

Committee: Human Rights Council

Issue: Empowering women in the workplace

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INTRODUCTION

It goes without saying that enormous advances have been made in addressing most of the problems with which women have been confronted the recent decades. On the one hand, governments have introduced policies to reduce the health and education gap that deprives thousands of them of access to a high standard health and education system. On the other hand, women themselves have repeatedly gone on marches to ensure their civil rights and have consolidated their position in the labor market. What is equally important is the fact that their contribution to the GDP of global economy is estimated to trillions of dollars and is claimed to be greater than that of new technologies.

However, despite the fact that women constitute a main driving force of global economy and growth the global labor force participation rate of women has been constant over during the last 25 years at 50% approximately of the economically active female population.

It is widely accepted that women are unevenly represented in business as far as both their number and their status are concerned. They are more likely to find a more vulnerable and a less paid job in comparison to their male counterparts while it is also true that only a tiny percentage of women working in either the private or the public sector make it to the top of companies and occupy high esteemed positions. These issues prove to be a significant hindrance to their professional life and progress. Additionally, a lot of companies tend to ignore these incidents while others simply fail to realize why they should adopt gender diversity and equality in their companies as major strategic goals.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Workplace

The workplace can be defined as “a place where people work”¹. According to this definition, a workplace does not have to do necessarily with large office buildings or factories. Instead, a home office can be also characterized as a workplace. In More Economically Developed countries (MEDC) the workplace functions and is perceived as one of the most significant social spaces apart from home not only for the employees, the employers and their families but also for the rest of the society in general. The latest technological advancements that have emerged and specifically those of communication technologies have enabled the development of the virtual workplace.

Workplace empowerment

Workplace empowerment has to do with creating opportunities for the employees to take their own decisions with regards to their tasks.

Enforcing women in the workplace means “allowing women to have more control over their lives. It means giving them the freedom to make their own schedules, learn new skills and gain self-reliance”². This empowerment can be achieved only if the abilities and the strengths that women add to their jobs are recognized and utilized. According to multiple evidence published by the United Nations businesses that try to implement women empowerment and gender equality as strategic goals tend to be more profitable.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Global overview

A great variety of different numbers and statistics is what characterizes the female labor force participation rate globally. The labor force participation rate indicates “the percent of people in the labor force as compared with the number of people in the population”³.

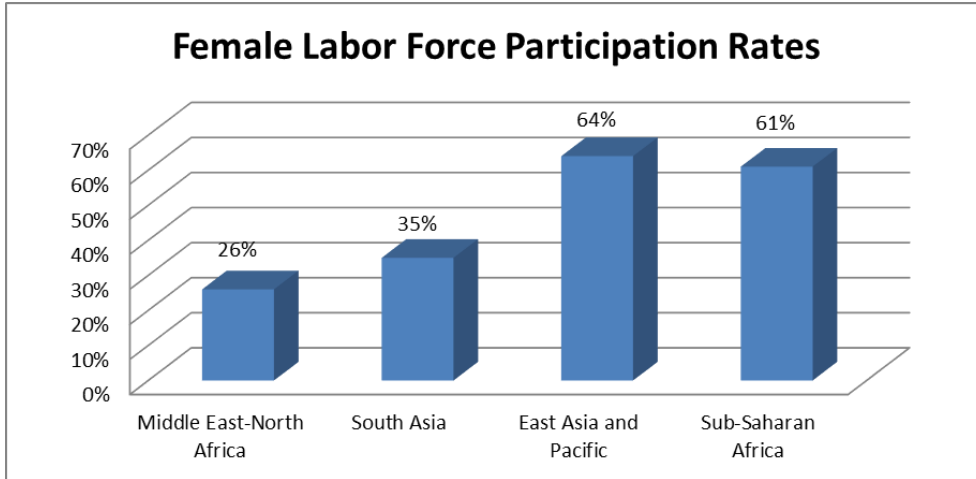
These large cross-regional differences mentioned above tend to lessen during the last decades as many countries in Latin America, North Africa and Middle East introduced

¹ “Workplace”. Oxford Dictionaries <<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/workplace>>.

² Chrum, Erin. “Women and Empowerment in the Workplace”. Chron. <<http://smallbusiness.chron.com/women-empowerment-workplace-17827.html>>.

³ “Employment status of women and men in 2007”. United States Department of Labor. <https://www.dol.gov/wb/factsheets/Qf-ESWM07_txt.htm>.

policies that aimed at increasing the number of women working while other countries with higher rates merely Europe, Central Asia and East Asia and Pacific experienced some minor declines. The world average rate has remained stubbornly stable around 50% up to a period of 25 years. Nevertheless, this average ratio does not indicate the significant differences across countries or even regions. Although most of the countries abide by this global trend of the convergence of the Female Labor Force Participation (FLFP) rate, the participation of



women in the market fell in Thailand (11,6%), in Vanuatu (18,8%) and in People’s Republic of China (PRC) (8,7%) while at the same time the gap between men and women in the market widened in these countries.

Known disparities in Europe

Women’s part in the labor market is quite disproportionate to the number of female graduates in Europe. To begin with, while women are the majority of graduates from European universities accounting for the 55% of total graduates, their employment rate is 21% lower than that of their male colleagues⁴. Furthermore, the European Commission has recently released a report that estimates the wage gap between men and women at about 15%⁵. Last but not least, within companies, gender diversity is inexistent in top executive jobs thus females constitute only 11% of top management positions and members of the head boards. (1% in Luxembourg)⁶.

⁴ “The business of empowering women: Where, why, and how”. McKinsey&Company. Jan. 2010. <<http://mckinseysociety.com/the-business-of-empowering-women/>>.
⁵ “The business of empowering women: Where, why, and how”. McKinsey&Company. Jan. 2010. <<http://mckinseysociety.com/the-business-of-empowering-women/>>.
⁶ “The business of empowering women: Where, why, and how”. McKinsey&Company. Jan. 2010. <<http://mckinseysociety.com/the-business-of-empowering-women/>>.

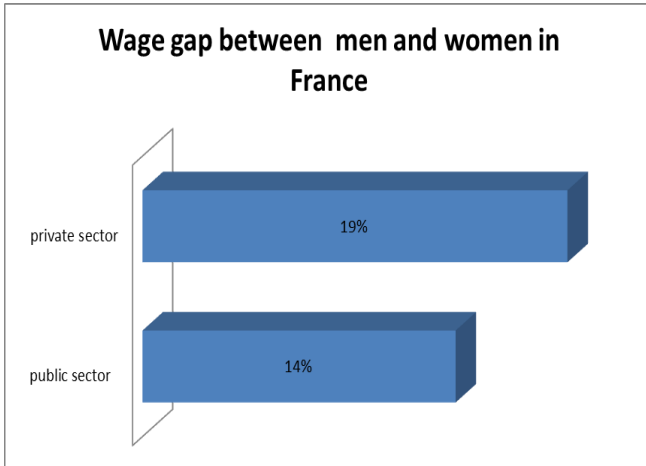


Figure 2: Wage gap in France

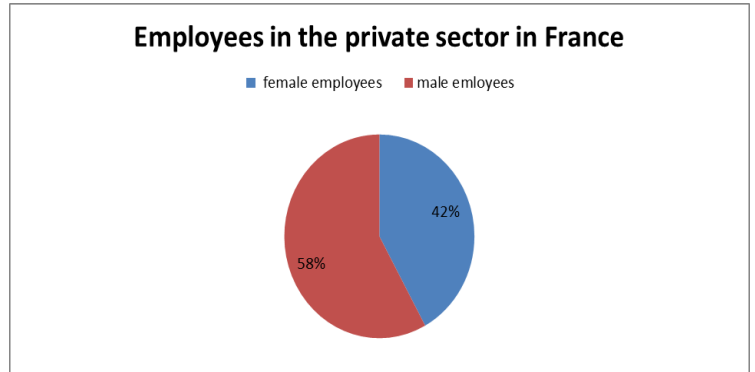


Figure 3: Employees in private sector in France

Determinants of women’s labor force participation rates

Women have to struggle to overcome several barriers that stifle their economic and professional progress. It is true that one of the main reasons why employers do not prefer women for their businesses are the childbearing responsibilities as potential mothers. What one also needs to point out is that women are forced to compete with men in the labor market but at the same time they are not provided with the same quality of technical and vocational training as men and more often than not they deal with jobs where they receive on average lower incomes. Additionally, what should also draw our attention is the fact that it is claimed that women often have to face the obstacle of limited access to credit and less capital that is at their disposal in their pursuit of becoming entrepreneurs. Resultantly, women are trapped in a vicious circle of barriers that perpetuates the negative circumstances and prevents them from entering the workforce and leading a productive career.

Female labor force participation and economic growth

The problem of female participation rates was addressed in many countries by a combined mixture of policies that fostered economic growth and promoted education among women. Additionally, growth of trade and economic integration resulted in an essential development of financial sectors such as garments, electronics and services that would employ an increasing number of women. However, according to a world bank report this is not the case especially in middle and high income-countries. It also needs to mention that it is claimed that higher female labor force participation is closely linked with the rise of the primary sectors of the economy. According to the above-mentioned report the

ratification of international conventions as well as the increase of female participation in politics are more important when it comes to women's rights' recognition.

Female labor force participation and education

Regarding the relationship between a high level educational system accessible to women and female labor force, the evidence is more than clear. Greater access to training and vocational education help women acquire managerial skills and abilities, which they may utilize in their effort to occupy high ranked positions.

The importance of education on women's empowerment and financial growth is pivotal as it also helps on the creation of qualitative human capital for the following generations. As research conducted by the World Bank has showed, better and thoroughly educated mothers are able to raise their children in a healthy environment ensuring their nutrition, schooling, and enhanced opportunities for academic success. This environment could enable the next female generations to fight for their professional success and enter the workforce. Therefore, apart from investing in future generations and in future working women the recent closing of the educational gap in all four corners of the world has significantly contributed to limiting the wage differences and increasing the female labor participation rate.

However, narrowing the education gap between women and men does not necessarily guarantee high participation of females in the labor force. For instance, although some countries in Asia have promoted remarkable enhancements in their educational system, they have seen their domestic rates of women in the labor force stable at low levels. The same applies to Europe where in spite of the soar number of female graduates from universities the participation of women in the workforce and especially for instance when it comes to managerial positions is expected to rise from 4% in 2005 to just 8% in 2035 in Spain and from 8% to just 16% in France⁷.

Females in the labor force and allocation of time

What is also said to be a key factor that explains the major inequalities that women share are both the burden of housework and childcare trying repeatedly to balance these duties with their professional responsibilities. The time that women use to devote to their household activities is twice as much than that of men while they also spend four hours

⁷ "The business of empowering women: Where, why, and how". McKinsey&Company. Jan. 2010. <<http://mckinseysociety.com/the-business-of-empowering-women/>>.

more daily on average fending for their children⁸. It is also worth to mention that the “discretionary time” -the time that each person devotes to itself and its personal activities- is also of utmost importance for the success in the workplace. It has been proved that women are susceptible to having less discretionary time due to their numerous responsibilities which is related to less productive market activity and possibly wage discriminations. The impact of these constraints depends on the level of social protection and support offered by the state, which may include the establishment of day-care centres as well as the implementation of tax policies that foster an increase in the number of women in the labor force. Europe is no exception to the rule mentioned above. European women spend an average of 4 hours and 29 minutes in their domestic tasks as opposed to the men’s average of 2 hours and 18 minutes daily. The dominant model in today’s business world links effective leadership to constant availability and geographical mobility at any time and at every cost. Therefore, the role of women as mothers may shrink their chances of a career success.

Labor unions

Gender equality and women’s empowerment has been described as the unfinished goal of the labor movement. It is true that when workers can express their demands through a union they can fight in an effective way for the consolidation of their rights. In this way labor unions can play an essential role in enhancing the social, financial and political status of women. Labor unions do not only fight in favor of family friendly policies but they also have the power to demand higher salaries and close the wage gap between men and women. It is true that the wage gap is lower among women that participate actively in labor unions as they earn 31% more compared to female workers but non-members of labor unions.

As far as the presence of labor unions in specific countries the percentage of workers belonging to labor union in 2010 was;

- US – 11,4%
- Germany – 18,4%
- Canada – 27,5%
- Finland – 70%

⁸ “Women in the Workforce, an unmet potential in Asia and the Pacific”. Asian Development Bank. 2015. <<http://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/158480/women-workforce-unmet-potential.pdf>>.

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED

United States of America

The employment status of women in the United States of America is significantly better than that in Europe or in Asia. The civilian labor force, that is the number of civilians who were 16 years old or older and are working or looking for a job was 153.1 million people of which 70,988,000 were women and 82,136,000 were men. Nearly 46% of the total labor force in 2007 was women. In 2016 this number has risen to 64%. Additionally, the labor force participation of women reached the percentage of 59,3% while 73,2% of all men were in the labor force in 2007. More specifically, 60% of mothers of children under the age of three years old worked. This percentage grew to 63% for mother of children under the age of six in March 2006 (from 54% in March 1986). Between 1997 and 2007 women occupied exactly half of the 16,000,000 new working positions that were created. It also must be highlighted that wage gap was around 20% in 2007 while it has risen to 21% in 2016.

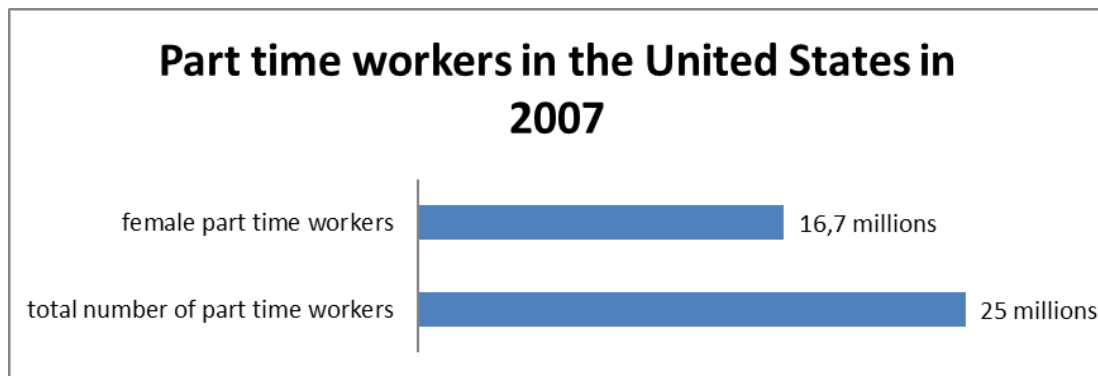


Figure 4: Part time workers in the US

Syria and Iraq

According to an ILO Report in 2014 Iraq and Syria are the two countries with the lowest female employment rates. On the one hand, Syria has faced a decrease in the number of employed women. This could be also linked to the ongoing civil war that has been affecting the citizens' lives for the past 5 years. On the other hand, Iraq has faced a rise of its percentage by 4% compared to the 11% of 1990. According to a report by the Central Bureau of Statistics in the Iraqi Ministry of Planning the majority of women in Iraq work in the agricultural sector; only around 15% of them work in non-agricultural sector (2011). It is worth to mention that the majority of women in these countries have received a proper education, however sexual and social discrimination blocks their ability to follow a career of their choice.

East Africa

According to the same ILO report the highest rates of female employment can be observed in the countries of East Africa like Tanzania, Rwanda, Mozambique etc. Though this fact seems to be really positive and promising, the actual situation is nothing but worrying. One should keep in mind that female participation is higher only in rural economies than in urban ones. Though the difference between male and female employment is slightly different in rural areas, the gap is larger than 10% in larger towns and cities. Furthermore, it is important to note that the majority of the population receives a primary -if any- education resulting in worse working conditions and limited employment opportunities. Last, but not least, women in eastern Africa have a lower salary average than men for the same kind of work.

Europe

Following Eurostat's research regarding gender equality we are in the position to have a clear and detailed overview of the situation in the European Continent (especially in the European Union). Therefore, one can claim that the situation in Europe is not a lot better than those in the aforementioned regions. Though European women receive a tertiary education -it is important to note that the percentage of females in the tertiary education is higher than that of males- gender discrimination has a negative effect both on their employment and their payment. While the employment gap in northern European States like Finland, Sweden and Lithuania is lower than 5 p.p the gap exceeds 15 p.p in the South, in countries like Greece, Italy and Romania. Last, but not least, according to the same Eurostat reports the wage gap in hour is on average 16%, thus men earning a lot more for the same working time.

Gender equality project

The aim of the Gender Equality Project is to promote gender evaluation methods. The project allows employers to apply for gender equality certification while also encouraging companies to make benchmarking reports, being more transparent and helping accelerate the goal of gender diversity and equality.

Women 20 (W20)

The organization Women 20 was established by the G20 in 2015. Its aim is to influence decision enabling women's empowerment in workplace. Their agenda comprises the goals of closing the gender gap and alleviating the problem of unpaid care work. Women 20 is backed by the UN Women and under Turkey's leadership it has senior representatives in all countries.

“Khadija”

It is a regional network of public, private and social sector institutions established in the Arab States by the European Union, UN Women and the League of Nations. This network makes efforts to draw policymakers’ attention to creating a friendlier working environment for women. It also tries to raise the number of women in managerial positions and prevent their discrimination and unequal treatment.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

| Date | Description of Event |
|----------------------------|--|
| 1979 | The UN General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) |
| 1995 | World Conference on Women was organized in Beijing where the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was introduced |
| 2009 | Global Private Sector Leaders Forum (PSLF) is established |
| July 2010 | The United Nations created the UN Women the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women |
| 2013 | Japanese Prime Minister Abe launched womenomics, an action plan aiming at increasing the number of women in leadership positions |
| 2015 | Women 20 was established under the auspices of the G20 in Turkey |
| August 2015 | World Assembly for Women conference in Tokyo |
| April 1 st 2016 | A new legislation, the “Female Employment Promotion Legislation” was introduced |

UN INVOLVEMENT: RELEVANT RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

The United Nations has established the UN Women in order to facilitate women’s economic empowerment and deal with much of the discrimination that women encounter in their workplace by suggesting methods of achieving gender diversity in entities of the public and private sector. The organization has called numerous times for all economic

policies and poverty eradication campaigns to include gender equality and women’s empowerment in their strategic goals. Some of UN Women’s actions involve:

- Supporting the General Assembly, the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) by providing valuable advice, information and policy recommendations on gender equality issues and resolutions that these bodies adopt.
- It has founded the Fund for Gender Equality that supports initiatives and campaigns by women-lead organizations that have high effect on marginalized groups of women.

Figure 5: Women empowerment principles

The Principles

- 1 Leadership Promotes Gender Equality**
- 2 Equal Opportunity, Inclusion and Nondiscrimination**
- 3 Health, Safety and Freedom from Violence**
- 4 Education and Training**
- 5 Enterprise Development, Supply Chain and Marketing Practices**
- 6 Community Leadership and Engagement**
- 7 Transparency, Measuring and Reporting**

- The Fund distributed 7,6 million USD to 53 active programs that promoted women’s empowerment in 2015 while its total portfolio is equivalent to 64 USD allocated to 120 programs⁹.
- It has published The Women's Empowerment Principles along with the United Nations Global Compact in order to provide business and the private sector with useful guidelines on how to empower women in the workplace, marketplace and community.

The UN General Assembly has also adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The Convention defines what we consider discrimination against women and promoted an agenda of national plans to stop it while

It forces every Nation that has ratified the convention to publish national reports and suggests measures on how to abide by the convention’s goals.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

The example of Japan and the project of Womenomics

⁹ “Fund for Gender Equality”. UN Women. <<http://www.unwomen.org/en/trust-funds/fund-for-gender-equality>>.

“Annual Report 2015-2016”. UN Women. <<http://annualreport.unwomen.org/en/2016/what-we-do/economic-empowerment>>.

When Japan went through a severe demographic crisis at the end of the last century, those who suggested higher female labor participation were considered unable to understand Japan's real root of the problem. Back then in 1999 the FLFP rate at 57% was included among the lowest in developed countries¹⁰. Japanese women would massively decide to opt out from their jobs so as to take care of their first child. It was not until 2013 that Japanese Prime Minister Abe announced "womenomics", that is attracting more women in leadership position as a central piece of Japan's domestic growth strategy. Three years later the Japanese FLFP rate at 66% is higher even than that of the US. The Japanese government in its effort to boost the FLFP augmented child care benefits and capacity by 219,000 spots and increased the replacement pay during parental leave from 50 percent to 67 percent for the first six months¹¹. On April 1st a new legislation, the "Female Employment Promotion Legislation" was introduced requiring from large scale private or public entities to conform to specific gender diversity targets holding their managers responsible of setting action plans and achieving the goals.

Global Private Sector Leaders Forum (PSLF)

Many of the Global Private Leaders Forum members have taken immediate action and have adopted high impact initiatives. For instance;

- A McKinsey and Belcorp partnership launched an initiative to promote literacy training among 50,000 girls in Latin America
- Carlson joined HAGAR International in its effort to support marginalized and exploited women and assist them lead a productive life based on literacy, education and work readiness.
- Carlson also established the AARP's Women's Scholarship Program aiming at encouraging women over 40 years old with limited incomes to remain or re-enter the workforce.
- Boeing collaborated with Accenture, Ernst & Young, WBG and other PSLF members in order to increase the number of women-lead companies in their supply chains spending 2 billion USD for products and services supplied by women-lead businesses.

¹⁰ Matsui, Kathy. "Womenomics continue as a work in progress". The Japan Times. May 25 2016.<<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/05/25/business/economy-business/womenomics-continues-work-progress/#.V5R5uLiLTIU>>.

¹¹ Matsui, Kathy. "Womenomics continue as a work in progress". The Japan Times. May 25 2016.<<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2016/05/25/business/economy-business/womenomics-continues-work-progress/#.V5R5uLiLTIU>>.

- McKinsey organized value chain research called “The Business of Empowering Women” and suggested along with other PSLF members ways the private sector could invest in women workforce.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

First and foremost, it is necessary to have a clear understanding of the situation at hand. More statistical analyses and information sharing can ensure a greater overview and in-detail knowledge related to the obstacles women face nowadays. These analyses should focus on the wage gap between men and women, indicate the labor force participation of women in the current workforce as well as outline the situation related to female promotions per year. This first step would raise awareness within companies as well as governments and would help in setting more feasible and effective goals.

Furthermore, flexibility that is remote working, part time jobs and flex time should be an indispensable part of companies’ working model. The cost that many companies would reduce by introducing the idea of “mobile offices” would convince them to include such flexible characteristics. This idea of flexibility should take into account that women are likely to take long breaks during their career and prevent any negative impact on their pay or success. Apart from that it is of the companies’ advantage to provide their employees with childcare options thus enabling women to combine maternity and career development.

Besides this the governments should take action towards ensuring an atmosphere of equality and security in the modern market. By creating national advocating teams responsible for frequent investigations of firms related to the issue as well as assist them by providing necessary guidelines and information would help increase the number of female managers and employees in general. Apart from that, it is also crucial to organize seminars and mentoring programs for women. This measure will help in raising awareness of women concerning their abilities, skills as well as opportunities they have in the global market, empower them in the workplace, while also providing them with psychological assistance and useful advice on how to manage their career life.

Governments should introduce new legislation following the example of Japan with the Female Employment Promotion Legislation in order to encourage the participation of women in labor unions, set specific diversity targets for businesses and ensure that women go back to work after big career breaks or maternity leave. The latter could be attained by

staying in contact with their employers and encourage personal meeting before and after the leave to make sure that the worker is reintegrated successfully in their working environment. In addition, setting a high minimum percentage of female members in firms accompanied by strict punishments for those not abiding by the specific rules would ensure an equal treatment of employees by firms.

What is also worth mentioning is that the recruitment, promotion and evaluation systems are reformed so as to ensure that they ensure equal chances for male and female workers. One should also keep in mind that new and more effective incentives for women as well as social support for working mothers would also help in the improvement of the situation.

Last but not least, a more difficult but also effective measure would be the altering of the orientation of firms. It is true that rewarding the outcomes achievements instead of purely working hours would enable women both to succeed and receive equal payments at work and to keep up with their role as mothers and wives.

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FIGURES

Figure 1: “Women in the Workforce, an unmet potential in Asia and the Pacific”. Asian Development Bank. 2015. <www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/158480/women-workforce-unmet-potential.pdf>.

Figure 2: “The business of empowering women: Where, why, and how”. McKinsey&Company. Jan. 2010. < www.mckinseysociety.com/the-business-of-empowering-women/>.

Figure 3: “The business of empowering women: Where, why, and how”. McKinsey&Company. Jan. 2010. < www.mckinseysociety.com/the-business-of-empowering-women/>.

Figure 4: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment and Earnings, Annual Averages 2007.

Figure 5: “Women’s Empowerment Principles”. UN Women National Committee United Kingdom. <www.unwomen.org/corporate/womens-empowerment-principles/>.