

## **Labour force and Employment:**

Women are a major presence in the paid labour force in all regions of the world. However, they are generally concentrated in a narrow range of industries and occupations and in all countries there is a significant gap between the average wages of women and men. These employment patterns and the wage gap, in combination with other factors, tend to reinforce each other.

### **Economic activity**

Over the 20 years from the 1970s the proportion of adult women who were economically active rose, while that for men declined. These trends were expected to continue into the next century and by 2006 the economic activity rate for women was projected to have reached 75 per cent.

### **Working mothers**

Rising economic activity among women was driven by a transformation in the working patterns of women with children. In the early 1970s there was a very marked difference between women with children and other women in terms of their labor market behavior. This was much less the case two decades later and women with dependent children were more likely to be working than not working. The most notable changes had occurred among women with children under five, 43 per cent of whom were working by the 1990s, compared with only a quarter in 1973.

### **Employment patterns**

Much of the increase in the number of women in paid work could be accounted for by the rise of part-time work (between 1971 and 1993, 93 percent of the total increase in women's employment was in part-time work). This resulted in a significant rise in the proportion of women working part time from one third in 1971 to 46 per cent in 1993.

### **Industry**

Over the two decades from the 1970s the most striking change in women's employment by industry was the decline in manufacturing and the rise of service sector employment. This had also been the case for men, but the trend among women was slightly more marked. In 1971, manufacturing accounted for 29 per cent of women employees, a figure which had fallen to 12 per cent by 1993. Among men the equivalent figures were 40 and 27 per cent respectively.

## **Occupation**

Despite substantial changes over the years, substantial differences remained in terms of the kinds of jobs women and men were working in by the 1990s. One half of employed women worked in three occupational groups (clerical and secretarial, personal and protective services, and sales). Together these occupations accounted for just 17 per cent of male employment. However, one of the most noticeable changes in women's employment over the had been their entry into professional and managerial employment. In 1971 these occupations accounted for just 12 per cent of women, a figure which had risen to 20 per cent by 1993.

## **Pay**

Some progress had been made in terms of women's pay relative to that of men. In women's earnings were on average 63 per cent that of men. By 1994, this proportion had risen to almost 80 percent. Much of this change occurred, however, in the years after the implementation of the SDA (sex discrimination act) in the mid-1970s, and from that point to the mid-1990s progress had been relatively limited.

## **An end to discrimination?**

Women's representation in a range of occupations had increased from the 1970s to the 1990s, with changes in some higher level jobs being particularly distinct (e.g. professional and managerial posts). This trend could not however be equated with an end to discrimination on the basis of gender. Evidence from a number of occupations showed that increasing equality of access to certain occupations did not mean that women and men progressed at the same rate within them. For example, by the 1990s over half of new entrants to the law were women, whereas they accounted for only seven per cent of High Court Judges. Even in occupations where women have a long history of access, they remained under-represented at the top: in teaching, women accounted for three quarters of full-time teachers but just 21 per cent of secondary school head teachers. The main barriers to women's equal participation in the labour market could be divided into two broad categories:

- practical barriers, such as access to affordable and flexible childcare and flexible working arrangements.

- cultural barriers, including the persistence of informal networks from which women are excluded, unease about women in positions of authority, and the continuation of working cultures in which women are not encouraged or expected to succeed.