



# General Assembly

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## Human Rights Council

Seventeenth session

Agenda item 3

**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,  
political, economic, social and cultural rights,  
including the right to development**

### **Written statement\* submitted by the Institute for Women's Studies and Research, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[16 May 2011]

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\* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

## **Women employment and extreme poverty**

More than 1 billion people live in poverty around the world, and a great majority of them are women. Women's poverty results in widespread violations of their human rights. When a woman faces a lack of access to adequate housing, food, or health care, her human rights are violated. When she lives in an unsafe and unhealthy environment or lacks access to clean water, she is not enjoying her fundamental human rights to a life of dignity and to an adequate standard of living.

Women face particular issues: they are more likely to be in nonpermanent working relationships than men, with less employment security and no access to maternity leave. Long working hours and overtime are also an issue and enforcement of labour laws is a problem in the agricultural sector in general.

Poverty has a strong female dimension, and women continue to face greater economic disadvantage compared to men. Women tend to be over-represented in jobs with poor working conditions and pay, often in the informal economy, and also undertake much 'invisible' work in the home or family businesses that is undervalued in terms of its contribution to economic development. Other key issues faced by women are disproportionate unemployment, occupational segregation and wage and other discrimination (ILO, 2009i).

The gender dimension of employment should also be taken into account, to ensure that men and women have equal access to productive work. This applies to job creation, vocational training and education, Medium, Small and Micro Enterprise (MSME), labour market policy and access to credit. For example, according to the ILO (2009i), sex discrimination in relation to vocational training is common and affects women's ability to access jobs with better pay and conditions. Microfinance has assisted many poor women to create or development MSMEs, raising household income so that more can be spent on children's education and family health and nutrition (ILO, 2009i).

Labour standards can also be considered as 'enabling rights' that encourage stronger standards of governance and democracy and promote social development. For example, widespread social and economic benefits can be gained by empowering women through providing greater access to income and employment opportunities.

As an NGO active in the field of human rights, Institute for women studies and researches urges the Human rights council and its member states to:

- adopt a gender-specific perspective in its common policies
- Make binding targets to ensure the equal representation of women and men in politics at national, regional and municipal levels.
- for Member States to build the gender perspective into their economic recovery plans by promoting female employment, and implement equal pay for equal work laws in full
- Create a family-friendly labour market for men and women and invest in education and training and active labour market policies, with a focus on the most vulnerable.