



**Dialogue on**  
**Globalization**

**OCCASIONAL PAPERS**  
**GENEVA**

N° 43 / May 2009

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**Global Trends in Women's Access  
to "Decent Work"**

**FRIEDRICH  
EBERT**   
**STIFTUNG**



International Labour Organization



## Dialogue on Globalization

*Dialogue on Globalization* contributes to the international debate on globalization – through conferences, workshops and publications – as part of the international work of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES). *Dialogue on Globalization* is based on the premise that globalization can be shaped into a direction that promotes peace, democracy and social justice. *Dialogue on Globalization* addresses “movers and shakers” both in developing countries and in the industrialized parts of the world, i.e. politicians, trade unionists, government officials, business people, and journalists as well as representatives from NGOs, international organizations, and academia.

*Dialogue on Globalization* is co-ordinated by the head office of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in Berlin and by the FES offices in New York and Geneva. The programme intensively draws on the international network of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung – a German non-profit institution committed to the principles of social democracy – with offices, programmes and partners in more than 100 countries.

This Occasional Paper is published by the Geneva office of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

May 2009

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ISSN 1614-0079

ISBN 978-3-86872-108-9

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# 1 Preface

The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, headquartered in Germany with offices in over 100 countries, is among the firmest supporters of the ILO's Decent Work Agenda alongside trade unions worldwide. The concept of Decent Work, with its four pillars of Employment and Enterprise Development, Rights at Work, Social Protection and Dialogue, constitutes an important point of reference in our projects, which aim to make societies more just, sustainable and equitable, while focusing on the empowerment of society's marginalized groups in particular.

This occasional paper comes at a time when ILO constituents are set to review and discuss achievements and challenges on the way to gender equality at the International Labour Conference in June 2009. They will set the ILO's agenda for the coming years, against a challenging background of a global financial and economic crisis that has already left millions of workers, men and women alike, unemployed.

Hence, the demand for Decent Work for All needs to be upheld ever more strongly. Decent Work is a prerequisite for just globalization and a fair distribution of wealth, which benefit everyone in the long run. Workers in developing countries need the solidarity and support of those who have been working and living in more secure circumstances in the industrialized countries. As Maria Floro and Mieke Meurs, the authors of this occasional paper argue, it is women in particular who need social rights and protection as they have remained – despite their growing role as income earners – among the most vulnerable. Their access to the labour markets in general and to decent jobs in particular is still limited by the prevalence of multiple discrimination in education, family, politics, culture and religion in many places. They have much to gain from decent employment, social rights, social protection and social dialogue as they continue to raise children and care for the elderly and the infirm.

Awareness of worker's rights and gender equality at work has increased across all regions over the last decades in general; and it is the ILO and its constituents, that have made this possible. Yet much remains to be done. The majority of workers worldwide still lack basic safety nets and health care systems. Economic growth has not trickled down to the poorest, and national policies which strive to smooth out the imbalances have not always been effective or implementation has been insufficient. Women are among the first to lose their jobs or continue working in precarious conditions. To reduce those and numerous other imbalances we need more dialogue and participatory approaches. We need to reach consensus in our societies about the direction we want to take and how much social stability and justice we want. Trade unions, women's organizations and civil society organizations like the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung have – alongside the ILO with its tripartite structure – a crucial role to play.

*Türkan Karakurt*  
Director, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung  
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*Jane Hodges*  
Director, ILO  
Bureau for Gender Equality

# 2. Executive Summary

The rapid expansion in trade, capital flows and economic restructuring have led to significant changes in work. Jobs have shifted from advanced market economies to developing countries and from the formal to the informal sectors. These changes led to new opportunities for employment, especially for women, but they also created gaps and imbalances, as well as continued marginalization of female workers in many parts of the world.

**Women's participation in paid labour and access to decent work is particularly affected by the burden of combining reproductive and paid work.**

Women's participation in paid labour and access to decent work is particularly affected by the burden of combining reproductive and paid work. This adds stress not accounted for in traditional conceptions of decent work, which focus on paid work and do not examine related changes in reproductive labour.

Influential social theories have reinforced the problem of women's double burden. Sociobiology emphasized the "natural" differences between men and women. Mainstream economic thought focused on individual rationality, competition, and market activities, at the expense of unpaid work, nonmarket production, social norms, and relations between economic agents. More recently, feminist economists have developed new and more comprehensive theories, defining economics as the study of the "provisioning of human life."

Different countries' trajectories and specific cultural practices and institutions result in significant differentiation in access to decent work. Differences emerge not only between men and women, but also by education, household structure, race, class and access to social protection and welfare support systems.

Researchers measuring access to decent work note that in many countries data is not available to adequately measure the prevalence of such work. This problem is significantly worse when attempting to measure and compare women's and men's access to decent work. We review available data on opportunities for work, fairness of income, security of work, social protection, and freedom to organize.

**Globally, female labour force participation rates remained steady from 1996–2006, at about 53% compared to male rates of 80%.**

The availability of decent work in the workplace, and trends in its availability, vary significantly across countries and regions. Globally, female labour force participation rates remained steady from 1996–2006, at about 53% compared to male rates of 80%. Women are still segregated into certain types of employment. Women's jobs are more likely to be part-time or temporary. In many countries, women are likely to work in the informal sector, and the share of workers in this sector appears to be increasing.

From 1980 to the end of the 1990s, the gender wage gap closed significantly in Latin America and in OECD and many post-socialist countries, where women now earn about 80% of what men do. Wage gaps are often greater in the informal than formal sectors, which may undermine the narrowing of the gap as employment shifts to the informal sector. Furthermore, the gap has closed during a period of wage stagnation worldwide, so that absolute gains for women are limited.

Work has become more insecure as jobs have shifted from formal, legally-regulated and large-firms to smaller and informal firms and home work. These jobs are often more accessible to women, but lie outside the protection of labour laws and lack rights to social benefits. Part-time workers in the formal sector also face significant insecurity.

Social protection, including the spending on public health and education, and access to pensions and healthcare insurance, can particularly benefit women. From the mid-1980s to 2004, many countries have experienced a fall in spending on these protections. In a few exceptional cases, the state has begun to extend social protection to informal or self-employed workers. An important alternative in some developing countries has been the effort by workers themselves – with support from NGOs – to develop alternative forms of social protection.

Increasingly “flexible” labour markets have reduced workers’ rights to organize in many countries and reduced their bargaining power. Unions have often responded by organizing new sectors, including the service sector and the informal sector. Female union membership has increased significantly in many countries, but this does not always increase women workers’ bargaining power. In some countries NGOs have begun to organize women in the informal and home work sectors.

Women’s ability to get decent work in the market economy is closely linked to the gender roles and division of work in the household. Women do substantially more unpaid work than men. When hours in paid and unpaid work are totaled, women have longer work weeks than men and less time for leisure or sleep. This affects the rate at which paid work is rewarded. Demands of reproductive and care work can also affect a worker’s choice of employment and work location.

The lack of social support systems for unpaid family responsibilities exacerbates these problems and hits poor and vulnerable families the hardest, forcing them to choose between employment and care, or to combine these activities. Workers, particularly women, may end up both ‘time-poor’ and ‘money-poor,’ which contributes to stress and undermines their well-being.

Some countries have significantly reduced tensions between paid and unpaid labour through extended paid parental leave, incentives for more equal sharing of this leave, limits on the expected work week, and expanded public and subsidized child care. However, much remains to be done to assure gender equality and the benefits of the Decent Work Agenda for all workers.

In order for the ILO and its partners to successfully promote economic and social policies that enhance the availability of decent work, a number of issues are crucial: developing a gendered statistical system and frameworks for the evaluation of gender-disaggregated data on decent work on the one hand, and promoting the participation of labour unions and women’s organizations in the development and implementation of social policies and social protection systems on the other.

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# 3. Introduction: Gender Issues in an Era of Rapid Change

This section presents our discussion of gender differences in access to decent work by situating the discussion of women's and men's experiences in the world of work amidst significant changes that have taken place over the last three decades. Rapid expansion of trade, capital flows and economic restructuring have been accompanied by significant changes in working conditions. Heightened global competition, developments in communications and technology, and changes in the organization of production have resulted in the increasing shift of jobs from advanced capitalist countries to developing countries and, within developing countries, from the formal to the informal sectors. Households reallocate labour in response to these changing conditions. These changes have brought new opportunities for employment to many, especially women, but they have also created gaps and imbalances and contributed to the continued marginalization of some vulnerable groups including those in precarious and subcontracted jobs.

The changes, coupled with parallel technological, demographic and geo-political shifts, have transformed gender roles and affected gender relationships throughout the world albeit in an uneven manner. In some cases, traditional roles are challenged and even transformed, as women increasingly become wage earners alongside men. Nonetheless, gender biases continue to be embedded not only in systems of kinship, family relations, religion, culture and law, but also in economic processes as well as institutions such as labour markets. Many remain unaddressed and some are reinforced. This situation inevitably creates stresses and growing tensions for men and women trying to balance old and new roles.

**Instead of replacing time in reproductive work with time in paid work, and shifting compensating amounts of reproductive work to men, it has been found that women tend to increase their total work time.**

Men and women experience these strains in caring for their households, in their search for jobs and their participation in the labour market. Studies and time use survey evidence suggest that norms regarding the traditional household division of labour evolve slowly. Instead of replacing time in reproductive work with time in paid work, and shifting compensating amounts of reproductive work to men, it has been found that women tend to increase their total work time. While there are variations across countries and social classes, the rules – both formal and informal – and practices governing asset ownership and property and household division of labour have combined to ensure that the care and nurture of the family is seen as primarily women's responsibility. As divisions of labour become established, they form the basis of new parameters of women and men's identities.

**The burden of combining reproductive and paid work inevitably impacts women's participation in paid labour and access to decent work.**

The process of globalization and the accompanying economic restructuring, coupled with changing demographic and geo-political conditions, have intensified these tensions by enlarging their scope and sphere of reference, as shown further on in this paper. They also contribute to maintaining gender disparities and may even generate a backlash or reversal of movement towards gender equality. The burden of combining reproductive and paid work inevitably impacts women's participation in paid labour and access to decent work. In addition, the double

burden adds stress not accounted for in traditional conceptions of decent work, which evaluate only the outcome of paid work, and do not examine related changes in reproductive labour by the same workers.

Further, while women may be closing some gaps with men in their access to decent work, in many parts of the world, access to decent work is declining for both men and women. Global pressures for informalization shift workers out of large, formal sector firms where regulations can be more easily enforced, and into small, dispersed firms or even workers' own homes, where conditions of work are harder to regulate.<sup>1</sup> Even in advanced capitalist economies, more workers are moving to part-time or temporary work where, like workers in the informal sector, they are less likely to have access to social security, health insurance, maternity leave and other protections. Informal, part-time and temporary workers are also less likely to be represented by unions, and the shift both undermines union voice overall, and the ability of individual workers to have a say in working conditions.

To be sure, the different trajectories of development undertaken by countries, and how these interact with cultural practices and social institutions have brought about variations in women and men's performance of their socially-ascribed roles and their relations to each other. Significant differentiation can be seen in access to decent work, not only between men and women, but also by education, household structure, race, class and access to social protection and welfare support systems. However, it is important to note that the relationships are complex. Education, for example, plays a role in gaining access to decent work. But decent work, by providing higher and more stable incomes, also plays a role in educational attainment. One conclusion from chapter 3 is that greater and more equal access to decent work will require distinct policies, tailored to the will and the needs of specific groups of workers. Standard state regulatory approaches, in particular, may not work well for the least educated and most marginalized workers labouring mainly outside the formal sector.

With the support of the ILO and NGOs, new and innovative efforts are being made to regulate informal and home work through traditional state channels, and to bring social insurance and self-representation to informal sector workers through non-traditional, non-state organizations. These and other innovative efforts will be important in protecting access to decent work as global pressures continue to change the organization of production.

In chapters 6 and 7, we outline recommendations for achieving greater and more equal access to decent work in more detail. One important starting point is the availability of better, gender disaggregated data to analyze issues like access to social protection and union representation, and the impact of changing market work on reproductive roles.

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<sup>1</sup> See ILO: Gender equality at the heart of decent work, Report VI, ILC, 98<sup>th</sup> Session, Geneva, 2009.

# 4. Current Tensions and Trends: Gender Norms and Decent Work

This chapter examines how specific perceptions of women's and men's traits and roles in the economy evolve and are maintained. It looks at the roles of paradigms in perpetuating beliefs about women and men's traits and ascribed roles, as well as the role of cultural practices and religion, political institutions and power structures in shaping gender norms and maintaining gender inequalities. This section also discusses how the socially ascribed roles and traditions are challenged by changes in the socio-economic environment, including changes in production processes, technology, resource availability and relative prices. We use examples to illustrate ways that these roles and expectations are, or are not, consistent with the experiences of women and men.

The interplay of these factors has influenced women and men's opportunities and constraints in the world of work. The evolving character of gender roles amidst these changes, however, is not linear; the interplay of forces can pull the process towards competing paths. In some cases, there can be reactions to rapid change and a movement towards more traditional roles instead of advancement towards gender equity.

## 4.1 The Role of Paradigms

There is an important connection between the social construction of gender roles and the social construction of dominant paradigms, or social theories, particularly in sociobiology and the economics disciplines. These influential fields provide intellectual rationale for the way societies attribute 'masculinity' and 'femininity' to various activities and even concepts.<sup>2</sup> Economic models and social theories have embedded subjective premises; they reflect certain interests and biases of those thinkers that create them. Theories change over time, however, as paradigms themselves are challenged and modified.

**Influential social theories in the 1960s and 70s, particularly those in sociobiology, have reinforced the beliefs regarding gender roles.**

Influential social theories in the 1960s and 70s, particularly those in sociobiology, have reinforced the beliefs regarding gender roles. Such theories emphasized the biological paternal and maternal functions of female and male species, including humans, in determining their "natural" traits. For example, Wilson argued that biological nature, which determines the difference between sexes, is the basis upon which gender differences in activities and roles are built.<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, a woman's nature is to be compliant, not competitive; nurturing, not instrumental. Her primary role is to provide a haven for her family and if she works for pay, she will do best in jobs compatible with her household responsibilities and her "fem-

<sup>2</sup> Ferber, M. and J. Nelson (eds) (2003): *Feminist Economics Today: Beyond Economic Man*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, E. O. (1975): *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press).

inine personality.” Man’s “natural” role, on the other hand, is to be the principal provider and protector. “Rationality, logical, and territorial” are attributes of the ‘stereotypical’ male.<sup>4</sup>

Dominant economic thinking tends to foster these gender roles as well. Mainstream economic thought focuses on individual rationality, market competition, and market activities including trade, finance, and monetary exchanges.<sup>5</sup> Topics such as unpaid work, nonmarket production, and social norms as well reproductive work and responsibilities in the family are considered ‘feminine’ and are largely marginalized in mainstream thinking.<sup>6</sup>

The influential works of new household economists such as Edward Phelps, Gary Becker and Jacob Mincer in the sixties and seventies provided economic rationale behind the prevailing division of labour at home and the specialization of men and women in market work and household work respectively. Gender roles with men as ‘breadwinners’ and women as ‘homemakers’ are explained through individual rational decision-making choices made under the assumptions of a harmonious household. Using the economic framework of utility maximization and adopting the basic premises of neoclassical economics, their household models avoided questions regarding patriarchy, conflicting interests, and socially constructed roles of women and men.<sup>7</sup>

In recent decades, such views have been challenged both theoretically and empirically in both biological and social sciences, including economics. Recent developments in the field of sociobiology showed increasing evidence contrary to the traditional view of male dominance and rationality and of female passivity and compliance.<sup>8</sup> Feminist economists developed new theories and conceptualizations, broadening the definition of economics to “provisioning of human life.”<sup>9</sup> By examining the economy in its totality, including market and non-market economic activities, and by highlighting the interrelation between unpaid and paid labour, feminist economics has made an important contribution in rethinking economics. The implications of feminist economics are far-reaching, including a deeper understanding of women and men’s conditions in the world of work. The analysis of employment goes beyond the models of discrimination and occupational segregation and reaches a broader analysis of labour markets in relation to non-market activity. The implication is that the provision of equality of opportunity will

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**By including market and non-market economic activities, and by highlighting the interrelation between unpaid and paid labour, feminist economics has made an important contribution.**

4 Blau, F., M. Ferber and A. Winkler (2006): *The Economics of Women, Men and Work* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall).

5 Beneria, L. (2003): *Gender, Development and Globalization: Economics as if All People Mattered*. (New York and London: Routledge).

6 Ferber and Nelson, *op. cit.*

7 England, P. (2003): “The Separate Self: Androcentric Bias in Neoclassical Assumptions” in Marianne Ferber and Julie Nelson (eds), *Beyond Economic Man: Feminist Theory and Economics*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), pp. 37-53. There have been several applications of this approach to understanding gender-based differences in educational attainment, choice of jobs, and level of earnings. These include S. Polachek (1981): “Occupational Self Selection: A Human Capital Approach to Sex Differences in Occupational Structure,” in *Review of Economics and Statistics*, 63 (1). The new household economists also took up economic policy issues ranging from social security, training programs, and welfare programs to agricultural policies and credit programs.

8 Kaplan, G. and Rogers, L. (1994): “Race and Gender Fallacies: The Paucity of Biological Determinist Explanation of Difference” in *Challenging Racism and Sexism: Alternatives to Genetic Explanations*, E. Tobach and B. Rosoff, eds., (New York: Feminist Press of the City University of New York).

9 Beneria, 2003., and Ferber and Nelson *op. cit.*

require changes in both domains. The new framework recognizes that macro-economic policies, development strategies, employment policies, family policies, social policies, and working time regimes along with social, political and demographic forces, affect the extent and form of women and men's participation in both the labour market and reproductive work.

## 4.2 Role of Social, Legal, and Political Institutions

The roles performed by men and women reflect existing gender relations, which are shaped by the interplay of cultural practices and social norms, economic incentives, political institutions and legal provisions. We provide some examples drawn from different regions of the world to illustrate how these factors help maintain patriarchal norms that privilege and empower men in social and economic relationships.

**Culture and the strength of patriarchy contribute to women's relatively low rate of labour force participation and high fertility rates.**

Norms regarding family and kinship ties have been a central force in shaping women's lives in many parts of the world. In parts of the Middle East and North Africa, culture and the strength of patriarchy contribute to women's relatively low rate of labour force participation and high fertility rates.<sup>10</sup> In Africa, social identity, the division of labour, and property transfers are often anchored in various forms of kin relationships.<sup>11</sup> For example, in Uganda it is elder men who tend to control the distribution of rights in resources.

**Religion plays a role in determining women's status as well, both directly through its interpretation and preaching, and indirectly through its influence in law and governance.**

Religion plays a role in determining women's status as well, both directly through its interpretation and preaching, and indirectly through its influence in law and governance. Access to employment, birth control, and education, public discourse on women's roles and control of women's fertility are often linked to the interpretation of family law and religion. Political institutions and the law, particularly those governing land rights, also have shaped women's and men's economic roles, as examples from Latin America show.

Political institutions and state intervention have been crucial to the recognition and upholding of women's rights, including the right to work, in Scandinavian, socialist and post-socialist countries.<sup>12</sup> These, however, have not necessarily led to the complete abandonment of patriarchal norms in the labour market. The tension between women's maternal and household responsibilities and the recognition of women's right to work has brought about debates on Sweden's family policy. Since the dual-breadwinner role became established, there has also been a trend toward decreased family stability with women taking the initiative for divorce, as well as reports of increasing health problems for women, particularly related to stress.<sup>13</sup> The parental leave model may also affect gender equality in the

10 Papps, I. (1993): "Attitudes towards Female Employment in Four Middle Eastern Countries," in *Women in the Middle East: Perceptions, Realities and Struggles for Liberation*, H. Afshar and M. Maynard eds., (London: Macmillan Press), pp. 96-116.

11 Obbo, C. (1994): "Gender Stratification and Vulnerability in Uganda," in *Color, Class and Country: Experiences of Gender*, G. Young and B. Dickerson, eds., (London: Zed Press).

12 Kabeer, N. A., Stark, and E. Magnus (2008): *Global Perspectives on Gender Equality: Reversing the Gaze*, (New York and London: Routledge).

13 Jelin, E. (2008): "Gender and the Family in Public Policy: A Comparative View of Argentina and Sweden," in *Global Perspectives on Gender Equality: Reversing the Gaze*, Kabeer, N., A. Stark and E. Magnus (eds), (New York and London: Routledge).

labour market. The expectation of long leaves, for instance, produces more unequal conditions for women if employers see more risks than advantages in hiring women as employees. The persistence of patriarchal norms is witnessed in socialist countries as well. In Hungary, the strategies adopted by the socialist government in the 1970s and 80s for advancing women's claims for equality in the labour market took the male patterns of full-time, lifelong employment as the norm against which all citizens, men and women, were required to perform.<sup>14</sup> This is regardless of the fact that a significant percentage of women continued to carry the primary responsibilities for child care and the sick, which men were not required to share. Many Hungarian women struggled to combine their child care and work responsibilities with little help from the state.

### 4.3. Challenges to Traditional Gender Roles

While traditional roles of men and women have been maintained by the interplay of varied forces, they can also be challenged or modified by changes in the socio-economic environment. This section illustrates some of the ways through which socially ascribed roles of men and women respond to changes in realities and socio-economic conditions. Again using country examples, we examine the manner by which men and women resolve the tensions between tradition and social norms, on the one hand; and the new opportunities as well as burdens brought about by technological change, demographic factors and economic restructuring, on the other.

As we will show, women have already adopted new roles across the globe. Specifically, an increasing number of women have taken on the role of income earners and even "breadwinners" in both the developed and developing world. The increasing rates of women's economic activity observed in many countries in the OECD, Latin America, Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa regions have sometimes been shadowed by declining rates for men. Evidently, not only are more women entering and remaining in the labour force throughout their childbearing years, but they are also finding more ways to combine family responsibilities with market work. But the roles of women and men have evolved in an uneven manner. While some women have benefited from new opportunities in terms of access to income or higher earnings, others face precarious work conditions, increased burdens and more stress.

One reason for these trends is related to demographic changes particularly in the last fifty years. Decreases in mortality rates and fertility rates, and increases in life expectancy resulted in fewer family responsibilities for women. In addition, increasing numbers of women began to postpone marriage and childbirth in many countries. Other demographic trends since the 1980s that encouraged women's participation in the labour market were rural-urban migration, urbanization,

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<sup>14</sup> Nagy, B. (2008): "Challenging the Male Norm of Employment: Evidence from Sweden, Norway and Hungary," in *Global Perspectives on Gender Equality: Reversing the Gaze*, N. Kabeer, A. Stark and E. Magnus eds., (New York and London: Routledge), pp. 87-110.

sharp increases in the divorce rate and female headship both in developed and developing countries. These have contributed to the increased share of single and married women in the labour force.

Political changes have also brought about social and political interaction, mobilization, and participation. Women gained the right to vote and demonstrated ever-expanding social and political activism. Together with population shifts and urbanization, enabling political institutions brought about landmark legal changes and brought women's issues to the center stage in policy making and social practices. Likewise, the rise of women's movements and gender advocacy groups in many parts of the world generated international discourses, dialogues and pressure to address the different forms of women's exploitation and subordination, and gave emphasis to promoting gender equality in economics and society as a whole.<sup>15</sup>

Technological change in the global economy has had a profound effect on gender roles vis-à-vis its effect on economic incentives and relative prices. In some countries like Japan, the United States and the former Soviet Union, labour-saving technologies both in agriculture and industry raised productivity and output in the sixties and seventies.<sup>16</sup> This contrasted with the labour-intensive technologies adopted in the seventies by newly industrializing countries, which increased the demand for women's labour. For example, in South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and Malaysia, the share of women workers in the export-oriented manufacturing sector has substantially increased.<sup>17</sup>

**Like changes brought by technology, the changes brought about by market liberalization have not yielded gender-neutral results.**

In recent decades, macroeconomic policies, particularly trade and financial liberalization policies have had extensive effects on the structure and types of employment. Like changes brought by technology, the changes brought about by market liberalization have not yielded gender-neutral results. Results differ for men and women in terms of earnings, employment, and level of unpaid work; neither is its effect uniform across countries and among women and men.

It should be noted that the global growth in trade has not been equally distributed across countries. Much of the enormous growth in trade over the last fifty years has occurred in developed countries and a few developing countries concentrated in East Asia and Latin America.<sup>18</sup> By contrast, Sub-Saharan African countries not only have had difficulties in shifting to manufactured exports, but have also seen the purchasing power of their main exports decline. Likewise, the flows of private foreign capital across countries have differed. Foreign capital flows have been highly concentrated, flowing to the OECD nations, and to a smaller extent, a handful of developing countries – primarily to the East Asian and the more highly industrialized Latin American economies.

15 Beneria, 2003, *op cit*.

16 Moghadam, V. (1995): "The Political Economy of Female Employment in the Arab Region" in *Gender and Development in the Arab World: Women's Economic Participation: Patterns and Policies*, N. Khoury and V. Moghadam, eds., (London: Zed Press), pp. 6–34.

17 Berik, G., (2000): "Mature Export-led Growth and Gender Wage Inequality in Taiwan," in *Feminist Economics* (November): 1–26 and Seguino, S. (2000): "Gender Inequality and Economic Growth: A Cross-Country Analysis," *World Development* (July): 1211–1230.

18 Floro, M. N. Çağatay, K. Erturk and J. Willoughby (2004): *Gender Issues and Distributional Concerns of Financing for Development*, Background Paper prepared for United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW).

## 4.4 Potential Backlash and Reversal of Gender Equality Opportunities

A growing body of research by feminist economists has demonstrated that economic policies and development strategies are seldom gender-neutral. Since the 1980s, the idea that liberalization of financial markets increases investment and hence employment and growth, has been promoted by neoliberal economic theories and has taken hold in most policy and academic circles. But trade, foreign investment and overall economic growth have not guaranteed an increase in decent work or equitable participation between women and men. Macroeconomic policies can help promote new opportunities and incentives for gender equality, but they can also reinforce gender inequalities and enable them to exist in new forms. Foreign investment and trade, for example, can provide increased employment and increased earnings for women, along with faster economic growth. However, the effects on women and men's access to decent work are complex and not always positive.

In many parts of the developing world including Bangladesh, the Dominican Republic, (South) Korea, Malaysia, Taiwan, and Thailand, employment expansion has significantly increased women's labour force participation.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, tax concessions given to foreign investors and their impact on public finances, the establishment of export processing zones (EPZs), the tacit endorsement of global subcontracting work chains, and the relaxation of labour laws have important gender implications, since the majority of the industries and enterprises in the EPZs and in subcontracting work chains generally employ women. The latter trend refers to (foreign and domestic) firms developing links to informalized production through outsourcing and subcontracting. Studies conducted by the ILO, Women in Informal Employment Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO), Homeworkers World Wide (HWW) and HomeNet show that firms, including multinational corporations, increasingly use subcontracting of women home workers at very low wages to replace core, full-time workers.<sup>20</sup> The growing informalization of employment is part of the dramatic transformation of employment patterns towards more precarious forms. Figure 1 shows the different sectors of the economy and the fluidity of movement of labour resources. With little bargaining power, subcontracted women workers and home workers in the informal sector face low piece wage rates and work without occupational safety and health standards, benefits and job security.

**Macroeconomic policies can help promote new opportunities and incentives for gender equality, but they can also reinforce gender inequalities and enable them to exist in new forms.**

**The growing informalization of employment is part of the dramatic transformation of employment patterns towards more precarious forms.**

19 ILO, (2007): Equality at Work: Tackling the Challenges. Global Report under the Follow-up to the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, (Geneva: ILO), and UNIFEM et al. (2004): "Trading Off Inequalities: Gender Trade Impact Assessment as a Tool for Trade Reform," in Trade and Gender. Opportunities and Challenges for Developing Countries, UNCTAD ed. (Geneva: UNIFEM), pp. 361–384.

20 Balakrishnan, R. ed. (2002): The Hidden Assembly Line (Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press), Chen, M., J. Sebstad and L. O'Connell, (1999): "Counting the Invisible Workforce: The Case of Homebased Workers", in World Development (March): 603-610., and UN Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) (2005): Gender Equality: Striving for Justice in an Unequal World, (Geneva: ILO).

**Moreover, working conditions such as job security, health and occupational safety and pay do not automatically improve for women as employment increases; indeed, these conditions may deteriorate under the pressure of international competition.**

Moreover, working conditions such as job security, health and occupational safety and pay do not automatically improve for women as employment increases; indeed, these conditions may deteriorate under the pressure of international competition. Recent studies also show that much of the export-led growth experienced by the 'miracle growth' economies e.g. Taiwan and South Korea has relied on prevailing gender wage inequalities and gender norms in these countries.<sup>21</sup> Berik, Rodgers, and Zveglic's 2004 study on Taiwan and Korea suggests that even if trade liberalization enhances women's employment opportunities, their 'competitive advantage' as workers remains rooted in lower pay and poorer working conditions.<sup>22</sup> Trade and investment liberalization provides strong incentives to keep women's relative wages low in order to ensure that the country remains competitive and attracts foreign investment.<sup>23</sup>

Studies examining the relationship of foreign direct investment and women's employment also argue that while foreign direct investment may have helped bring about the feminization of the labour force, this feminization trend can be reversed. In some cases, including parts of Latin America and Africa, even short-term employment effects are not positive. A shift to cash export crops has often undercut women's subsistence (food) production and replaced these with contingent and seasonal employment, leaving them with less real income than before.<sup>24</sup> In turn, women increasingly migrate to impoverished urban zones and expand women's presence in the informal sector, working in precarious jobs. The unregulated flow of imports continues to threaten the livelihood of men and women working in local industries with little or no trade adjustment assistance or support from the government. Local producers, especially self-employed women and men in the informal economy, have lost their market share to cheaper imports.<sup>25</sup>

A complicating factor is the interplay of social norms and economic forces. Although female integration into the global market provided opportunities for some women to challenge and/or defy socially ascribed roles, other women remain limited by persistent social forces and patriarchal norms. Women in Uganda for example, were relegated to the role of unpaid family workers in export crop production. They continue to work for men, and have gained little in terms of legal rights or their share of resources.<sup>26</sup> This also happened in cocoa production in Nigeria, and

21 Erturk, K. and N. Çagatay (2004): "Gender and Globalization: A Macroeconomic Perspective," Background Paper for the ILO Report: A Fair Globalization: Creating Opportunities for All, (Geneva: ILO), and Seguino, S. (2000) "Gender Inequality and Economic Growth: A Cross-Country Analysis," in *World Development* 29 (7), pp. 1211-1230.

22 Berik, G., Y. van der Meulen Rodgers, and J.E. Zveglic, Jr. (2004): "International Trade and Wage Discrimination: Evidence from East Asia," World Bank Policy Research Working Paper No. 3111, (Washington: World Bank).

23 Braunstein, E. and G. Epstein (2002): "Bargaining Power and Foreign Direct Investment in China: Can 1.3 Billion Consumers Tame the Multinationals?" in *Labour and the Globalization of Production*, William Milberg, ed. (London: Palgrave Macmillan).

24 Floro et al, *op. cit.* and United Nations (1999), 1999 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development: Globalization, Gender and Work, (New York: UN Division for the Advancement of Women, Department of Economic and Social Affairs).

25 Williams, M. (2003). "Gender Issues in Agricultural Liberalization," in *Gender Mainstreaming in the Multilateral Trading System* (London: Commonwealth Secretariat and the GATS), pp. 62-73.

26 Obbo, *op. cit.*

in irrigated rice in Zambia. In Nigeria, Nepal and India, there is evidence suggesting that agricultural commercialization can reduce women's share in household income.<sup>27</sup>

An increase in women's time in the labour market (or paid work) does not fully inform us about the resulting changes in women's access to decent work or about their welfare. Further, while having an independent source of income tends to be valued by women not only for what it buys, but also for the greater dignity it brings;<sup>28</sup> it may also have serious costs on their health and well-being that counter these beneficial effects.

Currently, and in recent decades, the global economy has become prone to financial and severe economic crises. As governments liberalize financial markets, financial institutions and investors have increasingly taken on excessive risks, created complex financial instruments, and undertaken short-term capital flows with lightning speed. Financial liberalization policies for the most part, have contributed to economic slumps, collapse of many financial institutions and dramatic increases in unemployment and underemployment, as was witnessed during the East Asian crisis, Russian crisis, and currently, the US-led, global financial and economic crisis. Market instability and economic downturns tend to disadvantage both men and women, with the latter serving as "safety net of last resort."<sup>29</sup>

**Market instability and economic downturns tend to disadvantage both men and women, with the latter serving as "safety net of last resort."**

The preceding discussion illustrates that gender roles are not static; they evolve and are affected by the interplay of economic, social, political and demographic forces. This evolutionary process is complex, however, and one needs to situate the analysis within a broader framework of the 'tensions' that have been created by rapid technological and scientific changes on the one hand, and the sluggishness of addressing gender inequalities on the other. It also calls for a more comprehensive evaluation of women and men's roles, not only in terms of their employment conditions, but also changes in unpaid work burdens. This will be examined in the next section.

27 Balakrishnan, op. cit.

28 Lim, J. (2000) "The Effects of the East Asian Crisis on the Employment of Women and Men: The Philippine Case," *World Development*, 29 (7): 1285–1306, and Singh, A. and Ann Zammit (2000) "International Capital Flows: Identifying the Gender Dimension," *World Development*, 29 (7): 1249–1268.

29 Lipton, M., with Richard Longhurst (1989). *New Seeds and Poor People* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press).

**BOX 1: Gender Dimensions of Financial Crises**

Studies on the impact of the East Asian financial crisis during the late nineties show that under economic distress, women's work burden, both in and out of the household, increases much more than that of men.

In South Korea, for example, the 1997–98 economic crisis caused shifts in employment patterns that affected women workers severely (Singh and Zammit op cit). First, female workers were dismissed and replaced by male workers because many employers and government agencies believed that employment should be provided to the “male family breadwinner.” Second, young women supplanted older women workers in the formal sector because employers could pay them lower wages. Finally, female employment in the more precarious informal sector grew as female employment in the formal sector declined.

In Indonesia, the financial and economic crisis, which started in the late 1990s, seems to have stopped or reversed many of the gains women had made as the economy grew in the 70s and 80s. This was particularly acute in the rural areas, where “women went backwards” in terms of wage labour employment. Women remained underrepresented throughout the period, in higher education, the judiciary, and in policy decision-making (Robinson, K. and S. Bessell, eds., (2002): *Women in Indonesia: Gender, Equity and Development*, Indonesia Assessment Series, (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies). Unemployment for women was significantly higher than for men by the late 1990s and this became particularly critical throughout the Indonesian economic crisis from 1997–1999. While some women, especially in the middle and upper classes, withdrew from the labour force and returned to their traditional roles as “housewives and mothers,” those among the lower income classes were compelled to intensify their workload by employing coping strategies and increasing their time spent in paid work, even as they performed their traditional roles as care-givers and household managers.

In the Philippines, the financial crisis in the late nineties brought about an increase in women's labour force participation and paid work hours as male unemployment worsened considerably (more than female unemployment). Lim (op cit) points out that an important coping mechanism during crisis periods is that women take two or even more jobs. In short, the crisis has created more idleness and shorter work hours for men and longer working hours for women.

# 5. Emerging Patterns of Work among Women and Men: Economic Opportunities and Constraints in Access to Decent Work

This chapter explores recent trends in the extent to which women and men have access to decent work in the labour market – trends affected by the global dynamics outlined in chapter 4. Drawing on the work of Dharam Ghai and others<sup>30</sup> which seek to establish clear and measureable standards for decent work, we examine:

- opportunities for work
- fairness of income
- security of work
- social protection
- freedom to organize and participate in the decisions that affect work life

We outline the differences in these outcomes between the sexes. Ghai and others involved in the quest to measure decent work note that in many countries data is not available to adequately measure the prevalence of such work. This problem is significantly worse when the objective is to measure the availability of decent work across sexes. Standardized, gender-disaggregated data is not available for many of the indicators needed for such evaluation. Below, we use available data to outline recent trends in the availability of decent work for women, as compared to men. We also outline data needs for future analysis.

The availability of decent work in the workplace, and trends in its availability, vary significantly across countries and regions. In this attempt to describe trends at the global level, we draw on both aggregate data by region and on country examples. Where possible, we outline trends since 1990. Across regions, we find mixed results on all variables. Some regions make progress, while others lose ground. The same mix can also be seen when comparing individual countries within regions. Obviously, it is very difficult to adequately discuss outcomes in such a broad range of regions and countries in one background paper, and much important variation will be glossed over even when highlighting the mixed nature of results.

**The availability of decent work in the workplace, and trends in its availability, vary significantly across countries and regions. Some regions make progress, while others lose ground.**

## 5.1 Access to Employment

We use labour force participation rates to measure access to employment. Women's labour force participation is among the best measured of the variables we use to evaluate access to decent work. Still, the data should be used with caution. Some data is based on censuses, whereas other data is based on much smaller labour

<sup>30</sup> See Ghai, D. (2003): "Decent Work: Concept and Indicators," in *International Labour Review*, 142 (2): 113–146 and the special issue of *International Labour Review*, vol. 142 (2), 2003 for a collection of papers on measuring decent work.

force surveys. Measures based on labour force surveys can vary significantly from year to year. Furthermore, informal and casual work, as well as work in family enterprises, is surely undercounted in the labour force participation rate data.

For the world as a whole, female labour force participation rates held steady from 1996–2006, at about 53%. These rates compare to male participation of about 80%, so women still significantly lag behind men in their access to, or at least take up of, paid employment.<sup>31</sup> Three regions showed clear gains in women's participation in paid work. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the female labour force participation rate rose from 1996–2006, from 46% to 52%, while in the Middle East it rose from 25% to 33%. In developed countries, rates rose slightly, from 51% to 53%. In most other regions, female labour force participation rates fell, although most of these declines were small and may not be statistically significant. One case of clear decline is East Asia, where rates fell from 71% in 1996 to 67% in 2006, in part due to the financial crisis.<sup>32</sup> Male labour force participation rates worldwide fell slightly over this period, from 81% in 1996 to 79% in 2006, so that the gap between female and male rates narrowed slightly.

**While women's participation in paid employment has increased worldwide, women are still segregated into certain types of employment.**

While women's participation in paid employment has increased worldwide, women are still segregated into certain types of employment. Due to a complex mix of factors, including household duties, educational background, discrimination, social norms and personal choice, women are more likely than men to be in part-time or temporary work, to be in the informal sector or to be doing home work, or unpaid labour in family enterprises, and to be concentrated in certain types of jobs, usually those at the lower end of the pay and status scale.<sup>33</sup>

Worldwide, in all regions and in developing as well as industrialized economies, women's jobs are more likely to be part-time or temporary. In European countries examined by Janet Gornick, 10–60% of women worked part-time in the early 1990s, compared to 3–11% of men. When women's work is part-time or temporary, it is less likely to offer benefits, an issue which will be discussed further below.<sup>34</sup>

**In Sub-Saharan Africa, about half of women are estimated to work in the informal sector, where 75% of employment is found.**

In many countries, women are likely to work in the informal sector, and the share of workers in this sector appears to be increasing. In Sub-Saharan Africa, about half of women are estimated to work in the informal sector, where 75% of employment is found.<sup>35</sup> In Asia and Latin America, the situation is similar. In most countries for which we have data, the vast majority of home-based workers are women.<sup>36</sup>

31 The extent to which women may "choose" not to engage in paid work to which they have access cannot be determined, since it is inextricably linked to women's expectations regarding their ability to share household tasks if they gain employment, social expectations regarding women's education, and expectations about gender discrimination in hiring and pay.

32 ILO, 2002, op cit.

33 King-Dejardin, A. (2008). "Gender Dimensions of Globalization," Paper presented at the meeting on Globalization – Decent Work and Gender, (Geneva: ILO).

34 Gornick, J. (1999). "Gender Equality in the Labour Market: Women's Employment and Earnings," Luxembourg Income Study Working Paper No. 206.

35 Charmes, J (2000). "Size, Trends and Productivity of Women's Work in the Informal Sector," Paper presented at the annual IAFFE Conference, Istanbul.

36 Balakrishnan, op. cit, Beneria, Lourdes (2004). "Changes Employment Patterns and the Informalization of Jobs: General Trends and Gender Dimensions," in *Women at Work: Challenges for Latin America*, C. Piras, ed., (Washington DC: Inter-American Development Bank Washington), pp. 61–92.

Within both the formal and informal sectors, women continue to be segregated into certain jobs. Looking at data from formal sector employment in 41 countries around the world from years in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Richard Anker found a high level of occupational segregation worldwide. He found that 60% of male and female workers in OECD countries would need to change jobs in order to have equal occupational representation. About the same level of occupational segregation existed for the non-Asian developing countries and European transition economies he examined, while the level of segregation in Asia was slightly lower and the level in the Middle East was slightly higher. Looking at trends, but analyzing data only for the period from the 1970s to the 1980s, Anker finds a “quite significant” decrease in average levels of occupational segregation. However, Asia and Southern Europe record significant and slight increases, respectively.<sup>37</sup>

## 5.2 Fairness of Income

One common measure of wage fairness by gender is the ratio of female to male wages – the gender wage gap. To properly measure fairness, estimates of the gender wage gap should correct for selectivity (caused by the fact that a smaller share of women than men engage in paid work, and women who expect to earn higher wages are more likely to engage in such work), and control for differences in education, experience, hours of work, and other factors relevant to wage determination. Published cross-country data generally provide only raw wage gap measures, and vary significantly in the range of sectors included. Below, we rely on such data.

From 1980 to the end of the 1990s, the gender wage gap closed significantly in Latin America, where women now earn more than 80% of what men do.<sup>38</sup> Estimates suggest that the wage gap also narrowed in the 1990s to about the same level in most OECD countries<sup>39</sup> and many post-socialist countries.<sup>40</sup> In some countries in each region the gap increased, however. Information for African countries is very limited. A study using data from the mid-late 1980s in Cote d’Ivoire found a small wage gap (women earned 97% of male wages), while data from Ethiopia and Uganda in the early 1990s showed women earning 60–75% of male wages.<sup>41</sup>

A number of studies have found that wage gaps are greater in the informal than the formal sector. The gap is significantly larger in the informal sector in countries as diverse as Egypt, India and South Africa.<sup>42</sup> If unchanged, the higher informal sector wage gap may undermine the narrowing of the gap in the formal sector, as employment shifts increasingly to the informal sector. Finally, the closing of the

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37 Richard Anker, (1998). *Sex Segregation of Occupations in the World* (Geneva: ILO).

38 Piras, Claudia (2004). “An Overview of the Challenges and Policy Issues Facing Women in the Labour Force,” in *Women at Work: Challenges for Latin America*, C. Piras, ed., (Washington DC: Inter-American Development Bank).

39 Gornick, op. cit. These estimates control for hours, age, and education.

40 Brainerd, E. (2000). “Women in Transition: Changes in Gender Wage Differentials in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union,” in *Industrial and Labour Relations Review* 54 (1): 138–162.

41 Appleton, S., J. Hoddinott and P. Krishnan (1999). “The Gender Wage Gap in Three African Countries,” *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, 47 (2):289–312.

42 Bivens, J. and S. Gammage (2005). “Will Better Workers Lead to Better Jobs in the Developing World?” in *Good Jobs, Bad Jobs, No Jobs*, T. Avirgan, J. Bivens and S. Gammage, eds., (Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute), pp. 1–30.

gender wage gap has occurred during a period of wage stagnation worldwide, so that while women have gained with respect to men, absolute gains in earnings are limited.

### 5.3 Security at Work

**Informal and home workers, and in many cases even part-time workers, lie outside the protections of labour laws and lack rights to social benefits.**

Worldwide, work has become more insecure as global competition has contributed to a shifting of jobs from the formal, legally-regulated and large-firm sector to smaller and informal firms and home work. While it is difficult to generalize about the nature of informal work and self-employment, it certainly offers less security than formal employment. Informal and home workers, and in many cases even part-time workers, lie outside the protections of labour laws and lack rights to social benefits. Even in cases where there are labour codes in place for home work (in the Philippines and India, for example), these are very weakly enforced. The 1996 ILO Convention on Home Work has not been widely ratified, although it provides a framework for future action.

**Where female unemployment rates do not exceed male rates, this is often due to women's greater willingness to exit the labour market.**

Workers in the formal sector also face significant insecurity in much of the world. Deregulation of labour markets has become a norm, driven by the increasing acceptance of the idea that firms should shed workers quickly in periods of downturn. In most regions of the world, women are shed more quickly than male workers, exhibiting higher unemployment rates than males for the period 1991–2000.<sup>43</sup> Where female unemployment rates do not exceed male rates, this is often due to women's greater willingness to exit the labour market.

### 5.4 Social Protection

Social protection considered in measures of decent work often include the share of national budgets spent on public health and education, and access to pensions and healthcare insurance. Changes in these protections may have a greater impact on women, as women do a greater share of caring for the sick and small children. Changes in infrastructure support may also particularly affect women as they are traditionally responsible for collecting water and fuel.

Using the share of national budgets devoted to public health and educational services provides only a rough measure of state delivery of these services. The percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) devoted to these services might rise due to price increases (for example, in cases of price liberalization in post-socialist countries). At the same time, the percent of GDP devoted to the services might fall if GDP rises rapidly, while services remain at the same level. But, with these caveats in mind, data suggests significant reductions in state support for these services from the mid-1980s to 2004. Almost half of the 142 countries for which

<sup>43</sup> Beccalli, B. and G. Meardi (2002). "From Unintended Consequences to Undecided Feminism? Italian Labour's Changing and Singular Ambiguities," in *Gender, Diversity and Trade Unions*, Fiona Colgan and Sue Ledwith, eds., (New York: Routledge), pp. 113–131; Piras, Claudia, op. cit.; Malehoko, T. (2002). "Women in the Labour Movement: Perceptions of Gender Democracy in South African Trade Unions," in *Gender, Diversity and Trade Unions*, F. Colgan and S. Ledwith, eds. (New York: Routledge), pp. 205–231.

the UNDP publishes data experienced a fall in the share of GDP devoted to public expenditure on health. The vast majority of these countries were low or middle income countries, and in many cases the decline was more than 50%.<sup>44</sup> In many countries, the share of GDP spent on education also fell.

Data on public expenditure on unemployment benefits, pensions and health care is harder to find, but spending in these areas has followed the same downward trends in many countries. Spending may also be unequal across gender lines, as these social benefits are often in the form of insurance and thus offered only to formal sector and full-time employees. In this case, women get a smaller share of the declining pool of benefits.

In some developing countries, efforts have been made to develop alternative forms of social protection, in response to the shift in jobs from the formal to the informal sector and reductions in the state role in providing education and health care services. A pilot seminar entitled “Social Protection, Informality, and Gender” hosted by the global research-policy network “Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO)”, the Center for Women’s Studies (CEM), and the ILO-Latin America regional office, held in Santiago, Chile in 2001 facilitated discussions and dialogue among policymakers, researchers, advocacy groups and worker organizations.<sup>45</sup> Such dialogues and the pressure from Servicio Nacional de la Mujer (SERNAM) have helped bring about a number of changes in working terms and conditions for women temporeras (seasonal workers) in Chile.<sup>46</sup> These include the provision of childcare facilities for horticultural and other agricultural workers and the establishment of four national commissions on Health and Safety at Work, Childcare, Pesticides and Training, to deal at the policy level with conditions of temporary work. SEWA’s Integrated Social Security Scheme in India is another example. SEWA is a trade union (registered in 1972) comprised of poor, self-employed women workers. It provides its 959,698 members vital supportive services such as savings and credit, legal aid, health care, child care and insurance services.<sup>47</sup> Some states have also expanded protections to those outside formal sector employment. For example, the government of Costa Rica has initiated an innovative health and pension provision scheme for informal workers under the Law of Protection of Workers Act.<sup>48</sup> But it is the NGO efforts that may become the basis for a new model of social protection in developing countries, especially for women, who are more likely to work outside the formal sector.

Two other forms of social protection which particularly affect women are maternity protection and subsidized childcare. These protection allow (especially) women to maintain their labour force attachment during childbearing and rearing, ensuring that the costs of child bearing are shared across male and female workers. While only 37 countries had signed the ILO Convention 103 on maternity protection as of 2004,<sup>49</sup> an ILO review of maternity protection legislation in 167 countries found that all had some legislation in place. In industrialized and former

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44 UNDP (2001): *Human Development Report 2001* (New York: Oxford University Press); UNDP (2007): *Human Development Report 2007* (on-line).

45 www.

46 UNRISD, op. cit.

47 See [www.sewa.org](http://www.sewa.org)

48 Ibid.

49 Beneria, 2004, op. cit.

socialist countries, only the US offered less than 14 weeks of leave, while many countries offered 18 weeks. Most industrialized and former socialist countries offer at least two-thirds pay for at least 14 weeks. In Asia, Africa and Latin America, however, most countries mandate fewer than 14 weeks of leave, with pay for less than 14 weeks. In the United States, of course, there is no assurance of any paid leave.

**In developing countries, however, it is unclear what share of workers can actually access maternity protections.**

In most OECD countries, these benefits have expanded significantly in recent years, increasing the length of possible leaves, the financial protections which accompany them, and the possibilities for sharing the leave between male and female parents, which helps to equalize the impact of childrearing on men's and women's careers.<sup>50</sup> In developing countries, however, it is unclear what share of workers can actually access maternity protections. And as the formal, large-firm sector has shrunk, the share has clearly declined.

A further issue is the take-up of benefits. Kawaguchi shows that in 2001 very few women in Japan used the mandated leave of up to one year with partial wages. Women cited social norms as well as low benefits and lack of information about leave rights as reasons for failing to take advantage of benefits.<sup>51</sup>

The availability of subsidized child care is limited in many parts of the world. Almost half of all countries have no formal programs for children under 3, and for those that do have programs, coverage is limited.<sup>52</sup> In OECD countries, the share of children under 3 served by publicly financed care varies significantly, from 2% in the UK to 74% in Denmark. For children between 3 years and school age, more care is provided, although the share of children reached still varies, from 53% in the US to 99% in Belgium and France.<sup>53</sup> Former socialist countries achieved high rates of participation in pre-schooling, ranging from around 70% or more in the European areas to about 20–50% in Central Asia and the Caucasus. But rates have fallen further in Central Asia and the Caucasus since 1989, as state subsidies, household incomes, and access to education have decreased.<sup>54</sup> In other developing countries, for the most part, there are few public programs. While private daycare centers are expanding, such market-based care facilities are often beyond the means of poor households or non-existent in rural communities.

**Even when day care programs are available, they often do not meet the needs of workers with children in terms of the hours and the duration of programs.**

Even when day care programs are available, they often do not meet the needs of workers with children in terms of the hours and the duration of programs. Most programs run between 15 and 40 hours per week, although many countries offer fewer hours.<sup>55</sup> Child care remains a problem even for school age children, as the hours of primary and secondary schools are typically shorter than the usual work day. Parents with two or more children can face a host of problems trying to patch together different childcare solutions for the different age-related needs of their

50 Janet Gornick and Marcia Meyers (2003): *Families that Work: Policies for Reconciling Parenthood and Employment* (New York: Russell Sage).

51 Kawaguchi, A. (2004). "The Child-Care Leave System in Japan: Development, Problems and Further Reform," in *The Economics of Social Security in Japan*, Toshiaki Tachibanaki, ed., (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar), pp. 249–277.

52 UNDP, 2007, op. cit.

53 Gornick and Meyers, op. cit.

54 Meurs, M., L. Giddings and T. Temesgen (2007). "Changing Preschool Enrollments in Post-Socialist Central Asia: Causes and Implications," *Comparative Economic Studies*, 49(1): 81–100.

55 UNDP, 2007, op. cit.

children. In many places, women choose part-time, home and informal work because of the possibilities this offers for combining child care with paid work.

Finally, women can benefit from the availability of legal protections against discrimination. The vast majority of countries have ratified the ILO conventions on elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation. However, there are serious problems with their enforcement. An ILO Director-General Report on discrimination notes the ways through which some countries have used labour inspections to raise awareness about the issues and mediate problems. Other countries, including a number of developing countries, have used numerical targets in hiring for underrepresented groups. As production shifts from larger, formal sector employers to subcontractors and informal sector work, however, these strategies become less effective.<sup>56</sup>

**Finally, women can benefit from the availability of legal protections against discrimination.**

## 5.5 Freedom of Association

One measure for the degree of freedom of association in a given country is the share of workers represented by labour unions. Labour unions have been under pressure due to globalization. Efforts to make labour markets more “flexible” have led to reductions in workers’ rights to organize in many countries, and firms’ ability to shift jobs overseas has reduced the bargaining power of labour. Sectoral shifts in employment from manufacturing to services have also reduced the share of workers with access to unions. Overall, many countries have seen declines in union membership as a share of the workforce, and in the share of workers covered by union contracts. Of the 58 countries for which the ILO publishes data, union density fell in 42 from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s. In numerous cases, the decline exceeded 20%.<sup>57</sup> In developing countries, a shift of economic activity to subcontracting and informal firms has accelerated this shift from union coverage.

In many countries, unions have responded to declining membership by organizing previously under-organized sectors, including the service and the informal sector, where women predominate. As a result, female union membership has increased significantly in industrialized countries and some developing countries.<sup>58</sup>

**In many countries, unions have responded to declining membership by organizing previously under-organized sectors, including the service and the informal sector, where women predominate.**

However, increases in women’s membership do not always mean increased power for women workers. Union leadership is traditionally male and focused on the interests of male, full-time workers. Women, and union leaders focused on increasing women’s membership, have often used separate women’s structures within unions to give women more voice and then bring these to the attention of central leadership. In some cases, this seems to have successfully increased women’s influence in unions,<sup>59</sup> while in other cases this appears to result in the

<sup>56</sup> ILO, 2007, op cit.

<sup>57</sup> ILO (2000). “Organization, Bargaining and Dialogue for Development in a Globalizing World,” GB.279/WP/SDG/2.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Colgan, F. and S. Ledwith (2002). “Gender, Diversity and Mobilization in UK Trade Unions,” in Gender, Diversity and Trade Unions, F. Colgan and S. Ledwith, eds. (New York: Routledge), pp. 154–185.

marginalization of women's issues.<sup>60</sup> Many unions in both industrialized and developing countries have also turned to quotas on national committees to increase women's participation in leadership.

In some countries – much of the evidence comes from Asia – unions and, to a greater extent NGOs, have begun organizing women in the informal and home work sectors. Such organizations include HomeNet, SEWA, PATAMABA (Philippines), WIEGO, and PSWS (Malaysia). Enforcement of legal gains is sometimes weak, but legal rights provide a basis for further action and demands.

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<sup>60</sup> Tshoedi, *op. cit.*

# 6 Decent Work and its Relation to Reproductive Work

Women's ability to get decent work in market economy is closely linked to the gender roles and division of work in the home. As a result, the slow change in the distribution of domestic and care work – referred to as reproductive work – among household members deserves closer scrutiny.

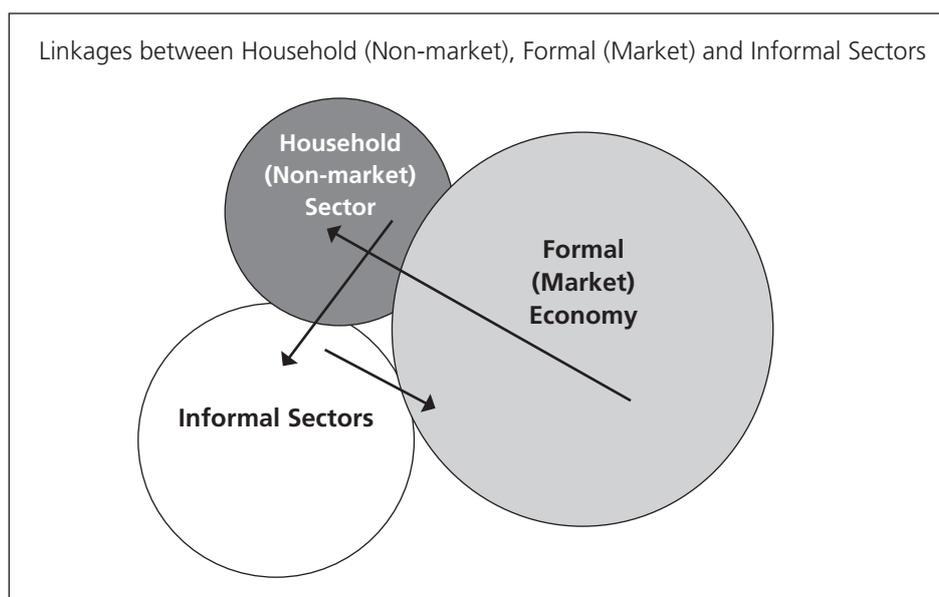
An examination of the interaction between market and non-market activities in the economy, particularly in the allocation of time spent between productive and reproductive work, is crucial for a comprehensive assessment of gender inequalities in the labour market. This chapter explores the critical issues and ongoing debates regarding unpaid work as well as related empirical evidence.

**An examination of the interaction between market and non-market activities in the economy, particularly in the allocation of time spent between productive and reproductive work, is crucial for a comprehensive assessment of gender inequalities in the labour market.**

## 6.1 Links between Labour Market and Reproductive Work

The link between decent labour market work and the reproductive, unpaid work that individuals also perform is multi-faceted. First, the time spent by a person in growing food for subsistence, gathering fuel and water, doing childcare, sick and elder care, and performing domestic chores is co-determined by the time spent in paid, market work. Thus, reproductive work time directly affects individuals' labour market options. Figure 1 depicts the fluidity of labour between the formal (market) sector, the informal (market) sector, and the reproductive (non-market) sector which utilizes most unpaid work.<sup>61</sup> The areas of overlap in the diagram

Figure 1: **Areas of Economic Activity**<sup>62</sup>



61 Beneria and Floro, *op. cit.*

62 Beneria, L. and Floro, M. (2006): "Distribution, Gender and Labour Market Informalization: A Conceptual Framework and a Focus on Homebased Workers," in *Rethinking Informalization* L. Beneria and Neema Kudva, eds., (Ithaca: Cornell University e-publishing).

refer to the multiplicity of work arrangements in the labour market sectors. These include home-based work that allows workers to combine paid market work with reproductive work, as well as subcontracting and outsourcing activities that link formal and informal work in a production chain.

**Household members that perform the unpaid work of caring activities assume important costs of producing the labour force and social fabric in society.**

Second, unpaid work also affects the rate at which time in paid work is rewarded, by limiting women's time available for work and their ability to specialize. Third, unpaid work activities such as domestic chores, fuel and water gathering, subsistence production and care work in the household are crucial to the production of the labour force, generation of knowledge and overall social reproduction. As Nancy Folbre puts it: "Children grow up to become workers as well as taxpayers, and the older generation is not the only group that benefits from their existence (...) The benefits are realized by all consumers of commodities, whether they have raised children or not."<sup>63</sup> Put in another way, those household members that perform the unpaid work of daily domestic chores and caring activities assume important costs of producing the labour force and social fabric in society.

**In some industrial countries, men have increasingly taken on more household chores.**

Finally, the interrelatedness of paid and unpaid work is reinforced by the complementarity and substitution between goods and services purchased with earned income and the non-marketed goods and services produced with unpaid labour. Market-produced goods and services (e.g. vegetables, flour, soap, tools) are inputs in household production of meals, clean clothes, and backyard gardening. Households which can afford them also make use of purchased goods and services (e.g. restaurant meals, housecleaning, laundry service, and daycare centers) as substitutes for home production, thereby reducing unpaid work. Although increasing numbers of women in most of the world have become income earners in the last few decades, the majority of them continue to perform their traditional roles as household managers and care providers. In some countries such as Australia, United States, Norway, England and Sweden there is evidence that men have increasingly taken on more household chores. Nevertheless, the bulk of unpaid work at home and in the community still falls on women.<sup>64</sup>

A number of developing as well as developed countries has undertaken time use surveys. Although estimates of unpaid work can vary considerably and many countries have yet to conduct time use surveys on a systematic basis, available empirical studies on time use and gender division of labour in both developed and developing areas show that women, both employed and non-employed, do substantially more unpaid work than men (Table 1). In contrast, men typically spend more hours in paid economic activities than women. However, the contributions hardly even out; when hours in paid and unpaid work are totaled, women tend to have longer work weeks than men and less time for leisure or sleep.

<sup>63</sup> Folbre, N. (2008): *Valuing Children: Rethinking the Economics of the Family*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press).

<sup>64</sup> Folbre, op. cit.

Table 1: **Gender and time allocation in a selection of countries\***

		Cooking and Cleaning Hours and mins per day			Care of Children hours and mins per day		
		Women	Men	m/f %	Women	Men	m/f%
Norway	(2000–1)	2:14	0:52	24	0:34	0:17	50
France	(1989–99)	3:04	0:48	16	0:28	0:09	32
Germany	(2001–02)	2:32	0:52	22	0:26	0:10	38
Korea	(2004)	2:36	0:20	9	0:55	0:15	27
Poland	(2003–04)	3:13	1:02	34	0:39	0:16	41
US	(2005)	1:54	0:36	23	0:48	0:24	50
Mexico	(2002)	4:43	0:39	6	1:01	0:21	21
Mauritius	(2003)	3:33	0:30	9	0:44	0:13	30
Nicaragua	(1998)	3:31	0:31	9	1:01	0:17	17
South Africa	(2000)	3:06	1:00	33	0:39	0:04	10
Madagascar	(2001)	2:51	0:17	7	0:31	0:08	26
Benin	(1998)	2:49	0:27	11	0:45	0:05	11

Data from UNDP Human Development Report 2007 (Table 32).<sup>65</sup>

## 6.2 Effect of Unpaid Work on Labour Market Participation

The fact that women do most of the unpaid reproductive work strongly affects their ability to be available for paid work. When women do participate in the labour market, family responsibilities affect the amount and type of work that women can undertake. The prevalence of women in part-time work is linked to their other responsibilities, especially raising children.

While labour available for performing paid (market) work seems to be directly related to the time use in reproductive and domestic (non-market) activities among women on average, this is not necessarily the case for men. Regardless of their position in the life course, a study using 1992 Australian time use data shows that men's weekly hours of unpaid work tend to be a fixed quantity.<sup>66</sup> Hence a reduction in men's paid work hours generally results in greater leisure time, so that men literally can choose between (paid) work and leisure. For women, however, it is more likely to be a choice between paid and unpaid work.

Gender roles in social reproduction can also affect a worker's choices of employment and work location. Home-based work has enabled some women to resolve the contradictions between socially defined roles and their need for income, while also meeting the demand for cheap, flexible labour by firms facing increased

**When women do participate in the labour market, family responsibilities affect the amount and type of work that women can undertake.**

65 Daly, Mary (2008): "The Equal Sharing of Responsibilities between Women and Men, Including Care-giving in the Context of HIV/AIDS", Paper Prepared for United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women Expert Group Meeting on "Equal Sharing of Responsibilities between Women and Men Including Care-giving in the context of HIV/AIDS, Geneva.

66 Bittman, M. (1999). "Parenthood without Penalty: Time Use and Public Policy in Australia and Finland, *Feminist Economics*, 5(3):27-42

**Not surprisingly, women are disproportionately represented among home-based workers across countries, as it allows them to combine paid work in time and space with their domestic responsibilities.**

competition in both domestic and global markets. Not surprisingly, women are disproportionately represented among home-based workers across countries, as it allows them to combine paid work in time and space with their domestic responsibilities. For example, in the Philippines, where an estimated two-thirds of women work in the informal economy, twenty percent of women cited family responsibilities as the reason why they turned to informal rather than formal employment.<sup>67</sup> Home-based work also results in “spillovers” through which some market risk and volatility are shifted onto the informal sector and particularly to unpaid family workers. In many small enterprises and agricultural production, unpaid family labour, mainly that of women and children, may be shifted in and out of production in order to absorb some uncertainties of production.<sup>68</sup>

### 6.3 Factors Affecting Labour Time Allocation

The level of household production and the gender division of household labour are not static, however. They change in response to changing wages and conditions in paid work, to policy reforms and to a host of demographic, economic and social forces. Changes in educational attainment, technology, and relative returns to different skills cause households and individuals to shift time between activities and change how labour is used. Macroeconomic conditions, labour and social policies, and social services also affect the level and distribution of unpaid work in a household. Demographic and social changes such as urbanization, migration, fertility and divorce rates can influence the allocation of labour time as well.

**While men have compensated for some of the time that women are now working outside the home, women are likely to accommodate increased labour market participation by reducing leisure time and by doing simultaneous activities.**

Time use studies show that while large differences persist in men’s and women’s allocation of time between (labour) market and nonmarket work, these began to converge between the 1960s and 90s. However, this convergence pattern does not take into account the extent to which multiple tasks are performed simultaneously by women, which can lead to intensification of work.<sup>69</sup> While men have compensated for some of the time that women are now working outside the home, women are likely to accommodate increased labour market participation by reducing leisure time and by doing simultaneous activities. Women, thus, increase not only total work hours but also work intensity.

Another impact of the recent changes in economic, demographic and social factors described in chapters three and four, is the blurring of boundaries between paid and unpaid work and the movement of labour between formal and informal markets, and between market and non-market sectors. For example, an increasing number of firms rely on workers outside the “traditional workplace,” through decentralization, outsourcing, and subcontracting. Encouraged by market liberalization policies, this has increased the link between the formal and informal sectors, and in some cases, between paid and unpaid work. These firms have tapped into the “seemingly abundant female supply of labour” by creating new

67 Verceles, N.A. and S.N. Beltran (2004). “Reconciling Work and Family. Philippine Country Study,” Unpublished Working Paper, Conditions of Work and Employment Programme, (Geneva: ILO).

68 Jayaweera, Swarna (2002): “Women Subcontracted Workers in Sri Lanka,” in *The Hidden Assembly Line*, Balakrishnan, ed., pp. 63-86.

69 Floro, M. and M. Miles (2003). “Time Use and Overlapping Activities: Evidence from Australia,” in *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 27 (6), November, pp. 881–904.

forms of putting out systems, involving multilayered networks of parent firms, subsidiaries, subcontractors and home-based workers.<sup>70</sup> The resulting firm restructuring and work arrangements have diminished the bargaining power of labour. During recessions and economic crises, informal enterprises and household, non-market production expands, to offset the decline in formal sector employment and the downsizing of the public sector and social services. As firms lay off workers, informal activities and household activities partially offset the drastic drop in access to market purchased goods and services. In the face of insecurity, the burden of survival falls on unpaid workers in the household and community, particularly women.

The increase in paid employment for women and the shift from formal to informal work has come at a time when social welfare schemes in industrialized countries and post-socialist countries have eroded. In developing countries, social security, healthcare and pension systems have remained limited. This lack of security on a social level has increased the demand for care work. For households affected by HIV/AIDS, the situation is quite grave as the demand for caring services increases at a time when additional income is needed for medical expenses and to compensate for the possible loss of the income of the infected family member.<sup>71</sup>

**The increase in paid employment for women and the shift from formal to informal work has come at a time when social welfare schemes in industrialized countries and post-socialist countries have eroded.**

## 6.4. Market Work and the Need for Care

A crucial aspect of reproductive work is care service provided to dependents and sick household members. In both developing and industrialized countries, family members have been a major source of caring labour. With women increasingly employed, dual-earner couples or working single parents who have traditionally been able to count on the unpaid care work of predominantly female relatives and kin (sisters, mothers, aunts, co-wives and daughters) find themselves more constrained in employment choices. Urbanization, migration, and the growth of single-mother households have further undermined extended family support networks. Women therefore increasingly take on responsibility as both income earners and caregivers.

**A crucial aspect of reproductive work is care service provided to dependents and sick household members.**

The conflict between the roles as income earners and care providers is, therefore, likely to intensify. Attempts to balance the demands of market work and the unpaid work in household maintenance and social reproduction have led to long hours of work and can undermine both men's and women's capacities not only in their jobs, but also in meeting care responsibilities.

Growing concern about potential crises of the family based care system and social reproduction as a whole has reached both developed as well as developing countries.<sup>72</sup> Yet, policymakers tend to continue neglecting the non-market sector and

<sup>70</sup> Balakrishnan, op. cit.; Beneria and Floro, op. cit., ILO, 2002, op. cit.

<sup>71</sup> Daly, op. cit.; Shahra, R. (2007). "The Political and Social Economy of Care in a Development Context: Conceptual Issues, Research Questions and Policy Option," Gender and Development Paper, No. 3, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development.

<sup>72</sup> Folbre, op. cit.

its important linkages to the market sector, particularly labour markets. Workers and their families are left alone to find their own solutions to deal with family and care responsibilities as there is few or no government support or public sector provisioning.

**For families with middle to high income, hiring domestic workers is a key to overcoming the lack of collective support for families.**

Hiring domestic workers, typically women, is a common solution for middle-income families in developing and developed countries.<sup>73</sup> Throughout Latin America, for example, domestic workers are approximately 17% of employed women. They are about 9% of all employed women in South Africa, about 9.5 % in the Philippines, and are found in 1 out of every 2 Kenyan homes.<sup>74</sup> For families with middle to high income, hiring domestic workers is a key to overcoming the lack of collective support for families.

This private solution to the demand for care work comes with its own problems and may undermine the ability of women to have decent work. Domestic workers are predominantly women, often from poor communities, rural areas, ethnic and racial minorities, or immigrants. In the majority of countries, domestic workers are treated unequally relative to other wage-earners. Enforcement of labour laws is often very weak, in part because of the “hidden” nature of the work. As a result, most domestic workers are employed informally, at very low wages, with few legal rights or social protections and little access to voice and representation. In fact, the large numbers of domestic workers, and the growing evidence of abusive working conditions that many face around the world, have compelled the Governing Body of the ILO to place a standard-setting activity for domestic workers on the agenda of the ILO in June 2010.<sup>75</sup>

**In many countries, it is typically girls who are removed from school to care for younger children and accomplish domestic tasks, thus contributing to household survival at the expense of long-term education and employment opportunities.**

For the working poor, hiring domestic help is simply unaffordable, and workers in these households are compelled to engage children in paid work and unpaid domestic work to enable the family to meet its survival needs. In many countries, it is typically girls who are removed from school to care for younger children and accomplish domestic tasks, thus contributing to household survival at the expense of long-term education and employment opportunities.

The lack of social policy measures and supports for unpaid family responsibilities hits poor and vulnerable families the hardest, as they have the weakest economic capacity to purchase goods (processed foods, labour saving devices) or services (private childcare, domestic help) that can free up their time for paid work. They are often forced to choose between employment and care, or to combine them – choices which require painful sacrifices in terms of quality of employment and/or quality of care. These choices also have longer term welfare and economic consequences. With no (other) childcare at hand, poor families cope by leaving children home alone or by taking children to work with them. For example, in Indonesia, 40 % of working women care for their children while working; 37 % rely on female relatives and 10% deploy older female children to help; in rural areas, reliance

<sup>73</sup> Razavi, op. cit.

<sup>74</sup> ILO, 2007, op. cit.

<sup>75</sup> Razavi, op. cit.

on older female children for care is much higher.<sup>76</sup> In Nairobi, 54% of poorer mothers were found to bring their babies to work, whereas 85% of better-off mothers had house-girls.<sup>77</sup>

The overall work burden and extent of role conflicts are heightened during periods of economic recession and crises, decline in real wages and cutbacks in government expenditures. Economic policies that cause workers to be both ‘time-poor’ and ‘money-poor’ contribute to the rise in stress and eventual deterioration of their well-being. The level and scope of non-marketed goods and services, and by extension, the volume of unpaid work invariably increases during this period. Poor women, in ensuring the daily survival of their households, perform more unpaid work during periods of market volatility.<sup>78</sup> They employ coping strategies such as working longer hours and doing multiple tasks and jobs. A working life characterized by the ‘double day’ and ‘high work intensity’ is an often ignored impact of economic policies.

Some countries have made important strides in reducing the tensions between paid market labour, and unpaid non-market labour in the home. The Nordic countries in particular have prioritized the balancing of work and family, through policies such as extended paid parental leave, the creation of incentives for more equal sharing of this leave, set limits on the expected work week, and expanded public and subsidized child care. The labour market entry of women became a gender-enabling process, in part due to the democratic institutional space that allowed women’s needs and interests to find their way into the policy process. The specific social policies implemented have implications for women and men’s access to decent work.<sup>79</sup> Cash benefit for childcare schemes encourage gender-differentiated family models. For example, state-supported childcare services facilitate the dual-earner model, while parental leave legislation encourages dual-earning and care-sharing parenthood. Still, even in countries with the best policies, domestic responsibilities continue to disadvantage women in their access to decent work on a par with men. In most of the world, women continue to face much greater pressures, combining income-generating work with domestic responsibilities, in a context of decreasing state support.<sup>80</sup>

Certain circumstances and characteristics of men and women particularly affect their labour market outcomes. Among these are education, household structure, race, class, and government policy. However, it is important to recognize that although these influence access to decent work, access to decent work can also influence these variables. Individuals expecting access to well-paid, skilled work are more likely to invest in education, for example, and individuals who hold well-paid jobs are more likely to be able to invest in such education for their children.

**Economic policies that cause workers to be both ‘time-poor’ and ‘money-poor’ contribute to the rise in stress and eventual deterioration of their well-being.**

**Still, even in countries with the best policies, domestic responsibilities continue to disadvantage women in their access to decent work on a par with men.**

76 Kamerman, S.B. (2000): “Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC): An Overview of Developments in OECD Countries,” Unpublished Paper, New York, Columbia University, Institute for Child and Family Policy. Available at <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/childpolicy/kamerman.pdf>, Addati, Laura and Naomi Cassirer (2008). ILO Paper Prepared for the Expert Group Meeting on “Equal Sharing of Responsibilities between Women and Men including Caregiving in the Context of HIV-AIDS,” (Geneva: ILO).

77 Lakati A. et al. (2002). “Breastfeeding and the Working Mother in Nairobi”, in *Public Health Nutrition*, 5 (6), pp.715-718.

78 Sparr, P., ed (1994): *Mortgaging Women’s Lives: Feminist Critiques of Structural Adjustment* (London: Zed Press); Singh, A. and A. Zammit (2000): op. cit.

79 Kabeer, Stark and Magnus, o.p. cit.

80 Gornick and Meyers, op. cit.

Likewise, household structure may adjust to economic need, as an individual's access to decent work changes. An adequate treatment of the relationship between labour market outcomes and the related factors would require careful econometric analysis. Here, we provide only an overview of some of the key relationships documented to date.

**Education plays an important role in access to decent work.**

Education plays an important role in access to decent work. More educated individuals are less likely to be unemployed, are more likely to work in the formal sector, and typically earn higher wages than less educated individuals. Men still get more education than women in many countries, although since 1980 the gap has narrowed everywhere except the Middle East/North Africa region, where it has widened as men have increased their educational levels faster than women.<sup>81</sup> Men and women also continue to pursue different types of schooling, with women more often preparing for traditionally "female" jobs.

Another important factor in explaining differences in access to decent work, particularly for women, is household structure. As seen in the preceding chapter, women do a significantly larger share of household work than men, and this impacts the time, energy, and mobility that they are able to dedicate to paid work. Households with more children or other dependents require more time in caregiving and other household work, which may reduce women's ability to access or keep decent work. Alternatively, households with more adult women may share the work load and increase labour force access. Like education, household structure is, thus, partly endogenous, resulting from household efforts and success in accessing and keeping decent work.

Unequal distribution of assets also affects access to decent work in a number of ways. Land ownership may allow owners to work for themselves, instead of taking work in the informal or home work sector, or migrating to cities in search of other (often informal) work. Other forms of assets may also provide direct opportunities for self-employment (as in using home space for a small shop or other business), and they may be used for collateral when taking loans to start a small business. Assets may also affect access to work when they are used to finance the education of children, additional training for adults, or assistance with household work, in the form of hired labour or purchase of time-saving technology.<sup>82</sup> Finally, when women increase their access to assets relative to men in their household, they may increase their household bargaining power. This may allow them greater influence over whether they go out to work, how far they can travel to work, and other decisions which influence their quality of work.<sup>83</sup>

Differences in government policy are clearly important in explaining variations in access to decent work across countries. Policies can play a significant role in reducing gender inequalities in access to decent work, as well as inequalities

81 Barro, Robert, and Jong-Wha Lee (2001): "International Data on Educational Attainment: Updates and Implications," in *Oxford Economic Papers*, 53 2001: 541–563.

82 Deere, Carmen Diana and Cheryl Doss (2006). "The Gender Asset Gap: What Do We Know and Why Does It Matter?," in *Feminist Economics* 12 (1–2): 1–50.

83 Quisumbing, A. and J. Maluccio (2003): "Resources at marriage and Intra-household Allocation Evidence from Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Indonesia, and South Africa," in *Oxford Bulletin of Economics and Statistics*, 65 (3): 283–327.

related to differing educational, racial, and class backgrounds and household structures within a country. There are a number of types of policy which have particularly contributed to equalizing outcomes among women and men. Perhaps the most fundamental policy is the assurance of equal educational opportunities. Facilitating policies more directly oriented toward labour markets include fiscal policies, which do not disadvantage two-worker households. Paid maternity leave of up to one year increases women's labour force attachment and reduces the negative impact of career interruptions, while leaves of longer than one year have negative effects on future earnings and labour force attachment, and unpaid leaves have no positive effect.<sup>84</sup> Requirements for fathers to take at least part of the (parental) leave can also help equalize the impacts of child-rearing on men's and women's employment.

Protecting workers' rights to organize collectively and have voice in workplace affairs also increases access to decent work, particularly for women and minorities who are likely to be at the lower end of the wage distribution. While the collectively bargained wages do not always reduce the gender wage gap inside the union compared to outside,<sup>85</sup> by reducing overall income inequality, unions contribute to a lower overall gender wage gap.<sup>86</sup> Unions can also promote other policies which reduce inequalities in labour market outcomes, such as child care benefits, and work time limitations,<sup>87</sup> although they may also fail to do so.<sup>88</sup>

Finally, recent efforts to quantify household work, incorporate it into national accounts, and measure its distribution among family members will contribute to better recognition and valuation of this work. This, in turn, is likely to contribute to changing perceptions about this work and also to its more equal sharing.

**While the collectively bargained wages do not always reduce the gender wage gap inside the union compared to outside, by reducing overall income inequality, unions contribute to a lower overall gender wage gap.**

84 Gornick and Meyers, *Families that Work*.

85 Tshoaedi, "Women in the Labour Movement."

86 Blau, F. and L. Kahn (1996): "Wage Structure and Gender Earnings Differentials: An International Comparison," in *Economic* 63 (250):S29-S62.

87 ILO, 2007, op. cit.

88 Beccalli, and Meardi, op. cit.

# 7 Policy Recommendations

The preceding discussion shows how structural and economic realities have shaped today's world of work and the lived experiences of women and men. The examples given throughout juxtapose the varied, emerging patterns of work and the new challenges brought about by forces of rapid change. These new conditions in the world of work offer new opportunities to women and men but, at the same time, seem to have limited the ability of many to find decent work in the labour market and in the home. Women with few assets and in weak bargaining positions are particularly prone to being 'time-poor', 'money-poor', or both. Throughout this paper, we have discussed the gender dimensions of persistent levels of unemployment, underemployment, poor quality and unsafe work, and insecure income, in addition to the burdens of balancing paid work with reproductive work. It is vital that the "Decent Work Agenda" specifically addresses issues of gender equality and women's empowerment as pertains to work such as those discussed throughout this paper.

**Economic, social and labour policies in many countries remain gender-blind to date.**

Economic, social and labour policies in many countries remain gender-blind to date. In fact, they directly and indirectly have contributed to rising stress and growing tensions that underlie persistent gender inequalities and disempowerment of women. Worldwide, work has become more insecure as global competition, firm restructuring and economic downturns contributed to a shifting of jobs from the formal, large-firm sector to smaller and informal firms, and home-based work. Deregulation of labour markets, until recently, has become a globally accepted norm. Informal and home workers, and in many cases, temporary and part-time workers, lie outside the protections of labour laws and lack rights to social benefits. In cases where there are labour codes in place, they remain limited and weakly enforced, particularly in most of the developing countries.

**Women in households with few or no assets have the fewest options to deal with the conflicts between economic and care responsibilities.**

The issue of decent (paid) work cannot be comprehensively addressed without examining the unpaid work that individuals also perform. As increasing numbers of women have taken on the role of income earners, the majority of them continue to perform their socially ascribed roles as household managers and care providers. In both developing and industrialized countries, family members remain a major source of caring labour. Although men in several countries have increasingly taken on more household chores, much of the unpaid work at home and in the community still falls on women. This fact strongly affects women's availability for paid economic activities. Even when women do participate in the labour market, family responsibilities affect the amount and type of paid work that women can undertake. The prevalence of women in informal and home-based work is linked to their other responsibilities, foremost to their duties of raising children. Women in households with few or no assets have the fewest options to deal with the conflicts between economic and care responsibilities.

Policy concerns and discourses regarding job creation, the balance between paid and unpaid work, equal opportunity, childrearing and care-giving and labour standards have brought the issues of social reproduction and human maintenance provisioning to the forefront of many discussions. These issues are central to providing women with equal opportunities to achieve decent work.

This chapter discusses the important role of governments, international bodies including the ILO, UNDP and UNIFEM, and labour unions and women's groups in addressing these challenges.

## 7.1 The Role of Governments and Intergovernmental Bodies

Achieving decent work for all requires a coherent yet strategic approach that includes a wide-ranging policy agenda, from gender-aware macroeconomic, social and labour policies to poverty reduction strategies and strengthened rights for workers to organize. While policies that promote trade and attract foreign investment can expand employment opportunities to some, they may simultaneously undermine the well-being of other workers including micro-entrepreneurs, subsistence farmers and care-providers, and thus raise policy concerns. Unless workers' rights are upheld strongly by governments and international organizations, intense competition, drive for profits and economic downturns that characterize current globalization trends are likely to undermine progress toward decent work, especially for women. This calls for governments to have plan of action to create a socio-economic environment that upholds rights at work, decent employment, social protection, social dialogue, and policies that enable men and women to balance their paid and reproductive work responsibilities and to share the latter equally.

**Unless workers' rights are upheld strongly by governments and international organizations, intense competition, and economic downturns are likely to undermine progress toward decent work, especially for women.**

In order for governments to successfully promote decent work and workers' rights, a number of actions and strategies are suggested below:

- Undertake, support and disseminate gender-aware analyses of the effect of macroeconomic policies including trade, fiscal, investment and financial policies as well as social/family policies, on access to decent work and on the level and distribution of reproductive work.
- Undertake, support and disseminate gender-aware analyses of financial flows, investment policies and the impact of financial/economic crises on availability and quality of employment and unpaid work.
- Develop and adopt legal frameworks that effectively address gender biases and discrimination in the ownership of and access to productive resources, especially land, credit, education, market knowledge and technology.
- Undertake and support the collection of sex-disaggregated data on employment, work conditions, earnings and time use. Improve the identification of paid and unpaid work, and address the information gaps on the subject, paying special attention to in the informal sector, home-based work and unpaid (community, household and care) work.

- Promote the use of such data and indicators, along with qualitative information, in the formation of policies on issues such as access to social protection, social services, union representation and collective bargaining, and the impact of changing work conditions on reproductive work.
- Use such analyses for the development and formulation of gender-aware macroeconomic policies.
- Establish gender-sensitive rules to guide employment practices of domestic and foreign firms, including global corporations, by building on existing multilateral instruments such as the ILO conventions on fundamental workers' rights and other conventions with regard to home-based work and part-time work.
- Develop and implement gender-aware employment assistance measures and programs in order to protect, retrain and assist laid-off workers and displaced entrepreneurs, particularly small and micro-entrepreneurs, in both formal and informal sectors, including through employment creation.
- Carry out country-specific and gender-aware assessments of labour laws and standards, with special attention given to those applied in export processing zones as well as those related to subcontracted, home-based work.
- Increase the resources allocated for inspection of work sites and enforcement of local labour laws, especially those that relate to fundamental worker's rights as specified by the Declaration on the Fundamental Rights at Work.
- Increase gender-awareness in labour ministries by increasing financial resources and technical capacities in this area.
- Develop export strategies that rely on the upgrading of workers' skills and capacities as opposed to those that jeopardize their capabilities, health and safety. Provide support to exporters that rely on decent labour practices.
- Promote the development and implementation of social policies and social protection systems that enable men and women to balance both their paid and reproductive work responsibilities. These must be based on institutions that legally recognize women and men as equal agents and support women's distinct position which straddles both the household and the market economy.
- Strengthen broad-based participatory policy formulation and decision making processes. Involve researchers and civil society, especially labour groups and women's groups.

## 7.2. The Role of ILO and other International Bodies

“Decent work sums up the aspirations of people in their working lives,” as noted in the ILO website. International bodies, including ILO and its partners, play a major role in facilitating the integration of the Decent Work Agenda into strategies for poverty reduction and gender equality. The ILO, but also other UN agencies and international organizations, face continuing challenges to promote decent work, with old questions about labour rights, economic security and social norms taking new forms in the context of technological change, demographic changes and global economic developments.

The ILO has created the concept of decent work as a prerequisite for sustainable development that benefits eventually both the workers and the economy. Many other actors besides trade unions and non-governmental organizations have joined its agenda, but to make it a reality worldwide, the ILO needs to continue leading and engaging its partners in promoting economic and social policies that uphold and protect workers’ rights, and particularly women’s rights. To achieve this, actions on a number of issues are crucial, including:

- Undertake, support and disseminate gender analyses of economic, social and labour policies and use these analyses in social dialogues on such policies.
- Promote gender-aware assessment of issues, such as access to social protection, social services, union representation and collective bargaining, and the impact of changing work organizations on reproductive work.
- Undertake, support and disseminate gender analyses of financial flows, investment policies and the impact of financial/economic crises on availability and quality of employment and unpaid work.
- Address gaps in knowledge and understanding of the linkages between the current economic and social environment and the work performed by men and women, formal and informal, paid and unpaid.
- Promote international partnerships focused on the enhancement of workers’ rights. Publicize good practices in this area.
- Support gender-aware research on the links between paid and unpaid work that can help develop gender-aware social, labour and family policies that effectively reduce differences in access to decent work between men and women.
- Promote the development and implementation of social policies and social protection systems that enable men and women to balance both their paid and reproductive work responsibilities. These must be based on institutions that legally recognize women and men as equal agents and support women’s distinct position which straddles both the household production and management and the market economy.

- Strengthen broad-based participatory policy formulation and decision making processes in international bodies and international fora.
- Support the establishment of gender-sensitive rules to guide employment practices of domestic and foreign firms, including global corporations by building on existing agreed multilateral instruments.
- Support capacity building on gender analyses of economic, social and labour policies for policymakers, economic advisers, technical consultants, as well as staff of international bodies.

The ILO and other international bodies can do much in terms of promoting the development and use of a gender-aware statistics, which require that both the process of data collection and statistical methods are *engendered*. Such gendered information is also essential in making governments and international policymaking bodies mindful of women's work and the gender-specific effects of policies. The ILO and other international bodies and their member countries are in a unique position to intensify and support these data collection efforts and more specifically:

- Develop a gendered statistical system and promote the collection of sex-disaggregated data, the identification and addressing of gaps in information, including on wages, work conditions, informal sector and unpaid community and household work.
- Develop frameworks for evaluating relevant gender-sensitive data, setting up benchmarks and monitoring progress towards decent work of both developed and developing countries as well as countries with economies in transition.
- Promote the use of such data and indicators, along with qualitative information, in assessing policies and examining issues like access to social protection, social services, union representation and collective bargaining, and the impact of changing work conditions on reproductive work.

### 7.3 Role of Labour Unions and Women's Organizations

Getting governments and international bodies to address decent work and the critical gender concerns will require an effective and broad-based participation of labour unions and women's organizations. These groups play an important role in influencing the deliberations and policy actions of governments and international bodies toward the achievement of decent work for all. It is therefore important that labour unions and women's groups continue their efforts and also incorporate the following recommended strategies and plan of action:

- Provide training to members on relevant economic issues and gender concerns in order to have broader participation and active engagement in dialogues with governments and international bodies and to be able to monitor their actions.

- Work towards broadening their membership base particularly in increasing the participation of and providing voice to women and men workers in contingent, subcontracted and precarious, informal sector jobs.
- Undertake and support action research projects that enable labour unions and women's groups to evaluate policy and program impacts in terms of potential gender-biases regarding earnings, job security, workers' rights and unpaid work. Use such analysis for the development and formulation of gender-aware policy and program recommendations.
- Strengthen coordination between labour unions and women's groups both within and across countries in order to ensure more effective mobilization and coherence in dialogues with governments and international bodies.
- Broaden public awareness on the gender dimensions of family policies, economic and social policies by disseminating the key findings of gendered impact assessments in order to generate public action towards holding governments accountable in promoting decent work.

# 8 List of Acronyms

CEM	Center for Women's Studies (Chile)
EPZs	Export Processing Zones
HWW	Homeworkers World Wide
ILO	International Labour Organization
KILM	Key Indicators of the Labour Market
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PATAMABA	<i>Pambansang Kalipunan ng mga Manggagawang Impormal ng Pilipinas</i> (National Network of Informal Workers – HOMENET Philippines)
PSWS	Persatuan Sahabat Wanita Selangor (Malaysia)
SERNAM	Servisio Nacional de la Mujer (Chile)
SEWA	Self Employed Women's Association
UNDAW	United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
UNRISD	United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
WIEGO	Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing

# 9

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ISSN 1614-0079  
ISBN 978-3-86872-108-9