

Revealing the Vast Global Gender Gap: New Data Unveil Wide Disparities

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Women Granted Only Two-Thirds of Legal Rights Enjoyed by Men, Latest Findings Reveal

A recent report from the World Bank Group has uncovered that the gender gap in the workplace is greater than previously thought. When taking into account legal discrepancies related to violence and childcare, women have access to less than two-thirds of the rights

afforded to men. It is significant to note that not a single country, not even the wealthiest ones, provides equal opportunities for women.

The most recent Women, Business, and the Law report presents a detailed overview of women's challenges when entering the global workforce and contributing to overall prosperity for themselves, their families, and their communities. It broadens its analysis by incorporating two critical indicators—protection from violence and access to childcare services—significantly influencing women's opportunities. When factoring in these measures, women, on average, only have 64% of the legal protections available to men—a significant decrease from the previous estimate of 77%.

In practice, the gender gap is even more pronounced. For the first time, Women, Business, and the Law evaluate the disparity between legal reforms and the actual experiences of women in 190 economies. The examination uncovers a startling gap in implementation. Despite laws suggesting that women have about two-thirds of men's rights, countries, on average, have established less than 40% of the necessary mechanisms for full execution. For instance, while 98 economies have passed laws mandating equal pay for women in equivalent roles, only 35—less than one in five—have implemented measures like pay transparency or enforcement mechanisms to tackle pay disparities.

The successful execution of equal-opportunity laws relies on a robust supporting infrastructure encompassing strong enforcement mechanisms, a system for monitoring gender-based pay gaps, and access to healthcare services for women who have experienced violence.

“Women have the power to turbocharge the sputtering global economy,” said Indermit Gill, Chief Economist of the World Bank Group and Senior Vice President for Development Economics. *“Yet, all over the world, discriminatory laws and practices prevent women from working or starting businesses on an equal footing with men. Closing this gap could raise global gross domestic product by more than 20% – essentially doubling the global growth rate over the next decade—but reforms have slowed to a crawl. WBL 2024 identifies what governments can do to accelerate progress toward gender equality in business and the law.”*

The gap in implementation underscores the significant challenges that remain, even for countries that have implemented equal-opportunity laws. Togo, for instance, stands out among Sub-Saharan economies for enacting laws that grant women approximately 77% of the rights available to men—more than any other country in the region. However, Togo has only established 27% of the necessary systems for complete implementation, a typical rate for Sub-Saharan economies.

In 2023, governments showed determination in advancing three categories of legal reforms for equal opportunities—pay, parental rights, and workplace protections. Nevertheless, almost all countries performed poorly in the two newly tracked categories—access to childcare and women’s safety.

The weakest aspect lies in women’s safety, with the global average score standing at just 36, indicating that women have barely a third of the required legal protections against domestic violence, sexual harassment, child marriage, and femicide. Despite 151 economies having laws against sexual harassment in the workplace, only 39 have laws addressing it in public spaces. This often hinders women from utilizing public transportation to commute to work.

The majority of countries also receive low scores for their childcare legislation. On average, women spend 2.4 more hours per day on unpaid caregiving tasks than men, a significant portion of which involves caring for children. Improving access to childcare typically results in an initial 1% increase in women's workforce participation, with this effect more than doubling within five years. Currently, only 78 economies—less than half—offer some form of financial or tax assistance for parents with young children. Additionally, only 62 economies—less than a third—have established quality standards for childcare services, which may cause women to hesitate before returning to work while they have children to care for.

Women encounter substantial barriers in other domains as well. For instance, only one in every five economies requires gender-sensitive criteria for public procurement processes, effectively excluding women from a \$10-trillion-a-year economic opportunity. Regarding wages, women earn just 77 cents for every dollar paid to men. Furthermore, discrepancies in rights extend to retirement, with 62 economies having different retirement ages for men and women. Women typically outlive men, but due to lower wages, career breaks for childcare, and earlier retirement, they often receive smaller pension benefits and face greater financial insecurity in old age.

“It is more urgent than ever to accelerate efforts to reform laws and enact public policies that empower women to work and start and grow businesses,” said Tea Trumbic, the report’s lead author. *“Today, barely half of women participate in the global workforce, compared with nearly three out of every four men. This is not just unfair—it’s wasteful. Increasing women's economic participation is the key to amplifying their voices and shaping decisions that affect them directly. Countries simply cannot afford to sideline half of their population.”*

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