



Women’s job market participation stagnating at less than 50% for the past 25 years, finds UN report

No country has achieved gender equality, and violence against women and girls remains rampant globally

New York, 20 October – Less than 50% of working-age women are in the labour market, a figure that has barely changed over the last quarter of a century, according to [a new UN report](#) launched today. Unpaid domestic and care work falls disproportionately on women, restraining their economic potential as the COVID-19 pandemic additionally affects women’s jobs and livelihoods, the report warns.

The World’s Women 2020: Trends and Statistics compiles 100 data stories that provide a snapshot of the state of gender equality worldwide. Presented on an interactive portal, the report analyses gender equality in six critical areas: population and families; health; education; economic empowerment and asset ownership; power and decision-making; and violence against women and the girl child as well as the impact of COVID-19.

“Today, in 2020, a quarter of a century since the adoption of the [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#) at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, efforts to achieve equal power and access to resources for women and men in the public and private spheres and equal rights for women worldwide are ongoing,” said UN Secretary-General António Guterres. “No doubt, we have made significant progress. Yet no country can claim to have achieved gender equality, and the current COVID-19 crisis threatens to erode hard-earned gains.”

Unpaid domestic and care work holding women back

While unpaid domestic and care work has intensified for both men and women during the COVID-19 pandemic, women continue to do the lion’s share. On an average day, women globally spend about three times as many hours on unpaid domestic and care work as men (4.2 hours compared to 1.7). In Northern Africa and Western Asia that gender gap is even higher, with women spending more than seven times as much as men on these activities.

This lopsided distribution of unpaid domestic and care work prevents women from participating in the labour market. In 2020, only 47% of women of working age participated in the labour market, compared to 74% of men – a gender gap that has remained relatively constant since 1995. In Southern Asia, Northern Africa and Western Asia, the number is even lower, with less than 30% of women participating in the labour market. And the pandemic is expected to exacerbate these gender disparities, as many women work in the subsectors hardest hit by COVID-19 and lockdown measures, including in paid domestic work, accommodation and food services, and the retail trade. Women also make up over 70% of workers in the health sector, therefore facing higher infection risks than men in the workplace.

No cracks in the glass ceiling

In terms of power and decision making, women held only 28% of managerial positions globally in 2019 – almost the same proportion as in 1995. And only 18% of enterprises surveyed had a female Chief Executive Officer in 2020. Among Fortune 500 corporations only 7.4%, or 37 Chief Executive Officers, were women. In political life, while women’s representation in parliament has more than doubled globally, it has still not crossed the barrier of 25% of parliamentary seats in 2020. Women’s representation among cabinet ministers has quadrupled over the last 25 years, yet remains well below parity at 22%.

Women's participation in education on the rise worldwide

The world has made substantial progress in achieving universal primary education, with girls and boys participating equally in primary education in most regions. While school closures related to COVID-19 are likely to set back progress on access to education, evidence shows that girls, once they have access to schooling, tend to do better than boys in terms of academic achievement. In tertiary education, women outnumber men, and enrolment is increasing faster for women than for men.

However, women continue to be underrepresented in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics, representing only slightly more than 35% of the world's STEM graduates. Women are also a minority in scientific research and development, making up less than a third of the world's researchers.

Violence against women and girls remains a global issue

During COVID-19 lockdowns, many women and girls have been isolated in unsafe environments where they are at heightened risk of experiencing intimate partner violence. Around one third of women worldwide have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner; and 18% have experienced such violence in the past 12 months. In the most extreme cases, violence against women is lethal: globally, an estimated 137 women are killed by their intimate partner or a family member every day.

While female genital mutilation is becoming less common in some countries, at least 200 million girls and women alive today have been subjected to this specific form of violence across Africa and the Middle East where the practice is most prevalent.

In a sign that attitudes are changing, women's acceptance of being beaten by their partners decreased in almost 75% of countries with data over the past seven years. But laws to address domestic violence are not yet universally available, with only 153 countries having such laws. Gaps are largest in Northern Africa, Western Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, where 43% and 35% of countries respectively have not passed such laws.

Reliable and timely data are critical

Reliable, timely and disaggregated data are critically needed, particularly now as the international community responds to the COVID-19 pandemic, to effectively measure progress in achieving gender equality. Closing the data and evidence gaps through regular collection and use of gender statistics is crucial.

"I call on all countries to accelerate efforts towards the empowerment of women and girls and towards improving the evidence base to monitor progress: data gaps in the coverage of key gender topics need to be filled," said Liu Zhenmin, UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs. "Timeliness and comparability of data over time and across countries need to be improved, and data disaggregation and dissemination by age, sex, location and other key variables need to become a priority in order to fully measure and address intersecting inequalities, respond to crises, and ensure gender equality by 2030."

About the World's Women report

Produced by the Statistics Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, [the World's Women report](#) has been produced every five years since 1990 and provides the latest data on the state of gender equality worldwide.

Full report with all data: bit.ly/worldswomen2020

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