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Capacity-building for mainstreaming a gender perspective into national policies and programmes to support the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including care-giving in the context of HIV/AIDS

Written statement*

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* The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations.

Work and family responsibilities: Background

Profound changes in the world of work and in families have placed increasing strain on families in balancing their family caring responsibilities with their economic activities. The last several decades have witnessed dramatic increases in women's labour force participation, due both to economic opportunities as well as economic necessity. At the same time, care responsibilities have intensified for many families. In both developed and developing countries, traditional family support for care has become less available with urbanization, migration, changes in family formation, and women's increased labour force participation. Population ageing in some societies has increased the number of elderly requiring care, and in other societies, health epidemics such as HIV/AIDS have placed greater caregiving demands on families, especially women and girls.

Despite women's increased participation in the labour market, their share of family responsibilities has not diminished. For one thing, men's participation in family responsibilities has not correspondingly increased, at least in part because traditional gender roles and stereotypes combined with the pressures of paid work can make it difficult for men to share family responsibilities. Moreover, social policies and services to support family responsibilities, and workplace policies to support work-family balance, have not kept pace with the changes in labour markets and families—and in many societies, public services have been cut back, placing even greater demands on women and girls to provide unpaid care.

The demands of unpaid work remain a major source of women's disadvantage in the world of work. When work is organized around the ideal of a worker that has no family constraints, workers, whether male or female, are expected to be available for long working hours with little flexibility or time for fulfilling care responsibilities. When support services such as childcare are also not available, gender stereotypes as well as the gender pay gap and occupational segregation in the labour market usually dictate that it is women in dual-earner families who limit or withdraw their labour force participation while men continue to perform as an 'ideal worker'. The strain to provide care and earn a living is particularly great for single parents, most of whom are women.

Poor households are particularly affected, as they have the weakest economic means to purchase goods (prepared foods, time-saving devices) or services (private-care services, domestic help) to help them balance their economic and care responsibilities, and women in these families spend extremely long hours in paid and unpaid work combined. For families with the economic means, purchasing care services has been a major reconciliation strategy, to the extent that employment in care services has greatly expanded in many societies. Most workers providing care services are women, and their professions and the skills involved tend to be undervalued and underpaid, mirroring the value and recognition of unpaid care work.

Hiring domestic workers is a common solution for many families trying to cope with work and family demands in the absence of collective policies and services. Domestic work provides millions of jobs, mostly for women, throughout the world, in countries at all levels of development. Domestic work is looked upon as unskilled because most women have traditionally been considered capable of doing the work, and the skills they are taught by other women in the home are perceived to be natural. When paid, therefore, it remains undervalued and poorly regulated. The poor pay and conditions of domestic work further undermine the goals of equal opportunity and treatment in the labour market on the basis of sex, as well as race, ethnicity, national or social origin, and other dimensions.

Tensions between work and family are likely to worsen in the present crisis. Past experience demonstrates that financial downturns tend to hit women harder than men, because pre-crisis gender inequality in the home and in the labour market place women in already vulnerable positions. Women's lower employment rates, weaker control over property and resources, concentration in informal and vulnerable forms of employment with lower earnings, and less social protection all place women in a weaker position than men to weather crises. The quality and availability of social services also tend to decrease with financial crisis and the fiscal austerity measures that result, devolving greater care responsibilities to the family and adding to the household work of women and girls. Women's coping strategies during crisis include engaging in more paid work and working longer hours, or engaging in multiple low-income jobs during crisis, while maintaining or increasing the hours they devote to unpaid care work. Poor households may rely even more heavily on their girl children to take care of family duties and domestic tasks, and may resort more often to unpaid child domestic work.

Promoting gender equality between men and women in the labour market and at home requires national and workplace policies to reduce the constraints of unpaid work on paid economic activities, to improve the responsiveness of the workplace to workers' family responsibilities, to promote more equal sharing of household and family responsibilities, and to improve the recognition, value and oversight of paid care work including domestic work. During crisis, efforts to preserve basic services, especially in health and education, and to retain community support structures are particularly important for reducing women's workloads, safeguarding girls' opportunities for education, and creating conditions conducive to gender equality.

Designing policies and measures that effectively mainstream gender equality objectives requires the commitments and partnership of governments, the private sector, trade unions, and other national, bilateral and multilateral actors. It also requires considerable efforts to strengthen knowledge, tools and capacities at all levels in order to gender mainstream national legislation, policies and programmes to support equal sharing of responsibilities between men and women, including care-giving in the context of HIV/AIDS.

ILO approach, instruments and commitments to capacity building

The ILO's Decent Work Agenda strives for economic growth with equity through employment, social protection, social dialogue and rights at work. In a reassertion of the Organization's core values and commitments to basic human and economic rights and social justice, the 182 member States of the ILO adopted a landmark Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization in 2008. The Declaration stresses the universality of the Decent Work Agenda, and reaffirms the centrality of gender equality as a means and an objective of advancing social justice. The Declaration calls on the ILO to effectively assist its members in their efforts, and recognizes the fundamental importance of strengthening capacities to deliver the aspirations upheld in the Decent Work Agenda through the Decent Work Country Programmes which have been established as the main vehicle for delivery of ILO support to countries in the context of national development strategies.

The ILO brings to bear international labour standards which are jointly developed and adopted by the tripartite representatives of member States from government, employers' and workers' organizations. Labour standards provide common frameworks for national legislation, policy and practice in all facets of work. Responding to the need for a policy framework that directly addressed the relationship between the gender division of labour at home and gender inequality in the labour market, the member States of the International Labour Organization adopted the Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156), and its corresponding

Recommendation (No. 165). ILO member States have also recognized the importance of ensuring that women's reproductive roles in childbearing do not compromise the objectives of gender equality in employment, and have adopted three Conventions on maternity protection (No. 3, 1919; No. 103, 1942; No. 183, 2000), which have progressively expanded the scope and entitlements of maternity protection at work to ensure that women's employment security, as well as safety and health, are guaranteed throughout maternity. These two Conventions, together with the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111), and Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100), form the wider framework of measures adopted by ILO member States to promote gender equality.

The Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention marked the recognition that gender inequality is deeply intertwined with the gender division of productive and reproductive work and that both women and men need support for their roles in the world of work and in the family. The Convention calls for policies and measures to better enable men and women with family responsibilities to prepare for, enter, advance and remain in employment.

The working conditions in domestic work are longstanding concerns of the ILO as well. Already in 1948 the ILO adopted a Resolution concerning the conditions of employment of domestic workers; in 1965, it adopted a Resolution calling for normative action in this area. In 1970, the first survey ever published on the status of domestic workers across the world made its appearance. Existing international labour standards do not offer adequate guidance on how to address the specific circumstances of domestic work. In March 2008, the ILO Governing Body agreed to include a standard-setting activity on decent work for domestic workers on the agenda of the 99th Session (2010) of the International Labour Conference (ILC), at which point the ILC will decide on the form of the draft instrument(s)—whether a Convention and/or a Recommendation. In 2011, the ILC will discuss the standard(s) with a view to adopting or rejecting them.

Policy measures to reconcile work and family responsibilities and reduce gender inequality in the labour market and in the home

Work-family measures are policy solutions intended to facilitate all workers' access to decent work by explicitly and systematically addressing and supporting their unpaid family responsibilities. ILO Convention No. 156 and Recommendation No. 165 provide considerable policy guidance and represent a flexible tool to support the formulation of policies that enable men and women workers with family responsibilities to exercise their right to engage, participate and advance in employment without discrimination. Work-family measures can be taken at the national, community and workplace levels, and are intended to make family responsibilities more compatible with paid work and to make working conditions more compatible with unpaid family responsibilities.

Government has a leadership role to play in setting policy orientation and creating a social climate that is conducive to dialogue and change for improving work–family reconciliation. In doing so, government also has the key responsibility for establishing a policy orientation that challenges the gendered division of paid and unpaid work. Much will also depend on measures taken within the workplace and at the community level, and success will rely on open dialogue and strong partnerships.

- ◆ **Policy research.** Recognizing, measuring and valuing unpaid care work and understanding its relationship to labour market outcomes for workers with family responsibilities requires

◆ ***Labour legislation and social security***

- **Working time measures.** Working time measures can help make the workplace more responsive to the needs of workers with family responsibilities, while also increasing productivity and expanding equal opportunity. Working time policy options include flexible work hours (such as staggered hours and flexitime), shorter working hours, compressed work-weeks, work-sharing and job-sharing, and individualized working hours. Such measures require consultation between the social partners and government, and consideration of the predictability of working hours, the needs of workers with family responsibilities vis-à-vis hours of school and services, and parity across categories of workers (e.g. full-time and part-time) in terms of employment and working conditions including social security, employment security and training opportunities.
- **Leave policies.** Well-designed leave policies, including maternity, paternity, parental and emergency leaves, are also key elements of sound work-family policies. Maternity leave, covered by the ILO Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183), gives the mother the right to a period of paid rest in relation to childbirth, with employment security and breastfeeding rights upon return. Many countries are encouraging fathers to take up care-related leave through the introduction of paid paternity leave or apportioned parental leave, making it available to both parents. Experience shows that men's take up is greatest when such leave is adequately paid and offers employment security.
- **Active labour market policies.** Active labour market policies, such as vocational training, counselling, information and placement services facilitate the reintegration of workers with family responsibilities, mostly women, into the labour market after family-related leaves.
- **Social care services.** Convention No. 156 also calls for the development of affordable, reliable and quality social care services, to ease the conflict between work and caring for young, older and sick relatives. These measures have been broadly recognized as cost-effective and gender-sensitive solutions to support the needs of workers with family responsibilities, with positive benefits for employers and society as well.
- **Social security allowances.** Social security benefits, tax relief, cash transfers and other appropriate child/family allowances, designed with gender concerns in mind, play an important role in supporting the costs of family responsibilities.

◆ ***Communication and information.*** Communication and education are needed to encourage the sharing of family responsibilities between men and women and to promote broader public understanding of the principles of equal opportunity and treatment, the problems facing workers with family responsibilities and the needs for solutions.

◆ ***Community services and public infrastructure.*** Public transport, supply of water and energy, housing, access to labour-saving devices, health services and free schooling with hours compatible with working hours are essential services for alleviating the workload deriving from unpaid family responsibilities.

Capacity building efforts

Success in designing effective policy frameworks promoting gender equality through laws, policies and measures that support work-family balance will hinge on the knowledge, capacities and tools of the stakeholders at global, regional and national levels. The ILO has worked to

provide guidance and strengthen capacities to effectively put into practice the principles of Convention No. 156 and Recommendation No. 165, and to promote gender equality in all aspects of work, including paid domestic and other caregiving work.

Guidance from the supervisory process. In 2006 and 2007, ILO members that have ratified the Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156) submitted reports to the ILO on the measures taken to give effect to the Convention. The ILO Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (CEACR), which is charged with examining such reports, issued a series of comments addressed to these countries. As found by the CEACR, most countries that have ratified the Convention have continued to strengthen its application, often through the introduction of new rights and entitlements of workers with family responsibilities (e.g. family related leaves, temporary reduction of working time, childcare facilities). The CEACR welcomed that the principles of the Convention are often explicitly acknowledged in gender equality policies, and also in the area of employment policy. A continuing concern of the CEACR in some countries is that certain family-related entitlements are not available to men and women on an equal footing. In some cases, the CEACR's comments called for the revision of legal provisions that do not appear in conformity with the Convention, as they are based on such stereotyped assumptions which are contrary to the principle of equality. It also emphasized the need to ensure that new measures that facilitate the participation of workers with family responsibilities in employment do not reinforce stereotyped assumptions concerning women being considered as bearing the primary responsibility for family and household-related tasks. More generally, the comments promote measures to encourage a greater sharing of family responsibilities between men and women.

Work and family issues are also being addressed in the supervision of other ILO Conventions, such as Conventions No. 100 and 111. With a view to achieving genuine gender equality in the labour market and to reduce wage inequalities between men and women, the ILO supervisory bodies have indeed regularly recommended ratifying States to adopt measures to facilitate reconciliation of work and family and to encourage a more equitable sharing among family members of household tasks and family responsibilities.

Strengthening capacities on gender mainstreaming and building knowledge on the needs and problems of workers with family responsibilities. Tools and training on gender mainstreaming are essential to developing gender-sensitive policies and programmes and achieving gender equality. The Participatory Gender Audit is an ILO flagship tool, designed to build ILO's internal capacities to mainstream gender equality objectives in all activities. It has steadily gained momentum in promoting gender responsiveness among ILO partners in government, employers' organizations and trade unions who are using the tool to build capacities for gender-mainstreamed policies and programmes. The tool has been used not only by ILO field and HQ offices, but by ILO constituents and UN agencies in a number of countries.

A strong understanding of the needs and problems of workers with family responsibilities and the impact on workers, families, employers and communities is similarly essential to building commitment and strong platforms for action. The ILO provides support in building knowledge, tools and capacities on work and family conflict and reconciliation. At the global level, the Office coordinates with representatives from the International Organization of Employers, the International Trade Union Confederation, the Global Union Federations, as well as other actors, such as the Inter-Parliamentary Union, for sharing of knowledge and practical experience and to promote greater understanding of the problems and priorities for action in realizing the principles of the Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156).

The ILO has worked with constituents in a number of countries to build research and analytical capacities on the topic of work and family and to improve understanding of the dimensions and impacts of the problems. Research has been undertaken in Azerbaijan, Brazil, Cameroon, China, Costa Rica, Egypt, Japan, Kenya, the Republic of Korea, Mauritius, the Philippines, Thailand, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia and Zambia. The ILO is also collaborating with UNDP and member States to prepare a regional report on work and family in Latin America. In Mozambique and the United Republic of Tanzania, the ILO is providing support to strengthen capacities of national institutions in developing and implementing statistical surveys and legal reviews of working conditions which include attention to the dimensions of unpaid work and the work-family constraints of workers.

Building capacity on the instruments, policies, measures and practices that can be taken to promote work-family reconciliation and gender equality. Understanding the problems of work-family conflict for employers and workers is essential for moving toward solutions. Building from understanding to action requires considerable investments in capacities of policy-makers and the social partners to design gender-mainstreamed policies and programmes that respond effectively to the problems. The ILO engages extensively in capacity building and the sharing of practical experience at the global, regional and national levels. The International Training Centre of the ILO in Turin, Italy develops and offers a wide range of training courses and modules on international labour standards for achieving gender equality in the world of work, including those on workers with family responsibilities and maternity protection. These are offered for government officials, and representatives of trade unions and employers' organizations from around the world. The ILO has also collaborated with the Inter-Parliamentary Union to raise awareness and build capacities of parliament members around the world on support for workers with family responsibilities through the ratification and effective implementation of ILO key gender standards.

At the national level, the ILO has provided technical support to tripartite constituents to build capacities on labour standards, policies, and measures to effectively respond to the problems facing workers and employers in coping with work-family conflict. Countries in which the ILO has responded to capacity-building requests from the constituents in recent years include Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, China, India, Japan, Kyrgyzstan, Mauritius, Paraguay, Spain, Thailand, Trinidad and Tobago, and Zambia.

Strengthening social security with a view to reducing gender inequalities

In Chile, the ILO has assisted the government in the formulation and implementation of the new solidarity pension and its "gender pillar", which was designed with women's unpaid work contributions to society in mind, by including a pension bonus to all women for each living child they have. The bonus is intended to compensate for the reduction of women's economic contributions during their working lives due to time off for unpaid care, and also supports those citizens without any earnings history, among whom unpaid women figure prominently. The Chilean government also offers senior citizens a range of subsidies on essentials such as electricity, water and health care, improving the well-being of seniors and alleviating some of the responsibilities for care that often fall to younger (female) relatives.

Strengthening trade union activities on work and family. The ILO provides technical support to trade union networks at international, regional and national levels to improve understanding, strategies and social dialogue on gender equality and work-family reconciliation. The Office has recently provided technical assistance to the UNI Global Union of skills and services to

strengthen capacities of Women's Committee representatives from more than 20 countries from around the world on work-family policies and measures as a means to address gender equality in the world of work. It has also supported the capacity-building efforts of the women's trade union network in Central and Eastern European states (CEE) and newly independent countries (CIS), and the capacity-building efforts of trade unions in Belgium and in Lithuania.

Strengthening employer action and workplace measures. Work-family initiatives at the workplace form an integral part of competitive and productive enterprise management, and the ILO has developed tools and training to enhance the capacity of employers' organizations and other representative business organizations to launch or further develop family-friendly measures in the workplace. The ILO has developed a training package on Work and Family with information, activities, good practices and other resources to guide action and initiatives on work and family. The UN Global Compact has also provided direction and opportunities for strengthening employer action on a wide range of gender equality and non-discrimination issues, including work and family reconciliation. The ILO has supported capacity-building activities with employer organizations in Azerbaijan, India, the Philippines and Zambia to further workplace measures for gender equality and family-friendly workplaces.

Encouraging care services. Addressing the needs of working parents for care services poses considerable challenges to Labour Ministries, employers and trade unions alike. The ILO has sought to provide practical guidance to strengthen responses by constituents and other stakeholders, bringing together good practices and promoting knowledge-sharing national frameworks and workplace partnerships to support workers' and employers' needs for childcare. In Costa Rica, India and Pakistan, the ILO has worked with constituents to develop responses to the need for childcare.

Public information and education. ILO has supported member States to develop gender-sensitive materials and campaigns for improving public awareness of the issues and policies for addressing the needs of workers with family responsibilities in Azerbaijan, India, Kyrgyzstan and Paraguay.

Public education leading to action

India: An ILO project on bonded labour in rural areas worked with communities to conduct a gender analysis and planning (activity profile and cash-drain analysis) for men and women. The activity helped participants identify the links between women's and men's activities during the day and their impacts on household income. The activity prompted considerable changes in behavior with men increasing their participation in the family chores.

Paraguay: The ILO provided support for raising awareness of the general public through a national campaign promoting equal sharing of family responsibilities between women and men and through capacity building activities with the country's Tripartite Commission on Equal Opportunities. These efforts resulted in the country's ratification of Convention No. 156 in December 2007. The ILO continues to provide technical assistance in the process of transposing the Convention's provisions into the national policy framework.

Improving the recognition, value, and oversight of paid domestic work. Recognizing and valuing unpaid care in the family is mutually dependent on recognizing and valuing care that is provided for pay. Moreover, ensuring equality of opportunity and treatment for all paid care providers requires attention to their rights to decent work. The ILO undertakes a wide range of

capacity-building efforts in this domain. In terms of domestic work, the ILO has worked with constituents to strengthen the recognition, legal rights, working conditions and organization of domestic workers, and to improve the quality, relevance and equity of vocational training to increase the recognition of skills and professionalization of domestic work in a number of countries, including Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Costa Rica, India, Indonesia, Lebanon, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Uruguay.

Challenges and the way forward

Achievements have been made around the world in introducing new laws, policies and measures addressing the needs of workers with family responsibilities. The length of maternity leave has increased in many countries, providing women needed time for recovery and for coping with the increased care demands at the time of childbirth. Innovative approaches have been introduced in a number of countries to encourage men to take up more care responsibilities in the home. Greater attention is being placed on care services.

Nevertheless, in many countries, governments, workers' and employers' organizations are only starting to reflect on work and family concerns, while in still others, the problems facing workers with family responsibilities are scarcely on the political agenda. There is an urgent need for more research, tools and understanding of the issues, consequences and responses surrounding the relationship between the labour market and unpaid family responsibilities. There is also a need to enhance social dialogue among the tripartite partners in order to reach agreements on and implement legislative measures on work and family.

A serious obstacle to the full application of the principles of the Convention on Workers with Family responsibilities is that gender-biased attitudes concerning the role of women as primary caregivers for children persist and continue to be reflected in policies and legislation. Well-meaning work-family measures can reinforce the gender distribution of household responsibilities and undermine women's ability to compete in the labour market on an equal footing with men if they target women in particular. For example, measures requiring enterprises to set up childcare centres when they employ a certain number of women overlooks the reality that men also have childcare responsibilities. Policy orientations must challenge such assumptions in order to promote equality.

Measures to promote the reconciliation of work and family responsibilities require multi-sectoral responses, partnerships, and coordination. To give one example, childcare that fits the hours and needs of working parents is an urgent need in virtually all countries. But childcare policies, funding, oversight and provision can involve an impressive array of government ministries, even apart from the involvement of employers and employers' organizations, trade unions, municipalities, community based organizations and others. Ensuring coordination, dialogue and partnership for integrated approaches is clearly a critical challenge. Nevertheless, many countries have established coordinating bodies to bring together actors from different sectors for coordinated responses, such as Chile's National Commission for Early Childhood Education, India's Integrated Child Development Service, and the U.K.'s Department for Children, Schools and Families.

Finally, whether and how nations address the urgent need for work-family measures during the current period of economic crisis remains to be seen. A strong case can certainly be made for stimulus packages that include generous investments in social protections and public services. Public spending on social services reduces the vulnerability of the population, alleviates unpaid care responsibilities and supports employment in the growing sectors of care and education, all

of which stand to support the reconciliation of work and family and contribute to greater gender equality, while also making economic sense. Public spending in education and care, for example, has demonstrated beneficial effects for employment and for the economy as a whole that are on par or better than the returns on public spending on infrastructure. Indeed, a number of countries have developed stimulus packages with careful attention to social spending. Nevertheless, these remain hotly contested topics in many nations and how they will play out in each remains to be seen.

*Much of this text is based on the following synthesis where references can be found:

Addati, Laura and Naomi Cassirer. 2008. "Creating effective equality of opportunity and treatment for men and women workers: The ILO policy framework for workers with family responsibilities and national practices around the world." ILO Background Paper to the Expert Group Meeting organized by the Division for the Advancement of Women on "Equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including care-giving in the context of HIV/AIDS," Geneva, Switzerland, 6 - 9 October 2008. Available at: www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/equalsharing/egm_equalsharing.htm