

More Women Join The Workforce And The Ranks Of The Unemployed

The following is an ILO report on the participation of women in economic activity.

A piece of good news for women: their proportion in the workforce has grown in many parts of the world. In fact, 21 developed countries and 13 developing countries registered an increase in the number of working women during 1982-85, according to the 1986 edition of the ILO's **Year Book of Labour Statistics**.

But there is another side to the coin: in most countries the unemployment rate continued to be significantly higher for women than for men. Furthermore, the gap actually widened during that period, particularly in developed countries. Thus, 8 out of 23 industrialised nations and 12 out of 16 developing countries showed higher rates of unemployment for women than for men. The female unemployment rate was about double the male rate in certain developed countries like Belgium (1.9 times higher) and Italy (2.5 times higher).

In the Third World the difference in unemployment rates for men and women was not as strongly marked. While in the Netherlands Antilles the women's unemployment rate was twice that of men, it was just the opposite in the Republic of Korea.

The number of developed countries where women's unemployment was higher than men's increased from 15 to 18 between 1982 and 1985. Moreover, where total unemployment rose, female unemployment increased more than male unemployment. Thus results reported indicated a positive relationship between high total unemployment rate in the country and that of women's unemployment.

Examples of the rate of change in unemployment in both developed and developing countries: the Federal Republic of Germany 0.1 for men, 0.2 for women; Australia 0.9 for men, 0.3 for women; Costa Rica 1.5 for men, 2.9 for women; and Hong Kong 0.3 for men, 0.2 for women.

This situation is not new. Such trends were already noticeable during the 1983-84 period. Yet, the phenomenon by which female unemployment grows higher and decreases less than male unemployment now affects 14 out of 25 advanced countries and 9 out of 16 developing countries. This was particularly evident in Austria, Canada, Denmark, Spain, the United States, the Netherlands, Switzerland, the Netherlands Antilles, Barbados, Hong Kong, Puerto Rico and Venezuela.

On the bright side, female employment did show a moderate increase in many parts of the world. In most developed countries women made up 35 to 45 per cent of the employed population. Finland registered 48 per cent of female participation and Sweden 47 per cent. In contrast, women's participation was substantially lower

Spain (29 per cent during 1982-85) and Greece (31 per cent in 1982 and 33 per cent in 1984).

In Latin America and the Caribbean the number of women in the employed population ranged from 26 per cent in Costa Rica to 44 per cent in Barbados. Asian countries showed less fluctuations, from 36 per cent in Singapore to 39 per cent in the Republic of Korea.

Higher rates of increase in the number of women employed were found in Uruguay, from 38 to 41 per cent, New Zealand, from 34 to 36 per cent, Luxembourg, from 32 to 34 per cent, and the Netherlands from 33 to 35 per cent. However, a decrease in the employed female population was registered in Australia, from 37 to 34 per cent.

The growth in the employed female population may be principally attributed, both in developed and developing countries, to the expanding service sector, which in 1985 provided jobs for around 55 per cent of the total employed population of most countries covered.

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