

INTRODUCTION

This issue of the *Review* addresses specific aspects of employment and social protection. Of the two articles on employment, the first attempts to quantify worker employability across sectors and worker categories, while the second examines variations in firm-level productivity dynamically over time, according to the intensity of the information-technology skills of workers. A third article identifies policies for promoting gender equality following the evaluation of recent social security reforms in selected central European countries.

The opening article, by *Andries de Grip, Jasper van Loo* and *Jos Sanders*, formulates an industry employability index by synthesizing both supply- and demand-side determinants. By way of illustration of its usefulness for measurement, the authors' methodology is applied empirically to 13 sectors of the Dutch economy for four specific groups of workers, further demonstrating its practical value as a policy instrument for improving labour market visibility and reducing social inequality. The results, the authors argue, invite further empirical testing of the index across a wider range of countries – particularly important in an era of rapid globalization and greater trans-border labour mobility (e.g. in the enlarged European Union). For instance, the employability index derived from the Dutch data shows that older workers are worse off compared to younger ones (significant given the high level of youth unemployment).¹ Another significant finding is the absence of any gender gap in employability. Overall, financial services get the best sectoral score on the index, while the lowest score goes to agriculture.

Cross-country data used in a recent contribution to the *Review* revealed a close association between Internet use and per capita income (pointing to information technology's potential for promoting economic growth), also showing that multi-factor productivity growth

¹ While young workers (between the ages of 15 and 24) account for a quarter of the world's working age population, they represented nearly half of the total 186 million people out of work worldwide in 2003 (see ILO: *Global employment trends for youth*, Geneva, 2004).

is associated with the use of information technology.² The second article in this issue of the *Review*, by *Stephan Kudyba*, draws on firm-level data (a sample of the top 500 United States corporate users of information technology) to reinforce the above macro-level findings. The article concludes that increases in the intensity of information-technology skills in an enterprise's overall workforce results in an increased contribution to firm output, with the productivity of information technology-intensive labour pools increasing over time.

Recent articles in the *Review* have touched on the issue of social security in analysing the labour dimensions of accession to the European Union by some central European countries and in analysing labour market flexibility in the transition countries of Europe.³ In this context, the last article by *Elaine Fultz* and *Silke Steinhilber* evaluates the gender implications of social security reforms (mainly family benefits and pensions) in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland during the period 1990-2002. The authors highlight the challenges faced in advancing gender equality in the provision of social security and recognize the need for complementary measures to reduce existing gender-based inequalities in the labour market (e.g. in wages and employment opportunities) in order to redress overall gender inequality in these countries.

The first of the three books reviewed in the *Books* section offers a comparative analysis of the determinants of women's labour force participation in Germany and Japan from the 1950s to the 1990s, illustrating how women are often used as a "buffer workforce". The second book is a historical and interdisciplinary analysis of the impact of globalization on the notion of work and its successive conceptualization in Western societies. The third book uses a combination of thematic and country case studies from Europe to study democratic participation at work and how it facilitates effective social dialogue.

The *Recent books* section highlights new research on occupational segregation, labour market flexibility, the impact of new management methods, and the causes of work-related mental health problems. Lastly, the *New ILO publications* section features the report of the World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization and numerous other recent releases, including reports on the ILO's role in promoting a fair globalization, migrant workers, and best practices in work-flexibility; policy studies on economic security, the philosophy of decent work, and female seafarers; the latest edition of the Key Indicators of the Labour Market; and codes of practice on security in ports and workplace violence in services.

² See Duncan Campbell: "Can the digital divide be contained?", in *International Labour Review* (Geneva), Vol. 140 (2001), No. 2, pp. 119-141.

³ See Philippe Egger: "Decent work and competitiveness: Labour dimensions of accession to the European Union", in *International Labour Review* (Geneva), Vol. 142 (2003), No. 1, pp. 5-28; and Sandrine Cazes and Alena Nesporova: "Labour market flexibility in the transition countries: How much is too much?", in *International Labour Review* (Geneva), Vol. 140 (2001), No. 3, pp. 293-325.