



International
Labour
Organization

EMBARGO
Do not publish or distribute before
Wednesday 7 March 2018 at 21:00 GMT (22:00 CET)

WORLD EMPLOYMENT SOCIAL OUTLOOK

A stylized world map composed of blue dots, overlaid with the word "WOMEN" in large green letters.

WOMEN

TRENDS
FOR WOMEN
2018

GLOBAL SNAPSHOT

WORLD EMPLOYMENT SOCIAL OUTLOOK

TRENDS FOR WOMEN **2018**
Global snapshot

Copyright © International Labour Organization 2018

First published 2018

Publications of the International Labour Office enjoy copyright under Protocol 2 of the Universal Copyright Convention. Nevertheless, short excerpts from them may be reproduced without authorization, on condition that the source is indicated. For rights of reproduction or translation, application should be made to ILO Publications (Rights and Licensing), International Labour Office, CH-1211 Geneva 22, Switzerland, or by email: rights@ilo.org. The International Labour Office welcomes such applications.

Libraries, institutions and other users registered with a reproduction rights organization may make copies in accordance with the licences issued to them for this purpose. Visit www.ifrro.org to find the reproduction rights organization in your country.

World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends for Women 2018 – Global snapshot
International Labour Office – Geneva: ILO, 2018

ISBN 978-92-2-131586-5 (print)
ISBN 978-92-2-131587-2 (web pdf)
ISBN 978-92-2-131588-9 (epub)

International Labour Office

employment / unemployment / labour policy / gender / sex discrimination / sexual division of labour

13.01.3

Also available in French: *Emploi et questions sociales dans le monde: aperçu global des tendances pour les femmes 2018* (ISBN 978-92-2-231344-0 (print)), Geneva, 2018; and in Spanish: *Perspectivas sociales y del empleo en el mundo: Avance global sobre las tendencias del empleo femenino 2018* (ISBN 978-92-328517-3 (print)), Geneva, 2018.

ILO Cataloguing in Publication Data

The designations employed in ILO publications, which are in conformity with United Nations practice, and the presentation of material therein do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the International Labour Office concerning the legal status of any country, area or territory or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers.

The responsibility for opinions expressed in signed articles, studies and other contributions rests solely with their authors, and publication does not constitute an endorsement by the International Labour Office of the opinions expressed in them.

Reference to names of firms and commercial products and processes does not imply their endorsement by the International Labour Office, and any failure to mention a particular firm, commercial product or process is not a sign of disapproval.

Information on ILO publications and digital products can be found at: www.ilo.org/publns.

This publication was produced by the Document and Publications Production,
Printing and Distribution Branch (PRODOC) of the ILO.

*Graphic and typographic design, layout and composition, copy editing,
proofreading, printing, electronic publishing and distribution.*

PRODOC endeavours to use paper sourced from forests managed
in an environmentally sustainable and socially responsible manner.

Code: DTP-CORR-WEI-REPRO

Table of contents

Introduction	5
Gender gaps in labour force participation remain wide	6
Women are more likely than men to be unemployed in large parts of the world	7
Vulnerable employment is more severe for women in developing countries	8
Informality remains pervasive among women in emerging and developing countries	10
Working poverty is widespread among both men and women	11
Gender gaps in the labour market aggravate social protection gaps	12
Significant additional efforts are required to close gender gaps in the labour market	12
References	13

More information on the ILO's work on gender equality is available on the ILO website

The WESO Data Finder, available at ilo.org/wesodata, features the data used to produce this snapshot. It allows the creation of charts comparing countries, regions and indicators, and the download of the data.

The online appendices A – Country groupings by region and income level, and B – Labour market estimates and projections, can be found at: bit.ly/WES0tw18

Introduction

The past 20 years have witnessed some progress for women in the world of work and in terms of gender equality in society. Today, more women than ever before are both educated and participating in the labour market, and there is greater awareness that gender equality is of paramount importance in efforts to reduce poverty and boost economic development. The adoption of the 2030 UN Agenda for Sustainable Development and the resolve of world leaders “to achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value” (Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 8, target 8.5.) and “to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls” (SDG 5) by 2030 are proof of that awareness. Yet, despite the progress made thus far and the global commitments to secure further improvement, women’s prospects in the world of work are far from being equal to men’s.

This “global snapshot” looks at the progress (or lack thereof) made during the past decade and assesses women’s labour market prospects by examining the gaps between men and women according to a selection of ILO statistical indicators, namely labour force participation, unemployment, informal employment and working poverty. It shows that not only are women less likely than men to participate in the labour force, but when they do participate, they are also more likely to be unemployed and more likely to be in jobs that fall outside the scope of labour legislation, social security regulations and relevant collective agreements. These findings complement ILO’s recent work on women’s labour market conditions and wages¹ by providing an up-to-date quantitative assessment of the extent and depth of women’s disadvantages and how these are likely to evolve globally in the near future.

Gender disparities in the selected labour market indicators presented here capture only partially the complexity of both the labour market challenges faced by women and the improvements that women have achieved thanks to conducive conditions in the specific economic and institutional context. In its wider approach to understanding the issues surrounding women and work, the ILO routinely identifies many structural and cultural factors, ranging from occupational and sectoral sex segregation to workplace discrimination and gender stereotyping. Such a wide-ranging approach is essential for providing a more comprehensive picture of gender inequalities in the labour market, including variation in gender disadvantage by region, socio-economic class, ethnicity and age, among other factors. The brief appraisal offered in this global snapshot is designed to focus on key patterns of progress and regression. Where challenges and obstacles to women’s equal participation persist, societies will be less able to develop pathways for economic growth combined with social development. Closing gender gaps in the world of work thus remains one of the most pressing labour market and social challenges facing the global community today.

1. See ILO (2016a, 2016b and 2017a) for a more comprehensive picture of the labour market challenges facing women.

Gender gaps in labour force participation remain wide

Globally, the labour force participation rate for men and women aged 15 and over continues its long-term decline; it stands at 61.8 per cent in 2018, down by 1.4 percentage points over the past decade. The decline in women's participation rate has been slower than that of men, resulting in a slight narrowing of the gender gap.² These trends reflect different patterns across the life cycle, resulting from changes in both education participation among youth and, at the other end of the scale, older workers' retirement choices. The headline finding, however, is that, on average around the world, women remain much less likely to participate in the labour market than men. At 48.5 per cent in 2018, women's global labour force participation rate is 26.5 percentage points below that of men (table 1). Since 1990, this gap has narrowed by 2 percentage points, with the bulk of the reduction occurring in the years up to 2009. The rate of improvement, which has been slowing since 2009, is expected to grind to a halt during 2018–21, and possibly even reverse, potentially negating the relatively minor improvements in gender equality in access to the labour market achieved over the past decade.

Underlying this global trend, there are considerable differences in women's access to the labour market across countries at different stages of development. The gap in participation rates between men and women is narrowing in developing and developed countries but continues to widen in emerging countries, where it stands at 30.5 percentage points in 2018, up by 0.5 percentage points since 2009. This trend is projected to continue into 2021, as women's participation rates will decline at a faster pace than men's. While the widening gender gap in participation rates shows that women in emerging countries are still a long way from catching up with men in terms of labour market opportunities, it also reflects the fact that a growing number of young women in these countries are enrolled in formal education, which delays their entry into the labour market. In fact, since the early 1990s, gender gaps in participation rates among youth aged 15 to 24 in emerging countries have been widening, whereas gender gaps in educational attainment have shrunk considerably. Gender gaps in labour market participation are especially wide in the Arab States, Northern Africa and Southern Asia, and are expected to remain wide in the near future, mainly due to the extremely low participation rates of women in the labour market in these regions. Underlying this trend, there is concern that owing to restrictive gender and cultural norms women in these countries are more constrained in terms of their options to seek paid employment (ILO, 2017a).

Conversely, women's participation rates are gradually approaching those of men in many developed countries. At 15.6 percentage points in 2018 (nearly half of the figure observed among emerging countries), the gender gap in participation rates in this group of countries is the lowest recorded since 1990; although it remains wide in a number of countries, especially in Southern Europe, it is projected to narrow further by 2021. Much of the progress achieved over the past couple of decades in developed countries can be attributed to the fact that women and men in these countries have near equal educational achievements and women face less restrictive social norms regarding paid work (ILO, 2017a). Public policies also play an important role. For instance, family support policies, which aim to improve work–life balance, rights to paid leave and return to equivalent work, as well as affordable childcare services for working parents, are known to have made a substantial contribution to lifting the participation rates of women, and especially those of mothers, in these countries (ILO, 2016b; Thévenon, 2013; Vuri, 2016). Having said that, evidence of persistent gender pay gaps in many developed countries highlights ongoing problems of gender gaps in job quality despite women's increasing labour market presence. Because women have significantly improved levels of human capital (e.g. education and experience), which have even overtaken those of men in several developed countries, new research is pointing to other factors that can explain the enduring wage penalty faced by women, such as employers' discriminatory hiring and promotion practices, for example (Grimshaw and Rubery, 2015).

Meanwhile, developing countries show the smallest gender gap in participation rates (11.8 percentage points in 2018), which is expected to remain stable throughout the period 2018–21. Women in this country group have one of the highest rates of participation (69.3 per cent), which often reflects the economic necessity to seek employment, driven by the prevailing poverty and a lack of access to social protection, as discussed below.

2. For further information on long-term trends in labour force participation rates and related gender gaps, see the brief *ILO Labour Force Estimates and Projections (LFEP) 2017: Key trends*, available at: <http://www.ilo.org/ilostat-files/Documents/LFEPbrief.pdf>.

Table 1

Level and trends in rates of labour force participation and unemployment by sex, 2009–21

Country/region	Labour force participation rate (percentages) and gender gap (percentage points)					Unemployment rate (percentages) and female-to-male unemployment rate ratio				
	Men		Women		Gap (Men – Women)	Men		Women		Ratio (Female rate/Male rate)
	2018	2018	2009–18	2018	2018–21	2018	2018	2009–18	2018	2018–21
World	75.0	48.5	▼	26.5	▲	5.2	6.0	▲	1.2	▲
Developing countries	81.1	69.3	▼	11.8	▶	4.6	6.1	▼	1.3	▲
Emerging countries	76.1	45.6	▲	30.5	▲	5.2	6.1	▲	1.2	▲
Developed countries	68.0	52.4	▼	15.6	▼	5.3	5.6	▶	1.1	▶
Northern Africa	71.9	21.9	▼	50.0	▼	9.1	19.5	▼	2.2	▲
Sub-Saharan Africa	74.0	64.7	▼	9.3	▼	6.4	8.2	▼	1.3	▲
Latin America and the Caribbean	77.1	51.5	▼	25.6	▼	6.8	9.5	▼	1.4	▲
Northern America	67.9	55.8	▶	12.1	▼	4.6	4.4	▲	1.0	▼
Arab States	77.2	18.9	▲	58.3	▼	6.8	16.3	▲	2.4	▼
Eastern Asia	74.7	59.1	▲	15.6	▲	4.8	4.2	▲	0.9	▲
South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific	79.4	56.5	▼	22.8	▼	3.5	3.3	▼	0.9	▶
Southern Asia	79.0	27.6	▼	51.4	▲	3.7	5.2	▲	1.4	▼
Northern, Southern and Western Europe	63.4	51.6	▼	11.9	▼	7.9	8.2	▲	1.0	▶
Eastern Europe	67.0	51.8	▲	15.2	▼	5.6	4.9	▶	0.9	▶
Central and Western Asia	73.5	45.1	▼	28.4	▼	8.0	9.4	▲	1.2	▼

Note: Throughout this report, figures for 2018 and beyond are projections. Developments for the periods 2009–18 and 2018–21 are marked with a red upward arrow if the gap in labour force participation (unemployment rate ratio) is projected to widen by more than 0.1 (0.01) percentage points, a green downward arrow if it is projected to narrow by more than 0.1 (0.01) percentage points, and a blue horizontal arrow for projections between those values. Numbers in the “Gap” column refer to the percentage point difference between the male and female labour force participation rates but may not correspond precisely due to rounding. For a detailed list of regional and country income groupings, see online Appendix A.

Source: ILO’s Trends Econometric Models, November 2017 (see online Appendix B for details) and Labour Force Estimates and Projections (LFEP) database, available at: www.ilo.org/ILOSTAT.

Women are more likely than men to be unemployed in large parts of the world

Not only are women less likely than men to participate in the labour force, but those who do are also less likely to find employment. As of 2018, the global unemployment rate of women, at 6 per cent, is approximately 0.8 percentage points higher than that of men. This translates into a ratio of female-to-male unemployment rates of 1.2 in 2018. By 2021, this ratio is projected to remain stable in developed countries and to increase in both developing and emerging countries, mirroring the deterioration in the relative position of women in terms of global unemployment observed over the past decade.

Developing countries show the highest ratio of female-to-male unemployment rates across income groups, at 1.3 in 2018. This largely reflects the fact that unemployment rates among men in these countries are low by international standards, while the rates among women are only slightly above the global average. Such a relatively low unemployment rate, however, is far from being an indication of a healthy labour market, either for men or for women. Indeed, the rate of unemployment is not considered a robust test of labour market performance in developing (and, to some extent, developed) countries. This reflects the complexities of informal employment and the limited access to social protection systems, both of which pressure women and men to take up any employment opportunity, regardless of the working conditions. At the same time, entrenched gender roles and labour market discrimination continue to hamper women’s access to decent jobs (ILO, 2016b and 2017a). In fact, the female unemployment rate is expected to increase further in this group of countries (while the rate among men is expected to remain stable), thus increasing the ratio of female-to-male unemployment rates by 2021.

In emerging countries, the female-to-male unemployment rate ratio is in line with the global average, at 1.2 in 2018. This ratio is, however, expected to increase by 2021, which risks discouraging further the already low labour market participation of women in these countries. This is especially the case in the Arab States and Northern Africa, where, in addition to low participation rates, women face unemployment rates that are more than twice as high as men's. Gender differences are even starker among young cohorts, which does not bode well for women's labour market integration prospects in these regions, where the unemployment rates range between 16.3 and 19.5 per cent in 2018. Recent reports by the ILO show that, despite women's expressed preferences for paid jobs, socio-economic factors and prevailing social norms continue to obstruct their participation in paid employment, particularly in these regions (ILO, 2017a; Gallup and ILO, 2017). The constraints are often directly linked to the disproportionate burden of unpaid care and household responsibilities that women have to assume, which restricts both the educational and employment opportunities they can access and their ability to participate in the labour market.

In contrast, women in developed countries are closer to parity with men in terms of unemployment rates, with a ratio of female to male unemployment rates of 1.1 in 2018, and with no significant changes expected in the near future. In certain regions, such as Eastern Europe and Northern America, women even register lower unemployment rates than men. While this reflects the substantial efforts to achieve gender parity in educational attainment and skill qualifications, the success in attaining unemployment rate parity is also attributable to the long-lasting negative effects of the 2008 economic crisis, which have impacted some male-dominated sectors, such as construction, more strongly than the rest of the economy.

Vulnerable employment is more severe for women in developing countries

Globally, over 42 per cent of workers are either own-account³ or contributing family workers⁴ (categories defined as “vulnerable employment”) (ILO, 2018a). This translates into over 1.4 billion workers who are more likely than those in other categories of employment to be in informal employment and living in poverty, and to have limited or no access to social protection systems. In developing and emerging countries, progress in reducing vulnerable employment is stalling, as the number of own-account and contributing family workers has been rising in line with the increasing labour force. As a result, the share of workers in these categories of employment in developing and emerging countries is particularly high, reaching 76.4 per cent of total employment in developing countries and 46.2 per cent in emerging countries in 2018.

There are important gender disparities in terms of the relative composition of own-account and contributing family work. While for men both categories experienced a slight decline over the past decade, women's share as contributing family workers has dropped by 4.6 percentage points and their share as own-account workers has increased by 1.8 percentage points. As a result, at 36.2 per cent in 2018, the share of own-account work among men is 10 percentage points higher than that of women globally. In contrast, women are more than twice as likely to be contributing family workers compared to men (table 2). There are also significant differences between countries grouped by income level. In developing countries, contributing family work accounts for 42.3 per cent of female employment in 2018, compared to 20.2 per cent of male employment. Moreover, no improvements are anticipated during the period up to 2021. Emerging countries, in contrast, have experienced a substantial reduction in the female share of contributing family workers, which decreased from 22.8 to 17 per cent between 2009 and 2018. Meanwhile, the share of women employed as own-account workers has increased by 2.4 percentage points, which suggests that the progress in narrowing the gap may be driven by the

3. Workers who, on their own account or with one or more partners, hold the type of job defined as a self-employed job, and have not engaged on a continuous basis any employees to work for them during the reference period.

4. Workers who are self-employed in a market-oriented establishment operated by a related person living in the same household, but with too limited a degree of involvement in its operation to be considered a partner.

Table 2

Shares and trends in own-account and contributing family work, 2009–21

Country/region	Share of own-account workers in total employment (percentages) and gender gap (percentage points)					Share of contributing family workers in total employment (percentages) and gender gap (percentage points)				
	Men	Women	Gap (Women– Men)			Men	Women	Gap (Women– Men)		
	2018	2018	2009–18	2018	2018–21	2018	2018	2009–18	2018	2018–21
World	36.2	26.1	▼	-10.1	▼	6.4	16.6	▼	10.2	▶
Developing countries	51.7	39.4	▲	-12.3	▲	20.2	42.3	▲	22.1	▶
Emerging countries	39.9	29.5	▼	-10.5	▼	6.2	17.0	▼	10.8	▶
Developed countries	10.6	6.9	▼	-3.6	▲	0.5	1.6	▼	1.1	▶
Northern Africa	22.1	15.4	▲	-6.7	▲	5.7	24.5	▼	18.8	▼
Sub-Saharan Africa	50.1	47.1	▲	-3.0	▲	16.2	31.7	▲	15.5	▲
Latin America and the Caribbean	29.3	25.6	▲	-3.7	▼	2.9	6.5	▼	3.7	▶
Northern America	7.6	5.5	▼	-2.1	▲	0.1	0.1	▶	0.0	▶
Arab States	14.5	6.9	▲	-7.6	▲	3.3	10.6	▼	7.3	▲
Eastern Asia	26.4	19.2	▼	-7.2	▲	3.7	13.1	▼	9.4	▼
South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific	34.0	29.8	▼	-4.2	▼	7.8	22.2	▼	14.4	▼
Southern Asia	60.8	46.5	▼	-14.2	▲	9.1	31.9	▼	22.8	▶
Northern, Southern and Western Europe	12.4	7.7	▼	-4.7	▼	0.7	1.3	▼	0.6	▶
Eastern Europe	11.1	7.6	▲	-3.4	▲	0.9	1.6	▼	0.7	▶
Central and Western Asia	23.3	16.6	▲	-6.6	▼	5.0	15.4	▼	10.4	▼

Note: Throughout this report, figures for 2018 and beyond are projections. Developments for the periods 2009–18 and 2018–21 are marked with a red upward arrow if the gender gap in the share of own-account workers or contributing family workers is projected to widen by more than 0.1 percentage points, a green downward arrow if it is projected to narrow by more than 0.1 percentage points and a blue horizontal arrow for projections between those values. Numbers in the “Gap” column refer to the percentage point difference between the female and male shares of employment in own-account or contributing family work but may not correspond precisely due to rounding. For a detailed list of regional and country income groupings, see online Appendix A.

Source: ILO's Trends Econometric Models, November 2017 (see online Appendix B for details).

shift of some of these female workers from contributing family work to own-account work. In developed countries, the numbers of women in own-account and contributing family work are limited, accounting for just 6.9 and 1.6 per cent of total female employment, respectively, in 2018.

In all countries, the labour market status of own-account and contributing family worker carries the risk of more limited access to the raft of employment and social protection rights conferred on workers who have an open-ended, formal employment contract. This risk is especially large in emerging and developing countries, where these employment categories are a strong indication of informality, poor working conditions and lack of social protection (ILO, 2018a). More specifically, own-account work does not seem to be a stepping stone to better labour market opportunities. In fact, the likelihood of own-account working women expanding their activities and becoming employers appears to be low. Globally, female employers – in other words, self-employed women with employees – account for only 1.7 per cent of total female employment in 2018 (a marginal rise from 1.5 per cent since 1990), compared to 4 per cent among men. Even in developed countries where this share is higher (2.2 per cent in 2018), working women continue to face labour market barriers when it comes to accessing business and management positions. For instance, although women today are more strongly represented in middle and senior management positions compared to two decades ago, very few are appointed to the top jobs, especially in large companies (ILO, 2015). According to the latest available estimates, women account for less than one-third of senior and middle management positions in the majority of developed countries, and represent less than 5 per cent of chief executive officers (CEOs) of publicly listed companies (ibid.).

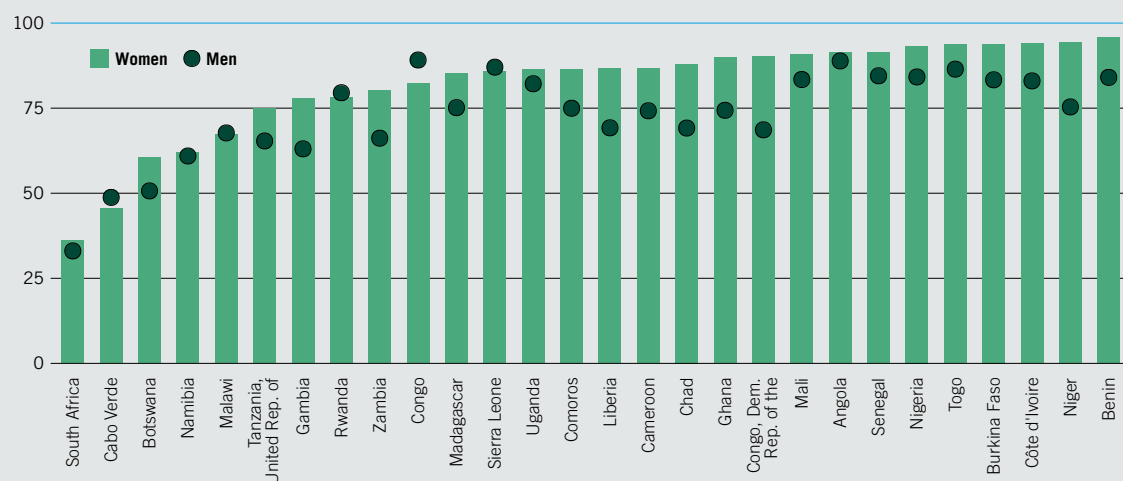
Informality remains pervasive among women in emerging and developing countries

There is a very strong likelihood, especially in emerging and developing economies, that own-account and contributing family workers are defined as members of the informal economy.⁵ This connection arises because own-account workers are typically not registered as legal entities, while contributing family workers do not have written employment contracts and therefore typically fall outside the scope of labour legislation, social security regulations and relevant collective agreements. However, these workers are not the only category of employment to be exposed to systematic labour market risks. The broad category of informal employment includes other groups, such as workers in the informal sector and workers in formal sector enterprises who hold informal jobs.

Women are over-represented in informal employment in developing countries, in part because there is a higher proportion of women who work as contributing family workers – a category which accounts for around one-third of the overall informal employment in developing countries. According to the ILO, the share of women in informal employment in developing countries was 4.6 percentage points higher than that of men, when including agricultural workers, and 7.8 percentage points higher when excluding them, in the latest year with available data (ILO, 2018b). This gender gap is much higher in some sub-Saharan African countries, where the gap stands at over 20 percentage points (ibid.). In close to one-third of sub-Saharan countries with available data, the share of women in non-agricultural employment who are in informal employment is over 90 per cent, while for men the share hovers at around 82 per cent (figure 1).

Figure 1

Share of informal employment in non-agricultural sectors, sub-Saharan African countries with available information, latest year (percentages)



Note: Informal employment includes all workers in unincorporated enterprises that produce, at least partly, for the market and are not registered (i.e. workers in the informal sector) as well as persons employed outside the informal sector who are not subject to national labour legislation (i.e. employees not affiliated to social security schemes related to the job or not entitled to certain employment benefits, such as paid annual leave or paid sick leave). A full definition of informal employment is available at: http://www.ilo.org/ilostat-files/Documents/description_IFL_EN.pdf.

Source: ILO, 2018b.

5. The coefficient of determination (r^2) stemming from a simple linear regression model having shares of informal employment in total employment as the dependent variable and the shares of vulnerable employment as the explanatory variable across 112 countries is close to 0.80. The r^2 can vary from 0 to 1.00, with the latter value indicating perfect correlation. An $r^2 = 0.8$ roughly suggests that 80 per cent of the average cross-country variation in shares of informal employment can be explained by differences in vulnerable employment across countries.

In contrast, men in emerging countries face a higher incidence of informal employment (at 70 per cent) than women (at 65 per cent), with a slightly larger gap when considering non-agricultural sectors only. This mainly reflects the trends observed in emerging countries in Asia and the Pacific, where the share of women in non-agricultural informal employment is typically lower than that of men, with some notable exceptions in countries such as Bangladesh, Cambodia and Viet Nam. However, informality rates for women employed in non-agricultural sectors in the emerging countries of Asia and the Pacific remain high, standing on average at 58 per cent compared to 65 per cent among men (ibid.).

Working poverty is widespread among both men and women

Being in paid employment is not a sufficient condition in many countries in the world for a person to escape poverty. In emerging and developing countries, as many as one in four working men and women live below the moderate poverty threshold (a per capita household income or consumption of less than US\$3.10 per day in purchasing power parity terms). The gender patterns are complex because, while women constitute a higher share of the low-wage workforce, they are more likely than men in some countries to be supplementing another household income and therefore contributing to the household's efforts to escape poverty. This is true, on average, for the Arab States, where 13 per cent of working women fall below the poverty threshold compared to 22 per cent of working men. However, the opposite situation arises in sub-Saharan Africa, where 63 per cent of working women compared to 59 per cent of working men live in poverty. Larger gender gaps in working poverty in sub-Saharan Africa, and more generally in developing countries, reflect the fact that women in many of these countries are almost as likely as men to participate in the labour market. However, they remain far more likely to be employed in subsistence activities and home-based production. In fact, sub-Saharan Africa is also where we find the widest gender gap in own-account and contributing family employment, suggesting that this is a strong causal factor shaping women's greater likelihood of living in poverty than men in this region, although other factors also need to be considered in exploring this linkage, such as the number of earners in the household and access to supplementary forms of welfare income, among others. In contrast, in emerging countries, the probability of being in working poverty is higher among men than among women. However, far from representing progress in reducing female working poverty, this result instead reflects the low female participation rates in these countries.

Gender disparities also persist with regard to average wages. Across a sample of developed, emerging and developing countries, for example, women are found to earn, on average, 20 per cent less than men (ILO, 2016a).⁶ A significant proportion of this gap is due to the over-representation of women in sectors and occupations with a higher incidence of low pay. In addition, a weakness or absence of well-functioning labour market institutions and policies, such as collective bargaining and minimum wages, are also partly responsible for persistent gender wage inequality (ibid.).

6. Figures refer to the hourly wage gaps determined using data on average/median wages and average/median hours worked across 45 countries at different stages of development. Some 94.6 per cent of the data refer to 2013 or a more recent year.

Gender gaps in the labour market aggravate social protection gaps

The problem of inadequate access to social protection is not specific to women. Policies of austerity in many richer countries and persistent underdevelopment of welfare states in the poorer regions mean that all working people face social protection gaps. Nevertheless, the combination of gender gaps in labour market outcomes and women's greater propensity to work in non-standard forms of employment (with irregular hours and interrupted working patterns) drives gender disparities in social protection. This situation is very well documented in terms of access to old-age pensions (ILO, 2016b and 2017b). Women's lower levels of labour force participation in comparison to men's, the sizeable gender pay gaps, a greater likelihood of shorter or interrupted employment careers and the over-representation of women in informal and vulnerable work, all negatively affect their ability to build up pension entitlements in contributory pension schemes. Indeed, these factors contribute to lower rates of pension coverage for women and lower pension levels, ultimately driving higher levels of old-age poverty among women than among men.

Measures that focus on compensating for gender inequalities and closing the gender pension gap, such as the recognition of periods of care provision in some public pension schemes, are thus of the utmost importance. Moreover, non-contributory (tax-financed) pensions play a key role in ensuring women's access to, at least, a basic pension; yet, as benefit levels are often low and insufficient to compensate for the lack of contributory provision, they typically fail to provide an adequate level of income security in old age (ILO, 2017b). Closing gender gaps in the labour market and in employment therefore has important knock-on effects with regard to ensuring adequate social protection for women.

Significant additional efforts are required to close gender gaps in the labour market

In the past decade, governments, together with employers and workers as well as their representative collective organizations, have implemented a number of measures to address the challenges that women face in the world of work. Especially notable is progress on family support provision, formalization of key areas of female-dominated informal work (such as domestic work) and efforts to address vertical sex segregation, especially in areas where reform has the potential to reduce sex discrimination. However, as this global snapshot highlights, current efforts by the major labour market actors to reduce the gender gap in labour market participation, while meaningful, are not sufficient. The difference in access to decent work opportunities between men and women is a major obstacle in global efforts to achieve a more equitable and inclusive labour market, and is expected to remain so in the coming years, unless additional efforts are made to address the persistent gender gaps outlined above. As shown in previous reports (see, for example, ILO, 2017a), the overwhelmingly unequal demands that women face with regard to household and care responsibilities continue to manifest themselves as labour market inequalities in terms of the types of jobs which women can both access and in which they can enjoy sustained employment. Indeed, the global challenges of informality and working poverty are also rooted (often organizationally and culturally) in patterns of sectoral and occupational sex segregation, which systemically constrain the opportunities open to women to gain access to better jobs. This suggests that tackling the labour market challenges confronting women will require not only efforts by governments, employers and trade unions to bridge the gap in the labour market, but also initiatives to dismantle the unequal demands that women face.

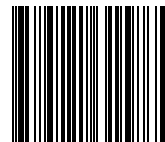
Reducing gender gaps in the labour market therefore requires comprehensive measures, tailored specifically to women (in recognition of their widely varying circumstances), which will ultimately contribute to the welfare of society (ILO, 2016b and 2017a). In developing and emerging countries, there remains the unresolved challenge of fostering the transition from informal to formal jobs, particularly among rural women in the agricultural sector. Promoting economic diversification, within both agricultural and non-agricultural activities, will contribute to achieving a higher degree of formalization, while reducing the incidence of working poverty through income diversification. Continuing to foster female enrolment in formal education, vocational training and entrepreneurship programmes is crucial in supporting the transition of women into decent jobs. At the same time, there is considerable scope to improve the reach and effectiveness of public policies for family support by expanding the coverage of child-related

services and promoting a more even redistribution of family responsibilities across members of the household (and possibly local communities). More generally, it is imperative for all countries and all constituent interest groups (especially governments, employers and trade unions) to work towards achieving the Agenda for Sustainable Development through measures that ensure quality jobs for women, reduce gender stereotypes and discrimination in both education and the workplace, and recognize, reduce and redistribute the disproportionate burden of care and household responsibilities that women currently bear.

References

- Gallup; International Labour Office (ILO). 2017. *Towards a better future for women and work: Voices of women and men* (Geneva and Washington, DC).
- Grimshaw, D.; Rubery, J. 2015. *The motherhood pay gap: A review of the issues, theory and international evidence*, ILO Conditions of Work and Employment Series (Geneva, ILO).
- International Labour Office (ILO). 2015. *Women in business and management: Gaining momentum*, Global report (Geneva).
- . 2016a. *Global Wage Report 2016/17* (Geneva).
- . 2016b. *Women at Work: Trends 2016* (Geneva).
- . 2017a. *World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends for women 2017* (Geneva).
- . 2017b. *World Social Protection Report 2017–19: Universal social protection to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals* (Geneva).
- . 2018a. *World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2018* (Geneva).
- . 2018b. *Women and men in the informal economy: A statistical picture*, third edition (Geneva).
- Thévenon, O. 2013. *Drivers of female labour force participation in the OECD*, OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers, No. 145 (Paris, OECD Publishing).
- Vuri, D. 2016. “Do childcare policies increase maternal employment?”, in *IZA World of Labor*, March issue, No. 241.

ISBN 978-92-2-131586-5



9 789221 315865