

**International Labour Conference, 96th Session, 2007**



International  
Labour  
Office  
Geneva

**Update**

**Report of the Director-General**

# **Equality at work: Tackling the challenges**

**Global Report under the follow-up to the ILO Declaration  
on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work**

**This update may also be consulted on the ILO Internet site ([www.ilo.org/declaration](http://www.ilo.org/declaration)).**

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Update relating to the section on long-recognized forms of discrimination

## Gender equality in the world of work: A mixed picture

1. A key prerequisite for effectively addressing sex-based discrimination in employment and occupation is to understand both its significance and its progression over time. In the absence of global data on sex discrimination, inequalities between men and women in labour market outcomes are taken as valid proxies for sex discrimination (Part I, Chapter 2). Although gender inequality coexists and interacts with other forms of inequality, such as age-based or racial inequalities, data on a global scale are more readily available for sex than for other personal attributes. This section therefore focuses on inequalities between men and women in respect of a number of labour market variables.

2. Eight indicators were chosen to examine women's relative status in the labour market: the labour force participation rate; the employment-to-population ratio by sex; the unemployment rates by sex; the female share in both non-agricultural and total paid employment; the percentage distribution of women workers by status (unpaid, self-employed and employee); the female shares in legislative and managerial positions; and the gender pay gap (see methodological note in the appendix).

### *Women's entry into the labour market continues*

3. Data for 1996–2006 confirm that women's participation in the labour force has maintained an upward trend in the majority of countries of the world, although as a share of the world's female working-age population it is slightly down (table 2.1). Table 2.1 shows the strongest increase of labour force participation rates in Latin America and the Caribbean, Middle East and North Africa, followed by the European Union (EU). Moreover male labour force participation rates fell more on the world level, thus narrowing the worldwide gender gap in labour participation rates by 1.2 percentage points.

**Table 2.1. Female labour force participation (LFP) rates and number of active women per 100 active men, by region, 1996–2006**

Region	Number of countries	Female LFP rates		Number of countries with an increase or decrease		Number of active women per 100 active men	
		1996	2006	▲	▼	1996	2006
<b>World</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>53.0</b>	<b>52.4</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>66.1</b>	<b>66.9</b>
East Asia and the Pacific	25	66.0	63.4	12	13	77.3	77.2
Europe non-EU and Central Asia	23	51.5	49.8	9	14	80.8	81.3
European Union	25	46.0	48.8	19	6	74.5	80.7
Latin America and the Caribbean	28	46.1	52.4	25	3	59.1	69.5
Middle East and North Africa	19	24.7	29.9	17	2	30.8	37.2
North America	2	58.5	59.8	2	0	83.4	86.4
South Asia	8	36.7	36.0	5	3	41.2	41.8
Sub-Saharan Africa	45	62.5	60.8	10	35	74.5	72.8

Source: ILO, Global Employment Trends Model, 2006; see also Technical Note in ILO, *Global Employment Trends* (Geneva, 2005) and for further technical information on the world and regional estimation processes, see <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/strat/wrest.htm>. Differences from earlier estimates are due to revisions in the labour market information used and the specific grouping of countries used in this report. The latter is taken from ILO, *Key Indicators of the Labour Market*, fourth edition, Geneva (2005). 2006 are preliminary estimates.

4. Women's employment-to-population ratios also increased in many regions (with significant variations from one region to another) and in the majority of countries. East Asia and the Pacific still displays the highest women's employment-to-population ratio, while the Middle East and North Africa continue to show the lowest rate (table 2.2). Moreover, while women's employment-to-population ratios have been increasing in the majority of countries, men's employment-to-population ratios have registered declines in 104 out of 175 countries and in seven out of eight regions, especially in Europe (non-EU) and Central Asia and South Asia.

**Table 2.2. Employment-to-population ratios by sex and by region, 1996–2006 (percentages)**

Region	Number of countries	Female employment-to-population ratio		Number of countries with an increase or decrease		Male employment-to-population ratio		Number of countries with an increase or decrease	
		1996	2006	▲	▼	1996	2006	▲	▼
<b>World</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>49.6</b>	<b>48.9</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>75.7</b>	<b>74.0</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>104</b>
East Asia and the Pacific	25	63.8	61.0	13	12	80.2	77.3	7	18
Europe non-EU and Central Asia	23	46.6	45.3	10	13	64.5	62.5	10	13
European Union	25	40.4	44.4	21	4	60.2	59.9	10	15
Latin America and the Caribbean	28	41.5	47.0	26	2	76.3	74.4	16	12
Middle East and North Africa	19	20.0	24.60	15	4	67.6	68.9	11	8
North America	2	55.2	56.9	2	0	70.0	69.2	1	1
South Asia	8	34.9	33.8	5	3	80.6	78.3	2	6
Sub-Saharan Africa	45	56.8	55.0	12	33	78.8	76.9	14	31

Source: ILO, Global Employment Trends Model, 2006; see also Technical Note in ILO, *Global Employment Trends* (Geneva, 2005) and for further technical information on the world and regional estimation processes, see <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/strat/wrest.htm>. Differences from earlier estimates are due to revisions in the labour market information used and the specific grouping of countries used in this report. The latter is taken from ILO, *Key Indicators of the Labour Market*, fourth edition, Geneva (2005). 2006 are preliminary estimates.

5. In the case of unemployment, for both men and women more countries have experienced declines in their rates across the world than increases. On the world level, however, unemployment rates have increased, both for women and for men, and women's unemployment rates have remained higher than men's in the world. The gender unemployment gap is largest in the Middle East and North Africa, and Latin America (table 2.3).

**Table 2.3. Unemployment rates by sex and by region, 1996–2006**

Region	Number of countries	Female unemployment rates		Number of countries with an increase or decrease		Male unemployment rates		Number of countries with an increase or decrease	
		1996	2006	▲	▼	1996	2006	▲	▼
<b>World</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>6.3</b>	<b>6.6</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>5.9</b>	<b>6.1</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>98</b>
East Asia and the Pacific	25	3.3	3.9	14	11	4.0	4.7	12	13
Europe non-EU and Central Asia	23	9.4	8.9	7	16	9.5	9.3	8	15
European Union	25	12.3	9.0	6	19	9.7	7.4	8	17
Latin America and the Caribbean	28	10.1	10.4	9	19	6.5	6.3	11	17
Middle East and North Africa	19	18.9	17.6	9	10	11.7	10.6	10	9
North America	2	5.8	4.8	0	2	5.9	4.9	0	2
South Asia	8	4.9	6.2	4	4	4.2	4.9	5	3
Sub-Saharan Africa	45	9.1	9.6	26	19	9.3	9.8	23	22

Source: ILO, Global Employment Trends Model, 2006; see also Technical Note in ILO, *Global Employment Trends* (Geneva, 2005) and for further technical information on the world and regional estimation processes, see <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/strat/wrest.htm>. Differences from earlier estimates are due to revisions in the labour market information used and the specific grouping of countries used in this report. The latter is taken from ILO, *Key Indicators of the Labour Market*, fourth edition, Geneva (2005). 2006 are preliminary estimates.

*More women in paid jobs, but many still work without pay*

6. Women's share of total wage employment in the non-agricultural sector is the indicator chosen for measuring progress in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) concerning gender equality and women's empowerment. In addition, data have been gathered for women's share in total wage employment, because in some countries export-oriented agriculture has become an important source of paid work for women in the past decade (table 2.4).

7. Table 2.4 shows that the share of women in both non-agricultural wage employment and total paid employment has increased in all regions by roughly two percentage points. Moreover, the proportion of women in non-agricultural wage employment is higher than in total wage employment, with the exception of South Asia. This trend confirms that paid work in agriculture is a relatively important generator of income for women in that region compared to others.

8. While the Middle East and North Africa still have the lowest share of women in non-agricultural paid employment, the increase in this variable has been strongest in that region, followed by sub-Saharan Africa, and East Asia and the Pacific.

**Table 2.4. Female shares in non-agricultural paid employment (MDG 3) and in total paid employment, 1995–2004 (percentages)**

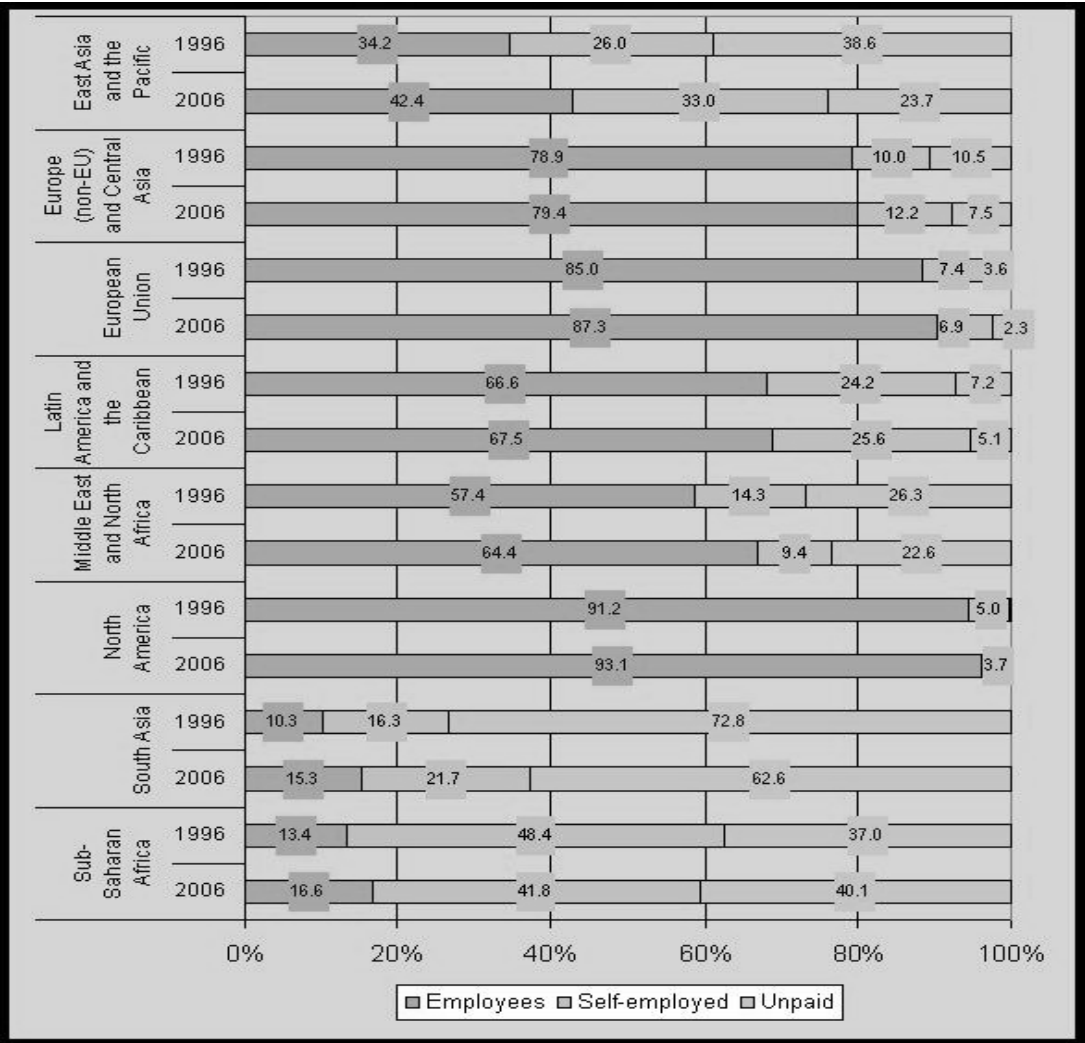
Region	Number of countries	Female shares in non-agricultural paid employment		Number of countries with an increase or decrease		Female shares in total paid employment		Number of countries with an increase or decrease	
		1995	2004	▲	▼	1995	2004	▲	▼
<b>World <sup>1</sup></b>	<b>79</b>	<b>41.3</b>	<b>43.5</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>40.3</b>	<b>42.1</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>98</b>
East Asia and the Pacific	11	43.1	46.5	11	0	41.8	44.9	12	13
Europe non-EU and Central Asia	12	43.9	45.7	9	3	43.4	44.7	8	15
European Union	22	45.8	47.4	16	6	45.4	47.1	8	17
Latin America and the Caribbean	22	40.4	42.2	19	3	38.6	40.3	11	17
Middle East and North Africa	4	24.5	28.2	4	0	22.2	24.9	10	
North America	2	48.1	49.0	2	0	46.5	47.4	0	2
South Asia	2	14.3	16.5	2	0	17.8	17.6	5	3
Sub-Saharan Africa	4	36.0	39.5	4	0	35.8	36.0	23	22

<sup>1</sup> All shares shown are calculated as unweighted means of country shares.

Source: Female shares in non-agricultural paid employment: UN Statistical Division – UN common database; female shares in paid employment: *KILM*, fourth edition, 2005, table 3. When data were not available in *KILM*, the table was completed with data from the ILO database on labour statistics (LABORSTA), table 2D (mainly for data on 2004).

9. Although these two indicators have shown positive development across the world, in many regions the proportion of women working without pay remains significant (figure 2.1). This is an important indicator of women's status, as unpaid family labourers have no control over either the means of production or returns to work.

**Figure 2.1. Percentage distribution of women workers by status in total female employment by region, 1996 and 2006**



Source: ILO, Global Employment Trends Model, 2006; see also Technical Note in ILO, *Global Employment Trends* (Geneva, 2005) and for further technical information on the world and regional estimation processes, see <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/strat/wrest.htm>. Differences from earlier estimates are due to revisions in the labour market information used and the specific grouping of countries used in this report. The latter is taken from ILO, *Key Indicators of the Labour Market*, fourth edition, Geneva (2005). 2006 are preliminary estimates.

10. Sub-Saharan Africa is the only region where the proportion of women working without pay in total female employment has increased (by 3.1 percentage points), while in all other regions this percentage has declined, although with significant variations. There are, however, important differences across regions in the proportions of women working without remuneration. South Asia, with two-thirds of all employed women working without pay, is the region with the highest share of unpaid female labour, but also registered the most important drop in that share in the period under review.

11. A significant proportion of employed women continue to be self-employed in many regions. Most self-employment in developing countries takes place in the informal economy, which is characterized by low pay, poor working conditions and lack of protection. A recent ILO study confirms that women are disproportionately represented in informal employment and that, while in many countries roughly equal proportions of



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men and women are self-employed, women are concentrated among lower-quality jobs within self-employment.<sup>1</sup>

12. Another “face” of female informal work is domestic work. Despite the absence of global data, evidence shows that this form of employment absorbs important and growing shares of females, partly as a result of the growth of female migration for labour (see section on migrant workers below).

13. As for the “employees” or wage earners’ groups, the female share has registered increases in all regions, except for Europe (non-EU) and Central Asia and Latin America, where it remained unchanged.

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<sup>1</sup> R. Galli; D. Kucera: “Gender, informality and employment flexibility in Latin America” (forthcoming).