

Executive summary



International
Labour
Organization

WOMEN AT WORK

TRENDS

2016

Women at Work

Trends 2016

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The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is an opportunity to address persistent gender inequalities at work

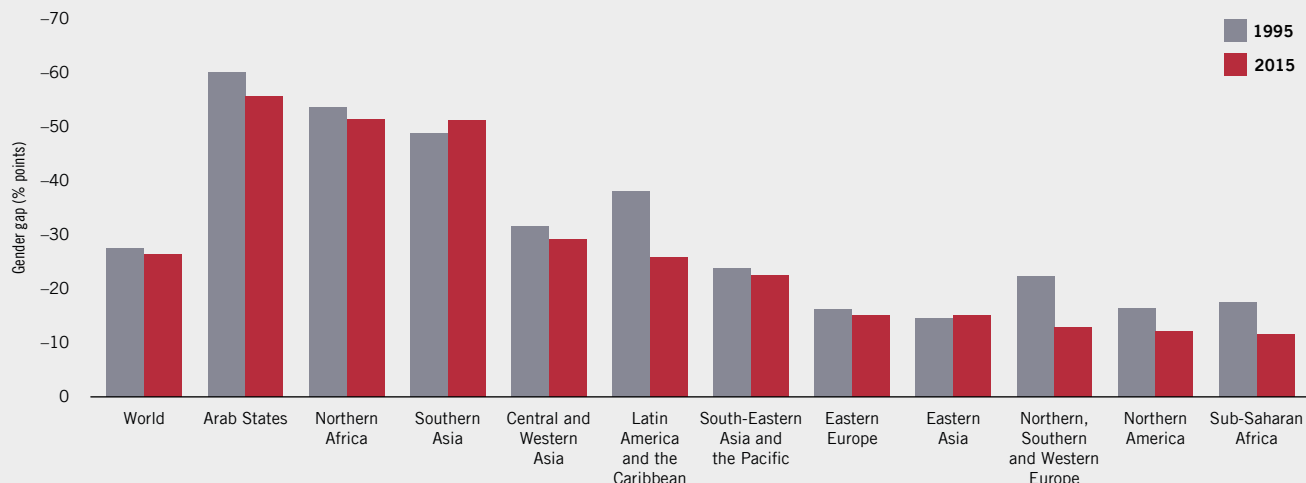
Throughout their working lives, women continue to face significant obstacles in gaining access to decent work. Only marginal improvements have been achieved since the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, leaving large gaps to be covered in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by the United Nations in 2015. Inequality between women and men persists in global labour markets, in respect of opportunities, treatment and outcomes. Over the last two decades, women's significant progress in educational achievements has not translated into a comparable improvement in their position at work. In many regions in the world, in comparison to men, women are more likely to become and remain unemployed, have fewer chances to participate in the labour force and – when they do – often have to accept lower quality jobs. Progress in surmounting these obstacles has been slow and is limited to a few regions across the world. Even in many of those countries where gaps in labour force participation and employment have narrowed and where women are shifting away from contributing family work and moving to the services sector, the quality of women's jobs remains a matter of concern. The unequal distribution of unpaid care and household work between women and men and between families and the society is an important determinant of gender inequalities at work.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development reaffirmed the universal consensus on the crucial importance of gender equality and its contribution to the achievement of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. More jobs – and quality jobs – for women, universal social protection and measures to recognize, reduce and redistribute unpaid care and household work are indispensable to delivering on the new transformative sustainable development agenda, which aims to reduce poverty (Goal 1) and inequalities (Goal 10), to achieve gender equality (Goal 5) and to promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all (Goal 8).

Gender gaps in labour force participation and employment rates declined only marginally

Between 1995 and 2015, the global female labour force participation rate decreased from 52.4 to 49.6 per cent. The corresponding figures for men are 79.9 and 76.1 per cent, respectively. Worldwide, the chances for women to participate in the labour market remain almost 27 percentage points lower than those for men (figure I). In regions where gender gaps in participation have been high, they have remained so. In Southern Asia and Eastern Asia, the gap has grown even wider. Women's lower participation rates translate into fewer employment opportunities, with little variation over time, which negatively affects women's earning capacity and economic security. In 2015, the gender gap in the employment rate amounted to 25.5 percentage points in women's disfavour, only 0.6 percentage points less than in 1995. It is only in Northern, Southern and Western Europe that employment gaps have closed marginally as women continue to enter the labour market in higher numbers in that region – but also as a result of the reduction of men's employment rates due to the economic downturn. In addition, the global financial crisis led to a temporary reduction in gender gaps in employment in Northern America. Overall, however, change has been virtually absent.

Figure I Gender gaps in labour force participation rates by region, 1995 and 2015



Note: The gender gap is measured as the difference between women's and men's labour force participation rates. The data cover 178 countries and the same countries are covered in figures II and IV.

Source: ILO calculations based on ILO, *Trends Econometric Models*, November 2015.

Young women face the highest risk of unemployment

Women are more likely to be unemployed than men, with global unemployment rates of 5.5 per cent for men and 6.2 per cent for women. With the exception of Eastern Asia, Eastern Europe and Northern America, male unemployment rates are lower than female unemployment rates in all other regions of the world, with the highest gender unemployment gaps found in Northern Africa and the Arab States. In Northern, Southern and Western Europe, and in Northern America, the gender unemployment gaps have narrowed as a result of the financial crisis, largely under the impact of the economic downturn on the male-dominated sectors and the rising employment rates for married women, who in some contexts are entering employment to compensate for losses in family income caused by male unemployment.

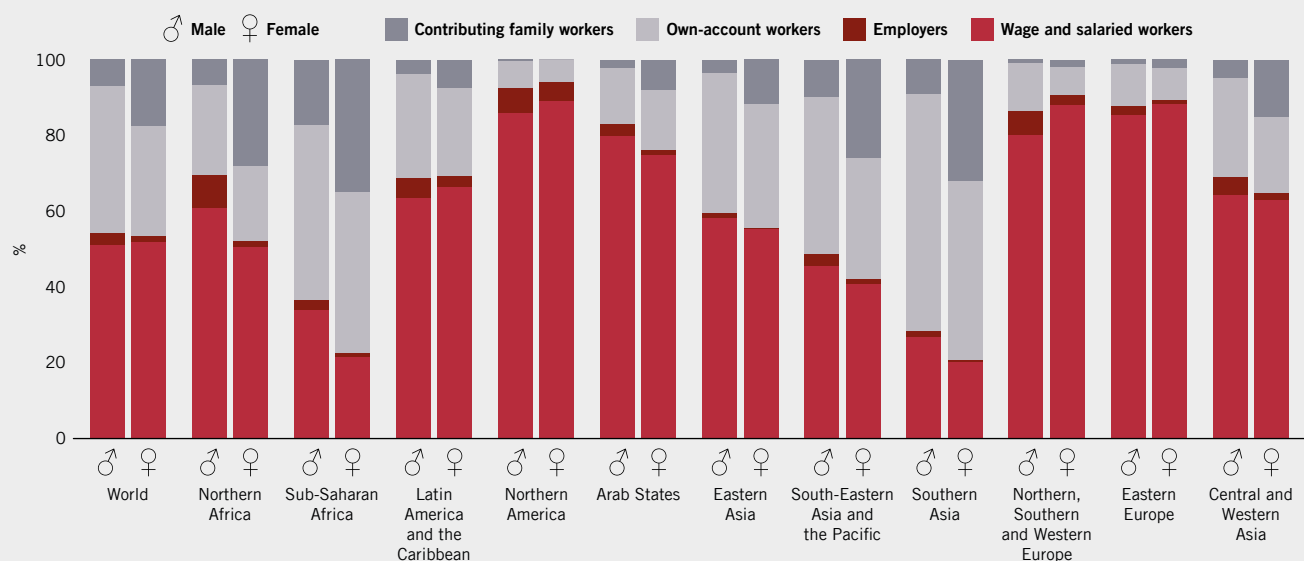
Globally, youth unemployment remains an issue of concern. Unemployment is affecting young women more than young men in almost all regions of the world. In Northern Africa and the Arab States, the female youth unemployment rate is almost double that of young men, reaching as high as 44.3 and 44.1 per cent, respectively. In contrast, youth unemployment is higher for young men than for young women in Northern America, Eastern Asia and Northern, Southern and Western Europe. As a result of the financial crisis, this inverse gender gap in youth unemployment has even increased in Northern, Southern and Western Europe and in Northern America; in this last region, however, there have been some signs of the narrowing of gaps in recent years.

The quality of women's jobs remains a challenge

Status in employment and informal employment

In 2015, a total of 586 million women were own-account or contributing family workers. Women remain overrepresented as contributing family workers. Some progress has been made, however, in closing the gender gap in this regard. Globally, the share of contributing family workers has decreased significantly among women (by 17.0 percentage points over the last 20 years) and to a lesser extent among men (by 8.1 percentage points over the same period), resulting in a decrease in the gender gap from 19.5 percentage points in 1995 to 10.6 percentage points in 2015 (figure II). This trend is part of an economic restructuring shift away from agricultural work, which largely consisted of subsistence and small-scale activities. That said, however, many working women remain in employment statuses and in occupations that are more likely to consist of informal work arrangements. In sub-Saharan Africa and in Southern Asia, a high proportion of women work as contributing family workers (34.9 per cent and 31.8 per cent, respectively) or as own-account workers (42.5 per cent and 47.7 per cent, respectively).

Figure II Employment status by sex, 2015



Note: The term “wage and salaried workers” refers to persons who work and receive a wage or salary. Employers, own-account workers and contributing family workers are considered self-employed. Contributing family workers are those who work in a family enterprise.

Source: ILO calculations based on ILO, *Trends Econometric Models*, November 2015.

Moreover, 52.1 per cent of women and 51.2 per cent of men in the labour market are wage and salaried workers. This in itself constitutes no guarantee of higher job quality. In fact, globally, nearly 40 per cent of women in wage employment do not contribute to social protection. Those proportions reach 63.2 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa and 74.2 per cent in Southern Asia, where informal employment is the dominant form of employment. In Southern Asia, for instance, informal employment represents over 80 per cent of non-agricultural employment. In three out of six regions, informal employment is a greater source of non-agricultural employment for women than for men (sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean and Southern Asia). In this regard, gender gaps in informal employment can reach up to 13 percentage points, as is the case in sub-Saharan Africa.

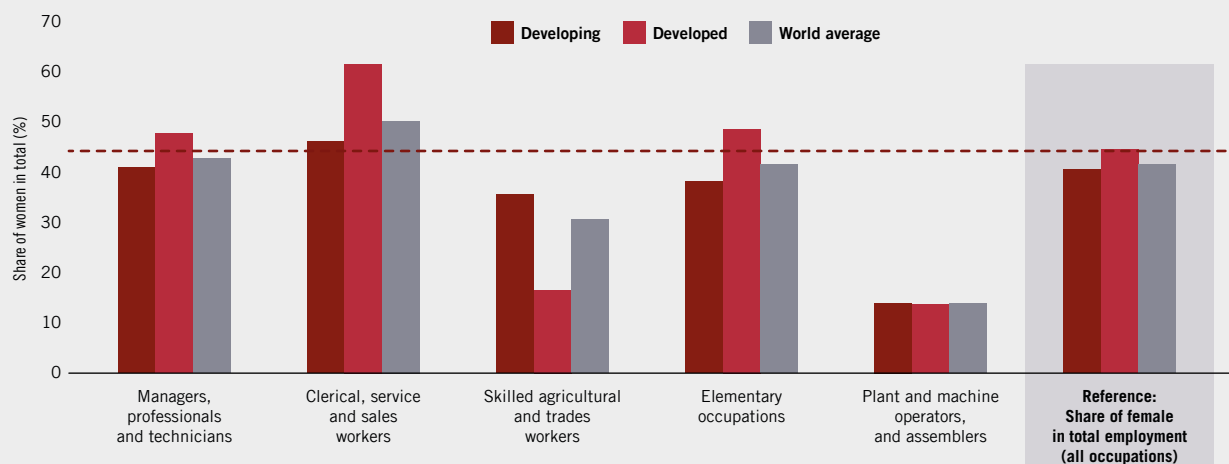
Sectoral and occupational segregation

Globally, the services sector has overtaken agriculture as the sector that employs the highest number of women and men. By 2015, slightly more than half of the global working population was working in services (50.1 per cent). While 42.6 per cent of all men work in services, substantially more than half of the world’s women are employed in that sector: since 1995, women’s employment in services has increased from 41.1 per cent to 61.5 per cent.

Sectoral and occupational segregation contributes significantly to gender gaps both in terms of the number and the quality of jobs. Women in employment are overrepresented in a narrow range of sectors and occupations. In upper-middle-income countries, more than one third of women are employed in wholesale and retail trade services (33.9 per cent) and in the manufacturing sector (12.4 per cent). In high-income countries, the major source of employment for women is the health and education sector, which employs almost one third of all women in the labour market (30.6 per cent). Agriculture remains the most important source of employment for women in low-income and lower-middle-income countries. In Southern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, over 60 per cent of all working women remain in agriculture, often concentrated in time and labour-intensive activities, which are unpaid or poorly remunerated.

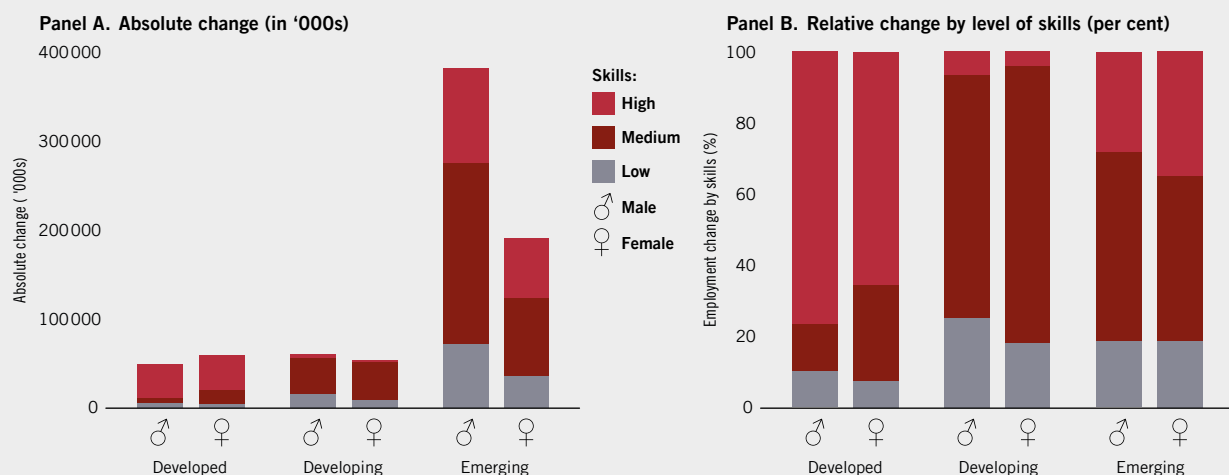
An analysis of 142 countries shows that women remain overrepresented (compared to their share in total employment) as “Clerical, service and sales workers” and in “Elementary occupations”. This is particularly the case in developed economies, where women constitute over 60 per cent and nearly 50 per cent of total employment in these two lowest paid occupations (figure III). By contrast, in developed countries, there is a slight relative overrepresentation of women in the highest paid occupational group “Managers, professionals and technicians” (48.1 per cent).

Figure III Occupational segregation, 142 countries (latest year available)



Note: Global estimates based on 142 countries (81 developing and 61 developed countries), representing 87 per cent of total employment. Latest years are used. More than 80 per cent of the countries have data for 2010 or after; more than 60 per cent have data for 2013 or 2014. Weighted by total employment.
Source: ILO calculations based on ILOSTAT.

Figure IV Employment by occupations requiring different skills, change in employment over the period 1995-2015



Note: Panels A and B describe the change in employment between 1995 and 2015 (absolute change in employment and relative change by level of skills). Occupations are grouped by skill level, according to the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED), that corresponds to a division of major ISCO-88 occupational groups (see the note to figure 16 below for the definition of occupational groups by level of skills).
Source: ILO calculations based on ILO, *Trends Econometric Models*, November 2015.

Occupational segregation has increased further over the last two decades with skill-biased technological change, notably in developed and emerging countries. Between 1995 and 2015, employment increased fastest in emerging economies. The absolute change in employment levels was twice as high for men as for women (382 million for men and 191 million for women), regardless of the level of skills required (figure IV, panel A). This reflects the above-discussed gender gaps in employment. Overall, medium-level skills dominate total employment change in both developing countries (68.4 and 77.9 per cent of the change in employment levels for men and women, respectively) and emerging economies (53.2 and 46.4 per cent, respectively – see figure IV, panel B). By contrast, high-skilled occupations dominate employment change in developed economies (65.4 per cent for women and up to 76.6 per cent for men). High-skilled occupations expanded faster for women than for men in emerging economies, the only group of countries where there is a gender gap in high-skilled employment in women's favour. For their part, low-skilled occupations expanded faster or just as fast for men as for women across all three regions.

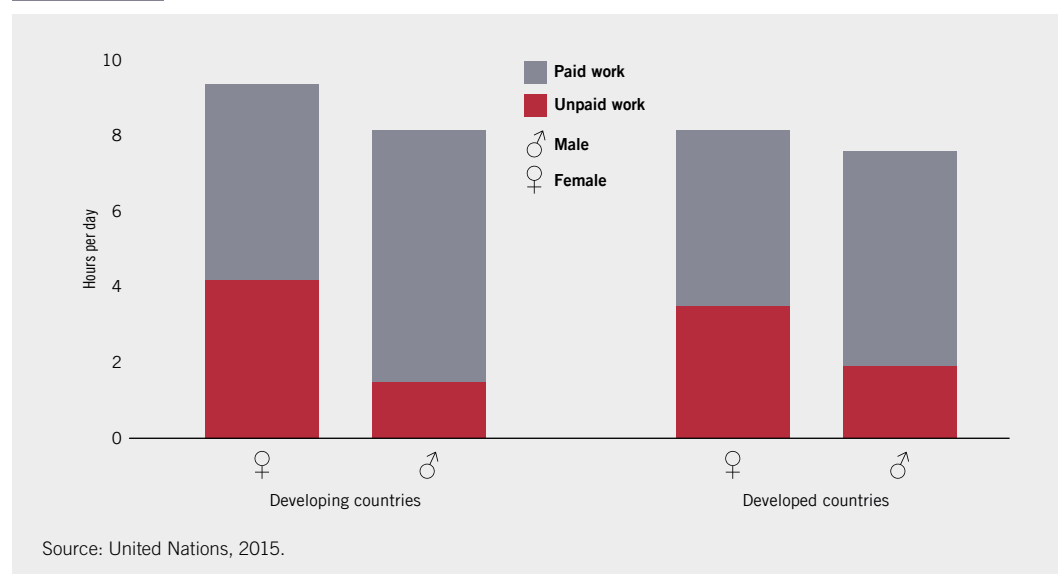
Gender gaps in the distribution of unpaid household and care work mean that women are more likely to work shorter hours for pay or profit

Unpaid household and care work

In both high and lower income countries, women continue to work fewer hours in paid employment, while performing the vast majority of unpaid household and care work. On average, women carry out at least two and a half times more unpaid household and care work than men in countries where the relevant data are available. Although this gender gap remains substantive, it has decreased over time, mostly because of some reduction in the time spent by women on housework, while there have been no significant reductions in the time that they spend on childcare. Women, however, continue to work longer hours per day than men when both paid work and unpaid work are taken into consideration. In particular, employed women (either in self-employment or wage and salaried employment), have longer working days on average than employed men, with a gender gap of 73 and 33 minutes per day in developing and developed countries, respectively (figure V). Even when women are employed, they still carry out the larger share of unpaid household and care work, which limits their capacity to increase their hours in paid, formal and wage and salaried work.

Figure V

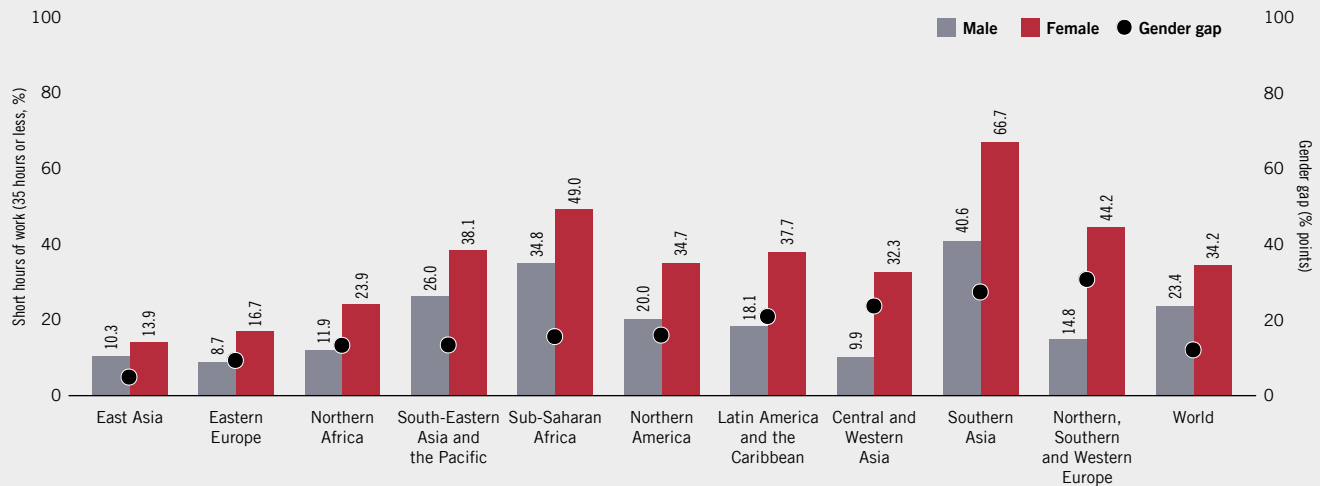
Time spent on paid and unpaid work for employed persons by sex, 23 developing and 23 developed economies (latest year available)



Short hours of work

As a consequence, women are more likely than men to work short hours, whether voluntarily or against their choice (thus finding themselves in “time-related underemployment”). Across the world, women represent less than 40 per cent of total employment, but make up 57 per cent of those working on a part-time basis. Estimates based on 100 countries show that more than one third of employed women (34.2 per cent) work less than 35 hours per week, compared with 23.4 per cent of employed men. Overall, the gender gap for part-time employment between women and men in employment is 11 percentage points (figure VI). Gender gaps are larger in most of the countries in Europe, Central and Western Asia, Southern Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean. In addition, underemployment is significantly higher for women than it is for men. In countries in Africa and Asia, the prevalence of underemployment for both women and men is high, with gender gaps of 7.5 and 6.4 percentage points, respectively, in those two regions. In some countries in sub-Saharan Africa, time-related underemployment for women is as high as 40 or 50 per cent of total employment.

Figure VI Persons working less than 35 hours per week and gender gap, 100 countries (latest year available)



Note: Global estimates based on 100 countries representing more than 87 per cent of total employment. The Arab States are not represented in the figure because of a representation of less than 25 per cent. Latest years are used (data for 2010 and after for more than 80 per cent of the countries). Regions are ranked by increased gender gap in part-time employment as a percentage of total employment.

Source: ILO calculations based on national household survey data.

Excessive hours of work

In addition, across the 100 countries surveyed, more than one third of men in employment (35.5 per cent) and more than one fourth of women in employment (25.7 per cent) work more than 48 hours a week. Excessive hours are most common in Asia, notably in Eastern Asia and in Western and Central Asia, where close to one half of men and women employed work more than 48 hours a week. Two main findings are worth highlighting. First, men tend to work longer hours than women, whether in wage and salaried employment (where there is a gender gap of over 10 percentage points) or in self-employment (gender gap of 5.5 percentage points). Second, the proportions of people working both long hours and short hours are higher among the self-employed, which means that self-employed people are likely to work either more than 48 hours or less than 35 hours a week. This suggests that working hours tend to be more polarized for self-employed than for wage and salaried workers, whose working hours tend to cluster around standard working hours, in line with national regulations. It also has implications for workers' healthy harmonization of work and family life and the equal distribution of unpaid household and care work between women and men.

At current trends, it will take 70 years to close the gender wage gap

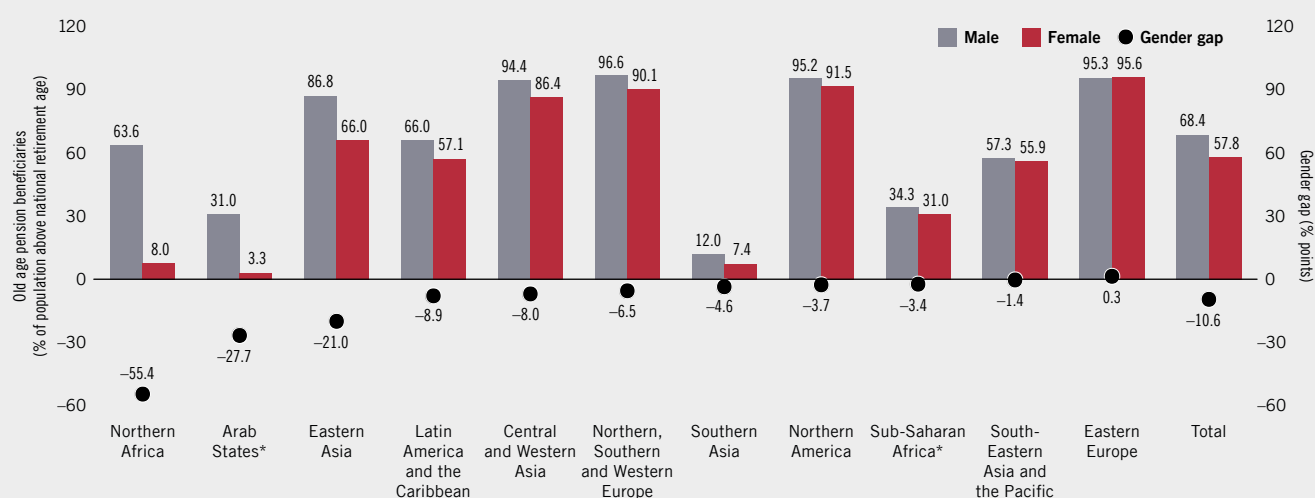
Globally, the gender wage gap is estimated to be 23 per cent; in other words, women earn 77 per cent of what men earn. Even when considering hourly wage rates (given the fact that women are working shorter hours than men), women continue to face a persistent gender wage gap, amounting to 10 per cent or more in countries for which data are available. These gaps cannot be explained solely by differences in education or age, but are also linked to the undervaluation of the work that women undertake and of the skills required in female-dominated sectors or occupations, the practice of discrimination, and the need for women to take career breaks to attend to additional care responsibilities, for instance after the birth of a child. Recently, some progress has been made in reducing these gender wage gaps, but improvements are small and, if current trends prevail, it will take more than 70 years before gender wage gaps are closed completely. Reductions in the gender wage gap are mostly attributable to explicit policy actions to address gender imbalances in the labour market, rather than to general improvements in living standards. In fact, the gender wage gap is unrelated to a country's level of economic development, as some of the countries with high per-capita levels are among those with the highest gender wage gaps. Economic development alone will not ensure an equitable distribution of the gains from growth between men and women.

Gender inequalities at work result in gender gaps in access to social protection, in particular maternity and old-age benefits

The gender gap in employment and job quality means that women have limited access to employment-related social protection, where such schemes even exist. Lower rates of formal wage and salaried employment, together with fewer hours and fewer years in insured employment for women, have adverse consequences for seniority premiums in pay and for coverage by employment-related contributory schemes. In particular, maternity cash benefits and health care are essential if women's specific needs during their active years are to be met, as are adequate pension levels for women in old age. As a consequence of gender gaps at work, coverage (both legal and effective) by contributory compulsory social protection schemes is lower for women than for men, leaving an overall gender social protection coverage gap. Globally, the proportion of women above retirement age receiving a pension is on average 10.6 percentage points lower than that of men (figure VII). Nearly 65 per cent of people above retirement age without any regular pension are women. This means that 200 million women in old age live without any regular income from social protection (old age or survivors pension), compared to 115 million men. Low female labour participation rates, together with the limited development of non-contributory pensions, weigh significantly on women's effective pension coverage in Northern Africa, the Arab States and Southern Asia, where the proportions of older women in receipt of a pension are inferior to 10 per cent.

While virtually all countries provide some forms of maternity protection for employed women, close to 60 per cent of women workers worldwide (nearly 750 million women) do not benefit from a statutory right to maternity leave. Problems with implementation, awareness of rights, insufficient contributory capacity, discriminatory practices, informality and social exclusion mean that, across the world, only an estimated 330 million women workers (28.2 per cent) would receive either contributory or non-contributory cash benefits in the event of childbirth. The existence of large non-contributory social protection schemes can, to some extent, offset both the lower rates of women's participation in the labour market and their less favourable employment conditions where social protection coverage is concerned. Levels of non-contributory benefits tend to be modest, however, and are often not sufficient to lift mothers and their children, and also older women, above the poverty line, especially in the absence of essential health care.

Figure VII Actual gender gap in pension beneficiaries, 107 countries (latest year available)



Note: Global estimates based on 107 countries representing 83 per cent of total population above national retirement age, weighted by population above national retirement age. Data are for the latest year available, which ranges from 2008 to 2013. This indicator of coverage is measured as the proportion of the population above the statutory pensionable age receiving an old age or survivor's pension. The asterisk for the Arab States and sub-Saharan Africa regions means that these averages are not representative, as they are based on a limited number of countries (less than 50 per cent of the population above national retirement age is represented).

Source: ILO calculations based on household survey data.

An integrated policy framework is needed to promote women's access to more and better quality jobs

Despite their recent advancement in educational achievement – in many countries there are now more women than men graduates – women face multiple barriers to their equal access, participation and progress in the labour market. Institutions and policies are established based on traditional gender roles, including on the expectation that men should be the sole or the main earner in a household and the continued undervaluation of care work. This continues to shape and inhibit labour market opportunities and incentives for women.

The achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development requires the implementation of an integrated framework of transformative measures guided by ILO Conventions and Recommendations, which places the elimination of discrimination and the achievement of gender equality at home and at work at the heart of policy interventions. This blueprint is also embedded in the ILO Women at Work Centenary Initiative, with the aim of marking the constitutional commitment of ILO constituents to gender equality as the ILO moves towards its second centenary in 2019.

Efforts must be made to tackle sectoral and occupational segregation

Gender stereotypes of women and expectations by society that they will shoulder larger care responsibilities, lack of role models, a work culture that expects long working hours, the undervaluation of traditionally “feminine” skills and inadequate work-family measures limit the possibilities for women to overcome segregation and participate on an equal footing in political, social and economic life and decision-making and reach top-level positions. In this regard, affirmative action policies, including the setting of targets, goals or quotas, represent an important measure that can be applied by governments, trade unions, employers' organizations and companies to help remedy the severe underrepresentation of women and their concerns in decision-making in business and societies. Moreover, education, outreach and training programmes must be designed to encourage and enable girls, boys and young women and men to venture more into non-stereotypical fields of study and work. In particular, to reduce sectoral and occupational segregation, training and education systems should encourage young men to enter into care-related professions, while promoting women's access to and prominence in both the study and professional exercise of science, technology, engineering, mathematics and related skills.

The gender wage gap must be closed

The high burden of care activities borne by women, and systems whereby take-home pay and social benefits increase with the length of seniority in a job conspire still further to widen the gender wage gap. In particular, mothers who often face additional care responsibilities suffer from a significantly reduced earnings capacity, contributing to a negative motherhood wage gap and to a fatherhood pay premium. Policies to promote the better sharing of care responsibilities can also help to reduce gender wage gaps. In this regard, more determined efforts to eliminate outright discrimination and to embed the principle of equal opportunity and treatment between women and men in laws and institutions constitute a key first step. Further progress can be made by promoting equal remuneration for work of equal value through wage transparency, training and gender-neutral job evaluations. These measures will help significantly in identifying discriminatory pay practices and unfair pay differences. In addition, countries need to support adequate and inclusive minimum wages and to strengthen collective bargaining as key tools in efforts to address low pay, improve women's wages and hence reduce gender wage gaps.

Adoption of the principle of equal treatment of part-time workers and ensuring access to contributory, employment-related social and labour protections on a pro-rata basis offer means of promoting good quality part-time work and normalizing it for all workers. In addition, in order to encourage a fairer division of unpaid care responsibilities between men and women, countries need to pass and enforce legislation to limit long paid hours and overtime, as these inhibit both women and men from breaking out of traditional gender roles.

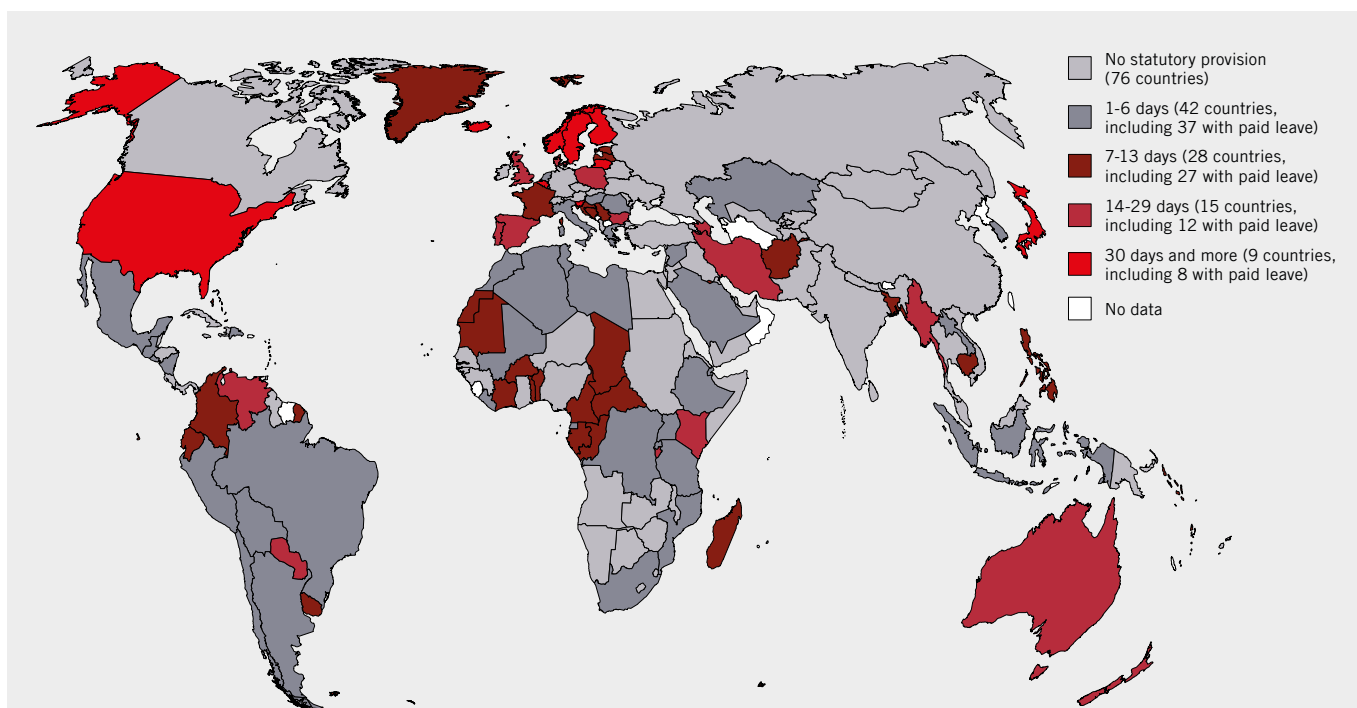
Unpaid care work must be recognized, reduced and redistributed and harmonization achieved between work and family life

Inadequate social protection and measures to balance work and family, including good quality jobs, services and infrastructure in public care, are a key concern for workers and businesses. The lack of such protection and measures impedes women's access to more and decent jobs. In many countries, inadequate access to water supply, sanitation, electricity, roads, safe transport and health-care services is a crucial factor behind the time spent by women on unpaid work and their disadvantaged position in the labour force. The inadequacy or total lack of childcare, disability and long-term care services, and services which do not meet the needs of workers, care recipients and providers in terms of availability, cost and quality, are also important factors. Economic crises and the related cuts in public spending on social benefits, services, jobs and working conditions in the public sector have also exacerbated the existing care deficits in both high- and low-income settings. Consequently, the responsibility to fill care gaps is taken up by women in the course of their lives in the form of low-paid and unpaid care and household work. The undervaluation of care work, both paid and unpaid, perpetuates poor working conditions for women, who form the vast majority of the employed care workforce, in particular domestic workers, early childhood care and education personnel, and long-term care workers and nurses, an increasingly large number of whom are migrant workers.

In this regard, governments should increase their social investment in basic infrastructure and measures to balance work and family commitments, ensure that care work is evaluated in a gender-responsive way, promote decent and adequately paid jobs in the care economy, with a focus on public provision, and make good-quality and affordable childcare and other social care services a universal right. Social protection schemes should be geared to guarantee equality of treatment between men and women, to take into account gender roles and to serve as a mechanism for the achievement of gender equality. In addition, nationally designed social protection floors can and should serve as a gender-transformative tool by addressing women's specific life contingencies, such as maternity, and by recognizing, reducing and redistributing unpaid care and household work.

Figure VIII

Countries providing paid and unpaid leave entitlements to fathers for the birth of a child, by duration (days), 170 countries, 2015



Note: This map covers leave provisions in national or federal legislation reserved for fathers in relation to the birth of a child or leave that can be used exclusively by fathers as paternity or parental leave. It does not include parental leave provisions that can be used by either the father or mother or parts of maternity leave entitlements that the mother can transfer to the father. It includes certain special leave provisions in addition to annual leave that may be used by fathers at the time of birth but which are not strictly categorized as "paternity leave".

Source: ILO data 2015.

In this context, governments should guarantee maternity protection to all women, in line with international labour standards, with no exclusion, increase the provision of well-paid leave benefits for fathers (see figure VIII), and promote their take-up rates. This should be further supported by implementing family-friendly flexible working arrangements which help families to share care responsibilities more equitably between parents, and also work reintegration measures (such as training, cash benefits, skills development, job-matching, mentorship and career guidance), with a view to enabling workers with family responsibilities to reintegrate into the workforce following care-related interruptions.

Lastly, joint income taxation, primarily in advanced economies, may create barriers and disincentives for women to participate in the labour market, in particular when it is accompanied by wage and income gaps, high childcare costs and unequal sharing of care responsibilities. Countries should therefore consider moving towards a more neutral tax-benefit system that does not create disincentives to work for one of the household's earners.

For substantive gender equality at work to be achieved, it is essential that societies recognize that both women and men have a right and responsibility to work and care. For that reason, governments should put forward a set of integrated policy measures, informed by international labour standards, to recognize unpaid care work and reduce and redistribute it between women and men, and also between families and societies. Paid care work should also be valued and remunerated according to its core role for the maintenance, prosperity and well-being of societies. Achieving gender equality, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, is an indispensable precondition for the realization of a sustainable development that leaves no one behind and ensures that the future of work is decent work.

