

Executive Summary

At the 1995 United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, Governments adopted the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which “seeks to promote and protect the full enjoyment of all human rights and the fundamental freedoms of all women throughout their life cycle.” Guided by these principles, *the World’s Women 2015: Trends and Statistics* presents the latest statistics and analyses of the status of women and men in areas of concern identified by the Platform for Action. It also reviews progress towards gender equality over the past 20 years. The publication is the sixth edition in a series.

The World’s Women 2015 comprises eight chapters covering critical areas of policy concern: population and families, health, education, work, power and decision-making, violence against women, environment, and poverty. In each area, a life-cycle approach is introduced to reveal the experiences of women and men during different periods of life—from childhood and the formative years, through the working and reproductive stages, to older ages.

The statistics and analyses presented in the following pages are based on a comprehensive and careful assessment of a large set of available data from international and national statistical agencies. Each chapter provides an assessment of gaps in gender statistics, highlighting progress in the availability of statistics, new and emerging methodological developments, and areas demanding further attention from the international community. In addition to the data presented in the chapters, a wide selection of statistics and indicators at the global, regional and country levels can be found in the Statistical Annex of this report available in a dedicated website hosted by the United Nations Statistics Division (<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/gender/worldswomen.html>). The report’s main findings are summarized below.

Population and families

Worldwide, men outnumber women by some 62 million. More baby boys are born than baby girls, a by-product of enduring natural selection processes. The slight male advantage in numbers at birth disappears progressively during childhood and young adulthood, owing to generally higher male than female mortality. Consequently, women outnumber men in older age groups. Women represent 54 per cent of the population aged 60 and over and 62 per cent of those aged 80 and over. The number of years lived as a person aged 60 and over is higher for women than for men by about three years. Noticeable differences are also found in the living arrangements of older women and men. In the later stages of life, women are much more likely than men to be widowed and to live alone. This has to be taken into account by programmes and services targeted to older persons, particularly in the context of the increasing share of older persons in the population (population ageing) that is taking place everywhere.

Marriage patterns have also changed over the past two decades. Both women and men are marrying later, a reflection of increases in education levels, later entry into the labour force, greater economic independence of women and a rise in informal unions. Women continue to marry a few years earlier than men, at age 25 on average, compared to 29 for men. The rate of child marriage—a fundamental violation of human rights that limits girls’ opportunities for education and development and exposes them to the risk of domestic violence and social isola-

tion—has declined slightly. Still, almost half of women aged 20 to 24 in Southern Asia and two fifths in sub-Saharan Africa were married before age 18.

Globally, the total fertility rate reached 2.5 children per woman in 2010–2015, a decline from three children in 1990–1995. While fertility fell slightly in countries with high and medium fertility levels, it rose slightly in some countries with low fertility. Increasingly, having children is becoming delinked from formal marriage, as reflected by the increase in the share of extra-marital births. As a result of this trend and a rise in divorce rates, one-parent households, among which single mothers with children make up more than three quarters, are becoming common in both developing and developed regions.

Health

Medical and technological improvements over several decades have extended the lives of both women and men, who are expected at present to live an average of 72 and 68 years, respectively. An analysis of mortality data across age groups and regions shows that women and men tend to die of different causes. In all regions, biological factors, along with gender inequality and gender norms, influence sex differences in health trajectories throughout the life cycle.

Adolescence and young adulthood should be a time of general good health with low mortality rates. Yet in developing regions, complications linked to pregnancy and childbirth, as well as sexually transmitted infections, particularly HIV, continue to take a heavy toll on the lives of adolescent girls and young women. This is due not only to underdeveloped health systems that are unable to address women's needs, but also to gender issues. Poor access to information and education, early marriage, and lack of decision-making power among girls who are married or in relationship increase their exposure to sexually transmitted infections, unwanted pregnancies and the risk of unsafe abortion. Traditional gender expectations also exert a harmful effect on men. Adolescent boys and young men often take up habits and risky behaviours that are associated with images of masculinity. During adolescence and young adulthood, road injuries, interpersonal violence and self-harm are the leading causes of death among young men in both developed and developing regions. Injuries are also a leading cause of death among young women in developed regions, although the corresponding mortality rates are much lower than those of young men.

For women of reproductive age, the biological functions of pregnancy and childbirth create additional health needs. Overall, reproductive and maternal health has improved considerably over the past two decades. A growing proportion of women are using contraceptives and the demand for family planning is increasingly being satisfied. Worldwide, the number of maternal deaths declined by 45 per cent between 1990 and 2013. Still, in sub-Saharan Africa, only half of pregnant women receive adequate care during childbirth. In 2014, 83 per cent of pregnant women in developing regions had at least one antenatal care visit, an improvement of 19 percentage points since 1990. However, only 52 per cent of pregnant women had the recommended minimum of four antenatal care visits.

At older ages, non-communicable diseases such as cardiovascular disease, cancer, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and diabetes are the more common causes of death. Over the entire life course, risk factors contributing to these diseases have a clear gender component. For instance, men smoke tobacco and drink alcohol to a much greater extent than women: 36 per cent of men aged 15 and over smoke and 48 per cent drink, compared to 8 and 29 per cent of women, respectively. However, large numbers of women have adopted these unhealthy habits, particularly in developed regions. Moreover, while the prevalence of obesity has increased among both sexes, women appear to be slightly more affected (14 per cent of women aged 20 and over are

obese compared to 10 per cent of men). Mental disorders, in particular dementia, are among the major causes of disability in later life. In 2013, an estimated 44 million people globally were living with dementia, a number that is expected to double every 20 years. Women are more affected than men due to women's greater longevity and the typically late onset of dementia. Women also represent the majority of informal caregivers of people with dementia—mostly in their role as partners, daughters and daughters-in-law.

Education

The past two decades have witnessed remarkable progress in participation in education. Enrolment of children in primary education is at present nearly universal. The gender gap has narrowed, and in some regions girls tend to perform better in school than boys and progress in a more timely manner. However, in some developing countries that have not reached gender parity, the disparities against girls are stark. Today, 58 million children of primary school age are out of school worldwide. More than half of these are girls and nearly three quarters live in sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia.

Secondary school enrolment has increased but remains lower than primary school enrolment. Although gender disparities in access to secondary education have been reduced, they remain wider and more prevalent than at the primary level—to the advantage of boys in some countries and of girls in others. Gender disparities are even broader at the tertiary level. Female participation in tertiary education overall has increased globally and currently surpasses male participation in almost all developed countries and in half of developing countries. However, women are clearly underrepresented in fields related to science, engineering, manufacturing and construction. Women are also underrepresented in the more advanced degree programmes, especially in science-related fields, resulting in fewer women than men in research. Women account for 30 per cent of all researchers—an increase compared to previous decades but still far from parity.

Progress in educational access has yielded improvements in adult literacy and educational attainment. Illiteracy among youths has been eradicated in many regions of the world, and the vast majority of young women and men presently have basic reading and writing skills. However, an estimated 781 million people aged 15 and over remain illiterate. Nearly two thirds of them are women, a proportion that has remained unchanged for two decades. Illiteracy rates are highest among older people and are higher among women than men. At age 65 and over, 30 per cent of women and 19 per cent of men are illiterate. The vast majority of older persons are illiterate in Northern Africa, sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia, where gender gaps are also noted. As societies experience population ageing, it becomes increasingly important that literacy and other lifelong learning programmes enable women and men to become more self-reliant, work as long as desired and remain socially engaged at older ages.

Work

As a group, women work as much as men, if not more. When both paid and unpaid work such as household chores and caring for children are taken into account, women work longer hours than men—an average of 30 minutes a day longer in developed countries and 50 minutes in developing countries. Gender differentials in hours spent on domestic work have narrowed over time, mainly as a result of less time spent on household chores by women and, to a smaller extent, by an increase in time spent on childcare by men.

Only 50 per cent of women of working age are in the labour force, compared to 77 per cent of men. The gender gap in labour force participation remains especially large in Northern Africa,

Western Asia and Southern Asia. Overall participation in the labour market is only slightly lower in 2015, compared to 1995. However, women and men aged 15 to 24 years have experienced a decline in participation, which is likely linked to expanding educational opportunities at the secondary and tertiary levels. Older women aged 25 to 54 increased their labour force participation in most regions, while that of men in the same age group stagnated or declined slightly across regions. The proportion of women aged 55 to 64 in the labour force has risen in most regions, reflecting changes in the statutory retirement age and pension reforms.

Women are more likely than men to be unemployed or to be contributing family workers, which usually implies that they have no access to monetary income. In Oceania, sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia, between 30 and 55 per cent of employed women are contributing family workers, about 20 percentage points higher than men in the same regions. Women are also more likely than men to be employed part-time. However, while this can help them to better balance work, household and childrearing responsibilities, part-time jobs are often associated with lower hourly wages, less job security and less training and promotion opportunities than full-time employment. Women are also significantly underrepresented in decision-making positions such as legislators, senior officials and managers, but are overrepresented as domestic workers, positions that are characterized by low pay, long hours and lack of social protection. Across all sectors and occupations, women on average earn less than men; in most countries, women in full-time jobs earn between 70 and 90 per cent of what men earn. Many developed countries show a long-term decline in the gender pay gap, but the trend is mixed in recent years.

Over the past 20 years, an increasing number of countries have adopted legislation providing maternity and paternity benefits, enabling workers to meet their responsibilities outside work. Over half of all countries currently offer at least 14 weeks of maternity leave and 48 per cent of countries have provisions for paternity leave. These measures, however, often exclude workers in specific sectors or categories of employment, such as paid domestic workers, own-account and contributing family workers, casual and temporary workers, and agricultural workers.

Power and decision-making

Inequality between women and men tends to be severe and highly visible in power and decision-making arenas. In most societies around the world, women hold only a minority of decision-making positions in public and private institutions. Advances over the past two decades are evident in all regions and in most countries, but progress has been slow.

Currently, only one in five members of lower or single houses of parliament worldwide is a woman. A few factors contribute to this blatant underrepresentation. Women are seldom leaders of major political parties, which are instrumental in forming future political leaders and in supporting them throughout the election process. Gender norms and expectations also drastically reduce the pool of female candidates for selection as electoral representatives, and contribute to the multiple obstacles that women face during the electoral process. The use by some countries of gender quotas has improved women's chances of being elected. Yet, once in office, few women reach the higher echelons of parliamentary hierarchies.

Women are largely excluded from the executive branches of government. Female Heads of State or Government are still the exception, although the number has increased slightly (from 12 to 19) over the past 20 years. Similarly, only 18 per cent of appointed ministers are women, and are usually assigned to portfolios related to social issues. Women are also underrepresented among senior-level civil servants, and seldom represent their governments at the international level.

Women's representation among corporate managers, legislators and senior officials remains low, with only about half of countries having shares of women in managerial positions of 30 per cent

or more, and none reaching or surpassing parity. The gender compositions of executive boards of private companies are nowhere near parity—meaning that the “glass ceiling” remains a reality for the vast majority of the world’s women.

Violence against women

Women across the world are subjected to physical, sexual, psychological and economic violence, regardless of their income, age or education. Such violence can lead to long-term physical, mental and emotional health problems. Around one third of women worldwide have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner or sexual violence by a non-partner at some point in their lives. Intimate partner violence is the most common form of violence, peaking during women’s reproductive years in both developed and developing countries. Prevalence declines with age but still persists among older women. In the most extreme cases, violence against women can lead to death; around two thirds of victims of intimate partner or family-related homicides are women.

In the majority of countries, less than 40 per cent of the women who experienced violence sought help of any sort. Among those who did, most looked to family and friends as opposed to the police and health services. In almost all countries with available data, the percentage of women who sought police help, out of all women who sought assistance, was less than 10 per cent. Women’s reluctance to seek help may be linked to the widespread acceptability of violence against women. In many countries, both women and men believe that wife-beating is justified in certain circumstances. However, attitudes towards violence are beginning to change. In almost all countries with available information for more than one year, the level of both women’s and men’s acceptance of violence has diminished over time.

More than 125 million girls and women alive today have been subjected to female genital mutilation across countries in Africa and the Middle East where this specific form of violence against women is concentrated. Prevalence tends to be lower among younger women, indicating a decline in this harmful practice. However, it remains commonplace in a number of these countries, with overall prevalence rates of over 80 per cent.

Environment

Access to clean water and modern energy services has improved everywhere, but remains low in some developing regions, including Oceania, sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia. Poor access to both of these services has a huge impact on health and survival, while also increasing the workloads of both women and men. About half of the population living in developing regions lack access to improved drinking water sources in their homes or on the premises, with the task of water collection falling mostly on the shoulders of women. In settings where women and men do not have equal access to health services, as in some parts of Asia, inadequate water, sanitation and hygiene may result in more female than male deaths. Women in developing countries are also more exposed than men to indoor pollutants resulting from the use of firewood and other solid fuels, due to their role in cooking and caring for children and other family members.

The impact of extreme climate events and disasters also has a gender dimension. Although limited, available data suggest that age and sex are significant factors in mortality resulting from natural disasters. Their contribution varies by country and by type of hazard. For instance, a higher risk of death among women than men was noted mainly in the context of recent tsunamis and heatwaves. Gender roles and norms can also play a role in the aftermath of disasters. In some

post-disaster settings, women's access to work and their involvement in decision-making related to recovery efforts and risk-reduction strategies remain more limited than men's.

Environmental protection, and consequently sustainable development, require that both women and men become actively involved through day-to-day activities and are equally represented in decision-making at all levels. More and more people are engaging in environmental protection activities, including recycling and cutting back on driving to reduce pollution; women tend to be more involved than men, which is somewhat linked to the gender division of domestic labour. However women's involvement in local and national policy formulation and decision-making in natural resources and environment management remains limited.

Poverty

Gender disparities in poverty are rooted in inequalities in access to economic resources. In many countries, women continue to be economically dependent on their spouses. Lower proportions of women than men have their own cash income from labour as a result of the unequal division of paid and unpaid work. In developing countries, statutory and customary laws continue to restrict women's access to land and other assets, and women's control over household economic resources is limited. In nearly a third of developing countries, laws do not guarantee the same inheritance rights for women and men, and in an additional half of countries discriminatory customary practices against women are found. Moreover, about one in three married women from developing regions has no control over household spending on major purchases, and about one in 10 married women is not consulted on how their own cash earnings are spent.

Gender disparities in poverty are more visible with the diversification of family arrangements, including an increase in one-person households and one-parent families. Working-age women in developed and developing countries are more likely to be poorer than men when they have dependant children and no partners to contribute to the household income or when their own income is non-existent or too low to support the entire family. At older ages, women in developed countries are more likely than men to be poor, particularly when living in one-person households. The difference in poverty rates between women and men, including among lone parents with dependant children and among older persons, is narrowing in some countries while it remains persistent in others. This points to the need for social protection systems that take into account the emerging diversification of family arrangements.

Moving forward on gender statistics

Availability of data for gender analysis has increased

Relevant, reliable and timely gender statistics—cutting across traditional fields of statistics, including education, health and employment as well as emerging ones, such as climate change—are essential to understanding the differences between women and men in a given society. Such information is critical to policy- and decision-makers and to advancing progress towards gender equality.

The World's Women 2015 has benefited from the growing availability of gender statistics. Because more countries are conducting household surveys, in addition to regular population censuses, the majority of them can produce at present data disaggregated by sex for basic indicators on population, families, health, education and work. Many more surveys are presently available on critical areas such as violence against women: 89 countries collected data on this topic through household surveys during the period 2005–2014 compared to only 44 in the previous decade. Furthermore, gender statistics based on administrative records are becoming more widely available. For instance, statistics on women's representation in lower or single houses of parliament are available for 190 countries in 2015, an increase from 167 countries in 1997.

... yet major gaps still exist in terms of availability and comparability

Despite improvements over time, gender statistics are still far from satisfactory and many gaps exist in terms of data availability, quality, comparability and timeliness, even for basic indicators. For example, according to the latest data reporting at the international level, only 46 countries were able to provide reliable statistics on deaths disaggregated by sex, based on civil registration systems, at least once for the period 2011–2014. Less than half of all developing countries have information disaggregated by sex on labour force participation, unemployment, status in employment, and employment by occupation for at least two points over the period 2005–2014.

Measuring gender equality in areas such as environment and poverty is even more challenging. Links between gender and environment have been assessed based on qualitative or small-scale quantitative studies and cannot be extrapolated to a whole society or across countries. Household-level data on poverty, measured traditionally on the basis of either income or household consumption, do not account for the distribution of resources within households. Thus they do not allow for an assessment of poverty at the individual level, which is needed for the production of relevant gender statistics.

The comparability of gender statistics at national and international levels is also problematic, mostly due to differences in sources, definitions, concepts and methods used to obtain the data. For example, the comparability of data on earnings is affected greatly by the data source used. Establishment surveys sometimes exclude workers in small enterprises and in the informal sector. Labour force surveys, although they cover all types of workers, have to rely on self-reported wages, which may introduce reporting errors. Comparability of data is also affected by the concepts and methods used to produce them, including how questions are phrased. For instance, the way in which women are interviewed about violence may affect their willingness

and capacity to disclose their experience, undermining the quality of the data produced and also their international comparability.

Even when information is collected, it is often not tabulated and disseminated to allow for meaningful gender analysis

Yet another shortcoming is the fact that the information collected is often not exploited sufficiently for gender analysis. Data are frequently tabulated and disseminated in categories that are not relevant or are too broad to adequately reflect gender issues. For example, assessing gender segregation in the labour market is often hampered by the lack of employment data in detailed occupational categories. Another example of the underutilization of existing data relates to information collected through time-use surveys. Although data are most often collected by detailed categories of activities, published data on time use are often limited to broad categories only. Separate categories for time spent on collecting water and firewood, for example, are not often available, making it difficult to assess the impact of these specific activities on the work burden of women and men.

New statistical standards and methods have been developed

New methodological guidelines have been produced by international organizations, with the aim to improve the availability, quality and international comparability of gender statistics. The most recent guidelines include the *Handbook on Integrating a Gender Perspective into Statistics* (2015); *Guidelines for Producing Statistics on Violence against Women* (2014); *Methodological Guidelines for the Gender Analysis of National Population and Housing Census Data* (2014); and the *Handbook on Developing Gender Statistics: A Practical Tool* (2010). Another ongoing effort, undertaken by the Evidence and Data for Gender Equality (EDGE) project, is developing methodologies to measure asset ownership and entrepreneurship from a gender perspective. The project is being implemented by the UN Statistics Division in collaboration with UN-Women. Furthermore, the International Labour Organization is developing statistical guidelines to collect data on work. The guidelines reflect the definition adopted by the 2013 International Conference of Labour Statisticians, encompassing all forms of work, including own-use production of goods and services, which is particularly relevant for gender analysis.

Another achievement towards the standardization of methods and harmonization of indicators is the 2013 agreement by the United Nations Statistical Commission to use the *Minimum Set of Gender Indicators*, consisting of 52 quantitative and 11 qualitative indicators, as a guide for national production and international compilation of gender statistics.

... but additional guidance is needed

Statistical methods and gender statistics are still lagging behind in many subject areas including: decision-making positions in local government and in the private sector; poverty based on individual-level data; the quality of education and lifelong learning; the gender pay gap; social protection measures, including pensions and unemployment benefits; universal health coverage; and the impact of natural disasters. Producing relevant, accurate and timely gender statistics remains a challenge for many countries. Initiatives to develop statistical standards and national capacity, particularly on integrating a gender dimension into official statistics, should therefore be undertaken on a priority basis.