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## A fifth of the world's workers toil for over 48 hours a week: ILO,

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**NBW DELHI** A study by the International Labour Office estimates that one in five workers around the world — or over 600 million persons - are still working more than 48 hours a week, often to make ends meet.

The study, "Working Time Around the World: Trends in working hours, laws and policies in a global comparative perspective/" says an estimated 22 per cent of the global workforce or 614.2 million workers, are working "excessively" long hours.

Shorter hours, the report says, could have positive consequences such as benefits to workers' health and family lives, reduced accidents at work spots, as well as greater productivity and equality between the sexes.

The study, however, says that a considerable number of short-hours workers in developing and transition countries may be underemployed, and thus more likely to fall into poverty.

The study spotlights working time in over 50 countries. In terms of those countries with highest incidence of long working hours for 2004-2005 (defined as more than 48 hours a week), Peru topped the list at 50.9 per cent of workers, the Republic of Korea 49.5 per cent, Thailand 46.7 per cent, and Pakistan 44.4 per cent.

In developed countries, where working hours are typically shorter, the United Kingdom stood at 25.7 per cent, Israel 25.5 per cent, Australia 20.4 per

cent, Switzerland 19.2 per cent and the United States 18.1 per cent.

Attempts to reduce the hours in these countries had been unsuccessful for various reasons, including workers working long hours to make ends meet and widespread use of overtime by employers in an effort to increase their enterprises' output under conditions of low productivity.

Another element of concern is what the report calls a clear "gender gap" in working time. The study says men tend to work longer average hours than women worldwide.

The report concludes that this is likely due to their bearing the primary responsibility for "unpaid" work in households and providing care for the family members, not only children but also the elderly and individuals suffering from diseases such as HIV/AIDS.

Expanding services sector and informal employment, two of the hallmarks of today's global economy, are also major sources of longer working hours.

Working hours in the services sector and its sub-sectors tend to be the most varied; and these hours are particularly long in industries such as wholesale and retail trade, hotels and restaurants, transport, storage and communications, all of which also involve shift work and "unsocial" hours.

Women in developing and transition economies are resorting to informal self-employment as means to reconcile their work and family responsibilities.