



International Labour Office - Geneva  
Bureau international du Travail - Genève  
Oficina Internacional del Trabajo - Ginebra

# **Women's Employment: Global Trends and ILO Responses**

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**ILO contribution**  
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## **Preface**

The International Labour Organization's (ILO) work on gender equality is set in the context of successive UN commitments to gender equality and poverty eradication as established by the World Summit on Social Development (Copenhagen 1995), the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing 1995), and the respective follow-up Special Sessions of the UN General Assembly in 2000. Gender equality is considered central to the core mandate of the ILO which is to promote decent work, both as a human right and as a positive productive factor. The ILO's approach to mainstreaming gender equality involves rights-based strategies for the economic empowerment of women and men as a fundamental step to protecting and promoting the rights of all workers.

The aim of this paper is to provide an overview of current trends on women within labour markets and to highlight ILO's action to promote gender equality in the world of work. The paper was compiled by the ILO Bureau for Gender Equality and draws on recent labour market data for women. Special acknowledgements are made to the ILO Employment Sector's Employment Trends programme and the ILO Bureau of Statistics for providing recent data and statistics on global employment trends for women.

## 1. Introduction

Gender equality refers to equal rights, opportunities, and treatment of women and men, girls and boys in all spheres of life. It asserts that people's rights; responsibilities; social status; and access to, and control over, resources do not depend on whether they are born male or female. This does not mean, however, that women and men are the same or must become the same. Gender equality implies that both women and men are free to develop their personal abilities and make choices without the limitations set by stereotypes or prejudices about gender roles or the characteristics of women and men.

Significant strides have been made towards advancing the cause of gender equality, and the responses from some individual governments have been encouraging. The range of actions taken includes integrating gender equality concerns into national programmes and plans of action, including the creation of national structures to enhance women's participation in development efforts. Significant steps have been taken towards improving women's access to education, employment, productive resources and property rights. However, there is still much work to be done.

This paper presents some of the recent trends in global labour force participation. One of the most striking phenomena of recent times has been the increasing proportion of women in the labour force, enabling women in many regions to use their potential more in the labour market and to achieve economic independence.<sup>1</sup> But does the fact that women are entering the labour market in increasing numbers mean that there is enhanced gender equality in the world of work? And does it mean that all women who look for work are successful in finding it? If they do find work, what are the typical characteristics of female work compared to that of male counterparts?

The paper is largely a compilation of findings from ILO research on global labour market trends for women as well as other sources that examine trends in the global labour market, both the formal and informal sectors.<sup>2</sup> Particular attention is given to trends in female labour force participation over the last decades.<sup>3</sup> The paper also provides highlights of the ILO's responses to emerging gender issues in the world of work.

## 2. Overview of labour force participation

### Globalisation and the labour force

Globalisation has created new opportunities for growth and employment but also challenges and problems such as job displacement and job loss, as well as increased stresses and strains at the workplaces exposed to increasing global competition. On a general level there is evidence that in order to grasp the new opportunities of globalised markets, it is important to be part of the trade and investment flows of the global economy. If countries do not participate in these flows or are integrated in the world economy solely as primary commodity

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<sup>1</sup> ILO, *Time for Equality at Work*, 2003

<sup>2</sup> For further reference, please see the following ILO publications: *Global Employment Trends for Women 2004*; *Gender! A Partnership of Equals*, 2001

<sup>3</sup> The ILO Bureau for Gender Equality acknowledges the ILO Employment Sector for assistance in the adaptation of text and graphs from the *Global Employment Trends for Women 2004* for use in this paper.

exporters they face bleak results in their economies and labour markets. The dismal growth, employment and poverty record of the excluded countries account for much of the unfairness in globalisation according to the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization (WCSDG 2004).<sup>4</sup>

Yet, even in the countries in which globalisation has had a generally positive impact, workers can still be negatively affected, as globalisation can contribute to jobless growth as well as labour market adjustment problems. The pros and cons of globalisation are in fact unfairly distributed between winners and losers within countries even when a country as a whole is a winner in globalisation. Labour markets in particular create winners and losers: While new jobs are created, other jobs are lost. Loss and creation do not occur in the same sectors, firms and regions of a country, and do not occur at the same time. Sometimes jobs are lost in one country and created in another. Jobs destroyed and created usually differ in terms of pay, skills, age, sex and so on.

From a gender perspective, the impact of globalisation on employment patterns is rather complex. Amongst other, it entails that when an economic sector with a high concentration of female workers, such as textile and garment, is negatively affected in one country, there could be job gains in other countries. Enterprises move around the world, relocating their production sites, seeking cheaper and more efficient suppliers, and frequently outsourcing work outside home countries, typically from industrialised to developing countries. Various international trade regimes also have different impacts on women and men, depending on the share of workforce in a given economic sector. Another impact factor of globalisation on women's employment is the increasing number of migrant women.

### **Changing nature of the labour force**

The growing proportion of women in the labour force has been one of the most striking labour market trends of recent times. Never before have so many women been economically active. The global female labour force (the sum of employed and unemployed women) was 1.2 billion in 2003, up from one billion in 1993. In addition, the labour force participation rate for men has decreased in most regions of the world. As a result, the gap between the sexes in terms of labour force participation has decreased considerably. Still, in no region of the world is the gender gap anywhere near to being closed.

The labour force participation rate expresses the share of employed plus unemployed people in comparison with the working-age population.<sup>5</sup> It gives an indication of how many people of working age are actively participating in the formal labour market. The gap between the participation rate for men and women has been decreasing in all regions during the past ten years, but apart from the transition economies (where 91 women are economically active per 100 men) and East Asia (with a proportion of 83 women per 100 men), all other regions still face a difference of fewer than 80 economically active women per 100 men. In the Middle East and North Africa and in South Asia there are only around 40 economically active women for every 100 men in the formal economy, clearly a reflection of the traditional gender roles ascribed to women and men.

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<sup>4</sup> The full report of the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization, *A Fair Globalization: Creating Opportunities for All*, can be downloaded from <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/faithglobalization/report/index.htm>

<sup>5</sup> For international comparisons, 'working age' refers to 15 years and above.

Furthermore, the 1990s and early 2000s saw an upward trend among the industrialised countries in terms of the share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector, increasing from 42 per cent to 44 per cent. For the transition economies, the estimate of women's share in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector was a high 49 per cent throughout the decade. The estimate of women's non-agricultural wage employment share for the Asian and Pacific regions steadily increased from 29 per cent to 31 per cent in the period. The regional estimate for Latin America and the Caribbean showed an upward trend over the decade from 38 per cent to 42 per cent. The low accuracy of regional estimates for Sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa and the Middle East is due to a scarcity of available country estimates. Nonetheless, the statistics available for these regions indicate an increase from 19 per cent to 28 per cent in Sub-Saharan Africa and a decrease for North Africa and the Middle East from 25 per cent to 22 per cent.

**Table 1**  
**Global labour market indicators, 1993 and 2003**

	Female		Male		Total	
	1993	2003	1993	2003	1993	2003
Labour force (millions)	1,006	1,208	1,507	1,769	2,513	2,978
Employment (millions)	948	1,130	1,425	1,661	2,373	2,792
Unemployment (millions)	58.2	77.8	82.3	108.1	140.5	185.9
Labour force participation rate (%)	53.5	53.9	80.5	79.4	67.0	66.6
Employment-to-population ratio (%)	50.4	50.5	76.1	74.5	63.3	62.5
Unemployment rate (%)	5.8	6.4	5.5	6.1	5.6	6.2

Source: ILO, *Global Employment Trends Model*, 2003.

### **Gender gap persists**

Women's greater access to jobs has not led to a significant reduction of the gender gap in earnings however. Some of the countries with the largest differences in male and female earnings are those where the growth in female employment in recent years has been the fastest. They are also usually countries with a strong export orientation such as Chile, China, the Republic of Korea, and Singapore. These trends indicate that traditional discrimination against women's access to wage employment may have been replaced in some instances by an active preference for women. But this preference is usually based on women's acceptance of unskilled jobs, low pay and their perceived docility and lack of protest.

Certain categories of women are especially vulnerable to inequalities in the world of work. Amongst these are rural women, those working in the informal economy, migrant women, the young, the elderly, and the disabled. At both ends of the spectrum, the young and the elderly face particular disadvantages. Girls are more likely than boys to be victims of the worst forms of child labour, such as slavery and prostitution. Young women tend to have higher unemployment rates than their male counterparts. The HIV/AIDS pandemic and situations of crisis have also increased women's vulnerability to poverty given their limited access to social protection and economic security. Older women, particularly in developing countries, face continued discrimination in the world of work and often have to assume care-giving responsibilities within their families in addition to their work outside the home.

### **Characteristics of female work**

An analysis of employment by three indicators – status, sector and wage/earnings – shows that women are less likely than men to be in regular wage and salaried employment, and that the female contribution to household work exceeds the male contribution in almost all

economies where data are available. Additionally, women are more likely to earn less than men for the same type of work, even in so-called traditionally female occupations. Women are also more likely to be found working in the informal economy than men. This work is largely outside legal and regulatory frameworks, with little social security and a high degree of volatility.

Many of the increasingly typical alternatives to regular full-time waged employment, in which women are numerous – self-employment, casual work, part-time work, employment in the informal economy, home work, domestic service, migrant labour – fall largely outside the scope of conventional social protection systems, which have usually been designed for male breadwinners in regular full-time employment. As social security provisions and different aspects of workers' protection develop to meet the new needs thrown up by globalised, flexible, and informal work and by demographic change, it is vital that the needs of women workers in increasingly feminised occupations and modes of work are taken into account.

### **Export-led growth in Jordan: A mixed picture for women workers**

Despite low official rates of economic activity, women's employment almost doubled in Jordan between 1980 and 2000. Women's employment rate increased from 14.7 per cent to 24.6 per cent of the labour force, and the rate of growth of female employment exceeded the rate of growth of male employment for the same period. There seems to be an increasing visibility of women workers in the manufacturing sector. During 2002 the ILO, through a national tripartite working group, conducted a study to assess women's employment opportunities and working conditions in the recently established export processing zones (EPZs) in Jordan.

The results indicated that about 70 per cent of the women workers were under 25 years of age and most had at least high secondary education and came from traditional and rural families. As such, women's access to education and employment was a significant achievement and in stark contrast with the opportunities which were available to their mothers. Furthermore, they were often the main breadwinners in their families (16 per cent were the sole breadwinners and 57 per cent were one of two breadwinners).

Nevertheless, the research also revealed the existence of poor working conditions (such as bad ventilation and sanitary conditions). Men were more represented in technical jobs while all the women were assembly-line workers, showing a clear occupational segregation. Because of their age and sex, young women were regarded as cheaper workers, with many hired as trainees receiving half the minimum wage during the first three months of employment. High labour turnovers, due to a lack of career prospects, were also found. Finally, most young women workers had little knowledge of their rights. As many as 86 per cent of young workers did not belong to a trade union, because they were unaware of its existence or because they did not believe that it could help improve their working conditions.

Source: ILO, *Women workers in the textiles and garments industry in Jordan: A research on the impact of globalization*, 2002.

Part-time work has become increasingly commonplace over the last decades. In 2002, around 18 per cent of the total working population within the European Union (EU) worked part-

time.<sup>6</sup> However, such work is not equally distributed among women and men. Figures illustrate a prevalence of women in part-time employment. Whereas a minority of EU men, 6.6 per cent, worked on a part-time basis in 2002, this percentage is much higher in the case of women, 33.5 per cent. Moreover, a time dynamic perspective shows that part-time work has increased more among EU women than for men, rising by 4.7 percentage points in a ten-year period compared with a rise of 2.4 percentage points for men. The reasons for working part-time are very different when gender considerations are taken into account. Whereas 23.6 per cent of part-time men cite 'education' reasons, this percentage drops to 7.6 per cent among women. By way of contrast, 'child and adult care' reasons are stressed by 31.5 per cent of EU women part-time workers, whereas only 4.2 per cent of their male counterparts cite this reason. Moreover, involuntary part-timers are more common among men compared with women (19.2 per cent versus 12.8 per cent, respectively), which shows that the option of part-time work is more attractive for women than for men. However, the fact that part-time work is an option in the context of limited alternative forms of childcare might reveal that the notion of 'choice' is ambiguous and contingent.

### **The ILO response – International Labour Conventions**

The ILO Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156) is intended to promote equality of opportunity and treatment in employment for workers with family responsibilities, and between workers with such responsibilities and those without. So far, a total of 36 countries have ratified this Convention (more developing and transition countries than industrialised countries). The ILO is currently promoting ratification of this Convention together with the other key gender equality Conventions: Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100); Discrimination Convention (Employment and Occupation), 1958 (No. 111); Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183).

The ILO's focus on maternity protection, reconciling work and family, and working hours has highlighted the specific requirements of women and men in the workforce and the need to adopt appropriate measures with respect to work arrangements and schedules. Technical cooperation projects are being implemented to extend social insurance to cover maternity benefits to both insured working women and the wives of insured working men.

Through its International Training Centre in Turin, the ILO is also offering training programmes to its constituents on how International Labour Standards can be applied to promote the rights of women workers and workers with family responsibilities as well as how to integrate employment promotion for women into sustainable anti-poverty policies.

### **Women and care work**

Within most economies of the world, women are primarily responsible for the care of family members and household tasks and therefore face greater constraints than men on the amount of time and effort they can put into paid employment and productive work. In developing countries, there is still considerable reliance on the extended family – usually women and girls – for care of children, the sick and the elderly, and few public or private services have emerged in response to the consequent demand for care. There is limited public action or legislation that seeks to harmonise work and family duties, even in areas where the impact of HIV/AIDS has dramatically increased the burden of care on working women. There is still

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<sup>6</sup> Statistics in this paragraph are taken from the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, *Part-time Work in Europe*, 2004.  
<http://www.eurofound.eu.int/working/reports/ES0403TR01/ES0403TR01.pdf>

little recognition of the contribution of household work to national economic outcomes and therefore little change in the corresponding economic and social policies for care work being promoted.

In some countries and sectors, working practices have emerged to assist women in balancing work and family commitments. This is beginning to be seen as an issue for men in some countries, and more men are starting to share in family care work. The division of labour within households is closely related to inequalities in the world of work and has therefore always been a gender equity issue, which calls for the need for a more equitable distribution among men and women of childcare, household and community responsibilities.

### **Structural change in Eastern and Central Europe**

A common structural trend occurring worldwide, the deregulation of labour markets, has meant increased reliance on flexible contracts in which the freedom to hire and fire is greater and in which the duration of contracts may vary considerably. The deregulation of labour markets has also been accompanied by increased obstacles to the organisation of workers. Vulnerable groups have been particularly exposed to such trends, and among these, women living in poverty.

Eastern and Central Europe represent one example of how structural changes have implied new obstacles and threats for women workers. Reductions in social expenditure have meant, amongst other things, the end of free or low-cost childcare. Furthermore, many enterprises have been forced to reduce the scope of services provided to their employees, including childcare facilities. They have begun to charge for services, or to transfer facilities to private owners. The dual pressures on women, at work and at home, are increasing as society presents them with a stark choice: they must devote their time and effort either to their paid work and career or to the family. Part-time jobs are still very scarce, and new private employers expect voluntary overtime and greater productivity.

Source: ILO, *Modular Package on Gender, Poverty and Employment*, 2000

An analysis of six labour market indicators (female unemployment rates, female youth unemployment rates, employment-to-population ratios, status of employment, employment by sector and wages/earnings) makes it clear that there is a positive link between increased female labour force participation rate and improved quality of employment for women. In 2003, out of the 2.8 billion people who had work, 1.1 billion were women.<sup>7</sup> The share of women with work in total has risen slightly in the past ten years to just above 40 per cent. However, improved equality in terms of quantity of male and female workers has yet to result in real socioeconomic empowerment for women, an equitable distribution of household responsibilities, equal pay for work of equal value, and gender balance across all occupations. In short, gender inequalities in the world of work and in access to resources still persist and remain a determining factor in the creation and perpetuation of income and human poverty.

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<sup>7</sup> ILO, *Global Employment Trends for Women 2004*.

<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/strat/download/trendsw.pdf>

### 3. Global employment trends – gender differentials

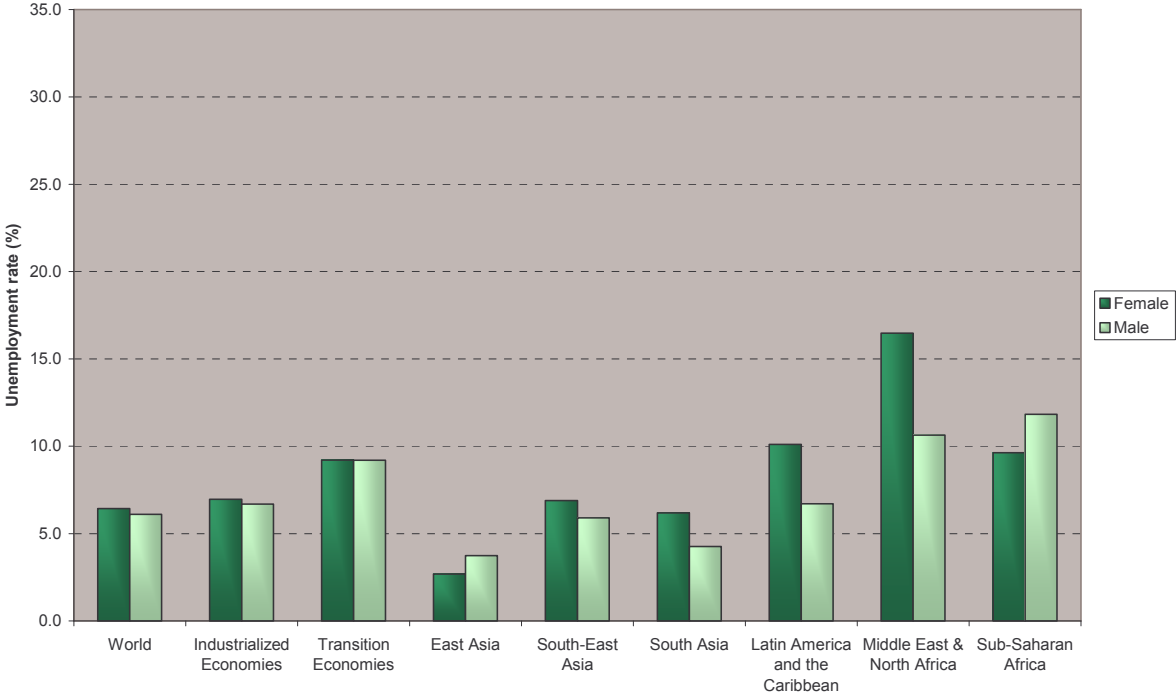
#### Unemployment trends<sup>8</sup>

The global unemployment situation for women does not seem to have improved over the past ten years, with the exception of the industrialised economies, the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia. The majority of regions saw little or no change in female unemployment rates over the period 1993 to 2003. In South-East Asia, the unemployment rate of women increased by more than two percentage points (from 4.7 per cent to 6.9 per cent).

The global unemployment rate in 2003 was at 6.4 per cent for females and 6.1 per cent for males. This leaves 77.8 million women and just over 74 million men without employment who are willing to work and are actively looking for work. The picture is more dramatic in some regions of the world. The regions that showed the greatest differential in rates between women and men was Latin America and the Caribbean with a difference of 3.4 percentage points, and the Middle East and North Africa where the female unemployment rate was six percentage points higher than the male rate. Unemployment rates for men are higher than for women in sub-Saharan Africa and East Asia.

The difficulty of finding work is even more dramatic for young females (aged 15 to 24 years). Being female and young can represent a double source of discrimination – young women appear to have the greatest difficulty in entering the labour market and retaining their jobs in periods of economic downturn. Youth unemployment rates for both sexes are higher than adult unemployment rates in all regions of the world. Again, in all regions except East Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, the regional female rate exceeded that of the male rate (Figure 1).

**Figure 1**  
World and regional unemployment rates by sex, 2003



Source: ILO, *Global Employment Trends Model*, 2003.

<sup>8</sup> Statistics in this section are taken from ILO, *Global Employment Trends for Women 2004*.

It is important to note that unemployment information in itself is a rather limited indicator for the inadequacy of the labour market situation, and should not be used in isolation from other indicators such as employment-to-population ratios, employment by status and sector data, as well as wage and earning indicators. Many national definitions of unemployment exclude persons who want to work but do not actively seek work either because they feel that no work is available to them or because such persons have restricted labour mobility, or face discrimination or structural, social or cultural barriers. These are the so-called discouraged workers, the majority of whom are generally women. Although data on discouraged workers are hard to come by, a review of the data available for industrialised economies revealed that females made up approximately two-thirds of total discouraged workers in Australia, Austria, Belgium, Germany, Greece, the Netherlands, Norway and Portugal and the female share of total discouraged workers was near 90 per cent in Italy and Switzerland.<sup>9</sup>

Caution is therefore needed in interpreting a trend of falling unemployment for women because it could indicate a situation in which women are adjusting to deteriorating economic conditions by opting out of the labour market altogether or by accepting shorter working hours rather than not working at all.

#### **The ILO response on employment creation**

The ILO recognises the need for strategies to fight unemployment and generate more employment for women and men. One of the operational objectives of the ILO is to assist member States and constituents to design and implement employment creation programmes, paying particular attention to the situation of women. Through the InFocus Programme on Boosting Employment through Small Enterprise Development (IFP/SEED), the ILO works proactively to create policy environments that enable small enterprises to provide women and men with more and better jobs in an equitable manner. Through its technical cooperation with member countries, the ILO is making efforts to design country action programmes for employment generation and poverty reduction in Africa. In Asia and the Pacific moreover, the emphasis is on enhancing national capacities to meet the need for productive employment creation through Start Your Business/Improve Your Business projects.

For more information, follow the link to IFP/SEED through the ILO's Employment Sector web-page at <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment>

#### ***The Youth Employment Network***

The Youth Employment Network (YEN) was created within the framework of the Millennium Declaration where heads of state and government resolved to 'develop and implement strategies that give young people everywhere a real chance to find decent and productive work'. Youth employment is both an integral part of the Millennium Declaration and a key contribution to meeting other Millennium Goals, including those relating to poverty reduction. Youth employment is key to the broader agenda on employment and the fight against poverty.

The ILO has been hosting the Secretariat of YEN, which is a partnership between UN, the World Bank and ILO to bring together leaders in industry, youth and civil society representatives, and policymakers to explore imaginative approaches to the challenges of youth unemployment. The process is underpinned by a UN General Assembly Resolution on Promoting Youth Employment. Member States were encouraged to prepare National Reviews

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<sup>9</sup> OECD, *Employment Outlook*, 2003

and Action Plans on youth employment by March 2004. The ILO, the UN Secretariat, the World Bank and other specialised agencies are invited to assist Governments in these efforts.

The YEN includes a high level panel of twelve experts and practitioners on youth employment which produced a set of policy recommendations discussed in the UN General Assembly in 2001. These recommendations focus on four global policy priority areas or “The Four E’s”: Employability, Equal Opportunities, Entrepreneurship, and Employment Creation.

Azerbaijan, Brazil, Egypt, Hungary, Indonesia, Iran, Namibia, Senegal and Sri Lanka have stepped forward to be lead countries in this process and to showcase successful youth employment practices from which others can learn.

### Employment by status

No agreed-upon single indicator exists for assessing conditions of employment. However, some insights can be gained by analysing three indicators: status of employment, employment by sector, and wages/earnings. An initial assessment of these indicators reveals that although progress has been made in terms of female labour force participation, this has not necessarily been paralleled with progress in the creation of decent work opportunities for women.

Family responsibilities are still very much assigned to women. When they have to combine reproductive and productive work, women are required to find a solution for balancing these two roles. Role incompatibility is likely to be a greater problem for women in wage employment, less for those in self-employment and least for family workers who are unpaid (but still count as employed people according to the standard definition of employment). Unfortunately, many developing economies do not have consistent data on employment status broken down by sex. Where available, this information suggests that in the poorest regions of the world, the share of female family workers in total employment is much higher than men’s, and women are less likely to be wage and salaried workers (Table 2).

**Table 2**  
**Employment by status, selected economies, latest available year**

Economy and latest year of data availability	Wage and salaried workers (employees)		Contributing family workers		Self-employed workers	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Bangladesh 2000	8.3	15.2	73.2	10.1	11.0	49.8
Pakistan 2000	33.1	36.0	50.1	16.7	16.8	47.3
Cambodia 2001	13.6	19.1	53.3	31.6	33.0	40.9
Thailand 2000	38.8	40.2	39.8	16.4	21.4	43.3
Zimbabwe 1999	22.0	50.8	n.a.	n.a.	58.0	29.2
West Bank and Gaza Strip 2001	63.9	61.9	27.3	6.0	8.8	32.2
Yemen 1999	13.8	50.7	0.3	0.3	63.4	49.0
Egypt 2000	57.2	60.6	26.0	8.2	16.8	31.1

n.a. = Data not available.

Source: ILO, *Key Indicators of the Labour Market*, 2003.

This trend is expected to continue in most parts of the developing world. Especially at times of economic crises or downturns, women are the first to withdraw from wage and salaried

work. They may then be forced to enter the informal economy as own-account or unpaid family workers.

Even among wage and salaried workers, more and more women are likely to be in non-regular or atypical employment. Whereas men are more likely to be hired in core or regular and better-paid positions, women are increasingly being hired in peripheral, insecure, less-valued jobs including home-based, casual or temporary work. These jobs are normally characterised by very low pay, irregular income, little or no job or income security and lack of social protection.

In both the formal and informal economies, women entrepreneurs account for a considerable number of enterprises and make a substantial contribution to national economies. In many countries however, women experience barriers at the stage of entering into business. Women have difficulty accessing finance, and even when they do so they obtain smaller loans than men. Women are also less likely to be members of business or employers' associations and often lack self-confidence in their business endeavours and fear that they will not be taken seriously by others.

### **Employment by sector**

An analysis of sectoral data gives an additional indication that women's work is not likely to be status-enhancing or empowering. Women have a higher share in agricultural employment in Asia, sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East and North Africa, and some economies in Latin America and the Caribbean, especially in economies with low per capita income. In all developing regions, women's share in industry is lower than men's. This is despite the fact that export-led industrialisation has been strongly female-intensive, particularly in the export-processing zones (EPZs) of developing economies. EPZs have created an important avenue for women to enter the formal economy at better wages than in agriculture and domestic service.

Within the services sector, women are still concentrated in sectors that are traditionally associated with their gender roles, particularly in community, social and personal services, whereas men dominate the better-paid sector jobs in financial and business services and real estate.

### **The ILO response on increasing voice and representation for women**

In its programming and through technical cooperation, the ILO is working to increase women's participation and representation in all fields. The ILO is promoting strategies that support women entrepreneurs and advocate the business case for gender equality, and the advantages of women's membership and leadership for enhancing the role and representation of trade unions. The ILO is also working to raise awareness about the special situation of women workers in the export processing zones and highlight best practices in dealing with the problems they face. The ILO has also produced various tools and resources which can be used for capacity-building of workers' organisations.<sup>10</sup>

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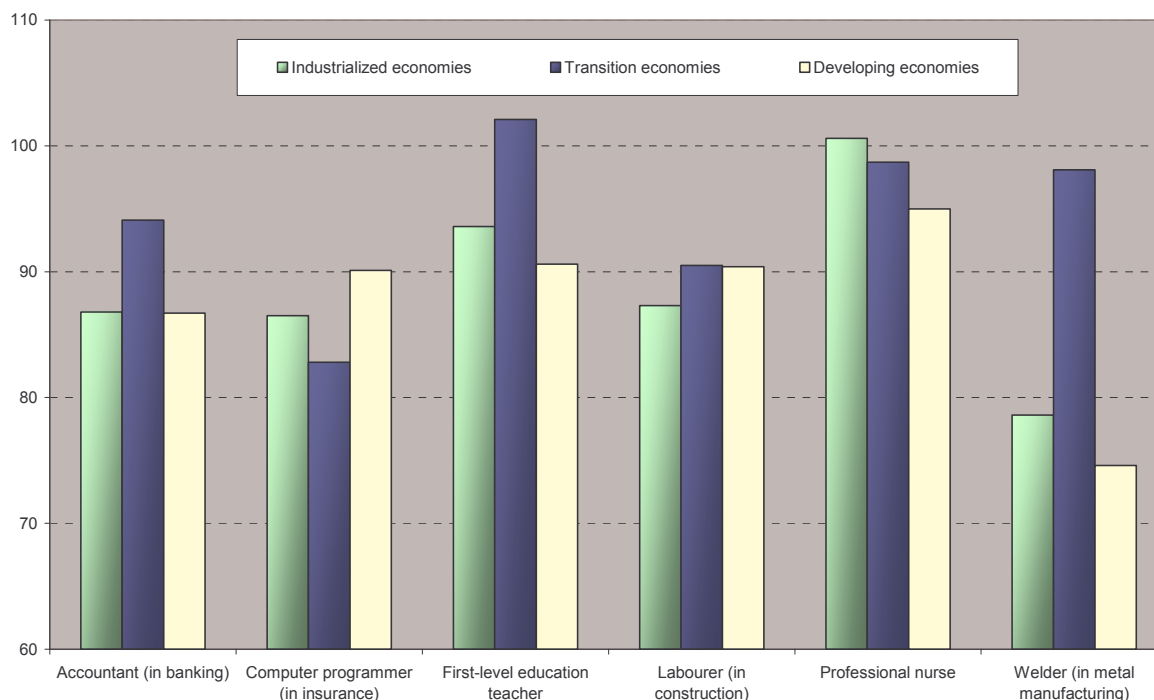
<sup>10</sup> These include: ILO, *Promoting Gender Equality: Resource Kit for Trade Unions*, 2002; ILO, *e.quality@work: Information Database on Equal Employment Opportunities for Women and Men* CD Rom, 2002. For further information, please see <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/gems>

## Wages and earnings<sup>11</sup>

Discrimination in remuneration occurs when the main basis for the determination of wages is not the content of the work to be performed, but rather the sex, colour or other personal attributes of the person performing the work. The elimination of discrimination in remuneration is crucial to achieving gender equality. Women everywhere typically receive less pay than men. A review of data available for six diverse occupation groups shows that in most economies, women still earn less than their male co-workers with differences of 10 per cent or more. In a typically male-dominated occupation such as welding in metal manufacturing, wage disparities are even greater. Female welders in the industrialised economies earn on average 79 per cent of what male welders earn, and in developing economies even less. Even in typically female occupations such as nursing and teaching, gender wage equality is still lacking. In Singapore for example, male primary school teachers earn approximately 6 per cent more than female teachers and male nurses 21 per cent more.

Women's assumed lower human capital and intermittent career paths are widely believed to be the main reason for gender differentials in income. Except for some countries in Africa and South Asia however, the gender gap in primary and secondary schooling is not only narrowing worldwide, women's enrolment in higher education also equals or surpasses that of men. And yet women continue to hold lower-paying occupations than men with equivalent education and work experience.

**Figure 2**  
Average female wages/earnings as percentage of male wages/earnings in selected occupations, latest available year



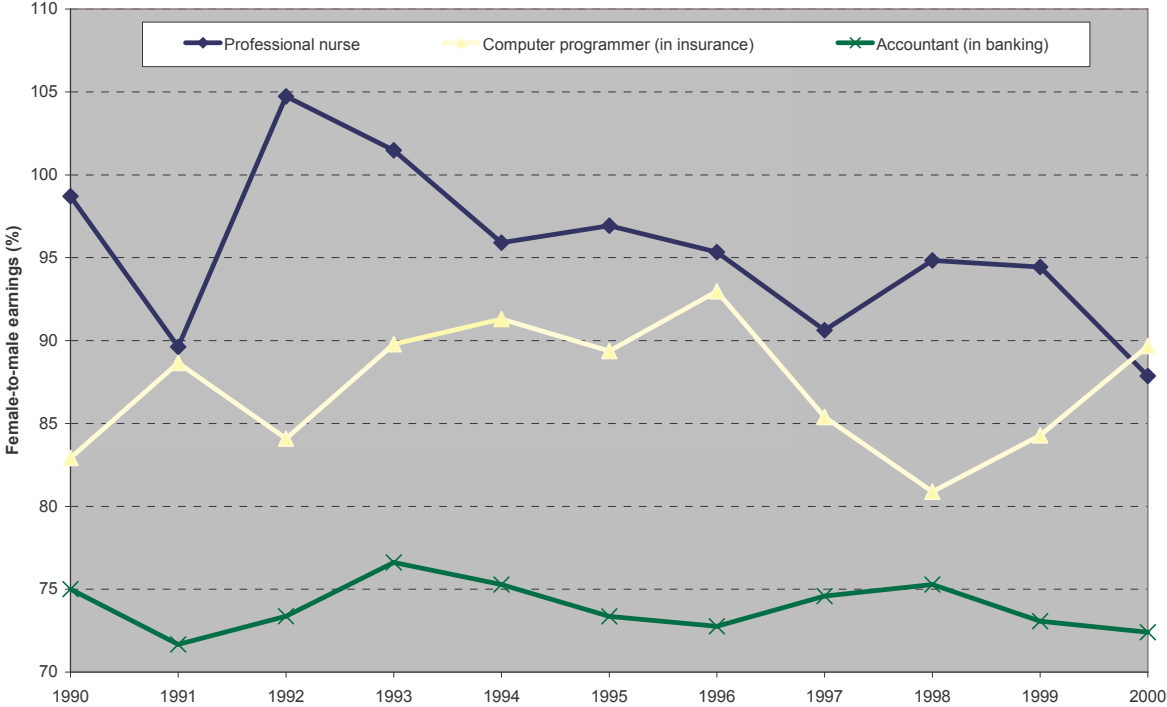
Note: Average in this chart denotes a basic average of the countries with available data; 12 economies in the industrialised economies, 17 in the developing economies and 7 in the transition economies.

Source: ILO, *Key Indicators of the Labour Market*, 2003.

<sup>11</sup> Data in this section are taken from ILO, *Global Employment Trends for Women 2004*, and ILO, *Time for Equality at Work*, 2003.

Traditionally, there has been greater wage equality in the transition economies than in industrialised or developing economies. This is still the case today. For example, the wages of female welders and female teachers in transition economies are nearly equitable to those of males (98 per cent of the male rate) and female nurses earn even more than their male counterparts in the same occupations (2 percentage points more than the male rate). The earnings gap also tends to be smaller in countries that have centralised collective bargaining and that emphasise egalitarian wage policies in general (such as Australia, Norway and Sweden).

**Figure 3**  
**Female occupational earnings as a percentage of male earnings in the United States, 1990 to 2000**



Source: ILO, *Key Indicators of the Labour Market*, 2003.

Statistics show that in the OECD countries as a group, the wage gap has been closing somewhat over the last 15 years. In 2003, the average gender wage gap in the OECD was at 18.6 per cent, a reduction from the 19.2 per cent of 2002.

**Gender pay equity in Latin America**

Across Latin America, average levels of pay equity between male and female workers improved during the 1990s. Across all 15 countries reported in Table 3, the average relative pay of female workers compared to men’s increased from a range of 56 – 88 per cent to a range of 68 – 94 per cent. All countries demonstrate an improvement in women’s pay and in five countries (Colombia, Honduras, Nicaragua, Paraguay and Peru) the increase exceeds ten percentage points, with the largest gains of 19 points in Paraguay. In others (Chile, Ecuador, El Salvador, Panama and Venezuela) the gains were more modest – no more than five percentage points. The data do not provide an accurate basis for cross-national comparison since for some countries data are restricted to metropolitan areas and or others data cover the entire economy. Hence, the ranking reported in Table 3 ought to be treated with caution.

Patterns of pay earned by female workers in the informal sector have also been explored in more detail for selected countries in Latin America. While there are problems related to the

cross-country comparability of such data, the differences in pay between countries are striking. Women working as domestic workers are generally low paid, but their position is particularly poor in Brazil and Chile where their pay relative to the average for all women workers in the economy is only slightly more than one third. Compared to the average for all male workers, their relative pay is just 27 per cent and 29 per cent, respectively. Quite a contrasting pattern is found in Argentina where female domestic workers earn 71 per cent of the average total female pay and 67 per cent of the average total male pay. Women working in small firms (defined here as those employing up to five persons) are heavily penalized in Brazil, Chile and Mexico but less so in Argentina and Colombia. Overall, while there is a common trend towards a closing of the gender pay gap across all Latin American countries, this is underpinned by a marked diversity in patterns of wage and employment structure across sectors and occupations.

**Table 3**  
**Changes in the gender pay ratio in Latin America during the 1990s**

	Gender pay ratio 1990-1994 (%)	Gender pay ratio 1999-2000 (%)	Change
Argentina	88	94	+0.06
Colombia	77	91	+0.14
Costa Rica	81	90	+0.09
Panama	85	88	+0.03
Venezuela	80	85	+0.05
Mexico	78	85	+0.07
Peru	72	84	+0.12
Uruguay	73	81	+0.08
Paraguay	59	78	+0.19
Chile	69	74	+0.05
Ecuador	73	74	+0.01
Brazil	63	72	+0.09
El Salvador	65	70	+0.05
Nicaragua	56	69	+0.13
Honduras	57	68	+0.11

Source: ILO, *Minimum wages and pay equity in Latin America*, 2003

**Table 4**  
**Women's earnings per USD 1 earned by men in selected countries, 2000**

	Industry and service	Manufacturing
Australia	0.90	0.85
Azerbaijan	0.53	n/a
Brazil	0.76	0.54
Czech Republic	0.81	n/a
El Salvador	0.89	0.95
Eritrea	0.58	n/a
France	0.81	0.79
Korea	0.62	0.56
Latvia	0.80	0.89
Malaysia	n/a	0.58
Mexico	0.78	0.71
Myanmar	n/a	0.96
Netherlands	0.77	n/a
Portugal	0.67	0.69
Sri Lanka	0.90	0.85
Sweden	n/a	0.90
United Kingdom	0.80	0.72

Source: UNIFEM, *Progress of the World's Women*, 2000

Table 4 indicates that women's earnings range between 53 and 90 per cent of men's earnings in industry and service sectors, and between 54 and 95 per cent in manufacturing sector. In many industrialised and developing countries, the move of women into wider ranging and better-paid jobs has led to a rise in the earnings of the top deciles of women compared to average income for men. This has resulted in greater gender equality, but at the cost of higher inequality between women, as the bulk of them remain concentrated in 'women's jobs' that are low paid and low status. Wage differentials are especially marked in those developing countries that are pursuing export-led industrialisation or that have Export Processing Zones. Wage differentials also tend to be large in countries that emphasise a traditional non-egalitarian role of women in the labour market (such as Japan) or that have decentralised market-oriented wage determination with enterprise-level bargaining (such as the United States).

One might expect to find near wage equality in high-skill occupations where the education and training level of applicants would presumably be comparable. This is not the case however. Even in these occupations, the average female wage is still only 88 per cent of the male wage. One of the reasons identified for the wage differential is women's lack of negotiating capability as well as bargaining power.

#### **The ILO response on pay equity**

ILO Equal Remuneration Convention No. 100 (1951) calls for governments to promote and ensure the application of 'the principle of equal remuneration for men and women workers for work of equal value'. So far, 161 member States have ratified this convention, but enforcement and actual practice can be further improved. In 2004 moreover, the International Labour Conference adopted a resolution calling for governments to undertake a series of specific actions to address the gender wage gap. Amongst other things, the resolution proposes that the ILO's tripartite constituents (governments, employers' organisations and workers' organisations) negotiate the introduction of gender-neutral job evaluation schemes, statistical indicators, as well as gender reviews at the workplace.

#### **Breaking through the glass ceiling?<sup>12</sup>**

Gender-based discrimination in the labour market persists practically everywhere and at all levels. Progress on three key and inter-related indicators for gender equality is still inadequate, namely the 'glass ceiling' (women in top management), the gender pay gap, and the 'sticky floor' (women in the lowest paid jobs). The higher the position in an organisation or company, the more glaring is the gender gap. Moreover, the critical role of unpaid work, largely done by women, continues to go unrecognised. Macro-economic indicators consistently fail to capture the 'care economy' as fundamental to economic outcomes.

Although women continue to increase their share of managerial positions, the rate of progress is slow, uneven and sometimes discouraging. The overall employment situation for women has not evolved significantly since 2001. Women's share of professional jobs increased by just 0.7 per cent between 1996 and 1999, and 2000 and 2002. And with women's share of managerial positions in some 60 countries ranging between 20 and 40 per cent, the data show that women are markedly under-represented in management compared to their overall share of employment.

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<sup>12</sup> ILO, *Breaking through the Glass Ceiling – Women in Management*, Update 2004.

In politics, the proportion of women representatives in national parliaments remains low, increasing from 13 per cent to 15.6 per cent between 1999 and 2004. There is however, a recent increase in the number of women in traditionally male-dominated cabinet posts, such as foreign affairs, finance and defence.<sup>13</sup>

Women's overall share of professional jobs in 2000-2002 was highest in Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), largely due to long-standing policies supporting working mothers. Women's share of professional jobs in South Asian and Middle Eastern countries was markedly lower at around 30 per cent or less.<sup>14</sup>

Data show that generally countries in North America, South America and Eastern Europe have a higher share of women in management jobs than countries in East Asia, South Asia and the Middle East. Nevertheless, in female-dominated sectors where there are more women managers, a disproportionate number of men rise to the more senior positions, and in those professions normally reserved for men, women managers are few and far between.

One exception is the high incidence of women holding top jobs in legal systems in some countries. In 2001-2002, more than 50 per cent of the judges in six Eastern European countries (Hungary, Romania, the Czech Republic and Estonia, Croatia and Lithuania) and 35 per cent of the highest judges in Poland were women. And in early 2003, out of the 18 judges elected to the International Criminal Court (ICC), ten were women.

#### **The ILO response on enhancing women's employability and career development**

Sufficient education and vocational skills are necessary conditions for women's attainment of professional and managerial jobs. The ILO is supporting vocational training programmes that incorporate gender concerns. Some target women only whilst others target groups of women and men. These programmes aim to broaden the skill base of women workers to enable them to obtain professional jobs.

The ILO's focus on maternity protection, reconciling work and family, and working hours has highlighted the specific requirements of women and men in the workforce and the need to adopt appropriate measures with respect to work arrangements and schedules. Technical cooperation projects are being implemented to extend social insurance to cover maternity benefits to both insured working women and the wives of insured working men.

#### **Employment in the informal economy<sup>15</sup>**

The informal economy represents a significant part of the national economy and labour market in many countries. Especially among the developing and transition economies, the informal economy plays a major role in employment creation, production and income generation. In economies with high rates of population growth or urbanisation, the informal economy tends to absorb most of the expanding labour force in the urban areas. Informal employment has become a necessary survival strategy in economies that lack social safety nets or where wages and pensions are low. There are only 17 countries for which ILO time-series data are available that permit the evolution of informal employment over time to be monitored. They show that in virtually all cases, the share of informal to total employment in the corresponding branches of economic activity has increased during the 1990s. Estimates of

<sup>13</sup> Database of the *International Parliamentary Union*. <http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/parlinesearch.asp>

<sup>14</sup> ILO, *Key Indicators of the Labour Market*, 2003

<sup>15</sup> Data in this section are taken from the ILO publication *Women and men in the informal economy: A statistical picture*, 2002. <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/infeco/download/menwomen.pdf>

the contribution of the informal economy to gross domestic product indicate that it is significant, varying from 27 per cent in Northern Africa, 29 per cent in Latin America and 41 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia.

Although national implementation of a universally agreed definition of the informal economy is still in its infancy, there is general agreement that work in the informal economy means being outside the legal and regulatory frameworks, and is thus normally characterised by a high degree of vulnerability. Workers have little or no legal or social protection and are excluded from, or have limited access to, public infrastructure and benefits. Informal economy workers are rarely organised for effective representation and have little or no voice at the workplace or in the socio-political arena. Most forms of informal employment are unstable and insecure, and some involve very long hours and high pressure periods to finish contract orders within short deadlines, followed by ‘inactive’ periods waiting for orders.

### **Defining the informal economy**

The Resolution concerning Statistics of Employment in the Informal Sector, adopted by the 15<sup>th</sup> International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS) in 1993, defined the informal sector as a sub-set of household enterprises (i.e. unincorporated enterprises owned by households) that includes:

- Informal own-account enterprises, which may employ contributing family workers and employees on an occasional basis; and
- Enterprises of informal employers, which employ one or more employees on a continuous basis.

The enterprise of informal employers must fulfil one or all of the following criteria: size of unit below a specified level of employment, and non-registration of the enterprise or its employees. For informal own-account enterprises only the second criterion (non-registration of the enterprise) applies.

In recent years, policy makers, activists and researchers have started to use the term ‘informal economy’ for a broader concept that incorporates types of informal employment that were not included in the 1993 international statistical definition of the informal sector. They seek to incorporate in this concept the whole of informality – including both enterprise and employment relations – as manifested in industrialised, transition, and developing economies. Under this expanded concept, informal employment is understood to include all remunerative work – both self-employment and wage employment that is not recognised, regulated or protected by existing legal or regulatory frameworks and certain types of non-remunerative work.

In 2003, the 17<sup>th</sup> ICLS adopted guidelines concerning a statistical definition of informal employment, which complement the 15<sup>th</sup> ICLS Resolution. In addition to employment in the informal sector, the 17<sup>th</sup> ICLS definition includes the following types of informal employment: informal wage employment in formal sector enterprises or households, contributing family work in formal sector enterprises, and the production of goods exclusively for own final use by one’s household (such as subsistence farming).

Sources: ILO, *Report of the 15<sup>th</sup> International Conference of Labour Statisticians*, 1993; ILO, *Women and men in the informal economy: A statistical picture*, 2002; ILO, *Statistical Definition of Informal Employment: Guidelines Endorsed by the 17<sup>th</sup> International Conference of Labour Statisticians*, 2003

There is a link – although not a perfect correlation – between working in the informal economy and being poor. This stems from the lack of labour legislation and social protection covering workers in the informal economy, and from the fact that informal economy workers earn, on average, less than workers in the formal economy. It is certainly true that a much higher percentage of people working in the informal relative to the formal economy are poor, and even more true that a larger share of women relative to men working in the informal economy are poor. The informal economy is often considered a fallback position for women who are excluded from formal wage employment.

Informal employment is generally a larger source of employment for women than for men in the developing world and it is often the only source of income for women, especially in those areas where cultural norms bar them from work outside the home or where, because of conflict with household responsibilities, they cannot undertake regular employee working hours. Other than in North Africa where 43 per cent of women workers are in informal employment, 60 per cent or more of women workers in the developing world are in informal employment (outside agriculture). In sub-Saharan Africa, 84 per cent of women non-agricultural workers are informally employed compared to 63 per cent of their male counterparts. In Latin America, 58 per cent of women in comparison to 48 per cent of men non-agricultural workers are informally employed. In Asia, the proportion of women and men non-agricultural workers in informal employment is roughly equivalent.

Women are more likely than men to be in certain types of informal activities that are difficult to measure because they are invisible, such as production for own consumption, unpaid family work, paid domestic activities in private households, home work, and engagement in small-scale economic units. They are often engaged in agricultural activities, which many countries exclude from the scope of their informal sector surveys for practical reasons. Statistics suggest that in India and Indonesia, the informal sector accounts for nine out of ten women working outside agriculture, while in Benin, Chad and Mali, more than 95 per cent of female non-agricultural employment is in the informal sector.

#### **Home work**

Although official statistics on home work are scarce, there is evidence that home work is becoming increasingly common, especially for women, due to the growing use of subcontracting and industrial outsourcing systems and the spread of information and communication technologies (ICT). Home workers are defined in the 1993 International Classification of Status in Employment as those who work for an enterprise to supply goods or services by prior arrangement with that enterprise, and whose place of work is not within any of the enterprise's establishments.

Home workers may be classified as employees or self-employed. While women may benefit from new independence in terms of work location and flexible working hours that allow them to balance work and family roles according to their own arrangements, there are growing concerns about conditions of low-pay and the lack of protection which can accompany home-based work. In addition, there is also concern that home-based work can create a sense of isolation and exclusion from career choices.

Source: ILO, *Global Employment Trends for Women*, 2004

### **The ILO response on the informal economy**

A resolution adopted by the 2002 International Labour Conference calls for the needs of workers and economic units in the informal economy to be addressed, with emphasis on an integrated approach with a decent work perspective. Mechanisms are currently being set up to collect and share lessons from good practices and policy across the work of the ILO in all the regions.

The ILO is committed to extending social protection coverage and reducing poverty among persons who earn their living in the informal economy. Through its capacity-building programme on Gender, Poverty and Employment (GPE), these issues are being addressed within a gender framework. For more information, visit the GPE website (<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/skills/informal/gpe/>).

The ILO is also focusing on extending social protection coverage and reducing poverty among persons who earn their living in the informal economy, through its international programme on Strategies and Tools against Social Exclusion and Poverty (<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/socsec/step/>).

Through technical cooperation activities on More and Better Jobs for Women and Men, which was one of the ILO's major responses to the Beijing Platform for Action, the ILO has assisted a number of countries in promoting poor women's access to both wage and self-employment in Latin America, Africa, Asia and the Pacific. In Bangladesh, for example, an integrated project is assisting women micro-entrepreneurs and workers in largely rural areas in enhancing their access to decent employment and health services, improving their working conditions and promoting fundamental rights at work (<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/gems/>).

### **Women migrant workers<sup>16</sup>**

There are approximately 120 million migrant workers worldwide (including their family members). In numbers, female migrant workers are almost as numerous as their male counterparts. In 2000, female migrant workers constituted nearly 51 per cent of all migrant workers in the industrialised countries and about 46 per cent of all migrant workers in the developing countries.

The major magnets for female labour migration are located in western Asia and in the countries of the Pacific Rim in East and South-East Asia. In these regions, the proportion of women among international migrant workers has been rising steadily since the 1980s. By 2000, the number of female migrant workers was estimated to have surpassed the number of males in East and South-East Asia. At the same time, the 7.6 million female migrant workers in western Asia were estimated to constitute 48 per cent of all migrant workers in that region.

In Africa, one of the most recent changes in migration patterns has been a growing feminisation of migration. Whereas mainly men used to leave in search for work in the past, more and more women are now striking out on their own to seek economic independence. Women currently make up half of Africa's migrant workers. As domestic workers or businesswomen, they are not only moving within national borders, but increasingly abroad. It

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<sup>16</sup> Data in this section are taken from ILO, *Preventing Discrimination, Exploitation and Abuse of Women Migrant Workers: An Information Guide*, 2003.

is noteworthy that in the case of African women migrant workers, a growing number are highly skilled.

In some parts of the world, the growth of a migration industry – comprising private recruitment agencies, overseas employment promoters, human resource suppliers and a host of other legal and illegal intermediaries – has greatly facilitated female labour migration. Some countries encourage the migration of both women and men as an important source for remittances of foreign exchange. Whereas men migrate for a variety of jobs, women are disproportionately concentrated in a limited number of occupations which are frequently associated with traditional gender roles, such as domestic work and ‘entertainment’ work. While these jobs are not necessarily exploitative, the circumstances of the work often lead to a high degree of vulnerability to abuse and exploitation. Globalisation has also opened new economic sectors that are women specific such as the growth of commercial sex. It has been suggested that trafficking of people for prostitution and forced labour is one of the fastest growing areas of international criminal activity.

In Hong Kong, female migrant domestic workers numbered more than 202,900 in 2000. Between 1999 and June 2001, some 691,285 Indonesian women left their country (representing 72 per cent of total Indonesian migrants) to work mainly as domestic workers abroad. In Malaysia, there were 155,000 documented migrant domestic workers in 2002. In Italy, 50 per cent of the estimated one million domestic workers are non-European Union citizens, and in France, over 50 per cent of migrant women are believed to be engaged in domestic work. Data on women migrants in the ‘entertainment’ industry or in sex work are lacking. But in 2000, some 103,264 migrants entered Japan as ‘entertainers’. Estimates from official statistics suggest that up to 5,000 women could have been trafficked into South Korea for the sex industry since the mid-1990s, although the actual number may be much higher.

Migrants, both women and men, are often used as a buffer stock for reserve labour hired at times of shortage and dismissed when the employment situation deteriorates. In some parts of the world, women migrant workers have become important income earners for their families and contributors of foreign exchange for their countries of origin, often on par with men. In Sri Lanka, they contributed over 62 per cent of the more than USD 1 billion total private remittances in 1999, accounting for more than 50 per cent of the trade balance. Their movement, often as a family survival strategy, has been given an added impetus by the negative impacts of structural adjustment programmes, economic/financial crises, transition to market economies, political conflicts in their home countries. In these contexts, the feminisation of poverty and the fact that more women are becoming the sole breadwinner in families have contributed to the growing number of women willing to take their chances by searching for employment and income opportunities abroad.

#### **4. The ILO commitment to gender equality**

##### **ILO action**

ILO’s programme of work for 2004-2005 addresses a number of high-priority gender issues under four strategic objectives covering rights at work, employment, social protection and social dialogue. Gender analysis and strategies to address gender-based inequalities are essential in achieving these objectives.

The ILO is committed to strengthening the capacities of its tripartite constituents – governments, employers’ organisations and workers’ organisations – to take effective policy and institutional measures to mainstream gender in order to promote gender equality at national, sub-regional and regional levels. For the first time, gender equality has been adopted as one of several key shared policy objectives of the ILO, which strengthens its integrated approach to equality issues in the world of work. The policy objective on gender equality is designed to build a solid knowledge base on gender issues through systematic collection and analysis of data disaggregated by sex.

ILO action to promote positive changes in constituents’ policies, legislation, programmes or institutions aims to bring about significant improvements in gender equality in the world of work. This includes building the capacity of governments, employers’ organisations and workers’ organisations to hold seminars and workshops to raise awareness and conduct training on gender issues, so that constituents can plan and implement specific activities to promote gender equality and incorporate a gender perspective in all other activities.

### **International Labour Standards (Conventions)**

International Labour Standard setting is a role unique to the ILO. Each ILO Convention is a legal instrument. Once a government has ratified a Convention, and it has come into force, the member State is obliged to bring its national law and practice into conformity with the provisions of the Convention, and to report periodically to the ILO on its application in both the law and in practice.

The ILO Conventions that aim to promote gender equality in the world of work form the basis of all other ILO activities promoting gender equality. The key gender equality Conventions are the Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100); Discrimination Convention (Employment and Occupation), 1958 (No. 111); Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156); and Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183).

The ILO promotes the ratification of these Conventions by selecting countries for targeted promotional and advocacy work, undertaking policy-oriented studies on work and family issues, providing technical support and advice to constituents in the design and implementation of national plans of action and in the drawing up of national legislation, and by campaigning with its partners to improve working conditions and extend maternity protection in the informal economy.

### **Countering the Decent Work deficit**

Despite the progress made in terms of increases in women’s labour force participation and share in paid employment, women are still overrepresented among the poor and the poorest in both developing and developed countries. As indicated above, in many countries, decent work – work undertaken in conditions of freedom, equity and human dignity – is in short supply and this disproportionately affects women. Particularly in poor developing countries women lag behind men with regard to access to quality employment and income, representation through workers’ organisations as well as in respect of fundamental workers’ rights such as the abolition of forced labour, freedom of association and the elimination of child labour.

Women have a higher share in the number of working poor in the world – those who work but do not earn enough to lift themselves and their families above the USD 1 a day poverty line. Out of the 550 million working poor in the world, an estimated 330 million are women. Adding the 330 million female working poor to the 77.8 million women who are unemployed

means that at least 400 million decent jobs would be needed to satisfy women's demand for decent work.

Inequality between women and men remains a determining factor in the creation and perpetuation of global poverty. Economic disadvantage is compounded by discriminatory gender relations that make women and men experience poverty unequally. Women face greater difficulties than men in breaking out of poverty. At the same time, women's responses to the rapid changes in the world of work – as employees, entrepreneurs, peace-builders, and carers – make them indispensable partners in the pursuit of decent and equitable work.

The 2000 Millennium Declaration calls on states to 'promote gender equality and the empowerment of women as effective ways to combat poverty, hunger and disease and to stimulate development that is truly sustainable'. This aim is covered in the third Millennium Development Goal (MDG): 'Promote gender equality and empower women'. The ILO has a particular contribution to make in addressing Indicator 11 of this MDG, 'Share of women in waged employment in the non-agricultural sector'. The ILO and other statistical experts are suggesting an improved MDG indicator for gender equality in employment that would encompass informal as well as formal employment. However, the ILO's promotion of gender equality in the world of work reaches far beyond this numerical indicator to encompass qualitative aspects of gender equality at work, such as equality of treatment, equality of social protection and equality in social dialogue.

### **A tripartite commitment to the eradication of poverty**

The ILO recognises the importance of promoting gender equality in the drive to reduce global poverty and works to strengthen the capacity of its constituents to influence national policies. As discussion moves from the identification of problems to possible responses, the ILO is able to introduce information and ideas on approaches to address issues of gender inequalities and poverty both at local and at national levels. Its main contribution is to bring available technical expertise and the experience of other countries in dealing with similar problems into the discussions.

Creating adequate decent work for women is only possible if policy-makers not only place employment at the centre of social and economic policies but also recognise that women's challenges in the world of work are even more substantial than men's. Unless progress is made to take women out of working poverty by creating employment opportunities to help them secure productive and remunerative work in conditions of freedom, security and human dignity, the UN Millennium Goal of halving poverty by 2015 will not be reached in most regions of the world.

The ILO's experience of working with national and local governments and employers' and workers' organisations over many years has resulted in a comprehensive portfolio of policy tools founded on enabling communities to work their way out of poverty.<sup>17</sup> The following policy recommendations have been established as a step to ensuring a greater degree of gender equality in this process:

i) Creation of decent employment and income as a means for poverty eradication should take centre stage in the formulation of overall macro-economic and development policies. Moreover, promoting equal and better access to employment, income and micro-finance for

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<sup>17</sup> ILO, *Working out of Poverty*, 2003

women, through a rights-based approach, is essential for the success of anti-poverty programmes. Supporting women's entrepreneurship growth is a key strategy for the economic empowerment of women and their families;

ii) Balancing paid and care work is a critical issue for women's employment promotion and economic empowerment, especially where HIV/AIDS is rampant. Countries will need to take concrete special measures to support those infected and/or affected and recognise the economic and social value of unpaid care work in national legislation, policies and action programmes;

iii) Gender equality in employment and income should be strongly featured in Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), national poverty-reduction strategies, Millennium Development Goals Reports (MDGRs), common country assessments (CCAs), and UN Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAFs);

iv) Countries should implement policies and programmes to achieve equal access for girls and women to education and vocational training, especially including the use of ICT. Overcoming gender stereotyping of occupations is an essential aspect of this process and has a far-reaching impact on the levels of their access to decent employment and income;

v) Through its tripartite structure, the ILO should continue to campaign for the elimination of sex-based discrimination in employment, in particular by ratification and implementation of the International Labour Standards. The participation of different line ministries and of employers' and workers' organisations in the CCA, UNDAF, PRSP and MDGR processes, is another avenue through which the objectives of gender equality and non-discrimination in employment can be embedded in national development frameworks. Governments, employers' and workers' organisations need to make continued efforts to increase women's representation at all levels, not only in their organisations, but also in leadership positions.