



FOURTH ITEM ON THE AGENDA

**Outcome of the Special Session of the
General Assembly: *Women 2000 –
Gender equality, development and peace
for the twenty-first century***
(New York, 5-9 June 2000)**Contents**

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I. Special Session of the UN General Assembly

1. On 5-9 June 2000, 8,000 representatives of UN member States, UN agencies, international institutions and NGOs gathered in New York for the Special Session of the UN General Assembly: *Women 2000 – Gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century*, also known as Beijing +5. Some 77 per cent of the participants were women. Notably, 1,500 media representatives covered the event, as it provided an opportunity and space for a public assessment of the progress made and obstacles encountered in the implementation of the Platform for Action (PFA) agreed at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 and to identify further action and initiatives to achieve its full implementation.

1. The outcome

2. In statements, discussions and debates, participants testified that some progress had been made towards gender equality, though it remained patchy, uneven and far from sustained. Gender equality and women's rights have gained recognition and the discussion has deepened. Gender equality remains firmly in place on the international agenda and is part of most national political agendas. Since 1995, most of the governments represented at Beijing have drawn up plans to keep their commitment to fully implement the Platform for Action and, significantly, 64 countries have changed their legislation. But socio-cultural resistance, financial constraints and a refusal to give sufficient priority to women's advancement have prevented the achievement of most of the concrete targets set at the Beijing Conference.
3. In New York, new targets were set and existing ones reconfirmed. The General Assembly adopted by consensus a Political Declaration and an outcome document¹ entitled *Further actions and initiatives to implement the Beijing Platform for Action*. Some 199 forms of action were agreed, to be taken at the national and international levels by governments, the UN system and international and regional organizations, including international financial institutions, the private sector, non-governmental organizations and other actors in civil society. The most significant aspects for the ILO are discussed below.
4. With the adoption of the outcome document, governments and the international community reaffirmed their commitment to the Beijing Platform for Action and a common development agenda with gender equality as an underlying principle. But the biggest challenge remains how to go beyond the rhetoric and operationalize commitments for action. The outcome document recognizes that:
 - the efforts towards ensuring women's advancement need to combine a focus on women's conditions and basic needs with a holistic approach based on equal rights and partnerships, promotion and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms;
 - policies, programmes and budgetary processes should:

¹ Report of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole of the Twenty-third Special Session of the General Assembly. Official Records, Twenty-third Special Session, Supplement No. 3 (A/S-23/10/Rev.1) [<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/followup/as2310rev1.pdf>].

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- (i) adopt a gender perspective based on clear research-based knowledge of the situation of women and girls and sex disaggregated data;
 - (ii) be defined in terms of short- and long-term time-bound targets, with measurable goals;
 - (iii) include follow-up mechanisms to assess progress.

2. Consolidation of the 12 critical areas of the Platform for Action

5. In spite of attempts to unravel the Beijing consensus, the outcome document preserves the goals of the Beijing PFA and in several areas moves the global agenda on gender equality forward. These include health, the elimination of human rights violations, globalization and the economic empowerment of women.
6. The issues most widely covered in national reports were: violence against women, including trafficking in women and girls; reproductive, sexual and other health issues; the feminization of poverty; the role of men in gender equality; women's human rights; and women's lack of access to political and economic decision-making.

(a) Areas identified as requiring focused attention

7. Governments agreed to increase the attention they give to: education, social services and health, including sexual and reproductive health, particularly in respect of the HIV/AIDS pandemic; violence against women and girls; the persistent and increasing burden of poverty on women; natural disaster and environmental management; the development of strong, effective and accessible national machineries for the advancement of women; and the formulation of strategies to enable women and men to reconcile and equally share work and family responsibilities.
8. Women on the whole have become better educated and have entered the labour market in unprecedented numbers, but the gender divide still persists. Women earn less than men and are more often involved in informal and unpaid work. Furthermore, there has been no breakthrough in women's participation in decision-making processes and little progress in legislation in favour of women's rights to own land and other property.

(b) Target groups for specific actions

9. The outcome document recognizes the diversity of women's situations and conditions. Some women face particular barriers to their empowerment. The following groups have been identified as warranting specific action tailored to their situation:
 - older women;
 - adolescents and young women;
 - refugees, asylum seekers and displaced women;
 - indigenous women;
 - entrepreneurs and the self-employed;
 - migrant women;
 - rural women;

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- women with disabilities;
 - female heads of household.

(c) *Mainstreaming gender*

- 10.** The Special Session reaffirmed the importance of gender mainstreaming in all areas and at all levels. It also underscored the complementarity between mainstreaming and special targeted activities.

3. Emerging issues

- 11.** The focus of the negotiations was on issues that had gained importance since 1995. In addition to the dozen areas of concern in the Platform, participants proposed and agreed on new forms of action related to women's access to decision-making in peacekeeping processes, gender-sensitive approaches to HIV/AIDS and humanitarian crises, changing patterns of migratory flows, new technologies, violence against women – including trafficking and in armed conflict, and the realization of women's full enjoyment of economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights.

4. The challenges of globalization

- 12.** The outcome document emphasizes the gender dimension of the challenges posed by globalization. It stresses the gender effects of changing patterns of production, work and accelerated technological advances in information and communication, pointing out their uneven impacts on women. While globalization brought greater opportunities for some women, many others have been marginalized due to the deepening of inequalities between and within countries.
- 13.** The outcome document calls for measures to ensure that women reap the benefits rather than bear the burdens of globalization. They include analysing and designing policy responses to the major reasons why women and men are differently affected by job creation and retrenchment; ensuring equal access to social protection systems to provide safeguards against the uncertainties and changes in conditions of work; facilitating employment for women, through, inter alia, adequate social protection and access to risk capital.

5. Reference to the ILO

- 14.** In addition to the decisions already mentioned, the new agreed text includes a specific reference to the ILO. Among the forms of action to be taken at the national and international level by governments, regional and international organizations, including the UN system and international financial institutions and other actors, paragraph 94(b) of the outcome document states the following:

Respect, promote and realize the principles contained in the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work of the International Labour Organization and its Follow-up, and strongly consider ratification and full implementation of International Labour Organization Conventions which are particularly relevant to ensuring women's rights at work.

6. Partnerships and cooperation

- 15.** The outcome document encourages partnerships and cooperation between governments, the private sector, non-governmental organizations and other actors in civil society at all levels – international, regional, national and local – in order to strengthen coherence of action. It also recommends tighter inter-agency coordination and collaboration within the UN system and with other international institutions.
- 16.** The Special Session stressed the need for continued international cooperation to increase the flow of resources for the Platform's goals of gender equality, development and peace, in particular through reaffirmation and fulfilment of the internationally agreed target of 0.7 per cent of the gross national product of developed countries for overall official development assistance, support for the Cologne initiative for the reduction of debt and the 20/20 initiative. Emphasis was placed on the identification and implementation of development-oriented and durable solutions integrating a gender perspective into the external debt and debt-servicing problems of developing countries in order to help those countries finance development programmes and projects, including the advancement of women. International cooperation was specifically mentioned in the context of the fight against poverty and trafficking in women.
- 17.** Beijing +5 confirmed the effective involvement of NGOs in gender issues at the grass-roots level. Some 1,038 NGOs were represented in New York.

II. ILO participation in Beijing +5

- 18.** The ILO had a strong presence at Beijing +5, as the event was seen as a unique opportunity to reaffirm the Organization's commitment to achieving gender equality, development and peace. It also enabled ILO officials to share the Organization's strategic agenda and expertise in gender issues with its constituents and the international community at large.

1. The ILO delegation

- 19.** The Director-General appointed Ms. Jane Zhang, Director of the Bureau for Gender Equality, as his special representative to Beijing +5 to lead the ILO delegation and deliver an official statement to the Committee of the Whole. The Director-General recorded a message of congratulations to the Special Session of the UN General Assembly. Mr. Somavia called for a stronger political will, concerted efforts and partnerships at all levels to achieve the goal of equality between men and women. He stressed that the time had come to join forces and create an enabling environment in which men and women everywhere have access to decent work that provides security for them and for their families.
- 20.** The ILO delegation consisted of 17 staff members from headquarters, the regions, the Turin Centre and the New York Liaison Office. The participation of the delegation in the Beijing +5 events (plenary session, Committee of the Whole, special events, and the NGO forums) gave maximum visibility to the work of the ILO and offered each staff member the possibility to attend those events of particular relevance to his or her own work and functions. In addition, the ILO publications and information stand generated great interest among participants and gave rise to dialogue with ILO staff.

2. Special events

(a) Special events organized by the ILO

21. The ILO organized three panel discussions in which policy-makers, practitioners and researchers presented experience from different regions of the globe.
1. Decent work for women, prepared by the Bureau for Gender Equality
 22. Introduced and moderated by an expert from Latin America, the panellists presented some lessons learned on how to promote gender equality in four specific contexts: women workers' rights – experience from an ILO project in India; poverty, employment and social protection in the light of the situation in Arab countries; management development and entrepreneurship for women – ICT prospects in China; and gender in crisis response and reconstruction in countries affected by armed conflict, with examples drawn from Africa. The presentations pointed to the centrality of employment in ensuring a decent standard of living and to the necessity of tackling gender issues in a broad and integrated manner. Two documents prepared by the Bureau for Gender Equality were widely distributed: *Decent work for women – An ILO proposal to accelerate the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action*; and *Promoting decent work for women – Some lessons learned*.
 2. Women's empowerment and microfinance, organized by the ILO's Social Finance Unit and co-sponsored by UNIFEM and the Microcredit Summit campaign
 23. The panel discussion confirmed that socially oriented and sustainable microfinance programmes can contribute to the empowerment of women. The panellists from Bosnia and Herzegovina, the United States, Nigeria and Senegal identified three major types of obstacles to achieving gender equality: in the exercise of rights, in equal opportunities and in the formation of social organizations. Microfinance was perceived as a strategic instrument to overcome these obstacles. It was also highlighted that access to and control over microfinance is crucial for accelerating social change. The workshop recommended that the ILO continue and strengthen its work in this area.
 3. Galvanizing action – Decent work for older women, under the responsibility of the Gender Promotion Programme in conjunction with the UN Programme on Ageing
 24. For the panel on older women workers, the ILO Gender Promotion Programme prepared a background document and a leaflet on *Realizing decent work for older women workers*. The panellists from Sweden, South Africa, Nepal, Canada, and the ILO confirmed that the problems faced by older workers remain widely under-acknowledged and that it is necessary to raise awareness and galvanize action by encouraging international policy debate around key relevant issues. They concluded that the social partners should express more concern and carry out more research and analysis on these issues. Given the variation in the extent of the feminization of later life within and between regions, there should also be a greater exchange of information, experience, lessons learned and good practices from existing policies and programmes on promoting decent work for mid-life and older women.

(b) Other special events

25. The ILO delegation attended a number of special events organized by the UN, EU, governments and NGOs relevant to the ILO's areas of work. Some of them had a regional dimension (*Women's rights under privatization in Central and Eastern Europe; Database*

on the status of women in Africa); others were intended to present new publications and research reports (UNIFEM's *Biennial report on progress of the world's women*; the World Bank's *Engendering development*; and UNDP's *Overcoming women's poverty – Linking Beijing +5 and Copenhagen +5*). One ILO representative participated as a panellist in the panel organized by the ICFTU together with Public Services International (PSI) and the Friedrich-Ebert Foundation on *Organizing for equality, jobs and justice in the global economy*.

26. Ever-present concerns in the special events were the feminization of poverty, the empowerment of women and women's leadership. Among new issues discussed were: conflicts and peace, and women's access to new information and communication technologies (panels organized by UNDP, UNIFEM and Cisco Academy). In addition, the development of tools and indicators to measure progress, the collection of data disaggregated by sex and the maintenance of databases attracted growing interest. Special mention should be made of the Task Force of the Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality (IACWGE), which reviewed advances made in mainstreaming gender in programme and budgeting processes within the UN system. The ILO was presented as one of the two cases retained as examples of good practice.

3. Synergy with Copenhagen +5

27. During the Special Session of the General Assembly devoted to Copenhagen +5 (held in Geneva, 26 June-1 July 2000), the Bureau for Gender Equality organized a workshop entitled *From Beijing +5 to Copenhagen +5*. Various UN agencies were invited to join forces with the ILO to inform participants in Copenhagen +5 of the recommendations reached at Beijing +5 and highlight some topics of critical importance for the promotion of gender equality (human rights; education and training; new jobs and opportunities in ICT; AIDS; conflicts; poverty and employment). It underlined the connections between Beijing +5 and Copenhagen +5 and the importance of mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the area of sustainable human development.
28. An informal information session on Beijing +5 was also organized during the 88th Session (2000) of the International Labour Conference to share information with delegates.

III. Proposed framework for ILO follow-up

29. The Beijing +5 outcome document covers a large spectrum of issues and all levels of decision-making. The ILO should focus on its priorities and take action on the areas of overlap and intersection.
1. **Overall objective: Incorporation of gender equality concerns, in particular the relevant conclusions and initiatives of Beijing +5 and Copenhagen +5, throughout the process of operationalizing decent work**
30. The Director-General proposed the goal of decent work as the overriding priority and focus of the Organization's activities in the coming years. The notion of decent work is built on four pillars: workers' rights, in particular those embodied in the core labour standards; remunerative employment; social protection involving healthy and safe working conditions, as well as health, unemployment and pension coverage for all workers; and social dialogue. Only a minority of the world's workers currently enjoy the full benefits of decent work.

31. Decent work is a development paradigm with gender equality as an underlying principle. It refers to all kinds of work, including unpaid work, work carried out from home, part-time and informal sector work. Women are the predominant workers in these sectors. Currently those doing this sort of work are deprived of most of the attributes of decent work.

2. Gender equality and operationalizing decent work

32. Achieving decent work for all is not a task that the ILO can do on its own. It is a goal that can only be realized with the firm commitment and support of political leadership and concerted and joint efforts at the local, national and international levels. It is a project for all institutions and individuals committed to social justice and the improvement of the living standards of working people throughout the world.

33. Decent work is an integrative concept which places the four ILO strategic objectives in a common perspective, with gender and development as cross-cutting issues. It stresses the interdependence of issues on the social policy agenda, and the need to work towards integrated solutions to economic and social problems.

34. Granting the same legal status to men and women is the first necessary step towards gender equality, but it is not sufficient. The promotion of gender equality also requires an enabling environment in which rights can be enjoyed by all. Economic growth opens up new opportunities, but it does not automatically provide the means to seize them. This has often been the case for women. The rights-based approach and the development-based approach, understood as widening choices and increasing capabilities of men and women to participate in economic and social life, are necessary complements.

3. Priority gender issues within the four ILO strategic areas

35. Over the past year, the ILO's preparations for Beijing +5 relied on an extensive participatory process. Staff from the regions and all the sectors participated in consultative meetings, both in the regions and at headquarters. A number of national studies were commissioned and a symposium on decent work for women was organized during the 277th Session (March 2000) of the Governing Body. Based on those consultations a list of priority gender issues has been drawn up as follows.

(a) *Fundamental principles and rights at work*

- Supporting the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and its Follow-up (1998). Integrating the gender perspective into the follow-up process of reporting and technical cooperation activities.
- Promoting other international labour standards, such as those concerning maternity protection, workers with family responsibilities, safety and health, part-time workers and home workers, and the organization of rural workers, both inside and outside the labour market.
- Pressing for equal access to and control over productive resources.
- Narrowing the gap between the *de jure* and the *de facto* situation of women in order to realize substantive equality of rights as well as formal equality.

(b) *The promotion of employment and income opportunities*

- Strengthening the employability of women: ensuring equal access to training and the acquisition of new skills in order to break occupational segregation by sex and enable women to benefit from new technologies.
- Fighting poverty by addressing both the quantitative and qualitative dimensions of women's employment; paying special attention to the vulnerability of women at different stages of the life cycle; and combating trafficking in women and girls.
- Supporting wage workers and the self-employed of the informal economy through innovative schemes.
- Supporting women in the area of management development and entrepreneurship.
- Addressing the vulnerability of women to crises (armed conflict, natural disasters, economic and financial downturns, social and political transitions), designing specific responses that cater for the different needs of both men and women.

(c) *Social protection*

- Reducing insecurity in the world of work: preventing poverty and social exclusion, maintaining incomes, ensuring adequate access to care and social services for all.
- Improving the governance and efficiency of social security systems; enhancing the coverage and effectiveness of social protection for all; eliminating discrimination and promoting gender equality in statutory social security schemes; extending coverage to workers currently excluded, many of whom are women.
- Implementing occupational safety and health policies to ensure protection for all workers, while taking into account the specific needs of each category of workers, both women and men: of specific interest to women are maternity protection, the elimination of sexual harassment and violence at the workplace, and improving working conditions in hazardous industries and in precarious employment.
- Promoting gender equality both at home and in the labour market and developing practical measures that help men and women combine work and family responsibilities.
- Protecting women migrants from the worst forms of abuse and forced labour and promoting government and international efforts to guarantee migrant women's basic labour rights.

(d) *Social dialogue*

- Making gender equality issues visible on the agenda of social dialogue and that of tripartite institutions, including governments, employers' organizations and trade unions, and making improved gender balance a goal for social dialogue.
- Mainstreaming gender in the work of labour ministries, government agencies, employers' organizations and trade unions.
- Reaching out to the informal economy, and helping small enterprises and precarious workers organize and extend their representation; building alliances with relevant women's organizations around programmes for the promotion of gender equality.

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- Reaching gender balance in the membership, leadership and representation functions of the social partners.

4. Implementation

36. To implement the above follow-up strategy, it is proposed that the Office strengthen and develop support activities in three specific domains.

(a) Knowledge base

- Developing new analytical frameworks at policy and programme levels.
- Generating gender-sensitive data and information: countries should be encouraged to systematically collect sex-disaggregated data (including wage data).
- Developing gender-sensitive indicators and benchmarks.
- Improving monitoring and evaluation tools.
- Collecting lessons learnt and disseminating good practices (at the national and international level), and setting up databases of good practices.
- Carrying out inter-sectoral applied research on specific gender issues and identifying crucial linkages to achieve the four ILO strategic objectives and decent work; topics of relevance include: work and family, the care economy, the informal economy, poverty and rising inequalities, migration and trafficking, gender and macroeconomics, men and masculinities, HIV/AIDS and ICT.

(b) Services

- Assisting the ILO constituents in enhancing their capacity to formulate gender-sensitive employment policy and strategies at the national level. This will include the provision of capacity-building activities centred around the four strategic objectives.
- Assisting ILO constituents in setting up institutional arrangements and support mechanisms for the promotion of gender equality at the organizational and national levels.
- Ensuring that all ILO-organized and supported meetings, functions and activities are gender balanced or make measurable progress in achieving gender balance.

(c) Advocacy

- Incorporating gender equality concerns in the operationalization of decent work.
- Highlighting gender equality issues in the eight InFocus programmes.
- Organizing workshops and seminars to stimulate exchanges of ideas within and outside the ILO on topics of relevance to gender equality and the decent work agenda.

IV. Schedule of activities for the consolidation of the follow-up framework

37. The following schedule is proposed:

- November 2000: The present paper on Beijing +5, including the proposed ILO follow-up framework, is submitted to the Governing Body for discussion and approval.
- December 2000: The needs assessment survey of ILO staff regarding gender capacity building is analysed and a schedule of activities drawn up.
- January 2001: The inter-sectoral/regional gender consultation workshop, directed at ILO staff, further elaborates and consolidates the follow-up strategy.
- February-September 2001: Workshops are organized in the regions to draw up and consolidate regional follow-up plans.
- Before the end of 2001: Workshops are organized at headquarters on specific topics (tentatively planned): engendering macroeconomics, men and masculinities, work and family, gender mainstreaming tools (gender-sensitive indicators, benchmarks, etc.), social productivity.
- By the end of 2001: Gender auditing will be carried out.

38. *The Committee may wish to recommend that the Governing Body –*

- (a) take note of the information, and endorse the proposals for the ILO follow-up framework contained in this paper;*
- (b) request the Director-General to maintain his strong commitment to gender equality and mobilize resources for the effective implementation of the follow-up strategy and strengthen the monitoring and accountability mechanisms to this end.*

Geneva, 3 October 2000.

Point for decision: Paragraph 38.