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Faculty of Occupational Safety, Serbia<sup>1</sup> [aleksandra.ilic@znrfak.ni.ac.rs](mailto:aleksandra.ilic@znrfak.ni.ac.rs)**GENDER EQUALITY – POLICIES AND  
LEGISLATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL  
LABOUR ORGANIZATION**

**Abstract:** *Although we have witnessed significant progress in achieving gender equality in the workplace over the past century, and especially in recent decades, the need to eliminate gender disparities in the world of work undoubtedly still exists. This paper examines gender equality from the perspective of the International Labour Organization (ILO). It analyzes gender equality policy measures in the field of labour and international labour standards in this area. The research shows that the ILO implements an active policy aimed at achieving gender equality at work, equal treatment, and equal opportunities for all. Some of the policy measures focus on promoting gender equality and decent work, reducing the gender pay gap, decreasing workplace violence and harassment, etc. This policy is supported by legislation in the form of international labour standards aimed at preventing harassment and violence at work, protecting maternity, safeguarding employees with family obligations, and similar protections.*

**Keywords:** gender equality, International Labour Organization, policy, legislation

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<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9831-722X>**INTRODUCTION**

Gender equality constitutes a fundamental human right, entailing that individuals of all genders possess equal rights, responsibilities, and freedoms. This principle mandates that the interests and needs of all genders are equally acknowledged and valued. As articulated by the United Nations, gender equality signifies that women and men, as well as girls and boys, enjoy the same rights, resources, opportunities, and protections. Gender discrimination encompasses any distinction, exclusion, or restriction based on sex that impairs or nullifies the recognition, enjoyment, or exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms in political, economic, social, cultural, or civil spheres. To dismantle entrenched power hierarchies within society, it is imperative that all individuals are treated with respect and afforded equal participation across all facets of social life (Mikkola & Miles, 2007).

Gender equality in the workplace and employee protection represent a crucial multidisciplinary concern. Over the past few decades, the status of women in the labour market has improved significantly, yet gender disparities persist (Kübler et al., 2018). This raises critical questions regarding the underlying factors that sustain discriminatory differences between men and women during hiring processes. Women continue to encounter unstable forms of employment, such as part-time or precarious contracts (Messing & Östlin, 2006). Empirical evidence reveals that non-standard employment – characterized by low compensation, limited benefits, and job insecurity – is disproportionately gendered, with women

overrepresented in these precarious roles (Heilman et al., 2024). Vertical segregation or intrinsic occupational hierarchy remains pronounced: women are overrepresented in roles with restricted promotion opportunities, whereas men predominate in occupations conferring greater organizational power (Kamenov, Galić, 2011). Consistent with this, women are often entrusted with fewer responsibilities compared to men, thus hindering their potential for career progression (Hoyt, 2010). The aforementioned gender disparities in the labour sector, among many others, adversely affect the safety and health of employees – primarily women – in the workplace.

Women play an indispensable role in the global economy. Currently, approximately 50 percent of women of working age worldwide are gainfully employed (Hassard, 2023). Although this figure remained largely unchanged from 2000 to 2020, the participation of women in the labour force continues to rise across Europe. This trend benefits families by boosting household incomes and enhancing employer productivity. Nevertheless, this expansion is accompanied by considerable challenges for both women and organizations. In Europe, projections indicate that if the female employment rate remains constant, the region will confront a shortfall of 24 million workers by 2040. Conversely, should women's employment rate align with that of men, this deficit could be reduced by some 3 million.

These statistics underscore the imperative of recognizing and supporting women as a vital resource

within the workforce – efforts that must be reinforced through policy interventions and organizational strategies.

This study employs a methodology based on the analysis of relevant academic literature and the prevailing legal framework to examine gender equality from the perspective of the International Labour Organization. It investigates the ILO's policy measures on gender equality in the workplace, along with the corresponding international labour standards.

## **GENDER EQUALITY AS A HUMAN RIGHT**

Gender equality is a basic human right. It can be asserted that gender equality constitutes a fundamental human right, as it is promoted by the United Nations in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights from 1948. This Declaration states that “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights” and that “everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, birth or other status” (UN, Universal declaration, 1948). Thirty-one years later, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979) was adopted by the UN. This was followed 16 years later by the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing as a visionary agenda for the empowerment of women (UN-Women, 2025). These documents clearly demonstrate that gender equality is a fundamental human right and that it was formally established in the second half of the twentieth century.

In addition to adopting foundational documents, gender equality is actively promoted and supported by the United Nations through various mechanisms (UN-Women, 2025). For example, the UN organizes a series of global conferences dedicated to this topic. The First World Conference on Women took place in Mexico City in 1975, as part of the International Women's Year. The Second was held in Copenhagen in 1980, serving as the mid-decade review under the UN Decade for Women. The Third convened in Nairobi in 1985, where the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women were adopted.

Furthermore, the United Nations has established specialized bodies and organizations dedicated to the advancement of gender equality. One such entity is the Commission on the Status of Women, which serves as the principal global intergovernmental body exclusively tasked with promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women (UN, 2025a).

Additionally, the United Nations established UN Women, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. UN Women is the UN organization responsible for implementing programs, policies, and standards that uphold women's human rights and ensure that every woman and girl can realize her full potential (UN, 2025b).

## **ILO POLICY ON GENDER EQUALITY**

The International Labour Organization, as a specialized agency of the United Nations dedicated to the protection of workers' rights, addresses gender equality within the scope of its mandate. Like the United Nations, the ILO has established its own policy on gender equality in the world of work and undertakes various initiatives aimed at the implementation of this policy.

In this context, the ILO publishes various types of documents – such as manuals, guidelines, and handbooks – that predominantly address specific issues related to gender equality, often focusing on particular countries. An example of a publication providing guidance to states in implementing gender equality policies is *Gender-responsive National Employment Policies: A Path for Gender Equality* (ILO, 2025), which offers countries practical advice on how to develop and implement gender-responsive national employment policies.

The ILO actively promotes gender equality in the world of work at the national level. For instance, the factsheet *Fostering Women's Entrepreneurship Development and Gender Equality for a Just Transition in Egypt* underscores the importance of empowering women entrepreneurs in Egypt as key contributors to a just transition toward environmentally sustainable economies (ILO, 2024).

Moreover, the ILO conducts research and publishes reports on the status of gender equality in the workplaces of its member states. For example, the report *Women and the World of Work in Uzbekistan: Towards Gender Equality and Decent Work for All* (2023) addresses the need for a comprehensive analysis of women's position in Uzbekistan's labour market. It aims to inform policies, legislation, and initiatives that promote decent work opportunities for all women and men. Similarly, the report titled *Building Back Better with Environmental Sustainability and Gender Equality: Viet Nam Country Summary* (ILO, 2022) highlights country-specific findings from the study, including priorities and recommendations identified by stakeholders to enhance environmental sustainability and gender equality within Vietnam's labour sector.

In addition to these activities, the most significant contribution of the ILO to gender equality policy in the world of work is the adoption of international instruments – conventions and recommendations. Through these mechanisms, international labour standards on gender equality are established, creating a foundation for harmonizing the status of men and women in the workplace.

## **INTERNATIONAL LABOUR STANDARDS ON GENDER EQUALITY**

At present, international labour standards on gender equality comprise five conventions. The fact that these documents are legally binding for ratifying states underscores the significant attention the ILO dedicates

to this issue, recognizing it as a crucial component of the occupational safety and health system.

The Violence and Harassment Convention No. 190 (ILO, 2019) acknowledges that gender-based violence and harassment disproportionately affect women and girls, and that an inclusive, integrated, and gender-responsive approach – addressing underlying causes and risk factors, including gender stereotypes, multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, and unequal gender-based power relations – is essential to ending violence and harassment in the world of work. Each ratifying state commits to enacting legislation and policies that guarantee the right to equality and non-discrimination in employment and occupation, including for women workers.

The Maternity Protection Convention No. 183 (ILO, 2000) takes into account the specific circumstances of women workers and the necessity of providing protection during pregnancy, which is a shared responsibility of governments and society. Each Member shall, after consulting representative organizations of employers and workers, adopt appropriate measures to ensure that pregnant or breastfeeding women are not required to perform work deemed by the competent authority to be harmful to the health of the mother or child, or where an assessment has identified significant health risks to either.

The Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention No. 156 (ILO, 1981) stipulates that, with a view to creating effective equality of opportunity and treatment for men and women workers, each Member shall make it a national policy objective to enable persons with family responsibilities who are engaged or wish to engage in employment to exercise that right without facing discrimination and, as far as possible, without conflict between their employment and family responsibilities.

The Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention No. 111 (ILO, 1958) requires each Member for which the Convention is in force to declare and pursue a national policy designed to promote, by methods appropriate to national conditions and practices, equality of opportunity and treatment in employment and occupation, with the aim of eliminating any discrimination in these areas.

The Equal Remuneration Convention No. 100 (ILO, 1951) establishes that each Member shall, through methods appropriate to the systems in place for determining remuneration rates, promote and, to the extent consistent with those methods, ensure the application of the principle of equal remuneration for men and women workers for work of equal value.

## CONCLUSION

Men and women differ not only in their biological characteristics (sex differences) but also in the types of occupations they engage in, the working conditions they encounter, and the societal roles they experience (gender differences). These factors influence both the types and levels of risks they encounter in the

workplace, and consequently, the methods by which those risks should be assessed and managed.

Men and women differ in both biological and societal aspects, and these differences have a significant impact on the types of occupational risks they face, as well as on how these risks should be identified, evaluated, and managed. In particular, women: tend to be employed in certain sectors and are concentrated in specific roles that differ from those typically held by men; commonly manage dual responsibilities, balancing paid employment with unpaid domestic and caregiving duties; are underrepresented in leadership positions, including supervisory and managerial roles; and possess physiological differences from men, although it is important to note that variation among women themselves can often exceed the average differences between men and women, for example, in areas such as physical strength, etc. Despite their relevance, these factors are often insufficiently considered in occupational safety and health policies and practices. As a result, the unique risks and workloads experienced by women may be underestimated or inadequately addressed in workplace health and safety strategies. That is why the ILO aims to highlight these differences and help improve OSH in areas that affect women most.

Gender equality, as a fundamental human right, constitutes a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable world. Although it remains one of the most pressing challenges of our time, it simultaneously presents an unparalleled opportunity to transform societies. Discrimination, understood as unequal treatment of individuals based on personal characteristics, persists across various segments of society, including the world of work.

The ILO is engaged in protecting workers from discrimination based on sex as a personal attribute of employees or job seekers. With regard to ILO regulations, international labour standards on gender equality currently comprise five conventions. Given their legally binding nature, it can be inferred that the ILO regards gender equality as fundamental to the protection of workers. These conventions obligate ratifying states to enact national legislation and define their own policies on gender equality in employment.

Beyond adopting binding and non-binding instruments, the ILO actively pursues gender equality policies through various other means. It publishes a range of documents on the subject, provides guidance to member states on the practical implementation of these policies, conducts research, and issues reports on the state of gender equality within member countries.

All of the above leads to the conclusion that the ILO maintains a highly active and comprehensive gender equality policy in the world of work, thereby encouraging and obligating member states to formulate their own policies and practices. Progress in gender equality in the workplace, in turn, will contribute to the overall enhancement of occupational safety and health for all workers.

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