

Comparative civilian labor force statistics, 10 countries: a visual essay

Jennifer L. Raynor

For many years, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) has regularly prepared international comparisons of labor force statistics that are used to assess relative economic performance across countries. This essay presents 10 charts of key labor market indicators, using data from the semiannual publication *Comparative Civilian Labor Force Statistics, Ten Countries*, available on the Internet at www.bls.gov/fls/. Charts cover the United States, Canada, Australia, Japan, and six European countries—France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden, and the United Kingdom—the same countries covered in the full publication. The data have been adjusted to U.S. concepts insofar as possible and are based mainly on labor force surveys.

Data are presented on three main components of the labor market: unemployment, employment, and labor force. Unemployment rates are the key measure of labor market performance in academic analyses and the media, and are presented first. Labor force and employment data show characteristics of labor markets in different ways and are presented next. Trends in employment distribution across economic sectors provide a snapshot of broad employment patterns over time and are presented last.

Among the 10 countries, the United States had a relatively low unemployment rate overall, no gender gap in unemployment, and relatively low teenage joblessness, compared with most of the European countries. U.S. labor force participation and employment-population ratios for both men and women were comparatively high. U.S. women's share of the labor force has consistently ranked among the highest. Trends in the distribution of employment across sectors are similar for all countries, with agriculture and manufacturing declining, and the

services sector increasing, in share of total employment over time.

All of the charts cover the most recent year available, which is 2006; however, for the last three charts, the most recent year available for France and the Netherlands is 2005. In addition, some charts highlight changes over time. Trends are shown back to the mid-1960s to highlight the long-term evolution of women's share of the labor force and sectoral shifts in employment.

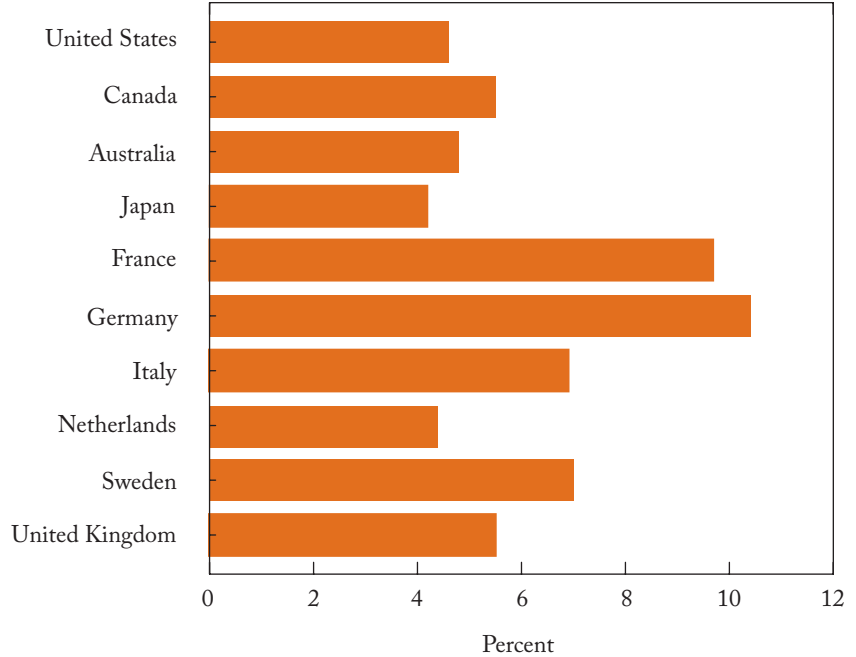
In the trend charts, there are various breaks in the time series for most of the countries, but they generally have a small impact. However, for Germany, a large break in time-series data occurred in 1991, reflecting the inclusion of the former East Germany. The data cannot be considered comparable across the break year, because entirely different economies are represented; therefore, data on Germany are not included in any of the trend charts. Also, the U.S. concept of "industry" includes employment in manufacturing, mining, and construction. For the charts showing employment by sector, "industry" is disaggregated into two categories: "manufacturing" and "other industry," with the latter category constituting the sum of employment in mining and construction. Note, however, that "other industry" is excluded from the chart presenting the average annual growth rate for employment by sector, because employment in mining and construction is relatively low and the trends show little change over time. Therefore, the chart in question does not precisely represent the total economy.

For more information on U.S. concepts, adjustments, and breaks in series, see the technical notes of the source document.

This essay was prepared by Jennifer L. Raynor, an economist in the Division of Foreign Labor Statistics, Bureau of Labor Statistics. E-mail: raynor.jennifer@bls.gov.

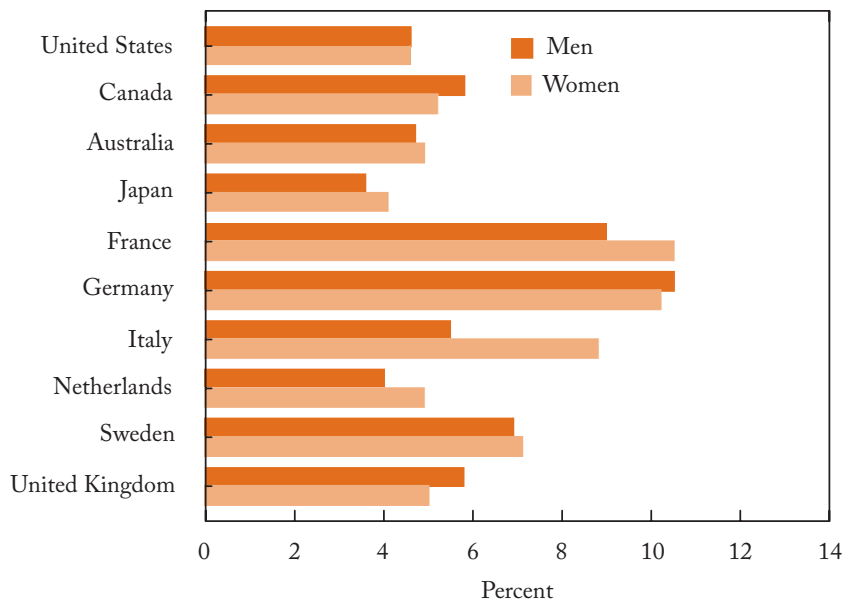
1. Unemployment rates, 2006

- The highest unemployment rates, by far, were in Germany and France. Japan had the lowest unemployment rate, followed by the Netherlands, the United States, and Australia.
- Five of the 6 European countries had higher unemployment rates than the United States.

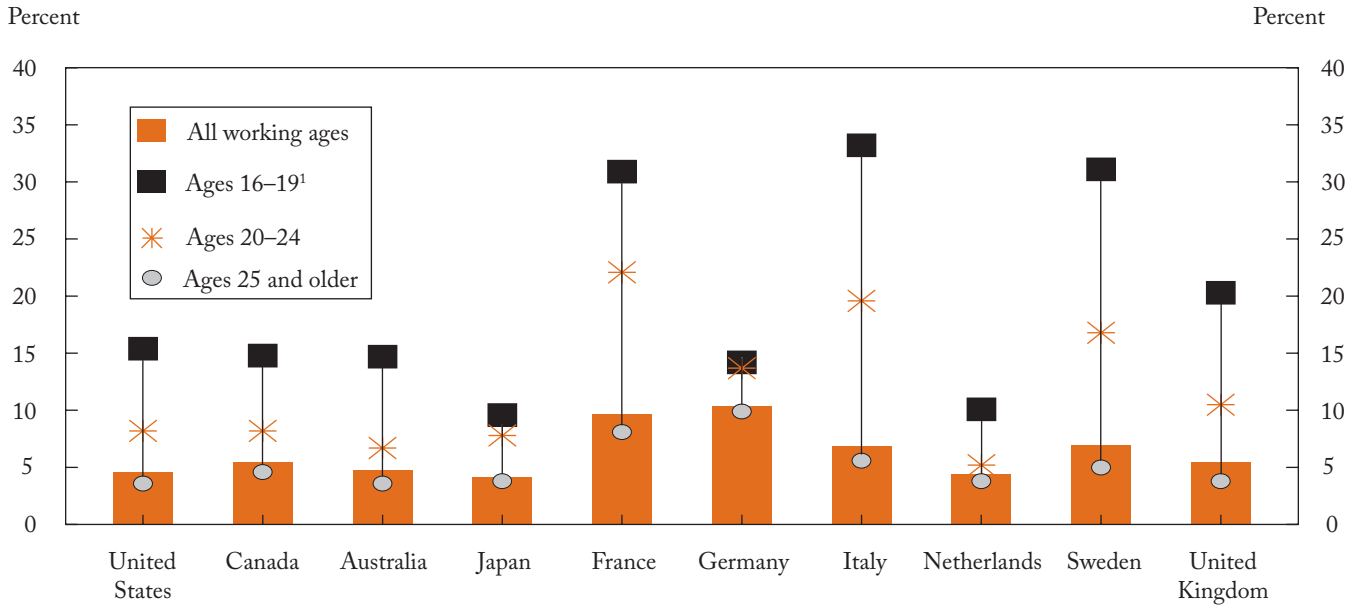


2. Unemployment rates, by sex, 2006

- The United States was the only country where the unemployment rate for women was equal to the rate for men.
- In 6 of the 10 countries, women had higher unemployment rates than men. Italy had the largest gap in unemployment rates, by far, with the rate for women more than 3 percentage points higher than the rate for men.



3. Unemployment rates for youths, 2006

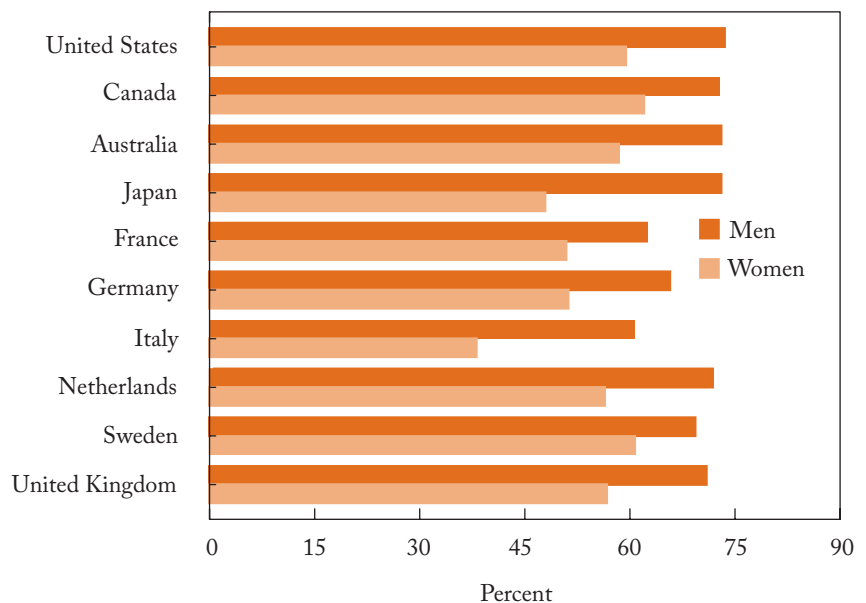


¹ Ages 15-19 for Australia, Japan, Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands.

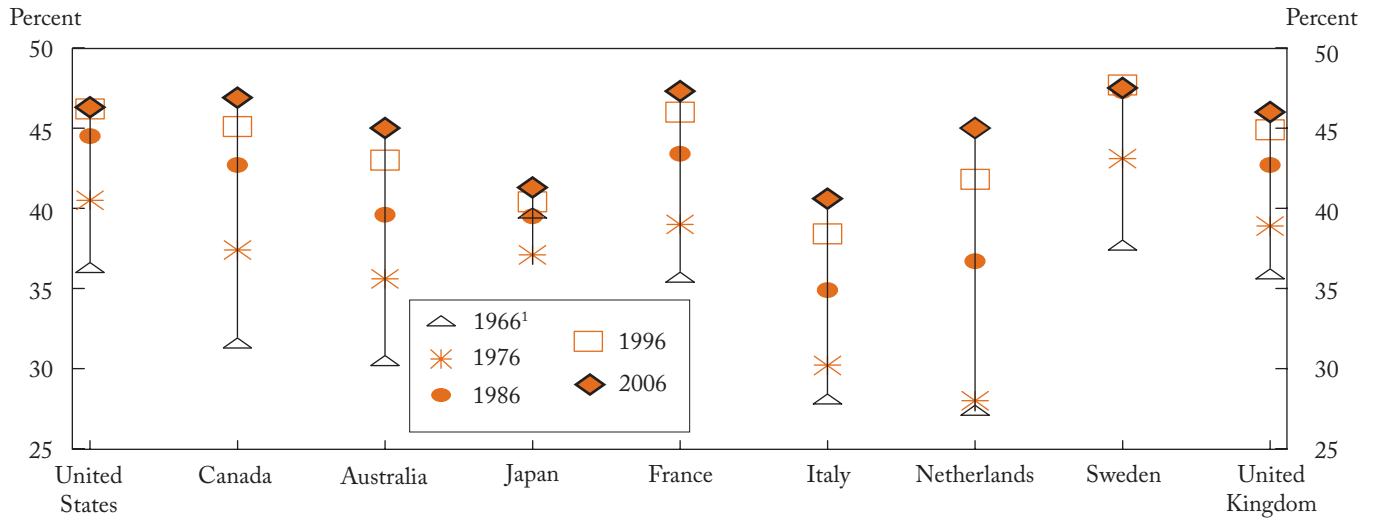
- Unemployment rates for teenagers and 20- to 24-year olds were higher than the rates for their adult counterparts in all countries.
- The largest gaps in unemployment rates between teenagers and adults were in Italy, Sweden, and France. Germany had the smallest gap in unemployment rates between these age groups.

4. Labor force participation rates, by sex, 2006

- Across countries, labor force participation rates for women varied more than rates for men. In Sweden and Australia, women participated in the labor force at about the same rate as U.S. women. Italian women had, by far, the lowest participation rate.
- Participation rates for men were at least 70 percent in the majority of countries. The lowest rates for men, about 60 percent, were found in Italy and France.



5. Women's share of the labor force, selected years, 1966–2006

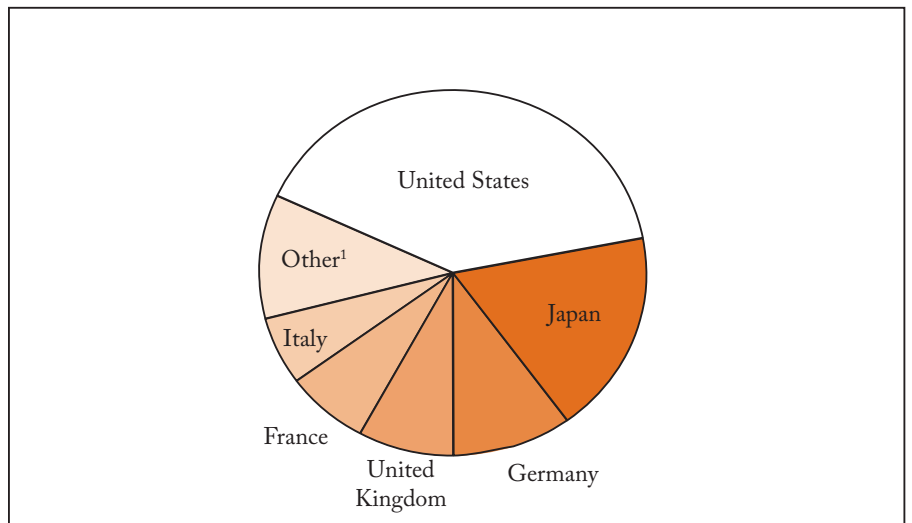


¹ 1973 for the Netherlands.

- Women's share of the labor force increased dramatically in all countries except Japan over the period. Gains were the greatest between 1966 and 1986 and have slowed since then for these countries.
- Overall, the Netherlands experienced the largest increase in women's share of the labor force, about 18 percentage points; Japan experienced the smallest increase, by far, in women's share of the labor force over the period, about 2 percentage points.

6. Distribution of employment among 10 countries, 2006

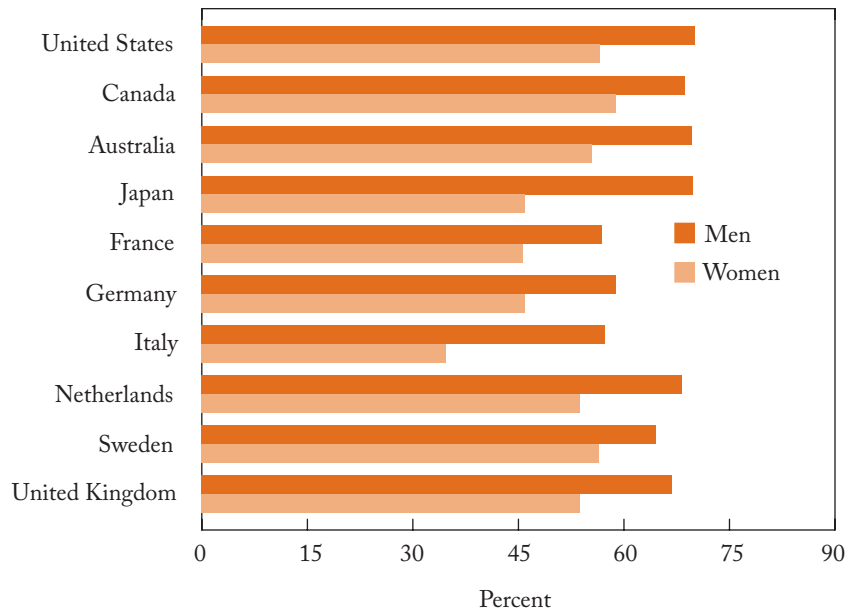
- The United States had, by far, the highest share of employment, constituting 40 percent of employed persons among the countries compared.
- Japan had the next-largest share of employment, 18 percent.



¹ Employment share for Canada, Australia, the Netherlands, and Sweden combined.

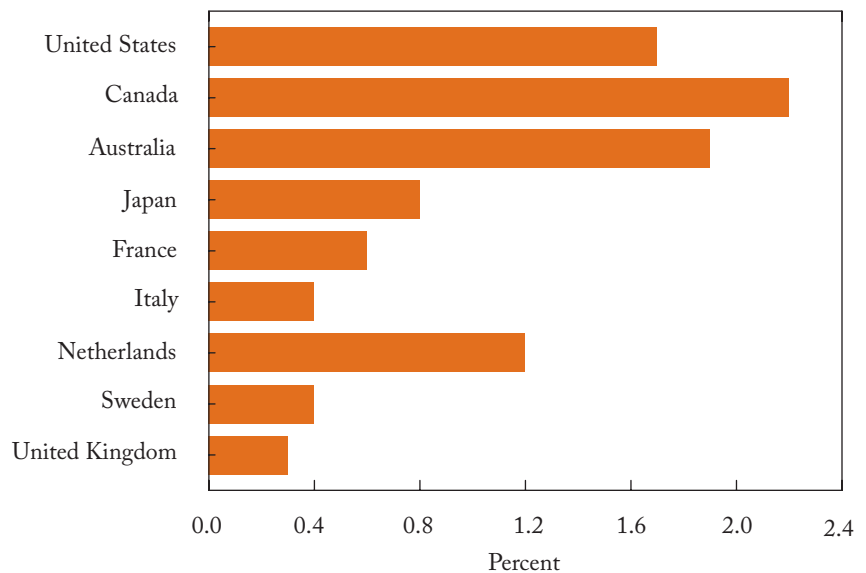
7. Employment-population ratios, by sex, 2006

- In the majority of countries, the employment-population ratio for men was at least 65 percent. France, Italy, and Germany had the lowest proportion of the male working-age population employed.
- Italy had the lowest employment-population ratio for women, with slightly more than one-third of the female working-age population employed.



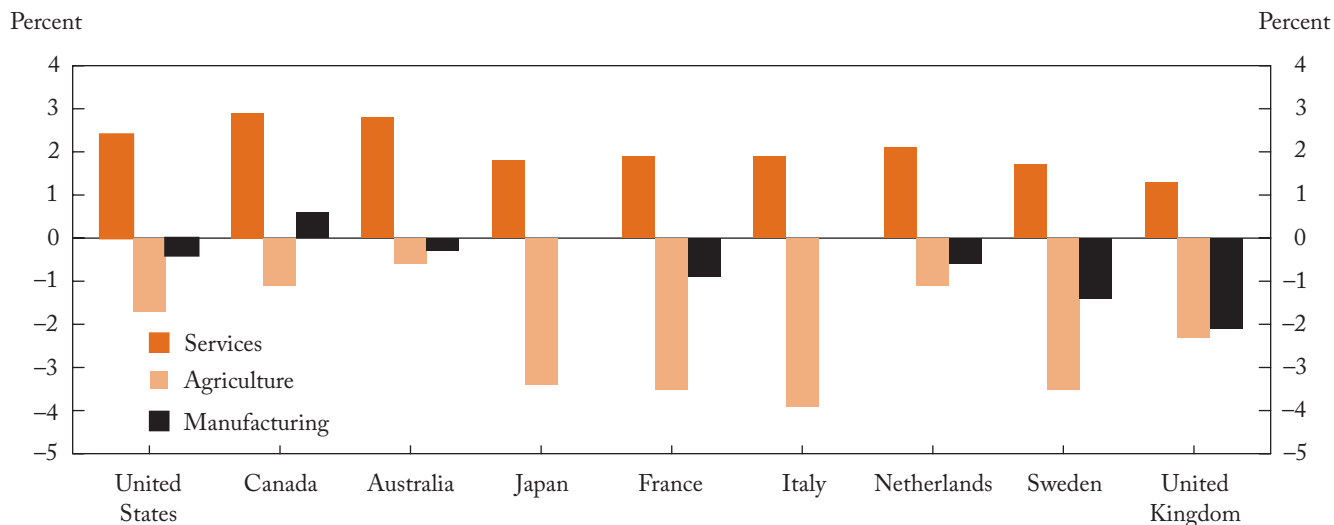
8. Average annual growth rates for employment, 1965–2006¹

- Employment increased over the period in all countries, but the rates of growth varied widely.
- Canada, Australia, and the United States had the highest growth rates for employment. Employment growth was lowest in the United Kingdom, Italy, and Sweden.



¹ 1965–2005 for France and the Netherlands.

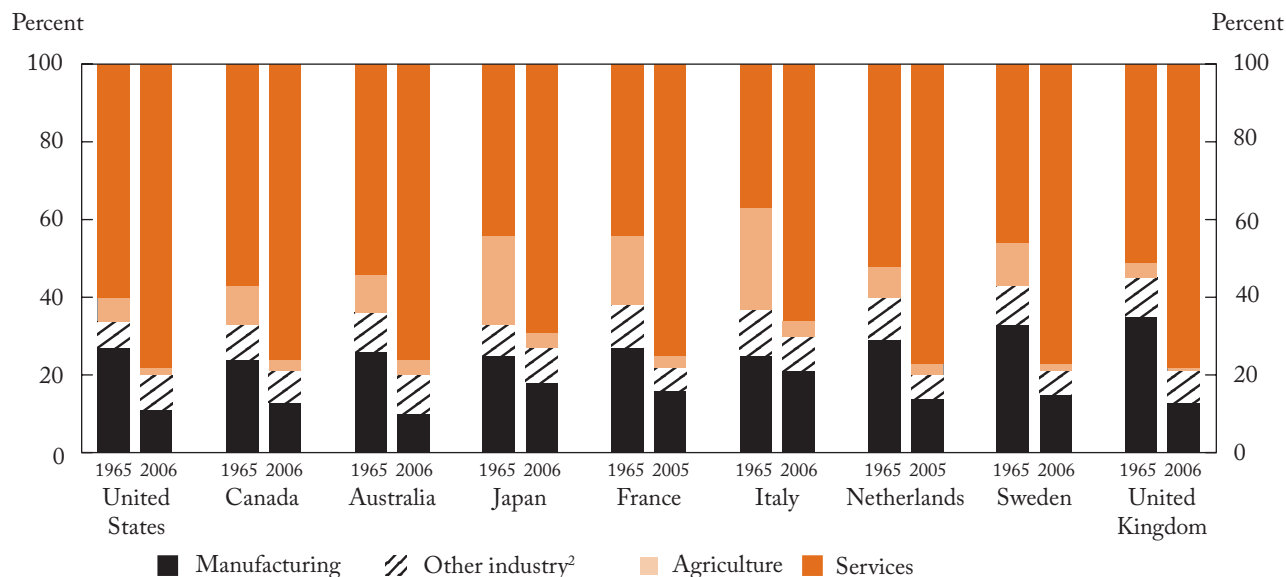
9. Average annual growth rates for employment, by sector, 1965–2006¹



¹ 1965–2005 for France and the Netherlands. Employment growth rates shown do not represent the total economy, because employment in mining and construction is excluded.

- Among the sectors shown, the services sector was the sole or primary source of employment growth in all countries.
- Eight of the nine countries experienced large relative declines in agricultural employment. Only Canada experienced growth in manufacturing employment, and Japan and Italy had virtually no change in this sector.

10. Employment, by sector, as a percent of total employment, 1965 and 2006¹



¹ 2005 for France and the Netherlands.

² Other industry comprises mining and construction.

- Employment distribution by sector changed dramatically over the period. In all countries, the services sector held an increasing share of total employment, and the share of other sectors declined.
- France, Sweden, and Italy had the largest increases in the services sector share of employment. The largest declines in manufacturing share occurred in the United Kingdom, Sweden, the United States, and Australia.