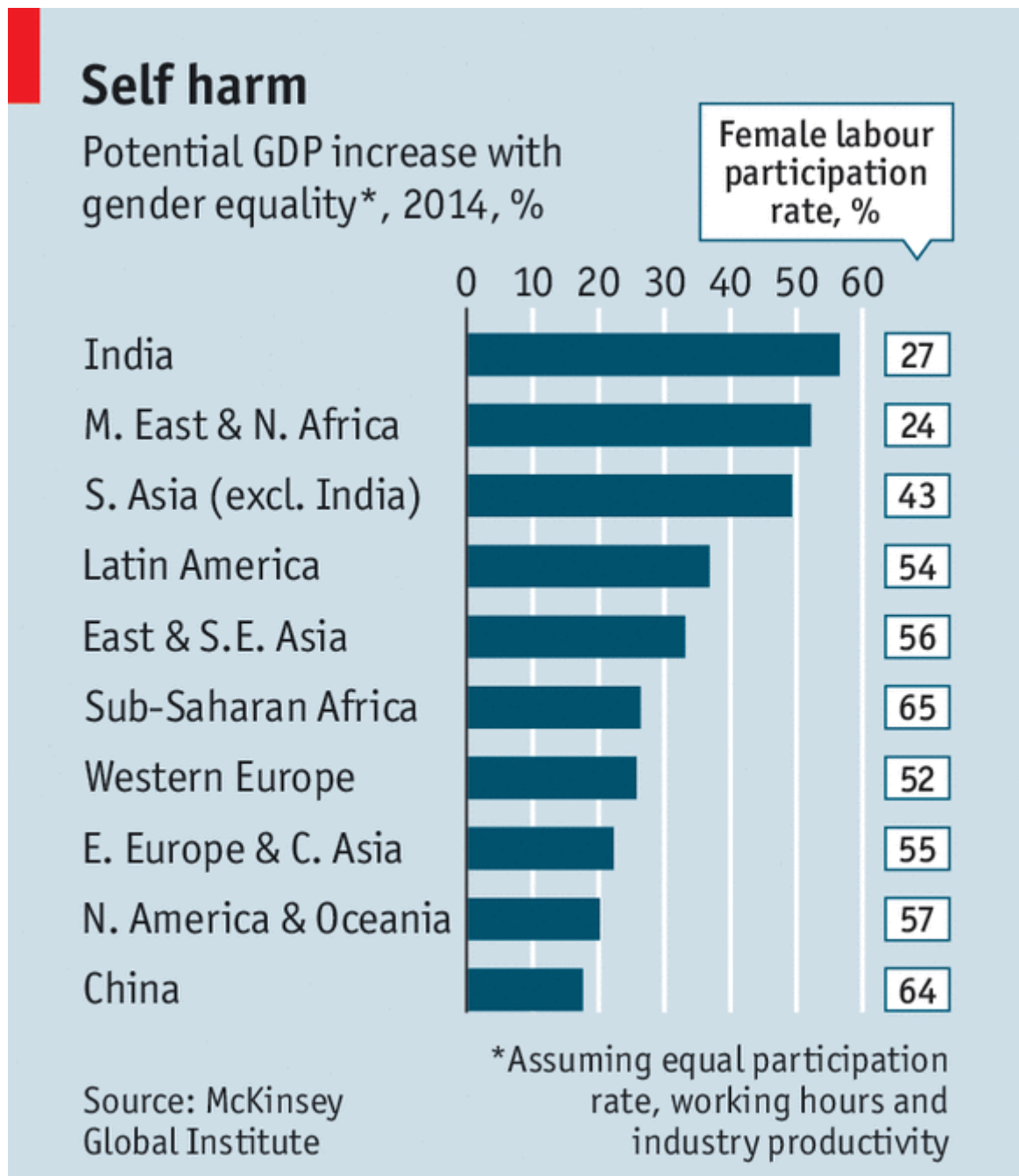


**The
Economist****Women and work****The power of parity****The world would be a much richer place if more women had paying jobs**

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JOAN RIVERS, a comedian who died last year, did not let chores get in the way of a career in showbusiness. “I hate housework,” she joked. “You make the beds, you do the dishes, and six months later, you have to start all over again.”

An escape from unpaid drudgery into paid work seems a distant prospect for millions of women. In South Asia, for instance, women carry out up to 90% of unpaid care work, including cooking, cleaning, and looking after children and the elderly. They are far less visible than men in work outside the home. Women make up less than a quarter of the paid workforce in India and account for just 17% of GDP, a measure of output that excludes unwaged work. By contrast, women contribute 41% of GDP in China.

A new report from the McKinsey Global Institute (MGI), a think-tank, underlines how gender inequality in work and society is itself distributed unequally across the world. The number-crunchers at McKinsey calculated gender-parity scores—gauges of how women fare at work and in society in comparison with men—covering over 90% of the world’s population. They reckon South Asia (India excluded) is the global laggard with a score of 0.44 (a score of one represents perfect parity between the sexes). Richer parts of the world do a lot better but are still a long way from complete gender equality. North America and Oceania, the best-ranked region, has a score of 0.74.

It is hard to put a number on the social costs of this but the McKinsey folk take a stab at estimating the loss of economic output that goes with it. Other studies find that countries could boost their GDP by 5-20% if women’s participation in the workforce was on a par with men’s. But that captures only part of the lost output. Even in rich bits of the world, where women are close to half the paid workforce, they tend to work fewer hours than men and in jobs with lower productivity, not to mention lower pay as a result of pure discrimination. If the gender gaps in participation, hours worked and productivity were all bridged, the world economy would be \$28.4 trillion (or 26%) richer, McKinsey reckons (see chart). The potential gains are proportionately greater in places where fewer women are in paid work. India, for instance, could be 60% richer.

A more realistic target is for countries to close their gender gaps at the rate achieved by the country in their region with the best recent record in this respect. That would add \$12 trillion to global output by 2025, according to McKinsey’s calculations, other things being equal (which they almost certainly will not be).

The policies that would quicken a closing of the gender gap at work, such as keeping girls at school for longer and providing better legal protections for women, are in the gift of government. Women whose level of education is on a par with men are more likely to find well-paid jobs in technical professions. They are also more likely to share unpaid work more equitably with men—or, at least, to be able to claim, as Rivers did, that the dullest chores can wait for another six months.

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