

Activity 1

Case studies

Equal treatment at work: women workers in the European Union

On 1 May 1999, the Treaty of Amsterdam came into force. It was negotiated by member states of the European Union (EU). One of its main objectives is to define citizen and employment rights. The treaty commits the EU to promoting equality between men and women. It contains important new equality provisions concerning employment.

Regional initiatives can now be undertaken within the EU to support and complement national activities dealing with labour market opportunities and treatment at work.

It is also now possible to adopt regional measures to ensure that the principles of equal opportunities and equal treatment in matters of employment (including equal pay for work of equal value) are being applied.

A significant change is that the treaty recognises that member states may take positive action to allow “the underrepresented sex to pursue a vocational activity or to prevent or compensate for disadvantages in professional careers”.

The most dramatic change in terms of equal treatment is the new Article 13. It establishes a new legal basis that allows the European Council to take action to combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. This provides the opportunity to tackle sex discrimination in the workplace and beyond throughout Europe.

Career prospects improve for women on the waterfront

More women than ever are working in ports, breaking down the traditional image of wharfies as men. This ILWU film shows men and women working together on the waterfront in Canada: bit.ly/1yS1Q95

Women have always been part of the ILWU but they have not always had equal access to all occupations. Women began entering the longshore industry in the 1970s under a rule that allowed the surviving offspring of a deceased active longshoreman to take their father's place.

In Northern California and the Pacific Northwest women also gained work opportunity and union membership through traditional means, such as working qualifying hours by taking extra or “casual” jobs on busy days in their ports.

In some areas under the ILWU's jurisdiction, such as Southern California, women took out lawsuits to win their rightful place in the industry.

By 1993, 540 women were working longshore on the Pacific Coast, about seven percent of the total workforce. Today, women are active in the workplace and in their union. Longshore women serve as elected local officers, caucus and convention delegates and members of their local union executive board.

Papua New Guinea women achieve collective bargaining success revealing their power and strategic significance in fisheries.

Within ITF affiliates, women comprise just three percent of the fisheries sector. However, the 135 million who work in the post-catch supply chain consists largely of women. The partnership between ITF and IUF (International Union of Food Workers) that targets workers across the fisheries supply chain is therefore significant to the ITF precisely because the land-based women workers can in turn positively influence their more isolated and disparate male fisher colleagues to become active union members.

The catcher to counter campaign identified that the post-catch supply chain offered the best potential for building significant power and membership bases which could then be extended to the far more isolated and often absent fishers. According to food and agriculture organisations (FAO), case studies suggest that 30 percent of the total workforce is women.

The pilot campaign in Papua New Guinea (PNG) built a model around the identification of women leaders who then participated in training, decision making and campaigning to deliver both constitutional and statutory changes that won union recognition and the right to collective bargaining predominantly for women workers.

“These canneries are where we can build our powerbase with large numbers, anywhere between 100 and 5,000, of fairly static workforces and significant numbers of women. These strongholds of membership are critical to our strategy to organise across the fisheries supply chain.” Liz Blackshaw, ITF/IUF fisheries programme leader.

In 2012, the predominantly female workforce of a cannery with a history of extreme union hostility launched a campaign to gain union recognition. The strategy was to then extend that campaign to include fishers.

In July 2013, after a series of training events, workshops and workforce actions including a petition signed by over 3,500 workers, the cannery workers won their right to recognition of the independent PNG Maritime Union (MTWU). The fishers have now formally requested that they be given the same right.

Fighting for the future of work: UPS strike

In August 1997, the IBT (Teamsters) union in the United States, which represents workers in the package delivery company UPS, took strike action. Along with increases in pay and pensions, the Teamsters demanded limits on subcontracting, better health and safety provisions and more full-time jobs.

Some two-thirds of the drivers, sorters and other UPS workers represented by the union worked part time. The union highlighted that these workers wanted full-time employment but were given no chance to get it. “The part-time issue is one that affects working families everywhere. It would particularly affect women and minorities,” said the Teamsters.

The strike was successfully resolved after two weeks of action and protracted negotiations, which resulted in a five-year contract and the creation of 10,000 new full-time jobs from existing part-time positions.

British Airways strike

In 1997, a highly effective strike in British Airways resulted in a major victory for the unions. For almost a year before the strike, British Airways had made vague announcements about a cost-saving programme.

One of BA's aims was a radical restructuring of cabin crew working arrangements – an occupation where the majority of employees are women. This involved working longer hours, a pay freeze, as well as developing a new workforce of younger and less experienced but super-cheap cabin crew. The company said that employees must accept these conditions. It said there would be no negotiations with the union and threatened to dismiss workers who went on strike.

After three days of strike action, the company was forced to negotiate with the union. Aviation workers in other countries showed support for BA workers by taking solidarity action. With the assistance of the ITF, the picket line became global!

Activity 2

Leadership worksheet

In small groups using this worksheet discuss and agree your answers. Be prepared to share your answers with the plenary.

1. What is the definition of leadership?
2. Name some great leaders (past or present)?
3. What makes/made them a great leader?
4. What skills do you need to be a great leader? Do you associate these skills with women or men? Add W next to the skills you associate with women and M next to skills you associate with men
5. Name a leader you have worked with and that you respected?

6. What was it you respected about them?

7. Looking at these features can you give an example of when you have displayed any of these behaviours?



Activity 3

Bargaining checklist for unions.

1. Does your union hold meetings for women members to discuss workplace issues and run women's campaigns?
2. Are women's issues identified prior to bargaining and included on the bargaining agenda?
3. Are women involved as members on negotiating and bargaining teams?
4. Do women get pay and conditions equal to their male counterparts?
5. Are women employed in adequate numbers in the workforce? Does the employer need to provide more information on this?
6. Are there specific provisions for women transport workers in your collective agreement or workplace policies? Some of these could include:
 - Separate washrooms with sanitary facilities
 - Sleeping and other rest areas
 - Suitable safety and protective clothing
 - Maternity rights
 - Sexual harassment policies
7. National & legislative considerations:
 - Does your state provide security of employment for all women transport workers?
 - Does your state have laws asserting the right of equity in pay and conditions between men and women?
 - Do you have state-set minimum pay rates?
 - Do you have state-set maternity and other parental paid leave provisions?
 - Do you have national laws against sexual harassment and violence against women?
 - Are there national occupational health and safety and anti-discrimination laws for women?
8. Do you aim to negotiate standards higher than the legal minimums?