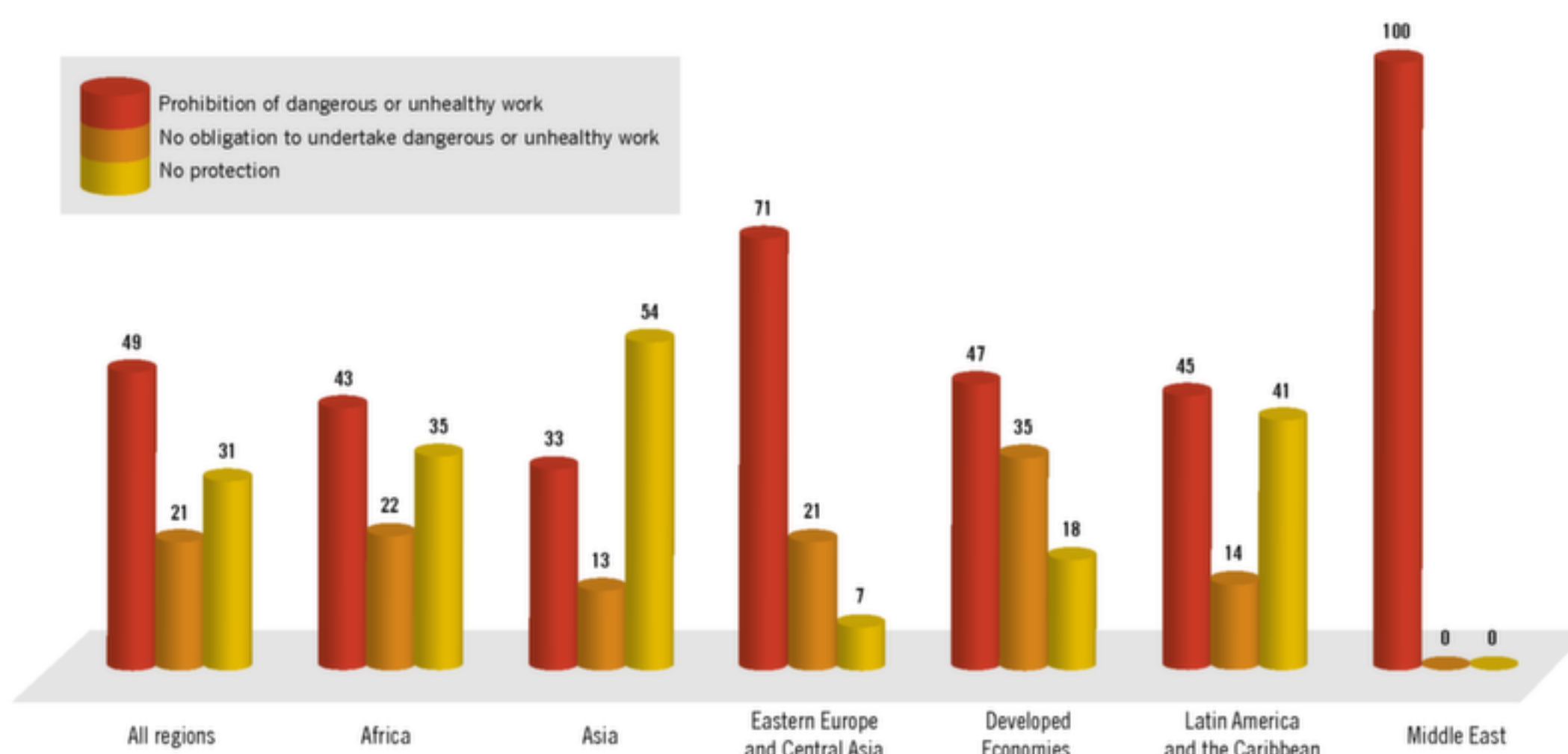


Figure 5.2 Statutory provisions on dangerous or unhealthy work, 2013 (160 countries) (%)

Source: ILO Working Conditions Laws Database – Maternity Protection. Available at: <http://www.ilo.org/travdatabase> [31 Mar. 2014].

Among the 78 countries with provisions forbidding hazardous work, around half (40) impose blanket prohibitions against employing all women in certain types of positions classified as dangerous out of concern for women's reproductive health or more general safety and health concerns. On the surface this may seem laudable; however, it may contribute to gender-based employment discrimination, ignoring working conditions that may pose dangers to male workers and failing to make them safe for all workers and/or denying women equal opportunity to access certain types of jobs. Examples of blanket prohibitions can be found in Costa Rica, for example, where, while women are not permitted to carry out work that is unhealthy, heavy or dangerous, no risk assessments are called for. In Burkina Faso, all women (but not men) are prohibited from work that is likely to affect reproductive functions as determined by law in line with the views of the advisory Work Commission. Examples of blanket provisions prohibiting women's employment exist in Colombia (where women may not work in mines, undertake dangerous or unhealthy work or take jobs with exposure to certain chemical radioactive or ionizing substances), Guinea (where women may not work in underground mines) and Tajikistan (where all women are prohibited from undertaking underground work, heavy work and work in harmful conditions).

According to Recommendation No. 191, measures should be taken specifically in respect of the following risks:

- (a) *arduous work involving the manual lifting, carrying, pushing or pulling of loads;*
- (b) *work involving exposure to biological, chemical or physical agents which represent a reproductive health hazard;*
- (c) *work requiring special equilibrium;*
- (d) *work involving physical strain due to prolonged periods of sitting or standing, to extreme temperatures, or to vibration.*

Recommendation No. 191, Paragraph 6(3)

With regard to arduous work, such as manual lifting, or carrying, pushing or pulling loads, many countries specify that this is prohibited for all women workers,¹³ for pregnant women¹⁴ or during the latter part of pregnancy.¹⁵ In other cases, prohibition continues for a period following the resumption of work after birth, especially if the mother is nursing.¹⁶

Many countries provide protection from work involving exposure to biological, chemical or physical agents.¹⁷ Countries vary in the types of agents to which they limit exposure and the individuals they protect. In Sweden, pregnant mothers are to be protected from exposure to lead. In Viet Nam, all women are to be