

IV. Unemployment rates

A. Persistent gender gaps in unemployment rates

Women continue to face higher risk of unemployment than men at the global level, with large variations in the unemployment gap across regions (see figure 5). The global unemployment rate in 2015 is estimated at 5.5 per cent for men and 6.2 per cent for women, reversing gains that had been made prior to the crisis when the rate stood at 5.2 per cent for men and 5.9 per cent for women in 2007.

Northern, Southern and Western Europe and Northern America have suffered the most from the financial crisis in terms of unemployment. While in Northern America, however, unemployment peaked in 2010 and is reverting to the pre-crisis rates, Northern, Southern and Western European countries are finding it more difficult to return to the pre-crisis levels. Moreover, the initial phase of the 2007–2010 crisis, witnessed a reduction of gender unemployment gaps. In Northern America, the female unemployment rate has remained below the male unemployment rate, although the gap has narrowed rapidly in very recent years. In Northern, Southern and Western Europe, it has increased less than the male unemployment rate. This slower increase may be attributed to two main factors. First, the crisis initially hit male-dominated sectors such as construction (for example, in Ireland, Spain and the United States), resulting in a faster increase in the male unemployment rate and narrowed unemployment gender gaps. Second, previously inactive married women might have entered the workforce directly into employment to compensate for the loss of family income due to their spouses' unemployment (Khitashvili, 2013). During the second phase of the crisis, however, the adoption of austerity measures in many countries has resulted in the freeze or cut of public sector jobs, which are female-dominated, affecting women more heavily than men (Theodoropoulou and Watt, 2011; Rubery, 2013). In the ensuing recovery phase, in particular in Northern America, the gap started to widen again as the recovery was primarily taking place in those sectors dominated by men.

In Eastern Europe, in the run-up to the crisis, the male unemployment ratio has increased more than the female one. This faster increase may be attributed to the higher concentration of men in those sectors, such as construction and financial activities, which were more strongly hit by the financial crisis.⁹

Similarly, in Eastern Asia, female unemployment is lower than male unemployment. The negative female-male unemployment gap does not necessarily mean, however, that women in Eastern Asia are better off in the labour market. The negative unemployment gap is most likely attributable to the persistent high demand for low-wage female labour in export-oriented manufacturing.

In South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific, unemployment rates for both men and women are low compared to the world average, and since 2011 gender gaps have narrowed.

In Southern Asia unemployment gaps between men and women remain wide but appear to be showing signs of a moderate reduction in recent years. As Southern Asia was not affected significantly by the global downturn in trade, male unemployment rates did not increase as much as in other regions.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, the gap in unemployment, having widened over the period 1995–2000, has narrowed since the early 2000s. Latin American and Caribbean countries have made progress since the early 2000s in reducing unemployment rates, which were estimated at 5.4 per cent for men and 8.1 per cent for women in 2015. These improvements have been made possible by an increasing participation of women who benefited from strong job demand to shift from inactivity to employment.

The unemployment rates are above the world average for both women and men in Northern Africa, where the unemployment rate for women is almost twice that for men. A similar picture may be observed in sub-Saharan Africa,¹⁰ where unemployment rates are also well above the world average, but gender unemployment gaps remain narrower than in Northern Africa.

In the Arab States, while the male unemployment rate is very close to the world average, the unemployment rate for women is above 20 per cent, almost three times that for men.

9. The share of men employed in the construction sector and financial activities is respectively 11.6 per cent and 10.1 per cent, levels much higher than those of women (1.9 per cent and 2.0 per cent).

10. The ILO report *Global Employment Trends 2014* (ILO, 2014a) focuses on the risk of a jobless recovery. The manufacturing sector in sub-Saharan Africa has not been an engine of job creation and the rapidly growing oil and gas sectors have not been able to create a sufficient number of new jobs. Moreover, as pointed out by Rodrik (2013), sub-Saharan Africa countries, unlike those in Eastern Asia, have not been able to transform their farmers into export-oriented manufacturing workers.