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# NATIONAL EMPLOYMENT POLICIES

# HOW TO GET MORE WOMEN

# WORKING IN ETHIOPIA

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**Key messages:** While some national employment policies take gender concerns into account, most employment laws, policies, and strategies reflect limitations in incorporating specific workplace challenges faced by women. There is a need to introduce legal reforms and advocate for their implementation in order to increase women's workforce participation.

## 1 | WHAT IS AT STAKE?

Achieving gender equality and empowering women in the labor market continues to be a challenge in Ethiopia, and various issues negatively affect millions of women and impede their chances and opportunities for a decent work life. Women continue to face higher unemployment and discrimination in the world of work, and their representation in the higher-value sector is low<sup>[1]</sup>. Women are often concentrated in lower-ranking positions and have less opportunity for promotion, access to holding a position of authority and management, and higher salaries. There are also wage gaps between men and women. In addition, the employment opportunities of women who become mothers are compromised as they are the primary childcare providers. Data both from the World Bank and the Ministry of Labor and Skills shows that female labor force participation in Ethiopia was reported at 46.31 % in 2021<sup>[2]</sup>.

However, women need to be fully engaged in the labor market and have an equal voice with men at all levels of economic decision-making. Economically empowering women and integrating them into solutions is a right. However, it also makes economic sense. A growing body of research shows that enhancing women's economic participation improves national economies, increases household productivity and living standards, enhances the well being of children with positive long term impacts, and can increase women's agency and overall empowerment<sup>3</sup>. As more women enter the labor force, economies have the potential to grow faster in response to higher labor inputs. Women's supply of labor increases household incomes, which help families escape poverty and increase their consumption of goods and services<sup>4</sup> and this is the main justification for having more women in the labor force.

This brief seeks to review gaps in various national employment policies and indicate pathways for improvement. Insights from the brief offer policy options for dialogue in order to support legal reforms that serve both male and female workers equally.

## 2 | APPROACHES

The policy recommendations are based on the national employment policy review conducted by the Network of Ethiopian Women Association (NEWA). The exercise was financially supported by the International Development Research Center (IDRC), Growth and Economic Opportunities for Women (GrOW) – East Africa project. The overall purpose of the policy

review was to provide a systematic review of the gender dimensions of the various national employment policies and their practice in Ethiopia and produce a brief for influencing policy. Ethiopia has put in place several policies, laws, and strategies dealing with national employment. The laws and policies were reviewed to understand the extent to which gender responsiveness is evidenced. These considerations include, among other things, the extent to which policies encourage access to soft skill training and job information services; whether employment policies consider the gender agenda in employment services; whether employment policies take into account women's household responsibilities; whether policies encourage workplace learning and apprenticeship opportunities; and whether policies encourage gender responsive career guidance and counseling.

Some of the policies reviewed include, the National Employment Policy and Strategy (2015), the National Technical & Vocational Education and Training Strategy (adopted in 2008), the Micro and Small Enterprise Development Policies & Strategy (adopted in 2012/edited 2016), the Rural Job Opportunity Creation Strategy (2017), Plan of Action for Job Creation (and other various employment-related laws and regulations, such as the Labour Proclamation No. 1156/2019, the Federal Civil Servant Proclamation 1064/2017, and the Private Employment Agency for Internal Employment Directive (2019) were reviewed.

### **3| KEY FINDINGS**

#### **A| There are some policy commitment to empowering women in the workplace.**

The Constitution of Ethiopia provides that women workers have the right to maternity leave with full pay. The Labour Proclamation No. 1156/2019 prohibits the employment of women in types of work that have been listed by the Minister as particularly arduous or harmful to women's health. Similarly, pregnant women may not be required to work overtime or at night<sup>5</sup>. In addition, the National Employment Policy and Strategy (2015), has included women-specific problems, gender-sensitive principles, and standalone women targeted strategies. It also directs the implementation of labor market adjustment measures to improve the employability of job seekers who are unable to compete for a variety of reasons. The Rural Job Opportunity Creation Strategy (2017) recognizes, in its introduction, the need for creating decent job opportunities for rural youth and women in a more coordinated and concerted manner. Also, the TVET strategy aims to empower women through skills development as well as ensure equal access to TVET for women with special needs. Further, the Micro and Small Enterprise Development Policies and Strategy, recognize the challenges of women transitioning from the domestic sphere to the world of work and the systemic and persistent gap in accessing the labor market when compared to men. The findings then show that some policies reflect gender sensitivity to a certain extent, but gaps persist, as shown below.

#### **B| Equal remuneration for work of equal value and minimum wage is missing**

Ethiopian employment laws fail to mandate equal pay for equally valuable work. Equal pay for men and women is guaranteed by the Constitution, equal compensation, however, encompasses more than just wages. Equal compensation includes benefits provided as part of an employee's overall remuneration package. Work of equal value can also refer to distinct tasks that are worth the same amount of money in addition to the same or similar jobs. When Ethiopian men and women perform work that is different in content but of overall

equal value, they should receive equal remuneration<sup>6</sup>. In addition, while the National Employment Policy and Strategy-NEPS (2015) provides for setting a minimum wage, legislation is yet to be put in place.

### **C| Most laws and policies are less sensitive to women's work burden**

The NEPS (2015) provides some provisions with regard to availing technology that reduces the burden on women from domestic chores and the provision of childcare services to mothers, though the policy falls short of recognizing the root cause, such as discriminatory gender stereotypes, norms, and values. The Rural Job Opportunity Creation Strategy (2017) and Micro and Small Enterprise Development Policies and Strategy (2012), for instance, fail to recognize women's burden of household responsibilities and unpaid care work. The same is true for the Micro and Small enterprise Development Policies and Strategy that fail to address issues related to household responsibilities and unpaid care work. Strategies for balancing work and family responsibilities, such as childbearing and childrearing, as well as caring for the sick and elderly, are not mentioned in the documents, particularly for those who work for a wage. The documents make no mention of preventing discrimination and addressing gender-based violence (including harmful traditional practices) that impede women's mobility, nor do they mention using affirmative action. There have been some initiatives by public and private employers to provide daycare services, but the coverage is limited and the sustainability is questionable. Flexible working hours for workers with family responsibilities and daycare services are yet to be fully accessible. Policy provisions that assist parents in balancing their family and work lives are largely missing.

### **D| NEP overlook Women's access to labor market information**

While the Plan of Action for Job Creation, which aims to create 14 million jobs by 2025, highlights the challenges of labor market information due to mainly weak labor market intermediation, most National Employment Policies (NEPs) overlook women's related problem of limited access to information on the labor markets, while men and women's abilities to access information are not the same. Furthermore, the labor market information system is not yet supported by technology and is not accessible to poor women and women at the grass-roots level. Most often, the market seeks mainly skilled jobs where women tend to be less mobile and have lesser access to electronic media than men (due to social, cultural, and economic factors), making them less capable of accessing the labor market and relevant information<sup>7</sup>. Lack of labor market information is a problem as it stifles opportunities to seek work. Overall, most policies fail to provide guidance on establishing labor market information systems and fail to make provisions for long-term information supply. Women's success in finding employment or starting their own businesses is made more difficult by a lack of access to IT-supported free employment information.

### **E| Unequal policy emphasis to soft skills in comparison to technical and vocational trainings**

Education and Training Policy (1994) and the National Technical & Vocational Education & Training (TVET) Strategy (2008) as well as NEPS (2015) make limited reference to the challenges of equipping students with soft skills. TVET strategy indicates strengthening vocational and skill training programs to ensure the competency of women in the labor market as a strategy, but does not differentiate between hard and soft skills. The same holds true for micro- and small-business development policies and strategies. Overall, there is a tendency to prioritize hard skills over soft skills. The policies fail to address the main

challenges in terms of enhancing soft skills related to communication, assertiveness, and leadership skills that empower women to look for employment opportunities, enter into self-employment businesses, demand their rights, and prevent GBV in the labor force and at the workplace; Practice shows that formal schooling and training institutions, at best, teach only technical skills. As a result, many youth lack the soft skills needed for success in the workplace/business. Various studies, however, have found that soft skills training interventions may improve employment prospects by providing youth with better job-search skills and confidence, as well as making them more productive in their jobs.

#### **F| Policy provisions for apprenticeship opportunities exist but not gender sensitive**

The National Technical & Vocational Education & Training (TVET) Strategy (2008) provides for apprenticeship opportunities. TVET students in Ethiopia have to apprentice for 70% of the time spent in the program. The government has given TVET colleges the responsibility of finding potential employers who can give TVET students an apprenticeship experience. While identifying and engaging employers in certain industries, especially government owned has been successful, it appears that other companies resist this practice and see TVET apprentices as a burden<sup>8</sup>. However, the policies and strategies fail to recognize the unique challenges that women face throughout the process as well as in completing apprenticeship training in the country.

## **4| POLICY OPTIONS**

Based on the evidence presented, the following Policy insights are provided for action. The Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Urban Development and Housing, TVET and other policy-making institutions are targeted. The government should take the following steps to make national employment policies (NEPs) more gender-responsive. Civil society organizations may advocate for legal reform and its implementation in order to create more favorable conditions for women to enter the labor force.

#### **A| Promote equal pay for equal value and minimum pay**

To increase women's labor-force participation, policy makers need to consider mandating equal pay for equal work<sup>9</sup>. CSOs may advocate and lobby for the establishment of equal pay legislation and also set a minimum pay that is responsive to women in various sectors including construction; Setting a minimum wage expected to protect the interests of workers.

#### **B| Issue directives that address women's burden in work place**

There is a need to issue detailed directives or guidelines that facilitate the realization of labour market adjustment policy measures indicated in the NEPS (2015). Policy makers can take into consideration that includes the following adjustments, depending on the country's capacity and labour markets areas.

- Wage subsidies for employers willing to hire women and provide on-job training
- Earnings supplements to enable women to re-enter the labour market, especially those who have been out of work due to childcare and family responsibilities
- Loans and grants for skills development
- Partnerships between the public and private sectors to create jobs
- Ensuring gender-balanced employment-guarantee programs
- Ensuring that women are prioritized in projects that create jobs

CSO and development partners should advocate and lobby for having directives or guidelines that clearly stipulates gender transformative measures of labour adjustments and group of people that benefit from such measures. Also, advocate for special policy provisions to assist parents in balancing their family and work lives, and ensuring that traditional gender division of labor is not enforced.

### **C| Promote Women’s access to job information services**

Reform employment laws so that labor market information is accessible to both urban and rural populations, while also being sensitive to the needs of men and women. Emphasize access to IT-supported employment information that benefits women’s success to get jobs or creating their own enterprises. Also, promote access to labor information in rural areas using the services of the government and private employment agencies. Expanding employment services to include women-specific job search assistance as well as employment guidance and reducing job search related costs. It is essential to increase women's access to labor market information systems and respond to shifting demands.

### **D| Emphasis on soft skill integration in to trainings and Gender sensitive Apprenticeship programs**

Explore ways of incorporating soft-skills program into high school curriculum and also other TVET and University education. To consider soft-skill trainings responsive to the needs of boys and girls, revise the National Technical and Vocational Education and Training Strategy as well as the Micro and Small Enterprise Development Policies and Strategy. In addition, make sure that the existing apprenticeship/internship programs and career counseling service policies incorporate women's needs and concerns.

### **E| Invest in NEP related data collection and capacity building**

Reviewing the gender dimensions of national employment policies and strategies is just the first step in understanding the trends on the ground: A useful next step would be to analyze the results of each policy on the ground in order to see the degree to which there is a gap between policy documents, implementation, and outcomes<sup>10</sup>. CSO and research institutions may improve the capacity of policymakers and also generate evidence on what works in the world of work for women and men.

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#### **NEWA**

Network of Ethiopian Women’s Associations (NEWA), is one of the largest pioneer national civil society network in Ethiopia working for the respect of the political, economic, social and legal rights of women. Please use this address to contact.

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