

Media Update

27 June 2024

ILO

PRESS RELEASE

Stakeholders advocate for equal opportunities for women in engineering

Gender equality in the engineering profession is a matter of decent work and social justice and an economic imperative.

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan (ILO & UNOPS News) – Stakeholders at the International Women in Engineering Day event recognized the ongoing challenges in achieving gender parity in the engineering profession and reaffirmed their commitment to ensuring equal opportunities for women to innovate, lead & excel in shaping the future of engineering.

The International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), and the Pakistan Engineering Council (PEC) marked International Women in Engineering Day by bringing together stakeholders, including representatives from Government, employers' and workers' organizations, amongst others at the ILO Country Office in Islamabad. The event highlighted the contributions of women in the engineering field and highlighted the challenges they face in accessing and pursuing engineering careers.

International Women in Engineering Day serves as a global initiative to promote the visibility of women in engineering, showcasing diverse career opportunities and celebrating the remarkable achievements of women engineers worldwide.

In Pakistan, women's labour force participation rate stands at a concerning 21%, with the majority concentrated in unskilled and low-skilled roles. Only 1% of women hold managerial positions. This disparity extends to the engineering field, where women remain significantly underrepresented.

The event underscored the need for increased investment in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) education for girls. It also called for initiatives to promote gender parity in male-dominated fields in Pakistan and to create a working environment that is more inclusive and free of violence and harassment.

Ms Jennifer Ankrom, Country Manager of UNOPS Pakistan, emphasized the importance of involving both men and women in the design, delivery, and review of infrastructure. “UNOPS has developed a range of guidelines related to inclusiveness of infrastructure to guide practitioners and policy makers. Part of this is considering that a workforce without women will not result in inclusive infrastructure. UNOPS Pakistan is making efforts to expand our pool of women led businesses and women engineers given that in both, women are significantly underrepresented.”

She further stated that UNOPS has a zero-tolerance approach to unsafe work environments. “We strive to deliver the highest quality work for our partners and communities we support – safely and sustainably. UNOPS' celebration of women engineers underscores our commitment to providing an enabling environment where women can thrive professionally, and support inclusive and sustainable development in Pakistan,” she added.

Dr. Arshad Mehmood, Federal Secretary, Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development, joined the event as chief guest and said, “Empowering women engineers in Pakistan can unlock a vast talent pool, significantly boost the country's labour force participation rate, and contribute to a more diverse and skilled workforce, both domestically and internationally.”

Representing the PEC, Engr. Khadija Qureshi said “Despite being 50% of the population, only 30,000 women are registered engineers, and just 3,000 are professional engineers. It's crucial to promote gender equality by encouraging

parents and girls to pursue STEM and focusing on skill building and career development resources.”

Ms Fauzia Waqar, Federal Ombudsman for Protection Against Harassment at Workplace stated, "Fostering an inclusive workplace culture that actively addresses and prevents harassment is crucial to attract and retain women in engineering, enabling them to thrive in a safe and respectful environment that values their skills and contributions."

Mr Guillermo Montt, representing the ILO stated: "The ILO, through its normative framework, works to improve the policy environment and application of International Labour Standards in order to ensure access to equal opportunities in training and employment for women and men. We do this through social dialogue with Government, employers' and workers' organizations."

The event also featured a panel discussion with women engineers who shared their experiences and highlighted three key issues: violence and harassment, the need for a supportive environment that allows women with family responsibilities to continue their careers, and access to training opportunities.

For further information please contact:

Muhammad Numan

Communication Officer

Email: numan@ilo.org

Mobile: +92 303 5000041

Arooj Zahra

Communication Officer

Email: aroojz@unops.org

Mobile: +92 346 8557731