Canadian Labour Congress), Julia Fäldt (Nordic Council of Ministers), Colleen Sheppard (McGill University) and Ruti Levtoy (Promundo).

The team wishes to acknowledge the comments and contributions from a number of colleagues at ILO Headquarters: Deborah Greenfield (Deputy Director-General for Policy); Manuela Tomei (WORKQUALITY); Audrey Esposito and James Howard (CABINET); Vera Guseva (Bureau for Workers' Activities); Jae-Hee Chang (Bureau for Employers' Activities); Sangheon Lee, Steven Tobin, Stefan Kühn, Richard Horne and Santo Milasi (RESEARCH); Kieran Walsh (STATISTICS); and Sara Elder (EMPLOYMENT).

We would like to express our gratitude for the significant feedback and inputs from GED Senior Gender Specialists in ILO field offices: Emanuela Pozzan (ILO Beirut); Maria José Chamorro (ILO San José); Joni Simpson (ILO Bangkok); Fatime-Christian Ndiaye (ILO Dakar); and Mwila Chigaga (ILO Pretoria).

Our gratitude is extended to those who coordinated the editing and publication at Gallup: Jennifer Carpino, who prepared the initial graphs; Trista Kunce and Kirsten Adams, who edited the report; and Ashley Faubel and Trish Doebel for the design.

Regarding the coordination of the launch of the report and related advocacy activities, special thanks to the ILO Department of Communication and Public Information (DCOMM), notably Adam Bowers, Moyette Gibbons, Sandra Kuchen, Jean-Luc Martinage, Kiran Mehra-Kerpelman, Martin Murphy, Karen Naets-Sekiguchi, Francesca Pezzola, Damien Riunaud, Hans von Rohland, Rosalind Yarde and their Field Communications Officers, as well as the ILO Washington, DC's entire team. Further thanks are extended to Gallup's Johnathan Tozer, Jennifer Donegan and Stephanie Holgado for their efforts at Gallup's global headquarters.

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Preface

Despite the considerable progress that has been made towards achieving gender equality in the world of work, certain constraints seem to be preventing it from accelerating. Consequently, as the ILO approaches its second century, we launched the Women at Work Centenary Initiative to take stock of the status and conditions of women and to identify innovative, effective actions that promote full and lasting gender equality and non-discrimination in the world of work.

However, to go beyond "business as usual," it is necessary to better understand why progress on delivering decent work for women has been so slow globally and far less than anticipated to date. A key building block, the perceptions and attitudes of women and men towards women and their work – whether unpaid at home or paid in the labour market – was missing. This ILO-Gallup project was borne out of the belief that we must listen first to identify what it will take to accelerate progress towards gender equality in the workplace. We approached Gallup to ask the world's women and men about their attitudes towards women's lives and work through the Gallup World Poll – and, in doing so, capture the human dimension that lies behind the statistics.

The results are not only revealing and informative but are also, in some cases, quite surprising. They are also timely because concerns regarding women's economic empowerment are reverberating around the world. The information in this report is directed towards a broad audience. We hope that the global data and analyses will be helpful in better navigating the complex path towards achieving gender equality in the world of work.

Together with labour statistics and other data, this information adds to the stock of knowledge the ILO can draw from as it provides policy guidance and technical support to governments and employers' and workers' organizations.

Our collective efforts take on even more significance in view of the sweeping new Sustainable Development Agenda the global community adopted with the ambition of transforming our world by 2030. Gender equality is at the centre of this global vision, and the world of work will be the main forum in which women's economic empowerment will be achieved.

We hope this report will serve as a catalyst for innovative action.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Guy Ryder". The signature is stylized with a large 'G' and 'R'.

Guy Ryder

Director-General

International Labour Organization
Geneva, Switzerland



The world needs to advance gender equality and empower women. Not just for the benefit of women, but for the benefit of all humankind.

Worldwide, productivity is slowing, which means human development is slowing. One solution to this incredibly depressing situation is to dramatically increase the number of women who have full and productive employment. And we need more women in management and leadership roles.

Gallup's global studies of tens of millions of workers, supervisors, managers and leaders find that men and women were born with equal talent to direct teams and lead organizations of any size. If anything, our research has discovered that women have slightly more management and leadership talent than men do. A recent Gallup study of women in the U.S. workplace found that teams led by women are more engaged at work, partly because women have more natural relationship-building talents. And female managers and employees are more engaged at work.

Our research also concludes that women have every bit as much game-changing talent as entrepreneurs and "builders" as do men. The problem is, millions of potential star women leaders are on the sidelines, and this isn't good for organizations, societies or countries. Failing to maximize women's talent to lead, manage and build stunts global economic growth and fails humankind.

Imagine if we woke up tomorrow morning and all organizations were led 50-50 by men and women. This would be a miracle that would honestly and suddenly save the world.

Gallup is thrilled to join with the ILO to help transform the way the world works. We love high mission, world-changing journeys. We thank Director-General Guy Ryder and his team for inspiring our ILO-Gallup joint effort.

Countries that fail to deliver on the hopes and dreams of women and men that Gallup and the ILO discovered through this project will fail to develop a booming economy and all the things that citizens want in a good life – which begins with a good job.

The world's productivity, as well as human development, will rise again, but only when we achieve gender parity in leadership.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jim Clifton". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending from the start of the name.

Jim Clifton
Chairman and CEO
Gallup
Washington, DC

Summary of key findings

ILO, in collaboration with Gallup, surveyed men and women in 2016 to understand their perceptions about women and work. The results, based on interviews with nearly 149,000 adults in 142 countries and territories, suggest that women might find support in their quest for productive employment and decent work coming from a rather unexpected source: men. Gender equality is still far from being achieved, and the findings show real divides still exist in many regions of the world. But it also appears men and women are not always as far apart in their attitudes as conventional wisdom might lead them – and governments and employers' and workers' organizations – to assume.

Worldwide, the majority of women would prefer to be working, and men agree.

A total of 70 per cent of women and a similar 66 per cent of men would prefer that women work at paid jobs. Each of these figures is more than double the percentages of those who would prefer women to stay at home.

This total notably includes a majority of women who are *not currently in the workforce*. But more importantly, this is true in almost all regions worldwide, including several regions where women's labour force participation is traditionally low, such as the Arab States.¹

Most men and women think it is acceptable for the women in their families to have paid jobs outside their home if they want one.

Majorities of women and men in *every region of the world* agree that work outside the home is acceptable for women in their families, although women are generally slightly more likely to feel this way than men are. Even in Northern Africa, where women's and men's attitudes are farthest apart, 79 per cent of women and 57 per cent of men believe work outside the home is acceptable.

Families play a significant role in shaping these attitudes. Among women in households in which it is not acceptable for women to work outside the home, 61 per cent say that they prefer to stay at home. Slightly more than one-third (36 per cent) would like to work at paid jobs.

Almost universally, men and women mention the “balance between work and family” as one of the top challenges that working women in their countries face.

In fact, people in the vast majority of countries mention “balance between work and family” as one of the top challenges facing women who work at paid jobs in their countries. With a few exceptions, women and men in most regions of the world identify the same top challenges for working women in their countries.

At the same time, women face different challenges in various parts of the world. Balancing work and family is the No. 1 challenge in developed and emerging economies, while unfair treatment at work is the most frequently mentioned concern in developing economies. Lack of affordable care for children and relatives is a bigger challenge in emerging and developing economies than it is in developed ones. And unequal pay tops the list only in developed economies.

¹ Throughout the report, “Arab States” refers to the Arab States and territories.

If a woman has similar education and experience to a man, women *and* men worldwide are most likely to say that she has the *same* opportunity to find a good job in the city or area where they live.

Women and men share similar views on women's employment. About four in ten believe women have the same opportunity to find a good job, while at least one in four believes women have either better or – on the other side of the spectrum – worse opportunities.

These attitudes vary, however, from region to region, largely based on women's educational attainment and their level of participation in the workforce. Worldwide, the more educated women are, the less likely they are to see better opportunities in the job market for women who are similarly qualified as men. Men's views do not change much with their education.

Worldwide, the majority of employed women say what they earn is at least a significant source of their household's income. More than one in four women say they provide the main income for their households, but men are still more likely to say they provide the main source of income.

This pattern holds in every part of the world except for Eastern Asia. In this sub-region, the majority of employed women (61 per cent) see their contribution as a small source of income, and only 35 per cent see their earnings contributing at least a significant amount to their household income.

In every region, however, the gender gap shrinks with education. The gap among employed women and men who say they make a small contribution to their household's income is also smaller among those with higher levels of education.

While the global trends suggest that women and men share some common ground in each of these areas, women face unique challenges in every region and every demographic. The following report will detail those challenges (as well as successes) and demonstrate through the data what work lies ahead and how daunting the task will be to bring more equality to the world of work.

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