

ITUC REPORT

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Living with economic insecurity: women in precarious work

The contribution of labour movement researcher and policy adviser Jo Morris, who made a significant contribution to this publication, is gratefully acknowledged.

CONTENTS

Introduction and key findings	5
1. Living with economic insecurity	7
1.1 The effects of the global economic crisis	7
1.2 A gendered perspective of the global economic crisis	7
2. Living with insecure employment	11
2.1 Precarious work	11
2.2 The informal economy and informal employment	18
2.3 Vulnerable work and female working poor	19
3. Living with low wages	21
3.1 Economic crisis cuts global wage growth by half	21
3.2 Wage inequality, low pay and gender	21
3.3 Unequal Pay for Women in Industrialised Economies: the case of part-time workers	22
Recommendations	23

This publication is part of the “Decent Work, Decent Life for Women” campaign which the ITUC has been running since 2008. Previous reports issued International Women’s Day and belonging to this campaign include: “The Global Gender Pay Gap” in 2008, “Gender (in) equality in the labour market: an overview of global trends and developments” in 2009 and “An Examination of the Factors Influencing Women’s Decisions for Work” in 2010.

INTRODUCTION AND KEY FINDINGS

The initial impact of the global economic crisis on employment, which has left at least 27 million people without jobs, has been well documented. This report analyses recent international research from a range of sources, highlighting a second wave of employment impacts which affects women in particular, and which is poorly reflected in official statistics and government policies. The pre-existing long-term trend towards precarious employment arrangements and increasing informalisation of the labour market has been markedly accelerated by the crisis, leaving more and more women without employment and income security, and further driving their wages down.

This report looks at women's economic insecurity focussing on the precariousness of their employment situation. It analyses global trends in the world of work from a gender perspective including the devastating impact of the 2008 global economic recession. It stresses that there is a second wave impact of the crisis on women which is insufficiently recognized.

The report underlines the boom of precarious and informal work in virtually all countries. The 2008 economic crisis has only accelerated an already rapid process of informalisation of work. It finds that women are most affected by these labour market trends and highlights how the overrepresentation of women in insecure forms of work undermines women's rights, perpetuates gender inequalities in societies and dampens the prospects for sustainable economic progress.

The report challenges the blanket assumption that the increased participation of women in the labour market has provided them with the sufficient means to build economic security. It makes an urgent call to governments to shine the light on the poor quality of the jobs many women hold.

The report maintains that standard indicators and data used to measure developments on labour markets fail to capture the extent to which women are being driven into increasing economic insecurity. Over the last decades, millions of women have been pushed into financial vulnerability making their present and their future unstable. Too often, data on the particular situation of women is lacking.

Finally in the concluding section of the report, governments and trade unions are urged to take action in four key areas:

- Shifting policy to focus on the creation of quality jobs
- Implementing gender equality measures on the labour market
- Providing universal access to social security through the implementation of a social protection floor for all workers regardless of their employment situation
- Taking up the challenge of organising workers in insecure forms of work.

Implementing these recommendations would be a major step in helping women to move out of informal and precarious employment, and increase their access to decent work. For a decent life!

1. LIVING WITH ECONOMIC INSECURITY

1.1 The effects of the global economic crisis

The total number of jobless worldwide escalated to 205 million in 2010 following an unprecedented increase of 27.6 million since 2007, the eve of the global crisis.¹ The global unemployment rate has risen from 5.6% in 2007 to 6.2% in 2010.

From the onset of the economic crisis, vulnerability and job-insecurity has fuelled growing in-work poverty in many parts of the world. The ILO estimates that the crisis has reversed the pre-crisis trend toward a constant decrease of vulnerable employment. The overall share of workers in vulnerable employment, the most extreme form of working insecurity,² has reached 1.53 billion, equivalent to over half (50.1 per cent) of the world's labour force. The number of women and men in vulnerable employment is estimated to have increased in 2009 by as much as 110 million compared to 2008.

The share of workers living with their families below the US\$ 2 a day poverty line is estimated at around 39 per cent, or a total of nearly 1.2 billion workers worldwide in 2009. This amounts to more than 42 million additional working poor than would have been expected on the basis of pre-crisis trends. In Latin America and the Caribbean for example, after decreasing from 27.7% to 15.3% between 1998 and 2008, the proportion of working poor is estimated to have risen to 21.3% in 2009.

This rise in poverty has a profound impact on the lives of women, both because their ability to earn has been severely restricted, but also because women have prime responsibility for the care of the family.

Global wages are stagnating. Excluding China and adjusting for inflation, global wage growth slowed from 2.2% in 2007 to only 0.7% in 2009. While world averages stay slightly positive, wages actually decreased in many countries. Workers who remain employed during the crisis experience flat or falling pay.

Since the late 1990s, the incidence of low pay, defined as being below two-thirds of a country's median wage, has increased in two-thirds of the countries for which figures are available. In addition, it is worth noting that the ILO found that low pay is much less prevalent in countries with higher levels of union membership. In fact, unions play a significant role in ensuring that wages rise along with productivity and that these gains are shared fairly³. The ITUC has on many occasions called on government to restore and promote collective bargaining as a measure to help their economy out of the crisis.

1.2 A gendered perspective of the global crisis

The crisis has a far reaching effect on women, exacerbating their historically disadvantaged position.⁴ The gender inequalities and power imbalances that predate the current crisis have resulted in the effects of the global crisis falling disproportionately on those who are already structurally disempowered and marginalised. These pre-existing inequalities, which include under-representation of women at all levels of economic decision making and their over-representation in informal, vulnerable, and casual employment, are often more significant than gender inequalities arising specifically from the crisis.⁵

According to the ILO, between 2007 and 2009 the global female unemployment rate increased from 6 to 7% - slightly more than the male rate which rose from 5.5 to 6.3%. Although global estimates show that the unemployment impact of the crisis has been almost equally detrimental for men and women around the world, women's lower employment rates, their concentration in low-earning informal or vulnerable forms of employment, and inadequate social protection all place women in a weaker position than men to weather crises.

Developing countries

In several developing countries, women are concentrated in export-driven manufacturing sectors, such as garments, cut-flowers or electronics, which have all been severely hit by the recession. Export Processing Zones (EPZ) have been the main providers of jobs for poor women in many Asian and African countries. But jobs in EPZ are characterised by their high level of insecurity, low wages, lack of training opportunities and systematic violation of trade union rights.

¹ ILO Global Employment Trends 2011 report

² Vulnerable employment is defined by the ILO as the sum of own-account workers and contributing family workers.

³ See ITUC 15.12.2010 press release

⁴ The Global Employment Trend; ILO 2010

⁵ ILO Global Employment Trends 2010 report

In export manufacturing sectors, women were often the first to be laid off, with employers ignoring outstanding pay and evading legal obligations to give notice and pay compensation, and governments turning a blind eye, with devastating consequences.

In the garment industry, a female dominated sector, some Asian countries have reported a massive loss of jobs for women. For example in Cambodia where textiles is the largest sector of employment for women, 38,000 jobs were lost in 2009 alone.

In the Philippines, there are no available gender-disaggregated data on local retrenchments and layoffs that have occurred since the onset of the global financial crisis. It is safe to say, however, that women who were formally employed in the electronics, semiconductors, telecommunications, and garments industries, as well as the other industries engaged in production for export, have been the hardest hit by the crisis. Women comprise the majority of workforces in these largely export-oriented industries.⁶

In Latin America, the Caribbean and Asia, the ILO found that job losses for women are expected to exceed those for men. This is particularly worrisome, given the large percentage of female headed households, almost 40% in the Caribbean.

Within developing countries women are often concentrated in the agriculture sector. In Sub-Saharan Africa more than the half of women are involved in subsistence agriculture with some off-farm work for wages or work in the informal sector. A recent UN report⁷ looking at gender disparity in the agricultural sector found that women still benefit less than men from rural employment and that the recent financial and food crises have slowed down the progress towards greater gender equity and decent work for women in agricultural and rural areas over the past few years.

The impact of the crisis on women is not adequately captured by statistics. Many developing nations do not have gender segregated data and do not always register different types of employment, making it impossible to analyse the number of, and the extent to which, women have been affected. In particular, it is extremely difficult to track the effects of the economic crisis on either the informal economy or the reproductive (care/family) economy. Macro-economic analysis, with its strong reliance on employment rates as a measure of global economic health, fails to take account of women's different, more insecure and tenuous, participation in the labour market.⁸

The impact of the global economic crisis on women in Asia: field studies

During the 1997–1998 Asian financial crises, women were disproportionately affected, and young, poorly educated women in urban areas the hardest hit. In order to assess the impact of the current crisis, the Asian Development Bank commissioned field studies on different export industries in the People's Republic of China, Indonesia, Philippines, Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam in mid-2009.

The main findings of the study were:

- Declines in demand for major exports from late 2007 were seen in all the countries. In response, retrenchment and reduced work hours were commonplace, although there were important cross-country gender differences: in Vietnam, women formed the minority of retrenched workers while in Indonesia, women were the first to lose their jobs. Of enterprises laying off workers in Indonesia, almost a third laid off all female workers.
- Regardless of industrial sector, status of employment, and sex of worker, respondents reported income declines. Automotive workers in Thailand reported income declines of about 40%, and electronics workers in the Philippines, falls of about 40–50%. In Vietnam, women reported a larger fall in income of 24.2% versus 21.3% for men. All workers reported reductions in spending, with education the last item to be reduced. Nearly 80% of Thai female automotive workers reported reducing remittances to rural areas.
- The downturn forced women and men to seek alternative livelihoods. In Vietnam, working in restaurants and shops was widely reported while in Indonesia, retrenched female workers reported becoming domestic workers or looking to work abroad for the first time.
- The recession triggered negative social impacts, such as increased family conflict.

⁶ Feminised recession: impact of the global financial crisis on women garment workers in the Philippines, Kristina Gaerlan; Marion Cabrera; Patricia Samia; L. Santoalla Online publication date: 15 July 2010

⁷ FAO, IFAD ILO report "Gender dimensions of agricultural and rural employment: Differentiated pathways out of poverty"

⁸ The Global Employment Trends for Women

The study concluded by underlying the need for a gender responsive approach to designing, monitoring, and evaluating economic rescue packages. Collecting and analyzing gender-disaggregated data of the hardest-hit sectors is absolutely necessary to determine differential gender impacts on workers and their families, and to provide voice and visibility to women that are affected.⁹

World's Working Women¹⁰

- Globally, women's participation in the labour market remained steady in the two decades from 1990 to 2010, whereas that of men declined steadily over the same period; the gender gap in labour force participation remains considerable at all ages except the early adult years.
- Women are predominantly and increasingly employed in the services sector.
- Vulnerable employment – own-account work and contributing family work – is prevalent in many countries in Africa and Asia, especially among women.
- The informal sector is an important source of employment for both women and men in the less developed regions but more so for women.
- Occupational segregation and gender wage gaps continue to persist in all regions.
- Part-time employment is common for women in most of the more developed regions and some less developed regions, and it is increasing almost everywhere for both women and men.
- Women spend at least twice as much time as men on domestic work, and when all work – paid and unpaid – is considered, women work longer hours than men.

Industrialised countries

55 per cent of the total increase in global unemployment between 2007 and 2010 occurred in industrialised economies. Male dominated sectors have been severely hit by the recession, such as the construction, transport, car industry, and manufacturing sectors. ILO data shows that the growth of the male unemployment rate has been higher than female: from 5.5 to 9.3 per cent for men versus an increase from 6.0 to 8.2 per cent for women between 2007 and 2010

However this should not hide the fact that in these countries women's participation in the labour market remains largely below that of men, estimated at 53.1 per cent versus 68.4 per cent in 2009.

In industrialised economies women, who tend to be concentrated in part-time employment, face cuts in hours of work and pay. This is for example the case in the cleaning sector, which has been directly hit by the closure of many offices since 2007. Official unemployment data may miss this trend because, even if underemployed, women will be counted among the ranks of the employed in labour-force surveys. There is also evidence that in some countries women have withdrawn from the labour force as a response to joblessness. This, too, will result in the underestimation of the unemployment effects of the crisis on women.¹¹

While the crisis first hit male dominated sectors, there are now signs that more gender-mixed sectors are being affected, such as services, or female-dominated sectors, such as the cleaning or care sectors.

A complete picture of the effects on men, women and gender relations must include not only the short-term immediate effects of the crisis, but also consider longer-term declines in tax revenues and resulting cuts in government expenditures in areas that affect women's employment and services.¹² A major concern at the moment relates to retrenchment measures taken in the public sector where women make up the majority of the workers. In several countries austerity measures to reduce public budget deficits are implemented without any assessment of their gender impact. Women are not only the majority of workers in the public sector, they are also the major beneficiaries of public services and programmes.

In the UK, the TUC warned that public sector job losses and welfare cuts will disproportionately hit women's income, setting

⁹ Samantha Hung in "Lesson Not Learned? Gender, Employment, and Social Protection in Asia's Crisis-Affected Export Sectors." Asia Development Bank, 2009

¹⁰ World's Women 2010, Trends and Statistics; October, 2010; United Nations

¹¹ The global economic crisis; Gender & Development Vol. 18, No. 2, July 2010

¹² Stephanie Seguino.; Gender & Development Vol. 18, No. 2, July 2010

progress on closing the gender pay gap back years. Women, who represent 65 per cent of the public sector workforce, will bear the brunt of the estimated 400,000 public sector job losses over the next four years. As the gender pay divide is estimated to be twice as high in the private sector (20.8 per cent) than in the public sector (11.6 per cent), the government's plans are likely to increase the gender pay gap. This led the British Fawcett Society to challenge the legality of the UK government's Emergency Budget. Of the 8 billion pounds worth of cuts made through changes to tax and welfare in the Budget, it is estimated 70 per cent are set to come from women's pockets. The Fawcett Society believes such a skewed budget could not have been drawn up in accordance with laws and regulation on gender equality.

Commonwealth of Independent States and Central and South-Eastern Europe (non-EU)

Unemployment peaked at the highest regional rate in the world in 2009 and remained high in 2010 at 10.4 per cent. A worrisome trait of the region is the extent to which youth unemployment bore the brunt of the impact of the economic downturn: today one in five economically active young people is unemployed.

The growth in the share of agricultural employment in total employment between 2007 and 2009 suggests that some of the employment losses during that period have been "absorbed" in the informal economy, and the impact of the crisis may be even worse than the unemployment figures suggest. Women are reported to be overrepresented among the worse-off.

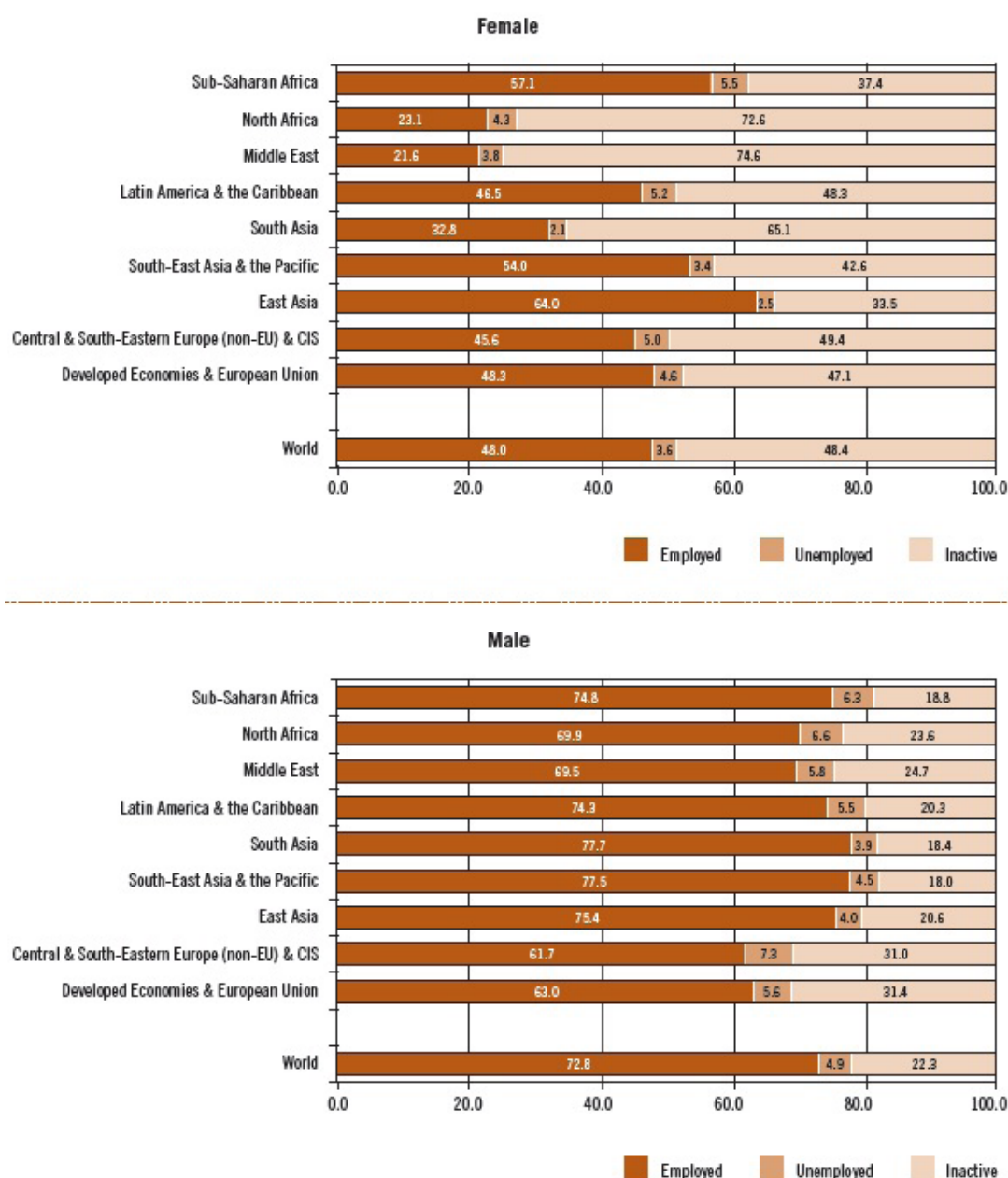
Global Impact on Women

The global financial crisis has affected women in ways that are distinct from its impact on men. In particular, women are directly affected by cuts in public expenditure both as workers in and as the main beneficiaries of public services. The employment impact of the crisis on women tends to be underestimated and never makes the headlines. Yet overall women are the most affected by the increasing insecurity and precariousness of work. The consequence of insecurity for women is far reaching as they remain the primary family care-givers. Unemployment, job insecurity, low pay and public service cuts all limit their ability to feed, educate and nurture their children.

2. LIVING WITH INSECURE EMPLOYMENT

Women's and men's situation and position in the labour market is strongly defined by their employment status. Being formally or informally employed, having a labour contract or not, working part-time or full time, all these factors largely determine the level of security, protection and rights at work – and frequently the size of the pay packet. This section looks at the prevalence of women in insecure, precarious and vulnerable work.

Regional distribution of female and male working-age populations by main economic status, 2009



Source: ILO, Trends Econometric Models, November 2009.

2.1 Precarious work

Unlike permanent employment, precarious or non-standard jobs shift social risks away from employers and governments onto individual workers – those who can least afford to bear them. These risks affect not only the workers but their families and society at large.

Definitions

Commonly, precarious employment is defined as forms of work involving job insecurity, low income, limited social benefits and statutory entitlements.

It is shaped by employment status (i.e. self-employment or paid employment, bilateral or triangular employment relationships), form of employment (i.e. temporary or permanent, part-time or full-time), and dimensions of labour market insecurity, as well as the social context and location. (Vosko 2006)

Typically, precarious employment refers to non-permanent, temporary, casual, insecure and contingent forms of work. From a workers' point of view, precarious work is related to uncertain, unpredictable and risky employment. Workers in these jobs are not, or only partially, covered by labour laws and social security protection. They encounter difficulties either in law or in practice to join or form a trade union. Female precarious workers are likely to be excluded from pregnancy protection and maternity leave provisions, as well as other important forms of social protection.

Precarious and insecure work creates greater economic inequality, insecurity, and instability for workers, their families and societies.

Based on their experience at the company level, trade unions testify that, in addition to income insecurity, employment precariousness often determines the level of safety at work and the possibility of using a collective voice.

The IMF (International Metalworkers' Federation) has identified the following employment practices often associated with precarious work¹³:

- Direct hire on temporary labour contracts,
- Hiring in labour via employment agencies or labour brokers,
- Contracting out functions to other companies,
- Personal labour contracts as bogus 'self-employed' workers,
- Abusive probationary periods,
- Disguised employment training contracts,
- On call / daily hire,
- Illegal or involuntary part-time work,
- Home work

A global weakening of the employment relationship:

The employment relationship, which is the main means by which workers have obtained rights and benefits associated with work, has come under serious attack from employers and governments. Women have been at the forefront of these attacks and their labour rights have been seriously undermined over the last decades.

Changes in national labour legislation have brought about an erosion of workers' rights and protection in many countries. This is for example the case of Peru where in 2000 the parliament weakened protections for asparagus and other agro-industrial workers with the passage of Law 27360. The measure, applying only to the strongly female dominated agro-industry, replaced the eight-hour day standard with an "accumulated workday" formula, when overtime pay only kicks in when the average workday over the entire work contract period exceeds eight hours. Under this law, an employer can require a 20-hour workday and not have to pay overtime as long as the average workday for the contract period averages eight hours or less. In addition, to increase competitiveness, the minimum wage in the agricultural sector includes "extras" in the base wage rather than adding them to the legal minimum, effectively suppressing wages.¹⁴

In parallel to legislative changes, employers are increasingly using mechanisms to hide or disguise the existence of employment relationships like outsourcing, subcontracting, hiring of temporary workers or the establishment of commercial

13. Global action against precarious work, 'Metal World', IMF, No 1, 2007

14 Drop by drop; Progreso, Centro Peruano de Estudios Sociales (CEPES) and Water Witness International, 2010; The Solidarity Center, Washington; Peruvian Society, Workers, and Labor Law; Dec 2009; Death and taxes: the true toll of tax dodging - Peru and Bolivia: a tale of two tax systems; Christian Aid; May 2008

contracts with pseudo-self-employed workers. The multiplication of these atypical contracts has blurred the line between formality and informality at work, creating confusion about the identification of the employer.

A study by the Centro Peruano de Estudios Sociales (CEPES) and Water Witness International carried out in 2010 found that at the Camposol company, one of the largest Peruvian agro-industry exporters, producing asparagus, red peppers, avocado, and other food products, one plantation employs 12,000 mainly female workers, of whom just 500 are contracted as long term permanent employees. Repeatedly extended short term contracts allow the employer to suspend the worker at any time and to terminate the contract without notice. Workers feel that employer has all of the power. When workers dare to join a union or speak out about poor conditions, their contracts are suspended or not renewed.¹⁵

In many cases, employers use precarious work to evade their obligations to provide social security, pensions, maternity and family leave, overtime payments, vacation and holidays and occupational health and safety. These are particularly important to women, whether they become pregnant, are widowed or have to survive on a minimum pension. The exclusion of part-time workers from social security schemes is a growing trend.

A field study carried out in 2010 by Labour Behind the Label and War on Want in Gurgaon, India showed that the law is widely flouted in the female dominated garment industry which is increasingly controlled by labour contractors or agents. The study found that the overwhelming majority of the workers were employed through three or four different labour contractors. Interviewed women were clear that employers had switched to using contract labour in order to avoid their responsibilities as workers on contract basis are not given their rights in terms of annual leave with wages, bonus etc. No worker is given the right to unionise. All the issues related to poor working conditions and high targets are under the control of a factory owner that is no longer the 'official' employer. Their actual employer is now the labour contractor, who has little, if any, control over workplace conditions and whom the workers rarely see. In fact, most workers at that factory reported only ever seeing the representative of the labour agent on pay day and almost never the contractor directly responsible for their employment.¹⁶

Why a rise of precarious employment?

The startling growth and obviousness of precarious work have made it one of the most salient features of today's labour markets. Precarious forms of work have spread to all sectors in virtually all countries, and they affect all workers from blue collar to those in managerial positions. Deregulated public services contribute strongly to this trend: outsourced and part-time workers delivering public services frequently have lower pay and conditions of employment than permanent colleagues. Precarious work flourishes wherever there is a labour surplus and workers are driven to accept work at any cost. These conditions exist in many parts of the world today¹⁷.

The pressure to establish flexible labour markets that would quickly adapt to global economic cycles became very intense in the 80's. Progressively labour markets began to become markets like any other and security of employment diminished¹⁸ - labour increasingly became just another commodity. In the 90's the acceleration of the financialisation of the economy and the related establishment of the shareholder value as the unique criteria to assess the success of companies, increased the pressure for short-term profit. Lay-offs became a major instrument of employers' restructuring strategies and one of the principle ways to increase the value of dividends to shareholders. This process precipitated the growth of precarious employment at the global level – and women are too often at the sharp end of it.

Precarious contracts and other arrangements reduce employers' obligations and responsibilities, shifting them to individual workers who are forced to fend for themselves or, in exceptional cases, get help from the State. Working women suffer particularly from social insurance cuts¹⁹.

¹⁵ Drop by drop; Prograssio, Centro Peruano de Estudios Sociales (CEPES) and Water Witness International, 2010;

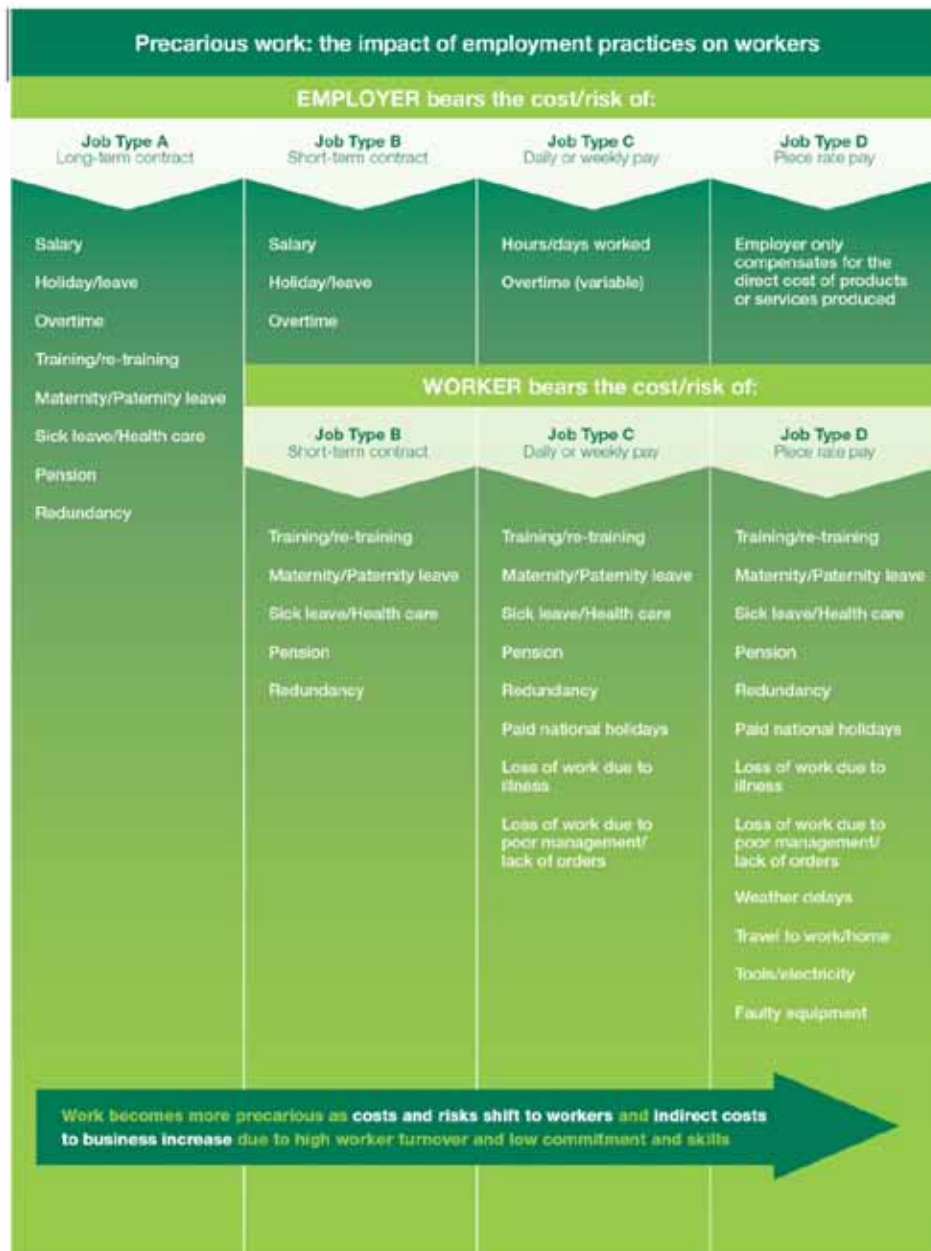
¹⁶ Taking Liberties; Labour Behind the Label and War on Want, London 2010

¹⁷ IMF (International Metalworkers' Federation)

¹⁸ Jim Baker Council of Global Unions – the rise of precarious work

The ITUC and its Global Unions partners are campaigning for governments to:

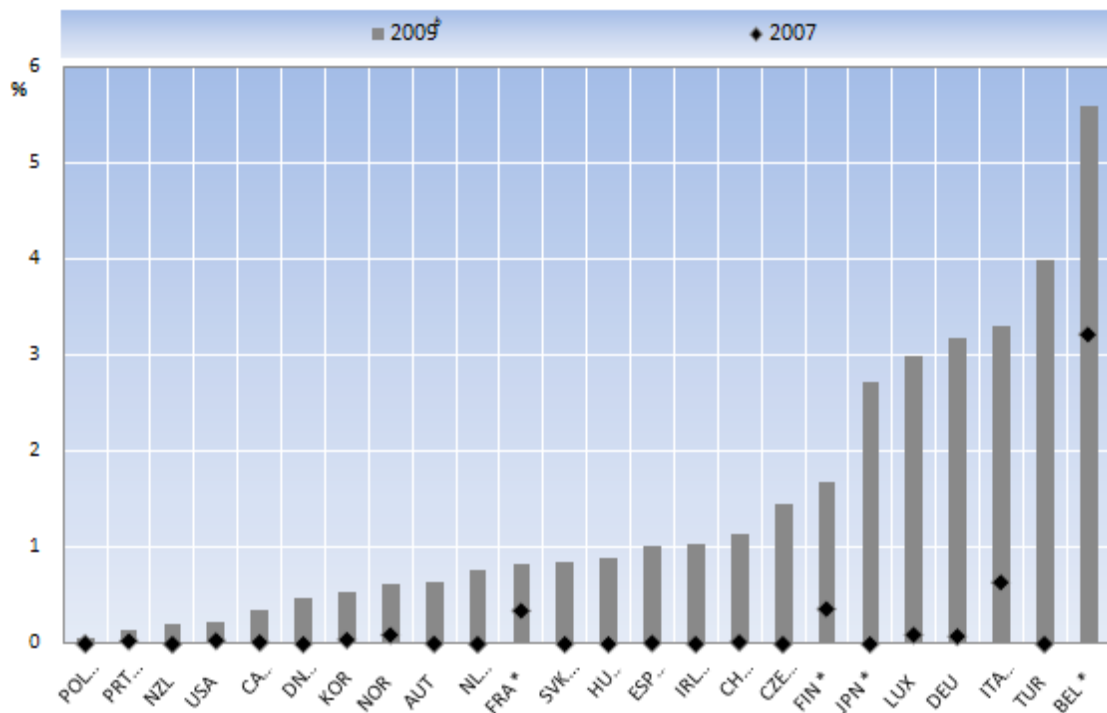
- Restrict temporary and contract work to cases of genuine need
- Guarantee equal pay for precarious workers and their right to join a union
- Require long-term temporary jobs to be converted to permanent jobs



Source: Research and Graphics from “Better Jobs in Better Supply Chains”, Business Brief No 5, Oxfam 2010

Many women in precarious work, such as short-term, temporary, imposed part-time jobs, have been laid off during the crisis as they were “easy to dismiss”. The graph below illustrates that since 2007 the number of employees in short-time work schemes in all OECD countries has substantially increased. This is a trend likely to particularly affect women workers, already the majority with temporary and short-term contracts in many countries.

Annual average stock of employees participating in short-time work schemes as percentage of all employees^a



* indicates that data are from national sources; ** indicates that data are OECD estimates using flows data from the OECD-EC questionnaire or from national sources.

a) Countries shown in ascending order of the share of participants in short-time work schemes in 2009.

b) Until 2009 Q3 for Austria and the Netherlands; August 2009 for Portugal and Spain; September 2009 for the Slovak Republic; and October 2009 for Luxembourg and New Zealand.

Source: OECD (2010), *OECD Employment Outlook*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

The gender dimension of precarious employment:

There are no global figures related to the number of women in precarious work but a great number of studies made at the national or regional level indicate an overrepresentation of women in this form of work.

In Australia, studies¹⁹ have shown that the trend in women's employment is increasingly part-time, casual work with 58 percent of part time jobs also casual. In the 15 years between 1991 and 2006 women employed in full time jobs had declined from 59 to 55 percent. Altogether 30% of employed women are casual employees as opposed to 22% for men. Studies of the Workplace Research Centre concluded that "in recent years nearly all the net growth in employment has been non-standard in nature".

In the EU, the European parliament adopted a resolution in October 2010 on precarious women workers, which highlights the "overrepresentation of women in precarious work" as a key contributing factor to the gender pay gap. The resolution calls on EU governments to take legislative measures to put an end to zero-hour contracts, a recent type of contract under which the employer does not guarantee the employee a fixed number of hours per week. The resolution also expresses disappointment that the EU employment law package and the directives on fixed-term, part-time, and temporary agency work do not adequately address the precarious nature of employment. It calls for further specific legislative measures such as granting all employees equal access to social services and benefits, including maternity leave, health care and retirement pensions, as well as to education and training, regardless of employment conditions.

In Canada, part-time, contract, and temporary work as well as self-employment, correspond to around one-third of the workforce nationally²⁰. This means that in Canada, about a third of the workforce engages in 'non-standard' work that

¹⁹ 2009 study by Preston and Barns, 2009 Workplace Research Centre
²⁰ Chaykowski & Slotsve 2008, Costa & Tourigny 2004

deviates from standard full-time, permanent employment contract with a single employer²¹. Women are overrepresented in this category mainly because of the high number working part-time.

In Japan precarious work is highly gendered. Women account for about two-thirds of non-regular workers²². Temporary work in Japan is gendered to an even greater degree than part-time work. Women make up more than 80% of temporary staff.

An important cause of women's overrepresentation in the ranks of precarious workers relates to the constraints they face because of child-care and domestic responsibilities. These constraints often leave them with no alternative but to seek part-time or low paid 'non-standard' work – facing the risks of short hours, low pay and limited access to benefits.

The experience of the IMF (International Metalworkers Federation) and IUF (Food, Agricultural, Hotel, and Restaurant Workers International) at plant level confirms that women's jobs tend to be more precarious in general, with less security, lower pay, fewer benefits and weaker social protection than men. In particular women working in sectors such as food processing and electronics industries experience a high incidence of precarious work and bad conditions. Many of these workers are young female migrant workers, either from rural areas or abroad, with little bargaining power.

Increasingly women working in deregulated public sector jobs, as outsourced cleaners or care-workers for example, have precarious contracts. Many are employed on mini-part-time contracts, as agency workers or as casual workers with few rights and no access to the social protection available to permanent employees. In Belgium the predominantly female office cleaning sector has been severely affected by the downturn – contracts for cleaning once a day have been reduced to once a week. Alongside job cuts, reductions in working hours have led to pay cuts for workers least able to afford them. According to the Belgium union centre FGTB, cleaners in public sector jobs have gone relatively unscathed until now, but there is a real risk that policies to "clean up" the public finances will lead, as they have done in the private and banking sectors, to public sector economy measures on plants and cleaning.

Precarious work = disposable workers

In a recent submission to the UN Special Representative for Business and Human Rights, the Global Unions IMF and IUF argued that precarious work is "rapidly becoming the biggest obstacle to the respect of workers' rights. More and more workers – many of whom are women - find themselves in precarious jobs where they have no right even to join a union, let alone to bargain collectively with their employer. Some are formally excluded because basic rights are denied in law. Others have rights on paper, but no rights in fact because laws are not enforced. And others are too afraid to exercise their rights because they could lose their jobs at any minute. As a result, millions of workers throughout the world and whole categories of employment are effectively excluded from the reach of ILO Conventions 87 and 98, as well as a whole host of other employment rights." ²³

The ease of hiring and firing workers on temporary contracts increases the ease of targeting union members. Precarious workers are systematically denied their right to join a trade union – and it is precisely low skilled, poorly educated women, so strongly represented among these workers, who are most in need of the protection of a union and the benefits of collective agreements.

The ILO Recommendation No. 198 on Employment Relationship recommends addressing the gender dimension of precarious employment by focusing on these sectors where women predominate and where there is high proportion of ambiguous and disguised employment relationship.

²¹ Law Commission of Canada, 2004

²² OECD 2008 Economic Survey: 185

²³ Precarious Work: Undermining Human Rights, International Metalworkers' Federation (IMF) submission to the UN Special Representative of the Secretary General for Business and Human Rights, May 2010

T-Mobile phone company workers in the US live in constant fear of losing their job for even small mistakes. While the mother company, Deutsche Telekom, recognises union rights at home in Germany, its US subsidiary T-Mobile is deeply hostile to its workers having union representation and bargaining rights and is running a sustained anti-union campaign.

The interviewed T-Mobile worker has to remain anonymous for fear of being disciplined or sacked. She is a call center representative who worries about being fired for spending too much time helping a customer or failing to meet T-Mobile's other exacting standards. She is generally satisfied with her wages and benefits, but she is tired of working under the constant threat of losing "good standing" for a single mistake or a few minutes' tardiness:

"They use fear as a means of control, and the economy makes that possible because you can't just quit. That's my motivation for wanting to unionize – job security."

Right now, the only job security for a worker who's lost good standing is to endure a humiliating, one-last-chance experience: Managers will say, "OK, you're on your last legs here. We're going to give you an opportunity to go home and think about what you did." Your assignment is to write a short essay about your strategy to get back with the program, I guess, to meet standards. So they escort you out of the building, they take your badge, and then the next time you're scheduled you meet with human resources and your manager and supervisor, and they will read what you wrote and make the decision as to whether or not they'll keep you on."

For her it happened after being late one day. *"I guess I'll take that over getting fired, but it's kind of awkward, it feels kind of childish."*

She details T-Mobile's long list of demands for call takers. For instance, they can't spend too much time on any one call, but better spend enough that the customer doesn't need to call back. And in that window of time, they also must "right-fit," the company's term for pitching new products and services to customers.

"Right-fitting has been around for a while but they have really stressed it to the point of actually coming in and speaking to our team and saying, 'If you're not offering it on every call you're going to be fired.' I mean, they said that."

She has learned that the quality standards really aren't about quality service for the customer. *"It's more like, 'How good are you doing for T-Mobile?' Are you selling something to the person?' It's 'sell, sell, sell.' It's not necessarily doing what's right."*

In fact, workers have even gotten in trouble for following customers' requests to remove items from their service plan. She suspects some are so fearful that they don't do it. *"I've had customers call in and say, 'I've been trying to get this feature removed for three months and it's still on my account.'"*

She believes a union would help dispel those fears, and that ultimately would be good for T-Mobile. *"If I feel more confident rather than worried, of course I'm going to perform better," she says.²⁴*

Precarious work and low wages

Workers in precarious employment generally earn less. This often creates tensions with their colleagues under permanent contracts.

In the metal sector, affiliates of the International Metalworkers Federation report that in many cases, precarious workers earn more than 50% less than those of the permanent workforce, while temporary, casual, part-time and contract jobs are becoming ever more commonplace. This means that precarious women workers have a double pay deficit – both discriminatory unequal pay and lower rewards from insecure employment.

In Korea, 70 per cent of women workers are precariously employed, earning only 43 per cent of the salaries of regular male workers. In one of the Korean factories cited in the IMF complaint to the ILO, only 5 per cent of the workers are permanent employees and they are all male. Nearly all the precarious workers are women, earning 47 per cent less than their male colleagues.²⁵

²⁴ ITUC

²⁵ Precarious Work: Undermining Human Rights, International Metalworkers' Federation (IMF) submission to the UN Special Representative of the Secretary General for Business and Human Rights, May 2010

In Europe millions of women, many migrant, work in the social and health care sector – in residential care homes, or providing care to people in their own homes. These jobs are highly precarious and low paid, often below minimum standards. Often women in this sector work “upon request” without any job security.

The overrepresentation of women in precarious employment has become a key factor contributing to the global pay gap between men and women²⁶. This relationship between pay gap and precarious employment was recognised by the European Parliament in a resolution on precarious women workers adopted in October 2010.

More jobs do not mean Decent Work for women

Neo-liberal economic policies which have de-regulated labour markets virtually everywhere, have not delivered on their promises: While more women are working outside the household, they remain trapped in insecure and low paid work. This is well illustrated in an interesting ILO research study of Pakistan:

Women in Pakistan's labour market: a story of perpetuating disadvantage

Labour markets in Pakistan are characterised by large gender gaps, but recent industrialisation has expanded the access to labour markets for women. In 2007, more than nine million Pakistani women were employed, almost four million more than in 2000. Nevertheless, the employment-to-population ratio for women (19.9 per cent) remains four times lower than for men (79.1 per cent) - much lower than the ratio in South Asia as a whole (33.5 per cent). While between 2000 and 2006 the female employment-to-population rate increased significantly, during the same period, the share of precarious and vulnerable employment in the total employment of women increased at a higher rate. For Pakistani men close to two thirds of the additional employment created 2000-2006 consisted of waged employment, while for women more than two thirds consisted of contributing family work. Even in manufacturing, which constitutes the key source of employment creation outside the agricultural sector, the share of women in precarious and vulnerable employment is increasing.

The opposite trend can be observed for males.²⁷ Women remain often confined to status groups that carry higher economic risk and a lesser likelihood of meeting the characteristics that define decent work, including social protection, basic rights and a voice at work. In general, women also have lower wages than men, and their wages increase less over time.²⁸

2.2 The informal economy and informal employment

The term “informal economy” refers to all economic activities that are, in law or practice, not covered or insufficiently covered by formal arrangements. It includes own-account workers and contributing family members. But it also includes wage workers who are employed in an informal way meaning that their employment relationship is not recognised leaving them outside the scope of labour laws and regulations.

In the last few decades, work in the informal economy has risen rapidly across the developing world. In Latin America and Southeast Asia, sustained economic growth has been accompanied by increasing informal employment. Even in OECD countries a growing tendency to the informalisation of working conditions creates informal employment. For example false self-employed workers whose employment relationship is disguised in order to bypass legal requirements, can often be considered informally employed.

Estimates indicate that informal employment comprises about 65 per cent of non-agricultural employment in developing Asia, 51 per cent in Latin America, 48 per cent in North Africa, 72 per cent in Sub-Saharan Africa and 24% in transition economy.²

Women are overrepresented in the informal economy although there are strong differences across regions. In countries such as India and Mali nearly 90 per cent of women in the non-agriculture sector are working informally.²⁹ However data

26 GURN; Moving from Precarious Employment to Decent Work, GURN Discussion paper No 13, Dec 2009

27 Employment Sector Working Paper No. 13, “Assessing vulnerable employment: The role of status and sector indicators in Pakistan, Namibia and Brazil” (Geneva, ILO, 2008)

28 Calculated using Pakistan Labour Force Survey, 2006/2007 (Islamabad, Federal Bureau of Statistics)

29 ILO 2009

is not always disaggregated by sex, making it sometimes difficult to measure the overall numbers of women.³⁰ But there is a significant overlap between being a woman, working informally and being poor.

The OECD in its report “Is Informal Normal?” found a disproportionate percentage of women at the lower end of the scale in informal employment indicating that both in the formal and informal economies, women are discriminated against. This can be explained to a large extent by the gender division of labour according to which women are still largely responsible for the care of the family members. As a result they have fewer opportunities in accessing the labour market, gaining qualifications and skills, advancing their career and becoming a union representative.

Field research, conducted by the ITUC affiliate the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) on informal construction work shows the multifaceted impact of the crisis on Indian women working in this sector. The research indicates that women established as informal construction workers are under threat from new male entrants in physically demanding occupations. In Ahmedabad, India, SEWA estimates that the decline of key industries during the crisis resulted in a 25 per cent surge in those seeking informal construction work.³¹ Many of these new entrants, both men and women, are competing for work in unskilled construction work, where women are already concentrated. Men are more likely to have skills in areas such as masonry, plumbing, and tile work so the competition for jobs from men disproportionately affects established unskilled female construction workers.

In addition, new male entrants have the advantage of being able to devote increased time and attention to their work, free from the many unpaid care and work obligations experienced by their female competitors in the labour market.

Unfortunately, neither new entrants nor traditional construction workers have promising prospects in Ahmedabad because the global crisis has driven down demand. The economic downturn and the high cost of building materials have curbed local construction: construction workers report that their work days have fallen from 10-15 to 5-6 days of work a month. Daily earnings, however, have fallen disproportionately for unskilled (women) workers. In February 2009, unskilled workers received 100-150 rupees a day for their labour, but at the time of their interviews in August 2009 they were receiving only 70-80 rupees per day. The wages of skilled workers remain unchanged over the same period. The crisis has intensified competition and women were forced into unskilled and lower-paying work.³²

The expansion and the persistence of informal employment limit the effectiveness of employment as a tool for poverty reduction. Indeed it is not enough to rely on jobs in the informal economy to get women out of poverty. Women need decent jobs.

2.3 Vulnerable Work and Female Working Poor

The ILO “vulnerable employment” indicator, defined as the sum of own-account workers and unpaid family workers, provides valuable insights into trends in overall employment quality, as a high share of workers in vulnerable employment indicates widespread informal work arrangements, whereby workers are left unprotected with inadequate access to social protection. Vulnerable employment is also often characterized by low pay and difficult working conditions in which workers' fundamental rights are undermined³³.

The current estimate of the number of workers in vulnerable employment in 2009 is 1.53 billion. This corresponds to a global vulnerable employment rate of 50.1 per cent. An additional 100 million of workers have joined the ranks of those in vulnerable employment³⁴ since 2007 indicating the severity of the impact of the economic crisis on the lives of insecure workers. In all regions of the developing world, the vulnerable employment rate among women exceeds that of men, with the largest gender gaps observed in North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East. Over half of all women in the world are in vulnerable jobs³⁵.

³⁰ World's Women 2010, The: Trends and Statistics; October, 2010; United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs

³¹ SEWA 2009

³² SEWA and Zoe Elena Horn, The effects of the global economic crisis on women in the informal economy: research findings from WIEGO and the Inclusive Cities partners; Gender & Development Vol. 18, No. 2, July 2010

³³ Global Employment Trends, January 2010, International Labour Office, Geneva, 2011.

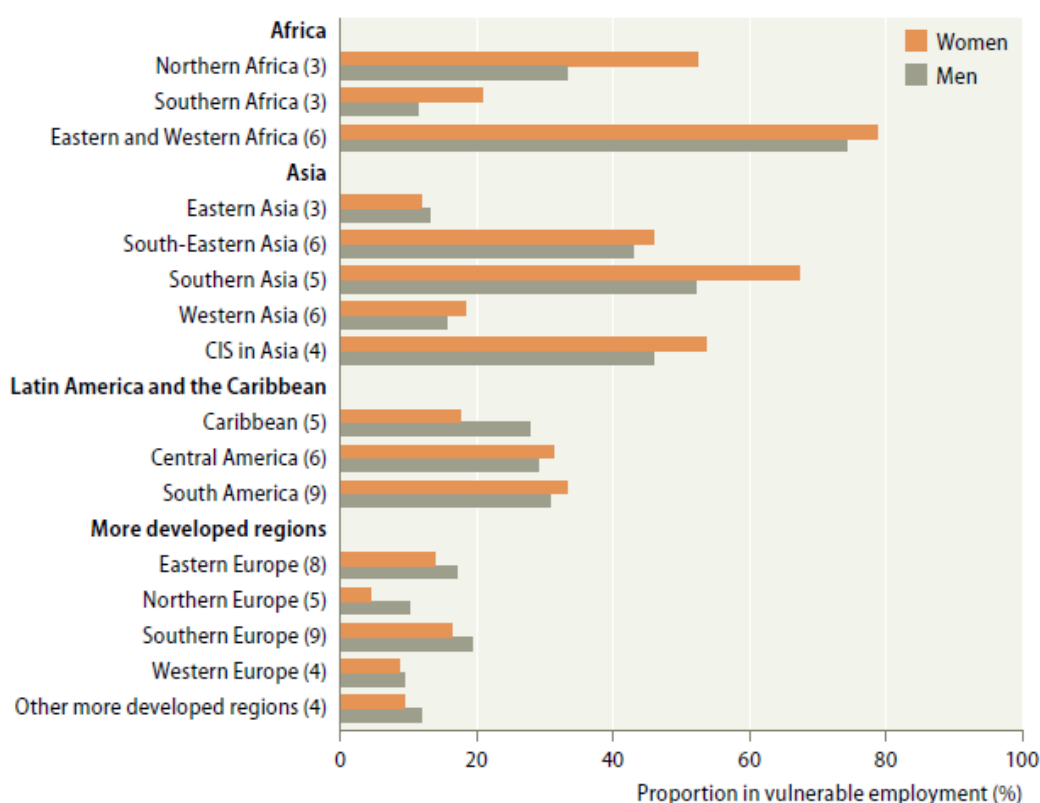
³⁴ Global Employment Trends, January 2010, International Labour Office, Geneva, 2010.

³⁵ Global Employment Trends for Women; ILO, March 2009

The rising proportion and number of vulnerable workers in Africa, South East Asia and the Pacific since 2008 suggests that many workers who lost their jobs in export oriented manufacturing cannot afford to join the ranks of the unemployed and instead have taken up employment in the informal economy, perhaps working in agricultural activities or in informal services, such as street vending.

Women in vulnerable employment are subject to a high level of economic insecurity and do not have the safety net of social protection to cover periods when they are out of work or sick. The following graph illustrates the over representation of women in vulnerable employment in Africa, Asia and Latin America. In the more developed regions, men make up the biggest part of workers in vulnerable employment.

Employed persons in vulnerable employment by region and sex, 2004-2007
(latest available)



Source: Computed by the United Nations Statistics Division based on data from ILO, Key Indicators of the Labour Market, 5th edition, table 3 (accessed in July 2009).

Note: Unweighted averages; the numbers in brackets indicate the number of countries averaged. The average for Eastern Asia does not include China. Western Asia excludes Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia; CIS in Asia includes the aforementioned countries plus Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

3. LIVING WITH LOW WAGES

3.1 Economic crisis cuts global wage growth by half

The financial and economic crisis has cut global wage growth by half during the years 2008 and 2009.³⁶ Analysing data from 115 countries covering 94 per cent of wage earners worldwide, the ILO Global Wage Report 2010 finds that global growth in average monthly wage slowed from 2.8 per cent in 2007, on the eve of the crisis, to just 1.5 per cent in 2008 and 1.6 per cent in 2009. Excluding China, the global average wage growth progressively drops to 0.8 in 2008 and 0.7 in 2009.

These figures demonstrate that the recession has not only been dramatic for the millions who lost their jobs, but has also affected those who remained in employment, severely reducing their purchasing power and their general well-being. Women, who bear the main responsibility for family-care and household purchases, are especially affected.

Since the mid-1990s the proportion of people on low pay – defined as less than two-thirds of median wage – has increased in more than two-thirds of countries with available data. Low paid workers, mainly women, can easily fall in poverty. Those workers urgently need decent minimum wages and a better articulation between wages, social and labour market policies.

Wages are higher in countries where collective bargaining covers at least 30 per cent of employees. The existence of a minimum wage reduces inequality in the bottom half of the wage distribution. Given their overrepresentation in low paid jobs, women benefit most from collective bargaining and minimum wages. At the same time, preventing the purchasing power of low-paid workers from falling can contribute to a faster recovery by sustaining aggregate demand.

In Sweden negotiations by the Swedish Hotel and Restaurant Workers' Union (HRF), an affiliated organisation of the IUF (Food, Agricultural, Hotel, and Restaurant Workers International), broke down in 2010 over employers' insistence on extending and increasing precarious employment, already rampant in the female dominated hotel sector, and their rejection of the union's proposal of a monthly wage increase. As a result of threatened solidarity strikes by the Swedish Food Workers and the electrical workers, HRF was able to get very close to their wage target, although this still left hotel workers' pay below other sectors – but nevertheless brought them closer to a living wage. The new agreement includes stricter limits on precarious employment, and in particular the use of casual, day-by-day employment arrangements which many members have been strung out on for weeks, months and even years. Employers will now have to offer permanent jobs where there is a consistent shortage of labour, and the use of agency workers is restricted. The HRF together with the other Swedish LO unions have elaborated a common platform for collective negotiations this year aimed at reinforcing the right to a permanent full-time job, curbing the expansion of all forms of precarious work and attacking structural wage discrimination entrenched in low wage sectors where women predominate.

3.2 Wage inequality, low pay and gender

Recent global trends in wages and in the wage share show widespread and rising inequalities. Despite increased productivity in many countries over the last three decades, which should have led to rising wages, the share of national income going to workers has been falling in the USA, Europe, sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, Latin America and the Caribbean. The flip side of this trend is that profits have been rising and inequality widening.³⁷

The latest ILO Global Wage Report of 2010 confirmed that the overrepresentation of women in low-wage jobs is a universal characteristic of labour markets.

The dominance of women in low-wage employment is closely related to the vulnerability of women-dominated occupations to low-pay. But employment conditions and the type of contract also affect the level of women's wages. Permanent and formal jobs are associated with lower incidence of low wages. Job insecurity, far from being compensated through higher wages, actually tends to go hand in hand with low pay.

³⁶ "Global Wage Report 2010/11 – Wage policies in times of crisis", ILO 2010
³⁷ ILO 2008 and Stephanie Seguino, Gender & Development Vol. 18, July 2010

Female agricultural workers are among those most likely to be in precarious seasonal work, with extremely low pay.

In the Philippines, where women's share of employment is less than 50 per cent, the incidence of female low-wage employment is 46 per cent higher among women than men.³⁸

Pervasive low-wage employment increases the gender pay gap. In spite of significant progress in recent years, the average monthly wages of women still represent only about 75 per cent of men's average wages.

According to an IUF, Unite the Union and War on Want study, in India, tea-pickers on plantations supplying Tata get only a tiny proportion of the cost of a box of tea bags. Women workers in northern India earn around a third of the living wage. The growing use of temporary contracts means that employers do not have to give benefits such as medical facilities, maternity leave and food rations. The low wages and insecure contracts for the women tea pickers badly affect children - malnutrition is rife and 60 per cent of children in Indian tea estates are underweight.³⁹

Aside from the specific circumstances of agriculture and the informal economy, low-wage employment is concentrated in key female-dominated sectors – in both industrialised and developing countries – typically including the retail trade, hotels and restaurants, cleaning and care work, transport, social services (including household activities) and textiles. Not surprisingly, low-wage employment is concentrated in the small enterprises where women tend to work.

3.3 Unequal Pay for Women in Industrialised Economies: the case of part-time workers

As the 2010 ITUC "Gender (in)equality in the labour market: an overview of global trends and developments" report showed⁴⁰, unequal pay between women and men continues to be a strong feature of almost all economies, including industrialised economies with an established legislative framework.

Employment status deeply affects the gender pay gap. Several OECD studies have shown that part-time workers do not receive the same hourly wage as their full-time colleagues. In industrialized economies, women make up the majority of part-time workers.

In Japan women part-time workers earn only 54 per cent of the hourly wage of regular women workers, a gap which has widened in the last decades.

While the EU Part-time Work Directive legislates for equal treatment of part-time workers, continuing pay discrimination is evidenced by the hourly pay gap between part-time and full-time workers. In Europe, the gender pay gap (according to official figures) stands at about 17.6%, which means that the hourly pay of women is on average almost a fifth less than that of men (Eurostat, 2007). Women's low and unequal pay is strongly influenced by their take-up of part-time or non-standard work, often in order to care for children or family members. Despite European anti-discrimination legislation, part-time workers are frequently remunerated at lower levels than full-time colleagues, even if their work is of a comparable value. Career breaks also contribute to women's lower lifetime earnings, which in turn results in higher rates of poverty among older women who have inadequate pensions.

³⁸ "Global Wage Report 2010/11 – Wage policies in times of crisis", ILO 2010

³⁹ Source: A Bitter Cup, co-published by IUF, Unite the Union and War on Want, August 2010

⁴⁰ Gender (in)equality in the labour market: an overview of global trends and developments; ITUC 2009

RECOMMENDATIONS

Labour market data shows a boom of precarious and informal forms of work in virtually every country in the world. The “informalization” of work has become the most salient feature of all labour markets. Women are most affected by this process which forces millions of them to live with economic insecurity. Reversing the growth of insecure forms of work requires a shift away from the neo-liberal agenda that has prevailed since the 70’s. It requires political courage and economic initiatives. The international trade union movement is ready to play its part.

ITUC priorities to get women out of precarious and informal jobs:

1. Shifting policy to focus on the creation of quality jobs:

- Extending the scope of labour law in particular to ensure full coverage of female dominated categories of workers
- Promoting collective bargaining
- Ensuring the employment relationship is legally secure
- Increasing the level and scope of minimum wages
- Expanding and strengthening labour inspection coverage

The ILO Decent Work Agenda provides the general framework on which to base adequate responses to the global problem of informalisation of work and the Global Job Pact can help governments address the negative consequences of the crisis. Both governments and social partners, through the conclusion of collective agreements, can promote policies and measures to redress the growth of insecure work. But governments are primarily responsible to ensure workers are protected by labour laws and a recognized employment relationship. It is essential to extend the scope of the labour legislation to these female dominated categories of unprotected workers such as domestic, care, agricultural, home-based or part-time workers. Measures to help recognize the existence of an employment relationship and identify the employer are essential especially for workers involved in triangular employment relationships and the so-called false self-employed. The ILO Recommendation No 198 on the Employment Relationship provides very useful guidance in this regard. The promotion of measures in national law that would remove the barriers to the realisation of trade unions and collective bargaining rights is crucial for all workers but particularly for those in labour intensive and high turnover sectors. The extension of the scope of collective bargaining throughout the supply chain would ensure the protection of workers situated at lowest levels where informality prevails. Placing time limits on the use of temporary contracts and temporary work agency workers and requiring equal treatment between temporary and permanent as well as between part-time and full-time workers will avoid abuses. Another important dimension is ensuring that the law is effectively enforced. This requires the provision of adequate human and financial resources for an effective labour inspection service. Equally urgent is to regulate labour migration and placement agencies so as to ensure that their practices are consistent with the promotion of decent work for all. Finally, increasing minimum wages and extending it to all workers as well as implementing the principle of equal pay for work of equal value are of utmost importance.

2. Implementing the gender equality agenda

- Investing in public services and infrastructure such as child care facilities
- Implementing national plans to overcome gender discrimination and segregation in the labour market
- Implementing work/life balance initiatives
- Taking action for equal pay
- Providing gender-based statistics and assessments

Expanding fiscal policies to spur employment growth for both men and women is essential in these times of hardship. Public investments in social infrastructure such as crèche, childcare facilities, homes for the elderly, education, health services are urgently needed in many countries. Prioritizing public investments in these services is an opportunity to modernize the economy and promote women’s access to decent work as these sectors are characterized by a female dominated

workforce. Equally important is to promote and expand measures to encourage the employment of women in all sectors. A major obstacle in this regard, is the scarcity of affordable good quality child care provision. This scarcity also contributes to the growth of precarious and informal employment in that it creates demand for informal domestic workers and child care providers. Work/family reconciliation policies such as flexible hours, breastfeeding regulations or parental leave are all crucial to ensure women can keep their jobs and access new ones. Ratifying and implementing ILO Convention NO 183 on maternity protection remains a central element to fight discrimination on the basis of maternity and to ensure women's economic security during pregnancy and postpartum periods. Fighting gender discrimination and segregation in labour markets is an on-going challenge that needs to be addressed to prevent the overrepresentation of women in insecure forms of work. National plans against discrimination and segregation must be established and implemented with the strong involvement of the trade unions. It would be counterproductive to abandon the goal of equal pay for work of equal value in the current context. Commitment and efforts to fight the pay gap need to be intensified as equal pay is a central piece in fighting women's poverty. Finally it is important to undertake gender impact assessments for all measures envisaged by governments on issues related to labour market and social protection. Trade unions should be involved in these assessments. This requires serious efforts in terms of collecting and analysing gender segregated data. The international community should provide much more financial and technical support to developing countries in collecting this data.

3. Providing universal access to social security through the implementation of a social protection floor for all

- Providing a universal social protection floor to cover all workers, regardless of their employment situation
- Ensuring that part-time and temporary workers have equivalent social security rights as standard full-time employees
- Ensuring all women have access to maternity protection regardless of their employment situation
- Implementing employment guarantee schemes to which women have full access
- Guaranteeing universal basic pensions

The extension of social protection to all would particularly benefit women given that they make up the majority of informally employed workers. Establishing a social protection floor above the poverty line and sufficient to provide reasonable living standards is an essential element of social justice. Access to health and reproductive care is crucial for women and these rights must be realized regardless of their employment status or their migratory situation. All workers, including those self-employed in the informal economy, must have access to social security provisions so as to ensure that their basic needs and the ones of their family members are met. Part-time workers, the majority being women, must have the same access to social security rights than their full time colleagues. Implementing public employment guarantee schemes providing basic unemployed women with minimum income has the double advantage of alleviating poverty and strengthening the ability of public administrations to deliver quality public services. The universal provision of a basic pension benefit is the best way to fight female poverty in old age.

4. Taking up the challenge of organising workers in insecure forms of work

- Trade union organising of workers in precarious and informal jobs
- Removing of legal obstacles to freedom of association and collective bargaining
- Broadening of collective bargaining strategies so as to better reflect gender equality and women rights' issues

The growth of precarious and informal work represents a serious challenge for trade unions. In fact in many situations, insecure forms of employment are promoted precisely to discourage unionisation. Obstacles to organize such workers are numerous. Some of them are legal. This is the case when workers in certain - often female dominated - sectors such as agriculture and domestic work or export processing zones, are not allowed to join or form a union. For contract workers, the difficulties to identify the employer can make it impossible in practice to bargain collectively. Other obstacles to unionization relate to the fact that workers are engaged for a short period of time only which may decrease their interest in joining a union. In addition as their work situation is by definition very instable, they may fear that joining a union would minimize their chance of obtaining better and more stable jobs. Organizing self-employed workers can be equally compli-

cated. The lack of employer forces trade unions to rethink the traditional bargaining process. Trade unions need to adapt their organizing strategies to these obstacles and increase their membership among workers in insecure forms of work. This requires unions to take up much more predominantly the gender agenda. Indeed as this report has shown women make up the majority of workers in precarious and informal work.

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