

Private Sector

Early in 2011, the Confederation of Indian Industries (CII) published the results of a caste census done among a selection of its members throughout India. The first of its kind, the survey shows that Dalits are seriously underrepresented in the workforce in many states compared to their share of the population. While the census shows regional differences with the highest proportionate representation of Dalits in the most industrialised state Tamil Nadu, with a concentration of textile industry, and the lowest in Bihar, there is no correlation between industrialisation and employment of Dalits.

The survey does not differentiate between the types of jobs Dalits fill, which would have given a more accurate picture of the ability of Indian business to give equal opportunities to Dalits. As documented most recently by Professor Ashwini Deshpande in "The Grammar of Caste" published in 2011, Dalits are still disadvantaged in the modern economy solely because of their caste status both in terms of recruitment discrimination at the work place and possibilities of career advancement.

The caste census is, however, a sign of cautious opening of corporate India to look inward, in terms of caste discrimination. The CII also followed up with an encouragement to its members to employ more Dalits, which is a much needed process, as caste discrimination and exploitation of Dalits in the private sector was again documented in a number of reports in 2011.

The ILO Global Report 2011 on Equality at Work highlights caste discrimination as a labour issue facing Dalits in South Asia, with specific references to India, Nepal and Bangladesh. For some time, IDSN has discussed with the ILO in India about the publication of a Dalit resource guide for companies and investors in India. It will reflect current debates on reservations, employment of Dalits and tools to eliminate caste discrimination in business operations, drawing in current developments in India, international and national legislation and existing tools and remedies to counter caste discrimination. Efforts to complete the guide were undertaken in 2011 and it will be published in 2012 as a joint product of the ILO India and IDSN.

After lobbying by the Dalit Network Netherlands (DNN), a majority in the Dutch parliament adopted a motion on discrimination of Dalits requesting the government to promote that "combating caste-based discrimination becomes an integral part of the CSR policy of Dutch and European companies, including in their supplychain, who are active in countries where caste-based discrimination