LABOUR MARKET BARRIERS FOR WOMEN - INFOSTORY

Structure – 3rd Draft, 03/10/2017

Based on World Employment and Social Outlook – Trends for Women 2017 (Authors: Steven Tobin, Stefan Kühn, Sheena Yoon, Richard Horne, RESEARCH Department)

# Title

Barriers for women in labour markets

# Introduction

[INTRODUCTION PAGE]

Around the world, finding and keeping a job is much tougher for women than it is for men. Even when women actively want to work, they are more likely to be unemployed. When they are employed, they tend to work low-quality jobs in vulnerable conditions. With little improvement forecast for the near future, these persistent gender gaps pose a big problem for the global community.

Before we can solve a problem, we need to identify its root cause. Explore this InfoStory to get the data behind the trends and learn more about the different barriers that hold women back from decent work.

# A global gap

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When someone is employed or actively looking for employment, they are said to be participating in the labour force.

The current global labour force participation rate for women is just over 49 per cent. For men, it’s 76 per cent. That’s a difference of nearly 27 percentage points, with some regions facing a gap of more than 50 percentage points.

Button: > 1.1. [INTERACTIVE MAP] Explore the gender gap by region

## Labour force participation gender gap by region

[INTERACTIVE MAP]

*Use data from* Table 1, pg. 6 *to create an interactive map where users can explore the labour force participation gender gap by region.*

# Unemployed or vulnerable

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Women who want to work have a harder time finding employment than men. This problem is particularly marked in Northern Africa and the Arab States, where unemployment rates for women exceed 20 per cent.

When women do find employment, they are less likely to be in secure paid jobs compared to their male counterparts. And while vulnerable forms of employment are widespread in emerging and developing countries for both women and men, gender is a major determinant of vulnerability.

Button: > 2.1. [STATIC MAP] Explore the unemployment gap by region.

Button: > 2.2. [FIVE TAB MODULE] Types of vulnerable employment affecting women

## 2.1. Unemployment gap by region

[INTERACTIVE MAP]

*Use data from* Table 2, pg. 9 *to create an interactive map where users can explore the unemployment gender gap by region.*

## 2.2. Vulnerable employment for women

[FIVE TAB MODULE]

**Shorter hours**

Women in paid jobs are more likely to work fewer hours than men, but usually not by choice. In developing countries, rates of “time-related underemployment” among women can be as high as 50 per cent.

**Unpaid work**

On average, women spend nearly three times more hours on unpaid household and care work than men. This invisible labour often eats into the time they could spend doing paid work. Overall, when both paid and unpaid work are taken in account, women frequently work longer hours than men.

**Contributing family workers**

Nearly 15 per cent of employed women – compared with 5.5 per cent of employed men – are contributing family workers (i.e. self-employed in a business owned or operated by a relative). Such workers are likely to be poorly paid (if at all) and living in poverty, with no contract and little access to social protection. This gap is even more pronounced in developing countries.

**Social protection access**

Women often do not have access to social protection. When they do, their entitlements are lower, due to low pay, shorter contribution periods and higher incidences of informal work. This problem is particularly prominent when it comes to pensions: on average, the proportion of women above retirement age receiving a pension is nearly 11 percentage points lower than that of men.

**Maternity coverage**

Most countries provide some measure of maternity protection for employed women. Despite this, nearly 60 per cent of women do not have a statutory right to maternity leave, and almost 66 per cent are not legally entitled to paid maternity leave. This lack of coverage has a major impact on women’s ability to hold down steady employment or stops them from returning to work after childbirth.

# Why does the gender gap matter?

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The freedom to work – by choice, in conditions of dignity, safety and fairness – is integral to human welfare. Guaranteeing that women have access to this right is an important end in itself.

From an economic perspective, reducing gender gaps in labour force participation could substantially boost global GDP. The regions with the largest gender gaps would see huge growth benefits. Many developed countries would also see their average annual GDP growth increase, which is significant during times of near-zero economic growth.

Button: > 3.1. [INTERACTIVE POP-UP] The growth benefits of reducing gender gaps

3.1. Effects of reducing gender gaps in the labour market by 2025[STATIC POP-UP] *Use data from* Table 4, pg. 19 *to illustrate GDP growth by region.*

# What women want

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ILO and Gallup teamed up to ask women across the globe if they preferred to work paid jobs, care for their families or do both. The data show that a staggering 70 per cent of women – regardless of their employment status – prefer to work in paid jobs.

Button: > 4.1. [VIDEO] WATCH: How do people feel about women and work?

Button: > 4.2. [INTERACTIVE CHART] Explore the data by region

## 4.1. How do people feel about women and work?

[Video featured in press release](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=13&v=hzZxFvoZeAY)

## 4.2. Explore the data by region

[Interactive graph](http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/multimedia/maps-and-charts/enhanced/WCMS_546424/lang--en/index.htm)

# The power of women’s preference

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In countries at all levels of economic development, a woman’s personal preference is the key factor in determining whether she will seek out and engage in paid work. However, this preference is heavily influenced by socio-economic constraints and pressure to conform to traditional gender roles.

Button: > 6.1. [STATIC POP-UP] Women’s labour market participation: preferences and constraints

Button: > 6.2. [VIDEO] – Drilling down: The methodology explained

## 5.1. Preferences of women and constraints on their participation in the labour market, 2016 (per cent of respondents)

` [STATIC POP-UP] *Use data from* Table 5, pg. 22

## 5.2. ILO researchers explain their work

Video, two minutes.

# Persistent barriers

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**Work-family balance**

Across the board, women report that the biggest barrier to paid work is the struggle to balance it with family responsibilities. Work such as childcare, cleaning and cooking are necessary for a household’s welfare – and therefore for the wellbeing of societies as a whole – but women still shoulder the brunt of this often invisible and undervalued workload.

**Marital status**

In developed and emerging economies, women who have a spouse or a partner are less likely to be employed in a paid job or actively looking for one. However, in developing countries the reverse is true and economic necessity means that married women are more likely to work.

**Lack of transport**

In developing countries, women reported that limited access to safe transport was the greatest obstacle to their participation in labour markets. All too often, women risk facing harassment and even sexual assault on their daily commute.

**Lack of affordable care**

Globally, the lack of affordable care for children or family members prevents women from participating in the workforce. In fact, it decreases a woman’s participation chances by almost 5 per cent in developing countries, and 4 per cent in developed countries.

# ­­Pressure to conform

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There are still a lot of people who believe it is wrong or unacceptable for a woman to have a paid job: 20 per cent of men and 14 per cent of women, to be exact. Many women reported that their immediate family disapproved of their decision to work outside the home. The role of women on the labour market that their social environment considers acceptable is driven by the social norms that are rooted in the history, religion and institutions of a society, and that are constantly evolving.

But despite pressure to conform to traditional gender roles, many women continue to break down barriers by joining the workforce, taking on leadership positions and starting their own businesses.

Button: > 8.1. [VIDEO] – Breaking barriers

## 8.1 VIDEO

*Compilation video, two minutes*

# Bridging the gap

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**Achieving equal pay**

The principle of equal remuneration for work of equal value must be protected in law and promoted in practice. Improved wage transparency and gender-neutral job evaluation can help achieve this end, in addition to strengthening existing systems such as minimum wages and collective bargaining.

**Tackling occupational segregation**

Women tend to be over-represented in occupations that are perceived as unskilled and “low-value” – particularly in caring professions. Preconceptions about the value of certain types of work can be challenged through education and public outreach. It is also essential to ensure that workers in undervalued sectors are paid fairly based on their skills and responsibilities, not on stereotypes.

**Eliminating discrimination**

Many countries have explicit legislation against gendered discrimination and harassment at work. While this is an important first step, it’s not enough to eliminate the problem completely. Additional measures, such as dissuasive sanctions, specialized equality bodies and public awareness campaigns are key to changing attitudes and social norms.

**Promoting work–family balance**

Many women and men worldwide have no access to adequate parental protection and other basic social protection measures. While quality, family-friendly working conditions are important for all workers, policy reforms should acknowledge that the bulk of unpaid family and household work is currently performed by women.

**Creating quality care jobs**

Care professions – in which women are over-represented – have a long history of poor regulation and protection. Promoting decent work for care professionals, including domestic and migrant workers, is essential. At the same time, over-reliance on unpaid care work should be reduced and redistributed through public services and social infrastructure development.

**Guarding against downturns**

Due to their increased likelihood of being in vulnerable or informal employment, women are disproportionately impacted by economic crises and weakened social protection systems. Safeguards against the effects of economic downturns need to be complemented by inclusive, gender-responsive policies, including efforts to formalize jobs in the informal economy.

# Bridging the gap

*Conclusion text, approx. 50 words*

The data is clear: women want to be in paid employment, but a persistent set of socio-economic barriers keep them out of the workforce. Identifying and quantifying these barriers allows us to develop smarter policy responses for removing them. Ultimately, closing gender gaps in the labour force is not just good for women and their households, but for the global economy as a whole.

Button: [Link to WESO Trends for Women 2017] LEARN MORE