

## INTRODUCTION

The articles in this issue of the *Review* address the subject of labour market data and different dimensions of equality. By standardizing the contents of an ILO database spanning 75 years, the first article provides a basis for comparing occupations and wages around the world to determine, say, whether globalization has reduced wage inequality within given occupations. The second article critically analyses the conflict between specific protection for female workers and the principle of non-discrimination in the context of the ongoing debate over the ILO instruments regulating night work. The third article considers inequalities in the outcomes of Australia's newly privatized employment services for disadvantaged groups of jobseekers. This issue of the *Review* closes with a Perspective that also touches on the question of equality within societies and between nations in the context of the future of work, employment and social protection in the industrialized countries.

Annually since 1924, the ILO has conducted its "October Inquiry" on pay by occupation across the world. The first such survey compiled data on 18 occupations in 15 countries. Today the Inquiry covers 161 occupations across 158 countries. Until 1963 the *International Labour Review* was actively involved in disseminating this database (it was featured in as many as 57 volumes of the *Review* between 1924 and 1963). For a number of reasons, however, this major source of cross-country statistics was never used as widely as it deserved to be for international research and policy. The article by *Richard B. Freeman* and *Remco H. Oostendorp* identifies five basic obstacles to the exploitation of the immense potential of this database for empirical analysis of cross-country patterns in occupations and wages. *First*, wage data are non-comparable because countries simply report the findings of various national surveys instead of obtaining data through special surveys conforming to ILO specifications. *Second*, countries do not report the requested statistics consistently from year to year. *Third*, the data furnished do not include all supplementary labour costs. *Fourth*, despite the ILO's guidance regarding the details of skill specifications, the data received on work performed in a given occupation vary from

one country to another. *Fifth*, further variation in the quality of the data arises from the data collection process, which draws upon diverse sources.

The main contribution of this article is to render usable the resources of this valuable database not only by standardizing the statistics for cross-country analysis, but also by putting them at the disposal of potential users worldwide on a special website. The article also offers powerful illustrations of how the standardized data set can be used in practice. For instance, the authors' analysis of the now-comparable cross-country statistics enables them to establish an inverse relationship between skill differentials and a country's level of economic development: higher levels of GDP reduce occupational pay differences across the globe. Standardization of the ILO October Inquiry Survey data also permits a cross-country comparison of trends which shows that, contrary to expectations, intra-occupational wage inequality increased over a period (1980s and 1990s) marked by rapid globalization.

The second article, by *George P. Politakis*, offers a historical and cross-cultural perspective on the ongoing debate over the conflict between special legal protection for female workers and the overriding principle of non-discrimination. Central to this debate is the question of the continued relevance of the ILO's Conventions prohibiting or otherwise restricting night work by women, i.e. the Night Work (Women) Convention, 1919 (No. 4), the Night Work (Women) Convention (Revised), 1934 (No. 41), the Night Work (Women) Convention (Revised), 1948 (No. 89) and the Protocol of 1990 to the Night Work (Women) Convention (Revised), 1948. The alternative framework is one that regulates night work for women *and* men alike: the Night Work Convention, 1990 (No. 171). The debate is highly divisive, particularly among the tripartite constituents of the ILO. Based on the findings of a survey of law and practice in 109 member States of the ILO, this article helps to clarify the key issues that emerge from the debate.

Two articles in recent issues of the *Review* identified weaknesses and biases in the incentive structures of government programmes for job creation and for reducing the welfare dependency of vulnerable groups, like the low skilled and the long-term unemployed.<sup>1</sup> In this issue of the *Review*, the article by *Alfred M. Dockery and Thorsten Stromback* evaluates the initial two years' (1998-2000) experience of privatized employment services in Australia. Though efficiency is shown to have improved, the new system has not succeeded in avoiding the exclusion of disadvantaged groups of jobseekers from the package

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<sup>1</sup> Bart Cockx: "The design of active labour market policies: Building in effective incentives", in *International Labour Review*, Vol. 139 (2000), No. 4, pp. 457-480; and Ivo Marx: "Job subsidies and employers' social security contributions: The verdict of empirical evaluation studies", in *International Labour Review*, Vol. 140 (2001), No. 1, pp. 69-83.

of employment services provided (basic job matching, job-search training and intensive assistance). However, the final judgement on the performance of the new Job Network system should be reserved until an evaluation is made on conclusion of the second round of contracts (2000-2003) for the delivery of employment services established with private parties through competitive bidding.

In order to identify the political response to the rapid changes that are affecting the organization of work, the content of employment relationships, the concept of the Welfare State and the scope of social protection in the industrialized countries, the “Perspective” by *Patrick Bollé* synthesizes the discussions of a recent ILO symposium on the future of work, employment and social protection held at Annecy, France. The issues raised are closely linked to the question of equality, both within societies and across the globe: the central concern of the Symposium was to consider social institutions for the new global economy. The “Perspective” distills the thoughts shared at the symposium on the transformations of work and new insecurities, the impact of changes on work and society, and the political response to the new challenges.

As the “Perspective” shows, some of the issues that came up for discussion at the Annecy Symposium have already been the subject of reflection and analysis in recent issues of the *Review*.<sup>2</sup> Overall, the main question addressed in this debate is not whether countries should participate in the global economy, but how they can do so in a way which leads to sustainable and equitable economic growth.

In the *Books* section, a review is devoted to a book on corporations and their relationship with society, based on experiences from the United Kingdom and case studies drawn from the United States and Scandinavian countries. Two of the three books in the *Recent books* section return to the issue of equality. The first book highlighted here examines the equity consequences of changes in the structure and functioning of corporations in the agro-industrial and financial sectors of Europe and North America. The second looks at equality in the sharing of benefits derived from the recent health-care reform in the United States. The remaining book in this section presents and analyses trends in the incidence of violations of trade union rights through a statistical analysis of the results of a survey carried out by the ICFTU in 150 countries.

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<sup>2</sup> On the internationalization of production processes, for example, see Ajit K. Ghose: “Trade liberalization, employment and global inequality”, in *International Labour Review* (Geneva), Vol. 139 (2000), No. 3, pp. 281-305. On the issue of digital technology, also discussed in Annecy, see Vol. 140 (2001), No. 2, a special issue of the *Review* on the *Digital divide: Employment and development implications*, which included a comprehensive assessment of the quantitative and qualitative impacts of information and communication technologies on employment in industrialized countries.

*New ILO publications include Guidelines on occupational safety and health management systems; a volume on Social security: A new consensus, synthesizing the general discussion held at the 89th Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 2001; a report of the Director-General to the Thirteenth Asian Regional Meeting, Bangkok, 2001: Decent work in Asia: ILO activities in the region; and a report prepared for the Tripartite Meeting on the Construction Industry in the Twenty-first Century: Its image, employment prospects and skill requirements, Geneva, 2001.*