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## Discrimination at Work: Asia

InFocus Programme on Promoting the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work

International Labour Organization

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## Discrimination at Work: Asia

### Abstract

Fact sheet on discrimination in Africa, prepared by the ILO.

### Keywords

AIDS, Asia, color, disability, discrimination, employment, gender, global, nation, organization, race, right, religion, work, workplace, law, legislation, HIV, human, labor

### Comments

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## Discrimination at Work: Asia

### OVERVIEW

In the world's most populous and diverse region, gender inequality and discrimination on the basis of sex are, unfortunately, still widespread. This is despite some progress including an increase in women's participation in the labour market in some countries, and women moving in to some formerly male-dominated occupations. Women very often earn less than men for work of equal value, their jobs are less secure, and the glass ceiling still stops them from advancing. In manufacturing, women are predominantly grouped in semi-skilled assembly line operations, or in fragmented production jobs.

Migrant workers are another group likely to feel the effects of discrimination and women, often in domestic work, are especially vulnerable. Similarly, people of different ethnic backgrounds and others who are perceived to be foreign are often treated unfairly at the workplace and beyond. Members of ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples are also likely to suffer discrimination. Religious discrimination can also be a concern.

As the HIV/AIDS pandemic continues to grow in the region, discrimination against those who are affected by the virus is an increasing concern. And, although there have been some encouraging developments in employment for people with disabilities, there is a great deal to be done.

All forms of discrimination are often linked with poverty. Discrimination can worsen poverty, and make it last longer. In turn, poverty can worsen discrimination at work, depriving people of opportunities to develop the skills the market demands and excluding them from social networks.

### KEY FACTS

- Over time, women's share of managerial and administrative jobs has risen - but remains significantly below that of men. An ILO survey of the female share of administrators' positions shows that in Asia and the Pacific women held just 15.3 per cent of these jobs - below the rate for Latin America and the Caribbean ( 32.8%); the Middle East and North Africa (28.1%); transition economies (32.9%) and developed countries (27.6%).
- In many cases, lack of understanding of the principles of equal pay for work of equal value and of the methods that can be used to make objective appraisals of jobs lead to ongoing inequalities in pay. In India, for example, wage classification of skilled and unskilled workers has sometimes placed women in the unskilled, lower paid wage category and men into the skilled, higher paid wage category, irrespective of the content or skill level of the job.
- Worldwide, some 42 million men, women and children are estimated to be living with HIV/AIDS, including 25 million workers aged 15-49. Discrimination against workers who are known or thought to have HIV/AIDS can come from co-workers, customers, service suppliers and employers. It ranges from pre-employment testing resulting in denial of

hiring to breaches of medical confidentiality that can lead to dismissal, or pressure to resign.

- In Nepal, some 20 per cent of the population is Dalit. As many as 80 per cent of this group live below the poverty line and their share of arable land is one per cent. Unequal distribution of resources along caste lines, restrictions on free choice of occupations and exploitative production relations are key factors.
- Across South-East Asia, ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples are at a disadvantage relative to other sectors of the national population. In Viet Nam, for example, the poverty rate in the country as a whole decreased from 58 per cent to 37 per cent between 1993 and 1998. However, poverty reduction efforts have largely bypassed ethnic minorities as the poverty rates of the regions where they are concentrated, such as the northern and central highlands, remained high at 73 per cent and 91 per cent respectively. In Australia, the high concentration of unemployment in many aboriginal families, lower educational attainments and biased local demand explain the high proportion of discouraged workers among indigenous youth.

#### **COMBATING DISCRIMINATION**

- In Pakistan over the past decade the Employers' Federation of Pakistan has carried out a number of action-oriented programmes to support small enterprise development for women, including training programmes on Start and Improve Your Business targeting women entrepreneurs, especially in rural areas.
- In the Republic of Korea gender equality is promoted through collective bargaining guidelines given to affiliates by the Federation of Korean Trade Unions and the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions.
- In Australia the number of large companies adopting diversity management approaches to improve competitiveness is growing steadily.
- In India and in Viet Nam, the ILO has run information campaigns, training and institutional capacity-building to support gender equality. In Viet Nam, there was a focus on improving collection of data disaggregated by sex, while in India, a campaign in the state of Maharashtra reached out to women working in both the formal and informal economies.

#### **WHAT IS THE ILO'S ROLE?**

The ILO works with governments, employers' and workers' organizations to promote this basic principle and right. Eliminating discrimination is also a vital step towards achieving social justice and reducing poverty, both at the heart of the ILO's concerns. The ILO has developed legal frameworks in the form of two Conventions dealing with discrimination [*Equal Remuneration Convention, (No. 100), and the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention (No. 111)*]. In terms of the ILO's promotional and awareness-raising work, the elimination of discrimination is one of the four priority areas covered by the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work.