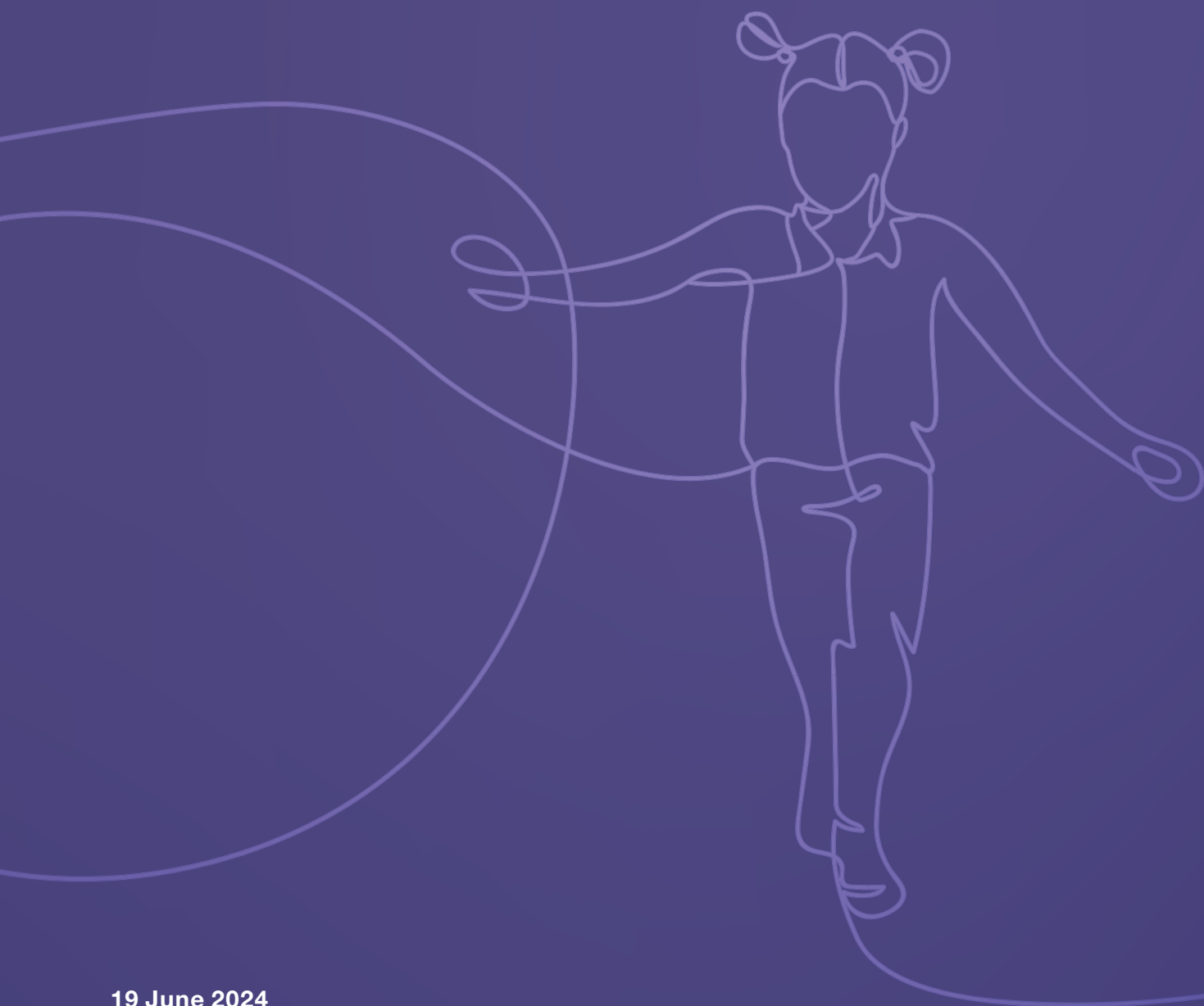


THE WOMEN'S FORUM BAROMETER CASE STUDY

Unleashing the economic potential of women in Asia



19 June 2024

— FOREWORD

Navigating the complex world of workplace dynamics in Australia, China, Japan, and Korea reveals a range of challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality. Based on thorough examination and real data, this report sheds light on the progress made and the obstacles that still need to be addressed.

Acknowledging Australia's commendable strides, where proactive policies have led to the smallest disparity of 8.4 percentage points between men and women in employment rates, it is imperative to recognize positive trends across the region. Japan showcases progress with a noteworthy reduction of approximately 6 percentage points in the gender pay gap since 2010. Additionally, Korea stands out for offering fathers a full year of non-transferable parental leave, signaling significant cultural shifts towards gender inclusivity. In China, economic advancements prompt governmental initiatives promoting gender equality, such as the Chinese Women's Development Program (2021-2030) and the National Human Rights Action Plan (2021-2025).

However, challenges persist. Gender disparities in labour force participation rates reveal deep-seated structural issues, with men exhibiting a participation rate of 74% compared to women lagging behind at 53%. Despite advancements, a significant gender gap persists in non-regular employment in Japan and Korea, impacting wage equality and career advancement.

As we analyse these findings, the call to action becomes resounding. Leveraging evidence-based policies and fostering collaboration among governments, businesses, and civil society are essential steps towards addressing systemic barriers. By embracing diversity, promoting inclusivity, and prioritizing gender-responsive practices, we pave the way for a future where every individual, regardless of gender, can realize their full potential and contribute to the collective prosperity of society.

This report stands as a guiding light, delineating the trajectory toward achieving gender parity within the workplace. Through concerted efforts and unwavering commitment, we have the capacity to convert obstacles into avenues for progress, thereby securing a future that is both brighter and more inclusive for all.



Anne-Gabrielle Heilbronner
President of the Women's Forum

Acknowledgements

This report was drafted on behalf of the Women's Forum for the Economy & Society by Nadia Caïd-Holzer. Special thanks are extended to Professor Rick van der Ploeg (Oxford University), Peter Kearns (Re-Imagine Europa), and Xavier Leflaive (OECD) for their insightful feedback. The collaborative efforts on Part II of this report by Laurène Boisson, Diane Lamotte, and Etienne Mercier (Ipsos) are gratefully acknowledged. We also acknowledge Sébastien Hardy (MaGwen) for his graphic design contributions and Margaret Key (MSL) for her support.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



In 2024, significant progress has been made towards gender equality within the labour force across the four economies under investigation

In the contemporary global employment landscape, the Asia/Pacific region emerges as a hub of economic activity, with a notable workforce engagement. However, disparities persist, particularly concerning gender parity in employment across Australia, China, Japan, and Korea. This summary endeavors to elucidate the prevailing dynamics within these labour markets, focusing on fostering inclusivity, addressing caregiving responsibilities, enhancing family leave provisions, and promoting gender diversity in leadership roles.

In 2024, significant progress has been made towards gender equality within the labour force across the four economies under investigation. However, a comprehensive examination points out that while progress has been achieved, these countries have yet to fully bridge the gender gap, indicating the imperative for sustained and intensified efforts to reach complete parity. Over the past decade, there has been a noticeable decline in the gender gap in labour force participation across these nations. Particularly noteworthy reductions have been observed in Japan and Korea, signifying positive momentum in narrowing this divide. This progress underscores the efficacy of targeted interventions and policy measures aimed at fostering greater gender inclusivity within the workforce.

However, a more comprehensive examination reveals a multifaceted landscape when addressing gender disparities in various aspects of the labour market. Australia showcases commendable progress, with a relatively narrow gender employment gap. Nevertheless, challenges persist, notably concerning the employment prospects of single mothers. China and Korea face broader gender employment gaps, characterized by a prevalence of unstable job arrangements for women, particularly in Korea, where temporary employment is common. Japan witnesses a substantial share of women engaged in part-time employment, presenting obstacles to career advancement and financial stability.

Japan and Korea have robust family leave policies in place; nonetheless, the utilization rates of these provisions fall below optimal levels. Conversely, Australia has recently implemented more adaptable family leave regulations. However, achieving equitable accessibility to these benefits demands further analysis and efficient measures.

The unequal distribution of unpaid work places a disproportionate burden on women not only in Australia but also in China, Korea, and Japan, thereby hindering their participation in the workforce and limiting economic autonomy. Rectifying this disparity demands concerted efforts to equitably redistribute caregiving responsibilities.

Despite some progress, the gender pay gap remains a persistent challenge across most economies, with only marginal improvements noted over recent years. This persistent gap is reflected in the ongoing disparities seen in low-wage job opportunities, access to managerial positions, and the prevalence of part-time employment among women. To genuinely promote gender equality, it is crucial to establish robust mechanisms and initiatives designed to break down systemic barriers and foster equal opportunities for all individuals in the labour force.

In Australia, China, Japan, and Korea, there has been an important effort to promote greater gender equality within the labour market, including an increased focus on providing support for women during various work transitions, especially upon their return to work after maternity leave. Additionally, there is a noticeable trend among the studied countries towards advocating for enhanced family leave policies and work-life balance initiatives. This reflects a growing acknowledgment of the significance of supporting caregivers and advancing gender equity in workplace policies and practices.

Moreover, there is a renewed commitment to addressing issues of gender-based discrimination and workplace harassment through targeted interventions, awareness campaigns, and legislative measures. Efforts to challenge deep-rooted stereotypes and societal norms regarding gender roles and responsibilities are also underway in these four countries. The goal is to challenge entrenched biases and promote a more equitable distribution of caregiving and household responsibilities between men and women.

However, despite significant progress, gender segregation within occupational spheres remains a substantial challenge across the economies under study. Women continue to be overrepresented in service sectors, while men maintain dominance in industry fields. These trends highlight entrenched societal norms and structural barriers that impede genuine gender inclusivity and diversity in the workforce.



Despite some progress, the gender pay gap remains a persistent challenge across most economies



Greater representation of women in leadership roles is imperative for fostering diverse, dynamic, and equitable work cultures

To effectively tackle these complex challenges and make substantial progress towards gender equality, additional decisive actions are required. This entails enhancing long-term care services and widening access to care leave, challenging deeply ingrained stereotypes related to caregiving and domestic duties through tailored educational campaigns and awareness efforts. Furthermore, it is imperative to protect employment rights in non-standard forms of work and actively address gender segregation in various occupational fields through targeted policies and initiatives aimed at fostering greater diversity and inclusivity.

Furthermore, enhancing data collection mechanisms and improving the evidence base on gender gaps within the labour market are essential for effectively monitoring progress and evaluating the efficacy of policy interventions. This requires a concerted effort to enhance data collection methodologies, ensure the availability of timely and comparable data, and promote greater transparency and accountability in reporting practices.

Looking ahead, it is imperative to implement additional measures to bolster long-term care provisions, challenge societal stereotypes associated with caregiving roles, protect employment rights in non-standard forms of work, and encourage gender diversity in leadership positions. Greater representation of women in leadership roles is imperative for fostering diverse, dynamic, and equitable work cultures. By fostering a more inclusive labour market and refining data-driven policy frameworks, these four economies can make progress towards achieving comprehensive gender equality goals. A multifaceted approach entails not only addressing current disparities but also proactively identifying and addressing potential obstacles to progress, thus ensuring sustained momentum towards a more equitable future for all.



PART I. — WORKPLACE DYNAMICS IN AUSTRALIA, CHINA, JAPAN AND KOREA

Introduction

In Korea, a notable share of women, exceeding 40%, undergo a career pause after marriage. Termed as "career-interrupted women", this designation highlights a prevalent trend where women's professional trajectories are influenced by the demands of marriage and childcare (TheDiplomat.com, 2023). Similarly, in Japan, the concept of "good wife, wise mother" symbolizes the societal ideal of a woman's behaviour. Conversely, Chinese media and the All-China Women's Federation have portrayed unmarried urban females over 27 as "leftover women," potentially diminishing their societal standing as they age, despite achieving career milestones. These labels reflect deeply ingrained cultural norms surrounding women in East Asia and the intricate balance they navigate between family responsibilities and career goals.

Discriminatory employment practices continue to hinder progress towards gender equality in East Asia. Despite declining fertility rates, female labour force participation remains low, in contrast to higher rates observed in OECD countries. Traditional gender norms assign women primary roles in household chores and caregiving, constraining their participation in the workforce and discouraging marriage and child-rearing. Consequently, women in East Asia grapple with a dual challenge rooted in deeply entrenched gender norms and societal roles.

The perception of women's roles in East Asia is heavily shaped by Confucianism, a philosophy that emphasizes hierarchical structures and values such as filial piety. Within this framework, women are predominantly assigned domestic roles as wives and mothers. According to Confucian philosopher Mencius, the inability of women to bear children is seen as a significant failure in fulfilling filial duties. These gender norms, deeply entrenched in Confucian teachings, are perpetuated in East Asian society through processes of socialization and education. For instance, Japanese preschool educators often reinforce gender stereotypes through language and behaviour, influencing children's perceptions of gender roles from an early age. In Chinese political discourse, traditional family values persist despite the discontinuation of the one-child policy.

These entrenched cultural norms continue to fuel enduring gender disparities in labour division throughout East Asia. Women in China and Korea spend nearly three times more time on domestic and caregiving responsibilities than men, while in Japan, this gap widens to five times. Despite Japan and Korea implementing relatively generous paternity leave policies, utilization rates remain low, as evidenced by statistics from 2022 (OECD, 2021). Furthermore, econometric data underscores the adverse effect of childcare responsibilities on women's work hours in China (IMF, 2021).

The societal pressure on women to prioritize family obligations over career aspirations has led to a notable decline in childbirth rates across East Asia. A recent 2023 survey highlighted that nearly half of Chinese women perceive minimal contribution from their partners in household chores and childcare responsibilities (Zhaopin, 2023). Consequently, around one-fifth of respondents expressed reluctance toward parenthood, while nearly 40% indicated a preference for no more than one child. Despite governmental initiatives aimed at bolstering fertility rates, many women in the region are increasingly prioritizing career progression, driven by a desire for personal autonomy and independence. However, entrenched discriminatory attitudes toward gender persist in the workplace, further complicating efforts to address this issue.

Discriminatory practices during the recruitment process remain prevalent in East Asian countries. For instance, in China, around one in five job postings for national civil service positions in 2018 explicitly favoured men, often using language such as "men only" or "men preferred" in their job descriptions (Human Rights Watch, 2018). These preferences are rooted in the belief that women may not fully commit to their roles and could potentially incur costs for the company due to maternity leave. Such biased practices perpetuate gender inequality in the workplace and hinder women's career advancement opportunities.

Similarly, numerous companies in Japan and South Korea have been discovered intentionally assigning lower interview scores to female candidates, with the aim of excluding them from the hiring process (NikkeiAsia, 2019). In Japan, one in five candidates faced inappropriate questions about family planning during interviews. Deep-rooted beliefs that women should prioritize household duties often lead employers to perceive them as "lost labour," expecting them to exit the workforce after childbirth. These discriminatory practices not only perpetuate gender inequality but also undermine efforts to create diverse and inclusive workplaces.

Moreover, the gendered allocation of tasks dominates the professional landscape in East Asia. Women often find themselves relegated to invisible tasks in the workplace, such as basic administrative duties, which provide little to no avenues for career advancement (Harvard Business Review, 2021). In South Korea, it's still prevalent for female employees to bear the burden of office chores such as preparing coffee for their superiors or washing dishes, perpetuating antiquated norms. Indeed, in 2023, over sixty public financial institutions faced accusations of perpetuating such discriminatory practices (Chosun Daily, 2023).

In Japan, women often find themselves drawn towards clerical roles rather than managerial positions, mainly due to the latter's requirement for overtime work, which conflicts with their household and childcare duties. Furthermore, women consistently encounter wage disparities compared to men and are notably underrepresented in leadership roles. For instance, a mere 14% of directors on the boards of the top 100 Chinese companies listed on the Shanghai and Shenzhen stock exchanges are female (Xue, 2023). These disparities underscore the entrenched gender biases within corporate structures and highlight the urgent need for systemic change to promote gender equality in the workplace.

While Australia shows promising signs in narrowing the gender gap, particularly in terms of lower job pressure and fewer long working hours for women, these positives are overshadowed by deeper structural issues in the workplace. Despite experiencing less job strain, women's overall participation in the labour force remains lower compared to men. This is reflected in lower employment rates, reduced working hours, and disparities in wages, contributing to higher long-term unemployment rates among women. Moreover, women's representation in entrepreneurship and innovation sectors remains notably lower, with less than one in six Australian inventors being female. Although progress have been made in recent decades, significant gender disparities persist, highlighting the need for continued efforts to address systemic inequalities.

Driving force behind employment growth

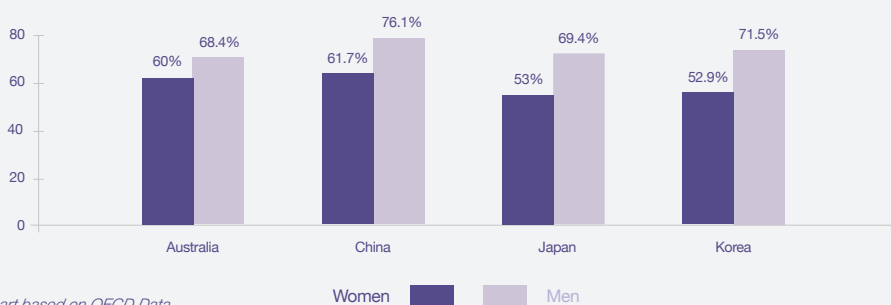
In recent years, there has been a notable disparity in labour force participation rates between OECD nations and Asia/Pacific countries, with the latter showing slightly higher rates at 63.2% compared to 61.4% in the former (OECD, 2022). However, a significant gender gap persists across the region, where men, on average, exhibit a participation rate of 74% while women lag behind at 53%. Although significant progress in female employment rates since 2000, gender disparities persist in the labour markets of Australia, China, Japan and Korea. Thus, despite the increase in female employment, which has risen by around 6% points since 2000, reaching 52.9% in 2022, the gender employment gap in Korea remains a notable concern, standing at 18.6 percentage points. This figure is higher than the OECD average of 12 percentage points. This disparity reflects underlying structural issues such as occupational segregation, limited access to quality employment opportunities, and entrenched gender norms.

Australia's leading position with the smallest disparity at 8.4 percentage points highlights the effectiveness of proactive policies promoting gender equality in the workforce. Initiatives such as pay equity legislation, flexible work arrangements, and targeted training programs have contributed to narrowing the gap and fostering a more inclusive labour market. Meanwhile, China's slightly wider gap of 14.4% points underlines the complexity of addressing gender disparities in rapidly evolving economies. Despite notable advancements in women's education and labour force participation, persistent barriers such as discriminatory hiring practices and cultural expectations continue to hinder progress towards gender parity in employment.

This data underscores the imperative for targeted interventions to dismantle barriers hindering female workforce participation across the region. While Australia sets a positive example, there remains room for improvement in achieving gender equality in employment across all sectors and levels. Notably, the employment landscape poses unique challenges for single mothers, constituting about 11% of Australian households as of 2022. Alarmingly, less than half of single mothers with children aged 0-4 were employed, a sharp contrast to over two-thirds of coupled mothers facing similar circumstances (OECD, 2023).

Despite a discernible increase in the employment rate among single mothers in Australia recently, it remains lower than that of other OECD countries, even those with overall lower female participation rates. The disparity in employment rates between single and coupled mothers is significant. In 2021, approximately 35% of Australian single mothers were not in the labour force, with an additional 3% experiencing unemployment (OECD, 2023). Hence, implementing evidence-based policies and nurturing a supportive environment for women in the workforce is crucial. This approach enables countries to unleash the full potential of their economies and promote sustainable growth

Figure 1. Gender gap in employment, 2022

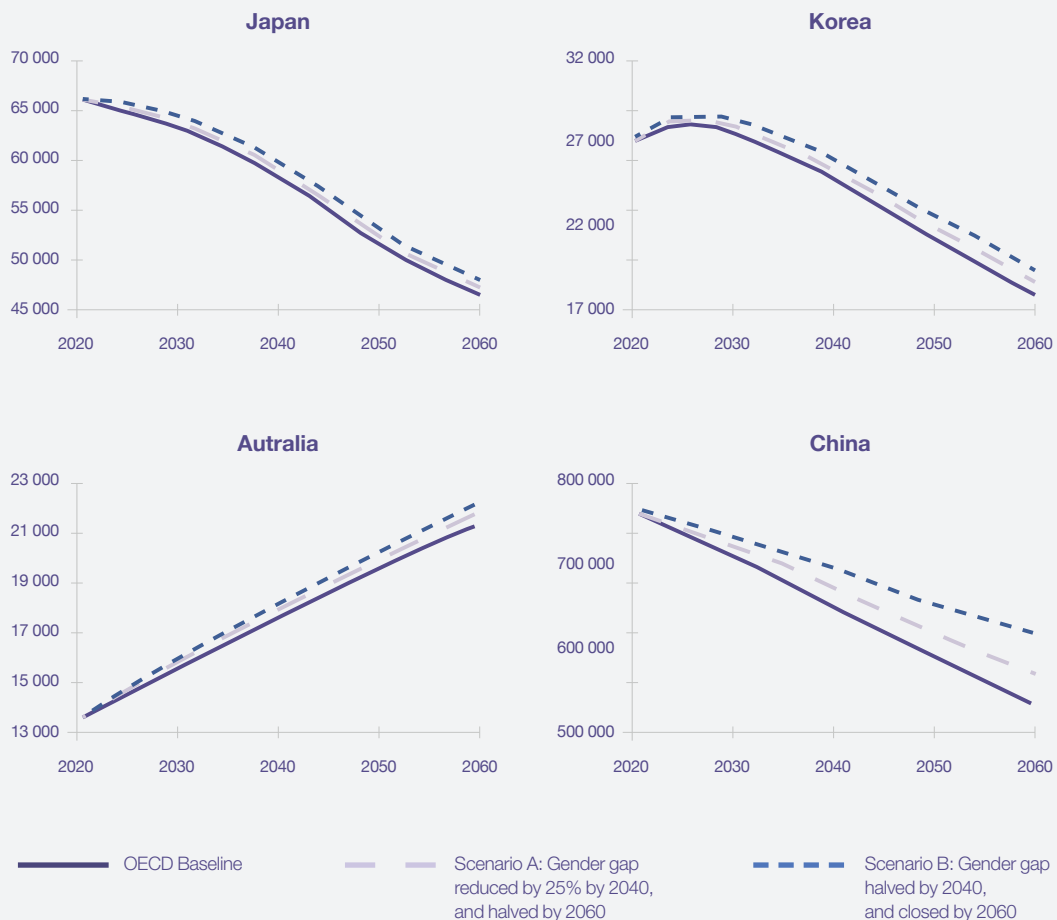


Source: chart based on OECD Data.

Looking towards the future, projections from the OECD indicate potential shifts in labour force dynamics. The figure below presents a scenario assuming consistent male and female participation rates across various age groups. Notable declines in the labour force are expected in countries such as Japan, China, and Korea, with Australia standing out as a notable exception expected to see labour force growth. Beyond the moral imperative of gender equality, studies indicate that increasing female labour force participation can drive economic growth (Hsieh et al., 2019). Furthermore, empirical evidence suggests that leveraging the talents of women, both as workers and in management roles, can enhance innovation and productivity, thereby boosting competitiveness on a global scale (Crisciuolo et al., 2021).

Should these commitments be implemented effectively, they have the potential to catalyse transformative shifts in labour force demographics, especially in countries where female participation rates currently lag behind (OECD, 2023). This could potentially result in a doubling of the labour force in specific regions, fostering substantial socioeconomic progress. Moreover, advancing gender equality in the workforce can produce significant benefits, including poverty alleviation, better health outcomes, and increased access to education.

Figure 2. Labour force projections, 2020-60



Source: OECD, 2022.

Definition and measurement

The labour force participation rate is a measure of the proportion of a country's working-age population (15 and more) that engages actively in the labour market, either by working or looking for work for at least one hour in the reference week. It provides the relative size of the supply of labour available to engage in the production of goods and services. Data was taken from the ILO's Key Indicators of the Labour Market (KILM) database for non-OECD countries. The labour force projections presented here are based on population projections for persons aged 15-74 years and current rates of labour market entry and exit. The model is a dynamic age-cohort model that projects future labour participation by gender and five-year age group. Three scenarios are considered and based on OECD population data and the OECD Employment Database.

1. **Baseline:** In many countries, there has been an increase trend in the participation of women which has offset a decline in participation rates for men, and there have been different trends by age. Rather than assuming fixed participation rates, the baseline scenario uses current (2011-20) rates of labour market entry and exit to project participation rates by gender and five-year age group over the period to 2060.

2. **Gender gap reduced by 25% by 2040 and halved by 2060:** Male participation rates are held at the baseline, with female participation rates projected such that the gender participation gap in 2025 is 25% smaller than the gap in 2020, and the gap in 2040 50% smaller than in 2020.

3. **Gender gap halved by 2040 and closed by 2060:** Male participation rates are held at the baseline, with female participation rates projected such that the gender participation gap in 2040 is 50% smaller than the gap observed in 2020 and is closed completely by 2060.

Source: OECD, 2022.

Several factors have driven the increase in women's participation in the workforce (OECD, 2023). These factors include the increasing educational attainment of women (National Skills Commission, 2021), shifting societal attitudes towards women in the workforce (Churchill and Craig, 2022), the introduction of policies such as paid parental and caregiver leave as well as subsidized childcare (United Nations Expert Group Meeting on Policy Responses to Low Fertility, 2015), and the expansion of flexible work arrangements (Heath, 2018).

Embracing cultural diversity to empower Asian women in the workplace

Korea's labour market demonstrates dual dynamics, with both job creation and the remarkable rise in female educational achievements driving the female employment rate from 50% in 2000 to an impressive 57% in 2017 (OECD, 2019). Despite this progress, significant segmentation persists within Korea's labour landscape.

This segmentation sharply divides the workforce into two distinct groups: those in regular employment, enjoying benefits such as seniority-based pay, robust social protection, job stability, and satisfactory working conditions; and non-regular workers facing challenges like low wages, limited access to social protection, fixed-term contracts, and inferior job conditions. This divide is particularly pronounced in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), where labour productivity tends to be lower. Within this complex landscape, women are disproportionately represented in low-wage employment, with 37% of women in full-time roles occupying such positions, a stark comparison to the 15% of men. Additionally, 30% of mothers and 12% of fathers navigate non-regular employment, often lacking essential social security coverage and excluded from maternity or parental leave benefits available to those in regular employment.

While female employment rates rise, Korea grapples with the persistent issue of long working hours, with full-time workers averaging 46.8 hours per week, surpassing the OECD average of 42 hours. Recent legislative measures aimed at addressing this entrenched 'long hours culture' have reduced the maximum working week from 68 to 52 hours, initially targeting large companies with plans for broader coverage in smaller enterprises. This legislative shift reflects a proactive approach to promoting a healthier work-life balance and enhancing labour productivity.

Beyond working hours, traditional norms like the "long hours culture" and the "after work social culture" profoundly shape the Korean labour market, leading to a stark division between paid and unpaid work, especially impacting women. While Korea has implemented relatively generous maternity and parental leave policies in response, many women choose not to take advantage of these benefits to avoid disadvantaging their colleagues, highlighting complex corporate and cultural dynamics.

To effectively tackle the challenge of balancing work and family responsibilities in the Korean labour market, a comprehensive approach is imperative. Workplace strategies to enhance work-life balance should focus on encouraging the use of maternity and parental leave through measures such as improved pay rates, flexible options for shorter but fairly compensated leave, and extending leave entitlements to currently underserved worker demographics, including those working fewer than 60 hours per month, domestic workers, and the self-employed. Ensuring the success of these initiatives requires not just legal adjustments but also the cultivation of a supportive workplace culture, complemented by robust enforcement of labour regulations.



To effectively tackle the challenge of balancing work and family responsibilities in the Korean labour market, a comprehensive approach is imperative

The impacts of unique workplace factors in Asia

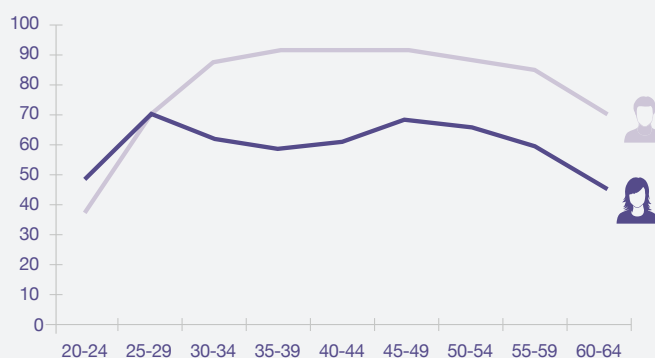
Over 30% of female employees in Korea and more than 53% in Japan are engaged in non-regular employment contracts, contributing to the persistence of the wage gap (OECD, 2019). Tackling these gender disparities in these labour market requires thoughtful examination and tailored interventions. Indeed, non-regular female workers experienced greater psychological distress, poorer self-rated health, a higher smoking rate, and less access to preventive medicine than regular workers did. However, despite the large number of non-regular workers, there are limited researches regarding their health (Inoue et al., 2016).

The prevailing culture of extended work hours, often exacerbated by lengthy commutes, particularly in the vicinity of Seoul and Tokyo, and intertwined with the post-work "socializing with colleagues" norm, further complicates the ongoing struggle of balancing professional and family duties for working parents. Maneuvering through the intersection of childcare and career advancement presents a formidable challenge, underscored by a distinct gender dimension where many women, unlike their male counterparts, perceive an unavoidable trade-off between the two domains.

Especially noteworthy is the tendency of highly-educated women to defer parenthood due to substantial opportunity costs. The growing number of women choosing not to have children suggests that a large share of them are convinced that they cannot juggle their career and family responsibilities. Unlike the OECD average, where the division between work and parenthood is less apparent due to the widespread adoption of maternity and parental leave policies, the employment situation for women in China, Japan and Korea still reflects the distinct 'M-curve' pattern, characterized by a notable decrease in employment during the childbearing years.

Traditionally, societal norms in these three countries dictated that women should leave the workforce either upon marriage or the birth of children. While some workplace cultures may still adhere to this norm, there is an observable increase in new mothers taking advantage of paid leave benefits. However, the persistent prevalence of the 'M-curve' pattern remains, especially among women in non-regular employment, where access to maternity and parental leave benefits is limited. Addressing these entrenched patterns requires a nuanced approach that takes into account both cultural factors and evolving workplace policies. The graph below clearly illustrates the M-curve that typifies the progression of women's careers in Korea.

Figure 3. Employment rates by sex and five-year age group in Korea, 2018



Source: OECD Employment Database.

¹ Under Japan's labour and employment policy, non-regular workers are defined as workers who fall under the category of part-time workers, fixed-term contract workers, or temporary agency workers, also referred to as "dispatched workers" in laws.



Especially noteworthy is the tendency of highly-educated women to defer parenthood due to substantial opportunity costs

Although there has been an increase in female employment rates across OECD countries, women still tend to be underrepresented in full-time positions compared to men. While opting for part-time employment can offer flexibility and allow women to remain engaged in the labour force, it often comes with trade-offs such as limited opportunities for career advancement and lower hourly wages compared to full-time roles (OECD, 2023).

In 2022, around 21.5% of women of working age in OECD countries held part-time jobs, a figure significantly higher than the 7.7% recorded for men. Over the past decade, there has been a slight decrease of 2.3 percentage points in the proportion of women working part-time, while men have seen a minor increase of 0.2 percentage points. These statistics underscore ongoing challenges faced by women in achieving full-time employment opportunities and the persistent gender disparities in labour force participation across OECD nations.

The figure 4 shows that a notable 37% of women in Australia are engaged in part-time work, far surpassing the figure for men, which stands at 15.3%. This disparity not only highlights the prevalence of part-time employment among Australian women but also highlights the need for gender-equitable labour policies.

While Australia leads in female part-time employment, Japan presents the most pronounced disparity between men and women in this regard. The difference between genders in part-time employment is striking, with a substantial 24.2 point difference. This significant contrast prompts further exploration into the cultural, economic, and societal factors influencing labour participation patterns in Japan.

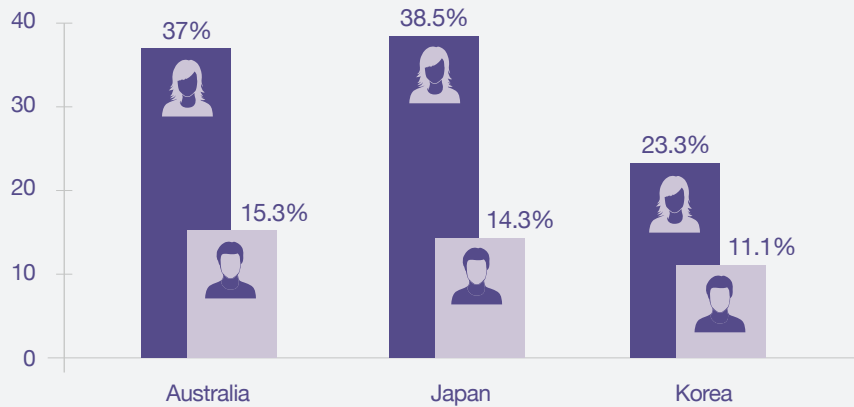
Moreover, delving deeper into these statistics reveals valuable insights into the broader labour landscape and gender dynamics within these countries. Analysing the reasons behind the prevalence of part-time work among women, as well as the challenges they face in accessing full-time employment opportunities, can provide key data for policymakers (OECD, 2023). Indeed, various factors contribute to this disparity. In Australia, for instance, cultural norms and societal expectations regarding caregiving responsibilities often influence women's choices in seeking part-time employment. Additionally, structural barriers such as a lack of affordable childcare options and limited access to flexible work arrangements can further perpetuate this trend (OECD, 2023).

In contrast, the situation in Japan may be influenced by a combination of cultural and economic factors. Traditional gender roles and expectations may limit women's participation in the labour force, particularly in full-time roles, while simultaneously placing greater emphasis on men as primary breadwinners. This societal setup may push more women towards part-time work, enabling them to balance family obligations and work responsibilities more effectively.

Furthermore, disparities in educational attainment and career advancement opportunities may also play a role in shaping the gender gap in part-time employment. Women may face obstacles in accessing higher-paying or full-time positions due to factors such as gender bias, a lack of mentorship opportunities, and workplace discrimination. As a result, part-time work may be perceived as a more viable option for maintaining work-life balance while navigating these systemic barriers.

Additionally, economic factors such as wage differentials and job availability may impact women's choices in part-time employment. In some cases, women may opt for part-time roles due to limited opportunities for full-time employment or disparities in wages between genders.

Figure 4. Share of women and men employed in part-time employment, 2022



Source: chart based on OECD Data.

In the two countries where data is accessible, a strong disparity becomes evident in the share of women who are involuntarily working part-time. For instance, in Australia, a significant 11.8% of women find themselves constrained to accept part-time positions against their preferences, compared to only 6.3% of men facing similar situations. This strong contrast sheds light on the systemic biases entrenched within the hiring process.

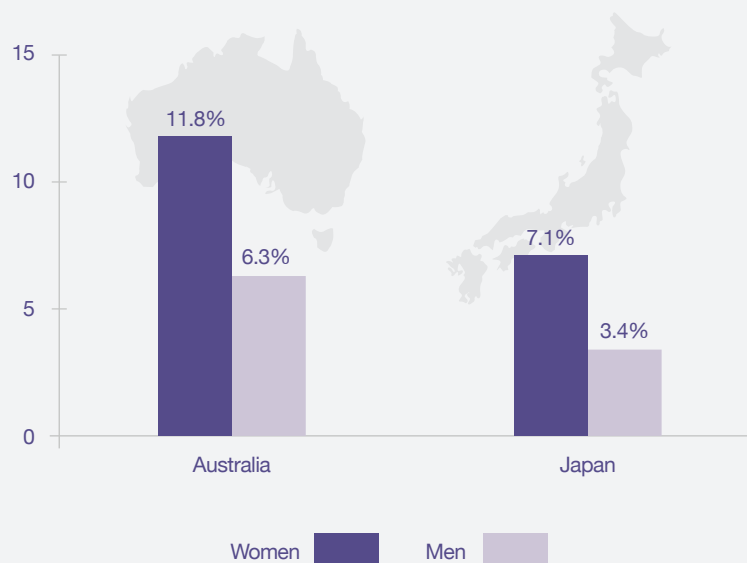
Furthermore, delving deeper into the data reveals a complex interplay of societal factors contributing to this phenomenon. Women's disproportionate caregiving responsibilities, coupled with limited access to flexible work arrangements and persistent gender stereotypes, exacerbate their vulnerability to involuntary part-time employment. Consequently, this imbalance not only curtails women's career progression but also perpetuates economic disparities within society.



Women's disproportionate caregiving responsibilities, coupled with limited access to flexible work arrangements and persistent gender stereotypes, exacerbate their vulnerability to involuntary part-time employment

Addressing these challenges necessitates comprehensive solutions. Policy interventions aimed at fostering gender equality in the workplace are crucial, alongside initiatives to enhance access to flexible working arrangements and combat gender biases in hiring practices. Additionally, investing in affordable childcare options and promoting initiatives that support work-life balance can mitigate the pressures driving women into involuntary part-time work.

Figure 5. Share of employed in involuntary part-time employment, 2022



Source: chart based on OECD Data.

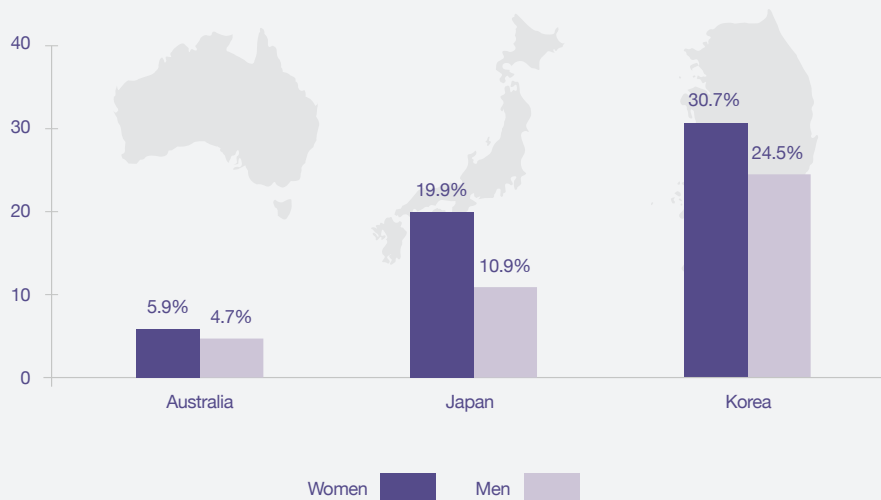
The labour market in Korea presents clear dualities, resulting in varied outcomes for workers in terms of job quality, earnings, and social protection. A significant aspect of this duality is the prevalence of non-salaried workers, particularly in micro-enterprises (OECD, 2019). In 2018, nearly 41% of employees worked in micro-enterprises, while only about 14.6% were employed by large firms with 300 or more employees (OECD, 2018). Despite a decrease in the proportion of non-salaried workers over time, it still remains significantly higher than the OECD average, which stood at 25% in 2018.

Additionally, about 30% of Korean workers in 2016 operated within the informal sector, lacking coverage under minimum wage regulations, labour standards, and social insurance regulations (OECD, 2019). This significant labour market segmentation contributes to a high turnover rate, with many workers switching jobs frequently. Indeed, the average job tenure among Korean employees in 2018 was notably brief, standing at just 6.2 years, compared to the OECD average of 9.4 years (OECD Employment Database).

The rapid turnover in jobs exacerbates economic instability, particularly among female employees, who often face shorter-term positions compared to their male counterparts. Despite the ostensibly low unemployment rate, the prevalence of temporary employment contracts amplifies financial uncertainty, which can hinder family planning efforts. The figure 6 illustrates the prevalence of temporary contracts among women and men in Japan, Korea, and Australia. Notably, in Korea, 30.7% of women are engaged in temporary employment, surpassing the 24.5% of men in similar roles. In Japan, while the overall numbers are lower, the gender gap is more pronounced, with 19.9% of women working on temporary contracts compared to only 10.9% of men.

The analysis of the data for Australia shows that a relatively small proportion of both women and men are engaged in fixed-term contracts, standing at 5.9% and 4.7%, respectively. Despite these overall modest percentages, a gender gap remains evident in this aspect of employment, highlighting persistent disparities within the labour market.

Figure 6. Share of employed in temporary employment, 2022



Source: chart based on OECD Data.

Empowering gender equality in pay

The gender pay gap persists as a longstanding challenge, fueled by entrenched structural inequities. These inequities encompass various factors, such as disparities in both paid and unpaid work, differences in job roles and responsibilities within companies despite comparable qualifications, and segregation across industries and sectors. These disparities often lead to the devaluation of professions traditionally dominated by women (OECD, 2023).

In Korea, a significant gender gap persists in non-regular employment, with women predominantly occupying temporary or part-time roles (OECD, 2019). In contrast, men are less prone to leaving the workforce due to family responsibilities. However, women who temporarily leave their jobs to care for young children often encounter obstacles upon re-entering the workforce. These "returning mothers" often face limited opportunities for stable employment, with mostly low-paying non-regular positions available. As a consequence, mothers are three times more likely than fathers to find themselves trapped in non-regular employment. Intriguingly, fathers are also three times more likely than their childless counterparts to secure stable employment, suggesting that parenthood does not hinder men's access to regular jobs as it does for mothers.

The gender pay gap and various other labour market disparities tend to exacerbate following the arrival of children, with mothers disproportionately shouldering caregiving responsibilities. As a result, they often take longer breaks from employment than fathers, frequently opting to return to work on a part-time basis. This trend is particularly pronounced in Japan, where nearly 39% of employed women work fewer than 30 hours per week (OECD, 2023).

Japan has made notable progress in expanding its Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) systems, with participation rates now exceeding the OECD average after a nearly 50% increase since 2010. The country implemented free childcare for 3- to 5-year-olds in 2019, and continuous efforts are underway to improve both the capacity and quality of the ECEC system.

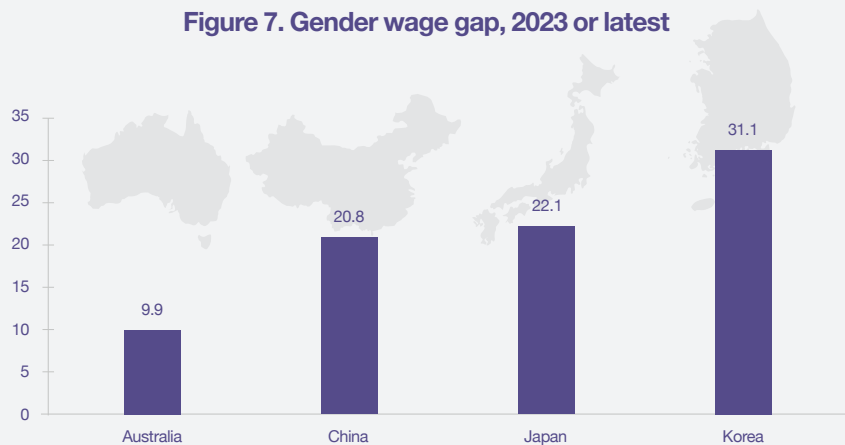
While Japan offers generous incentives for fathers to take parental leave, there persists a social stigma surrounding paternal leave within the workplace. Both mothers and fathers are entitled to individual parental leave lasting approximately one year, with an extra two bonus months available if both parents opt to share the leave. The uptake of parental leave among new fathers has seen a significant increase, rising from 1% in 2010 to 14% in 2021, especially with the introduction of a new four-week paternity leave in October 2022. Prioritizing efforts to encourage employers to support fathers in taking leave and fostering more gender-inclusive workplaces is crucial for achieving greater equity.

The gender pay gap continues to be a pressing issue in labour markets worldwide, with marked disparities evident among various countries. Notably, Korea reports the highest gender pay gap among full-time employees within the OECD, reaching 31.1% as of 2023, contrasting sharply with the OECD average of 12% (OECD Gender Data Portal, 2023). This disparity is shaped by factors including income distribution and the disproportionate representation of women in lower-paying, non-regular employment positions.

In Japan, the gender pay gap for full-time workers remains a significant concern at 22.1%, positioning it among the highest across OECD nations. This underscores persistent challenges despite economic progress. Nonetheless, there has been a noteworthy reduction of approximately 6 percentage points since 2010, a pace twice as rapid as the OECD average. **The recent introduction of mandatory pay gap reporting for private enterprises offers hope for further narrowing this gap in the years ahead. This highlights the imperative for comprehensive strategies aimed at tackling systemic barriers and fostering fair remuneration practices.**

In contrast, Australia exhibits notable progress, achieving the smallest gender pay gap among the countries surveyed at 9.9%. This positive result reflects ongoing efforts to address gender-based wage discrepancies and promote workplace equality. Nonetheless, disparities persist, underscoring the importance of sustained focus on gender equity initiatives.

Figure 7. Gender wage gap, 2023 or latest



Source: chart based on OECD Data.



The European Commission's directive on pay transparency extends the right to all employees, regardless of a company's size, to request information disaggregated by gender regarding the average pay of colleagues in similar roles

Enhancing pay transparency

Enhancing pay transparency is a key strategy in addressing gender pay disparities in Australia. Similar initiatives have gained traction in other OECD countries, aimed at empowering underpaid female workers to negotiate fairer wages by shedding light on pay discrepancies within organizations (OECD, 2023). This is especially pertinent for highly educated women in Australia, as data suggests that gender pay gaps are most apparent in this demographic.

Studies of pay transparency reforms in the UK (Blundell, 2021), Canada (Baker, et al., 2021), and Denmark (Bennedsen, et al., 2020) suggest that such measures contribute to shrinking gender pay gaps. However, the impact varies, with some cases showing slower pay increases for men compared to faster pay increases for women. Some evaluations suggest more modest benefits when enforcement mechanisms or wage gap visibility are weaker (Böheim and Gust, 2020).

Given that implementing pay transparency regulations entails administrative burdens for firms, the authorities of the four countries under investigation should closely monitor the impact of new pay transparency laws on improving gender equality and adjust the provisions accordingly.

In 2022, the Australian government took a significant step by banning pay confidentiality clauses in employment agreements. Subsequently, in 2023, it enacted fresh legislation mandating that companies with over 100 employees disclose various aspects publicly. These include gender pay differentials, the gender distribution within the workforce and leadership positions, as well as policies regarding flexible work arrangements for staff (Commonwealth of Australia, 2023).

Various forms of pay transparency measures exist that could potentially aid in narrowing gender pay disparities. For instance, the European Commission's directive on pay transparency extends the right to all employees, regardless of a company's size, to request information disaggregated by gender regarding the average pay of colleagues in similar roles. Moreover, this directive places the onus on employers to prove non-discrimination in cases of alleged bias, with strict penalties, including fines and retroactive pay, for affected employees.

Additionally, fostering the adoption of clear job classification systems across both public and private sectors can enhance transparency regarding promotion criteria. This clarity can facilitate more objective recruitment and promotion processes, thereby reducing instances of discrimination and enabling more women to ascend to better-compensated positions within organizations.

While targets and quotas may serve as short-to medium-term measures to address gender disparities, sustainable success lies in cultivating a gender-balanced talent pool capable of advancing into senior roles across various industries.

The role of paid leave entitlements in advancing gender equality

Effective parental leave systems play a pivotal role in supporting mothers to remain engaged in the workforce and facilitating their seamless return after childbirth. Thoughtfully designed parental policies not only influence societal perceptions of childcare but also contribute to dismantling gender stereotypes prevalent across various professions and sectors. This is particularly pertinent as regards the countries under investigation, given the persistent decline in female employment rates post-childbirth.

While the decision regarding childcare is deeply personal for each family, government policies on parental leave should be structured to prevent the exacerbation of gender disparities in caregiving responsibilities. Encouraging fathers to take on a more equitable share of unpaid work can help mitigate the employment disruptions often experienced by women following the birth of a child.

Moreover, research underscores the significant impact of fathers' involvement in early childcare on the comprehensive development of their children, including cognitive, emotional, and physical aspects. Fathers who actively engage with their children tend to report higher levels of life satisfaction and better overall health, both mentally and physically, compared to those who are less involved (OECD, 2016).

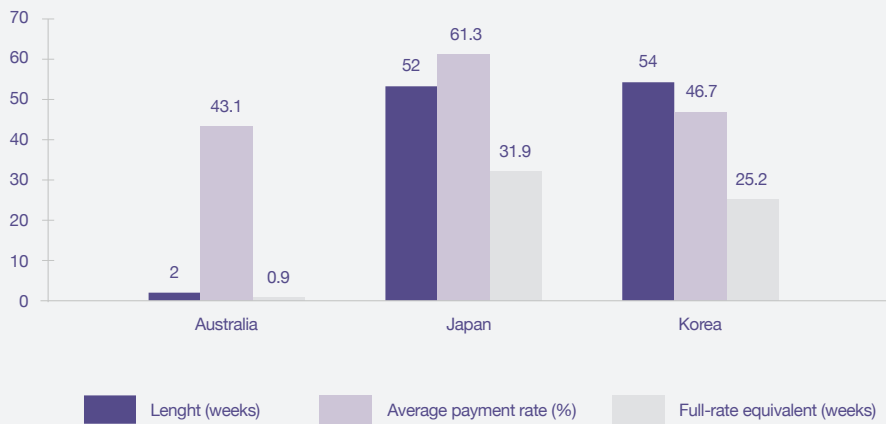
In terms of duration, the paid parental leave systems in Japan and South Korea are notably among the most generous, granting fathers a full year of non-transferable leave. In South Korea, women are entitled to a 90-day maternity leave, with the initial 60 days paid at 100% of their previous earnings and the subsequent 30 days at 100% of earnings up to a cap of KRW 1,800,000 (USD 1,636). What sets the Korean system apart from international norms is its provision for both employed mothers and fathers insured with the Employment Insurance Fund to each take up to 12 months of paid parental leave, extending until the child's eighth birthday, as detailed in the First Basic Plan on Low Fertility and an Aging Society. Additionally, fathers can benefit from three extra "Daddy months", during which payment rates are set at 100%, capped at KRW 2,500,000 (USD 2,273) per month, approximately 61% of the average earnings for a full-time worker in 2019.

The public parental leave system in Australia is relatively young compared to systems in most other OECD countries, having first been introduced in 2011 (OECD, 2023). Until recently, the scheme consisted of two payments; Parental Leave Pay (up to 18 weeks) and Father and Partner Pay (up to 2 weeks), both paid at the rate of the national minimum wage. In addition, some employers offer extra parental leave: data from the Workplace Gender Equality Agency suggest that 60% of large private companies (over 100 employees) offer some paid parental leave for primary carers on top of the government scheme (OECD, 2023). Compared to most other OECD countries, the duration of publicly provided leave and the rate at which it is paid is relatively low.

In July 2023, the two public payments were combined, meaning that partners can now claim up to 20 weeks paid parental leave between them. Single parents are eligible for the full 20 weeks. Increased flexibility is also being introduced, with parents able to receive Parental Leave Pay concurrently for up to 10 days and in blocks as small as one day at a time (OECD, 2023). The government plans to introduce further legislation to progressively increase the duration of the leave entitlement to 26 weeks in 2026. Simulations using the OECD Long-Term Model suggest that this would increase the female prime-age employment rate by 1¼ percentage points within 10 years (OECD, 2023).

The graph below illustrates the significant lead Japan and Korea hold in terms of allocated and designated days exclusively for fathers. In Japan, fathers are entitled to 52 weeks of paid leave at 61.3% of their salary, equivalent to 31.9 weeks at full pay. This leave is designed to support fathers in their caregiving responsibilities and to promote gender equality in the workforce and at home (OECD, 2022). In Korea, fathers enjoy 54 weeks of leave, albeit with a lower coverage rate of 46.7%, translating to 25.2 weeks at full pay. However, Australia's policies present a stark contrast, falling significantly behind with only 2 weeks of leave coverage, representing a mere 43.2% coverage. This effectively translates to an inadequate number of equivalent full-pay weeks.

Figure 8. Total paid leave reserved for fathers, 2022



Source: chart based on OECD Data.

Despite the comprehensive benefits available to parents, the use of paid leave programs in Korea remains low, resulting in limited allocation of funds for family support in the country. For instance, only about 23% of mothers of children born in 2017 received maternity leave support from the national Employment Insurance Fund (OECD, 2019). In 2018, nearly 100,000 parents (comprising 81,537 mothers and 17,662 fathers) claimed parental leave benefits, translating to just over 30 claimants per 100 live births, according to Statistics Korea (2018). This stands in stark contrast to some other OECD countries such as Germany in 2016, where approximately 94 mothers and 35 fathers claimed parental leave benefits for every 100 live births (OECD, 2019).



Despite the comprehensive benefits available to parents, the use of paid leave programs in Korea remains low, resulting in limited allocation of funds for family support in the country

Paid leave around childbirth is instrumental in fostering a healthy work-family balance for parents, especially during the formative years of a child's life. However, in Korea, the effectiveness of this system is hindered, as fewer than a quarter of parents of newborns use it. Several factors contribute to the underutilization of parental leave entitlements, including:

- Prior to the July 1, 2019, reform, approximately one-third of female employees lacked coverage under the employment insurance fund due to specific exclusions. The Employment Insurance Act did not encompass employees working fewer than 60 hours per month, domestic workers, and those employed in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) within sectors such as agriculture, construction, forestry, fishery, and hunting, provided they had four or fewer employees. To address this issue, the reform introduced income support of up to KRW 1,500,000 (USD 1,364) for three months for these workers. Additionally, government officials and public and private school teachers had distinct occupational arrangements, offering payment rates similar to employment insurance (EI) along with the option of two years of unpaid leave.
- Until the 2018 reform, eligibility for employment-protected leave was subject to strict criteria, requiring employees to have worked for an employer for the preceding 12 months. This excluded numerous workers, especially those in non-regular positions. However, the reform reduced the qualifying period to six months, a change expected to increase participation in the future.
- To qualify for paid parental leave in Korea, employees must have been insured for at least 180 days prior to taking leave and must take a minimum of 30 consecutive days off, a requirement that may discourage fathers from utilizing this benefit. Self-employed workers are not eligible for paid parental leave.
- In general, parental leave payment rates in Korea lag behind international standards. While the first three months of parental leave are compensated at 80% of previous earnings - and 100% of previous earnings for the second parent taking leave - the remaining period is only paid at 50%. Factoring in payment caps, the average payment rate for a parent earning the 2019 average full-time wage would be approximately 31% of previous earnings, increasing slightly to 37% for the second parent taking leave. Cultural norms may influence young mothers to exit the workforce rather than take leave, and many women may opt out of taking leave to avoid burdening their colleagues, as temporary positions are often left vacant by companies (OECD, 2018). Additionally, men may be reluctant to take leave due to concerns about potential negative impacts on their careers.

In 2019, the compensation plan for the second parent opting for parental leave - typically the father - entailed full wages for the initial three months, capped at approximately 60% of the average full-time earnings (OECD, 2019). However, the anticipated impact on fertility resulting from increased paternal leave appears to be minimal. **Interestingly, both Korea and Spain shown signs indicating a potential negative correlation between a father taking leave and the probability of having a second child.**

To enhance payment rates, one strategic approach is to offer parents the option to select shorter leave periods with higher payment rates. Another effective method, which encourages more people to take leave while maintaining family incomes, is to allow the use of paid leave on a part-time basis, enabling individuals to combine it with their regular earnings. This not only supports financial stability but also resonates with the widespread demand for a fair distribution of leave entitlements, reflecting the views of an important share of the Korean population.

Parental leave systems definitions and methodology

Parental leave systems are diverse and individual systems do not always fit neatly into classifications suitable for international comparison. However, four general types of parental leave are identifiable:

- **Maternity leave (or pregnancy leave):** employment-protected leave of absence for employed women directly around the time of childbirth (or, in some countries, adoption). The ILO convention on maternity leave stipulates the period of leave should be at least 14 weeks. In most countries, beneficiaries may combine pre- with post-birth leave; in some countries, a short period of pre-birth leave is compulsory, as is a period following birth. Almost all OECD countries have public income support payments tied to maternity leave. In some countries (for example, Australia, Iceland, New Zealand, Norway and Sweden), there is no separate regulation for (paid) maternity leave, with stipulations instead integrated into the parental leave scheme.

- **Paternity leave:** employment-protected leave of absence for employed fathers at or in the first few months after childbirth. Paternity leave is not stipulated by international convention. In general, periods of paternity leave are much shorter than periods of maternity leave. Because of their short length, workers on paternity leave often continue to receive full wage payments. In some countries (e.g. Iceland), father-specific leave entitlements are part of the parental leave scheme, rather than a separate right.

- **Parental leave:** employment-protected leave of absence for employed parents, which is often supplementary to specific maternity and paternity leave periods, and frequently, but not in all countries, follows the period of maternity leave. Entitlements to parental leave itself are often individual (i.e. each parent has their own entitlement), but entitlements to public income support during parental leave are frequently family-based, meaning that only one parent can claim income support at any one time (except for a short period after childbirth). In some countries, certain periods of parental leave are reserved for use only by the mother or father and cannot be transferred; in others (such as Austria and Germany), “bonus” paid weeks are offered if both parents use a certain portion of the family entitlement. Assuming that the family wishes to maximize the total length of leave on offer, this implies that a certain number of weeks are effectively “reserved” for fathers or the “second” parent.

- **Home care leave (or childcare or child raising leave):** employment-protected leaves of absence that sometimes follow parental leave and that typically allow at least one parent to remain at home to provide care until the child is two or three years of age. Home care leaves are less common than the other three types of leave and are offered only in a minority of OECD countries. They are also often unpaid. Where a benefit is available, home care leaves tend to be paid only at a low flat-rate.

Source: OECD Family Database, [oe.cd/fdb](https://data.oecd.org/fdb)

Germany has emerged as a noteworthy model for leave reform, with policy adjustments implemented since the mid-2000s. This reform entails providing higher payment rates for shorter durations, such as a 12-month paid leave at 67% of the parents' previous earnings, supplemented by an additional 2-month bonus if both parents take at least two months off (OECD, 2023). Furthermore, the flexibility to take leave on a part-time basis extends the allowance period to 20 to 24 months. Notably, this reform has been associated with an increased fertility rate among highly educated women in their mid-thirties.

When considering the broader implications of these policies, it is essential to underline, once again, the substantial duration of paid leave afforded to fathers within the Japanese system, amounting to an impressive 31.9 weeks or nearly eight months. This generous allocation provides ample opportunity for paternal to connect with their newborns and active participation in their care and nurturing. Japan's provision of such extensive parental leave for fathers sets a noteworthy standard among OECD nations, exemplifying the nation's commitment to enhancing support for working parents and advancing gender equality within parental caregiving roles.



Breaking through paternity leave limits: exploring solutions through Korean case study

In Korea, women who have taken career breaks to care for young children frequently encounter obstacles when re-entering the workforce. These individuals, often referred to as "mother returners," often face challenges in securing stable employment opportunities and are frequently offered only low-paying non-permanent positions (OECD, 2019). This situation is particularly troubling given the increasing educational achievements of contemporary young women, signaling an inefficient use of invested human capital. Moreover, with the population rapidly aging and the labour force projected to decline, it is essential for Korean policies to expand initiatives supporting the balance of work and caregiving responsibilities for all potential parents.

Indeed, as it has in the previous section, OECD projections indicate that the anticipated downturn in the size of the Korean labour force over the next few decades could be effectively counteracted by elevating women's labour force participation and completely eliminating the gender participation gap by 2040 (OECD, 2019; OECD, 2018).

Policy plans on low fertility and an ageing society in Korea

In 2018, the Korean government introduced the "low fertility and aging society policy roadmap". At the same time, discussions were held for the fourth basic plan designated for the period of 2021-2025. This roadmap marks a significant change in Korea's population policy, focusing on improving the quality of life and fostering a more inclusive society that embraces diversity across socio-economic backgrounds, gender, and generations (Presidential Committee on Aging Society and Population Policy, 2018).

The roadmap places particular emphasis on promoting gender equality in the workplace and providing more time for parents to spend in the private sphere. Specific measures include increasing payment rates to encourage fathers to take parental leave: starting in 2016, the duration of the 'daddy month' was extended to three months, and as of January 2019, the payment rate increased to 100% of regular earnings, capped at KRW 2,500,000 (USD 2,273) per month.

Furthermore, the roadmap introduced financial subsidies to assist employers in covering wage costs for employees with children up to the age of 8, who opt to work reduced hours. It also requires companies (with 300 employees and/or assets worth KRW 5 trillion – approximately USD 4.6 billion) to disclose workplace gender gaps, including disparities in pay, employment opportunities, and career advancement.

The prevailing culture of long working hours in Korean workplaces presents a multifaceted challenge, impacting both work-life balance and demographic trends. Not only does it hinder the ability of individuals to reconcile work commitments with family responsibilities, but it also serves as a deterrent for approximately 20% of Korean women from pursuing motherhood. Beyond its demographic implications, this entrenched work culture generates health risks and contributes to a broader deterioration in labour productivity, underscoring the imperative for systemic reform (OECD, 2019).

Traditionally, the negotiation of employment terms has been based on agreements between employers and labour unions, with governments worldwide showing caution in directly intervening in such matters. However, the Korean government has recently taken proactive steps, enacting legislation to reduce maximum working hours from 68 to 52 per week and implementing flexible working arrangements to support parents with young children (OECD, 2019). Despite these positive initiatives, there is still ample opportunity to enhance workplace practices. Key areas of focus for improvement include:

Expanding part-time opportunities:

- Introducing regular part-time employment opportunities with proportional pay, a strategy similar to the successful model implemented in the Netherlands could serve as a pivotal measure (OECD, 2019). This approach has shown promise in mitigating the departure of women from the labour force during childbirth and facilitating their reintegration into the workforce post-parenthood. Notably, certain countries such as Germany and Sweden limit flexible working time benefits to employees with childcare obligations. Conversely, jurisdictions such as the Netherlands and the United Kingdom extend these privileges universally to prevent discrimination against specific demographic groups or employees.

Promoting working time flexibility:

- Promoting flexible scheduling arrangements such as adjustable start and end times, distributed working hours throughout weeks or months, and options for remote or telecommuting work can significantly enhance work-life equilibrium. The government plays a crucial role in encouraging companies to incorporate these practices into enterprise and sectoral negotiations. By fostering an environment favorable to sharing best practices in work time flexibility and facilitating corresponding adjustments in work organization, companies can adapt to evolving workforce needs while optimizing productivity and employee satisfaction.

Strengthening gender equality measures:

- Building on affirmative action plans already in place to monitor gender equality progress in companies. Following the lead of some countries, the introduction of pay transparency measures could help mitigate gender pay disparities.

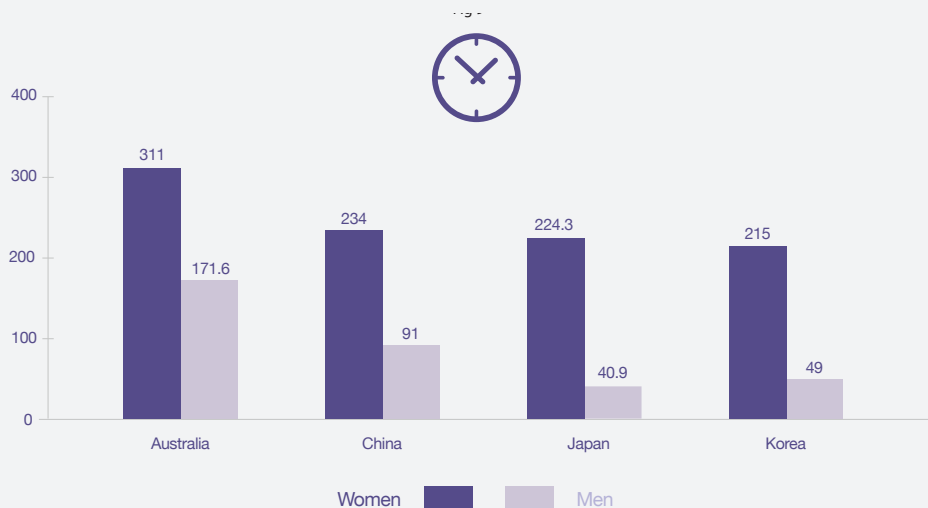
Addressing discrimination effectively:

- Enhancing sanctions on employers to reinforce the financial incentives for complying with non-discriminatory workplace practices; fortifying the labour inspectorate to more effectively enforce anti-discrimination legislation; and facilitating the process for workers to file discrimination complaints with labour courts.

Unpaid care

In every country, women are more likely than men to perform the majority of unpaid work. **Indeed, in OECD countries, they spend about four hours per day or slightly more than two hours per day than men on unpaid work (Women's Forum, 2023).** As a result, women have less time available for paid work. Women work fewer paid hours and for shorter periods than men. **Even when total paid and unpaid working hours are considered, women in OECD countries work 25 minutes longer each day than males (OECD, 2022).** Because of these factors, women may suffer greater financial insecurity and a higher risk of losing their jobs throughout their lives.

Figure 9. Time spent in paid and unpaid work, minutes per day, 2023



Source: chart based on OECD Data.

Based on the 2018 findings from the International Labour Organization (ILO), unpaid care responsibilities emerged as the primary reason cited by women of working age for their absence from the labour force globally. In contrast, men were more inclined to attribute their non-participation to factors such as being in education, sick, or disabled. During the same year, approximately 606 million women declared themselves as unemployed or not seeking work, starkly contrasting with the 41 million men who were similarly out of work due to unpaid care responsibilities. This important disparity highlights a significant issue, with a total of 647 million individuals worldwide excluded from the labour market due to full-time unpaid care duties, the majority of whom are young mothers. Notably, these full-time unpaid caregivers represent 41.6% of the world's 1.4 billion inactive women, while comprising only 5.8% of the 706 million inactive men (ILO, 2018).



China has a deep-rooted cultural tradition emphasizing distinct gender roles. However, recent economic advancements have challenged this traditional division of labour

The demographic landscape of China is undergoing significant change, with a rapidly increasing proportion of elderly individuals (ILO and UN Women, 2023). In 2015, the population aged 60 and above stood at approximately 220 million, a figure projected to surpass 300 million by 2025 and reach a peak of around 482 million by 2053 (Zhai et al., 2017). To address this major demographic change, China implemented further revisions to its family planning policies in 2022, allowing all couples to have up to three children. However, the growing number of elderly and children in need of care has led to an escalating demand for both paid and unpaid care services, putting significant pressure on the entire care system.

Chinese households have experienced a trend toward smaller sizes, compounded by a decrease in the working-age population, leading to a reduction in their capacity to provide care (ILO and UN Women, 2023). According to the "Seventh National Census Communiqué" issued by the National Bureau of Statistics in 2021, the average household size in China in 2020 was 2.62 persons, representing a decrease of 0.48 persons compared to the average of 3.10 persons in 2015. Moreover, the provision of public services is insufficient, and market-based care services lack standardization, posing significant challenges in terms of both quantity and quality of care provision (ILO and UN Women, 2023). This imbalance between demand and supply is particularly evident in the heavy burden of unpaid care within households, primarily borne by women (Xiao and Jian, 2020).

China has a deep-rooted cultural tradition emphasizing distinct gender roles. However, recent economic advancements have challenged this traditional division of labour, prompting the Chinese government to promote gender equality. Initiatives such as the current Chinese Women's Development Program (2021-2030) and the National Human Rights Action Plan (2021-2025) advocate for reducing the caregiving burden placed on women.

In this context, it is essential to explore and gain a deeper understanding of care work and the care economy in China (ILO and UN Women, 2023). Both unpaid and paid care work are complementary aspects. However, unpaid care work is not included in the System of National Accounts (SNA), the primary economic accounting system used to quantify contributions to GDP. By recognizing and assigning value to unpaid care work, a more comprehensive assessment of progress in both social welfare and economic development can be achieved

Examining unpaid care work sheds light on the dual pressures faced by women, particularly married women, in juggling work and family commitments, while also enabling a more accurate evaluation of women's contributions to the family, society, and the economy. At the societal level, understanding the importance of unpaid care work and the sacrifices made by women in undertaking it can foster an environment where both men and women share family responsibilities, thereby fostering a more equitable distribution of labour.

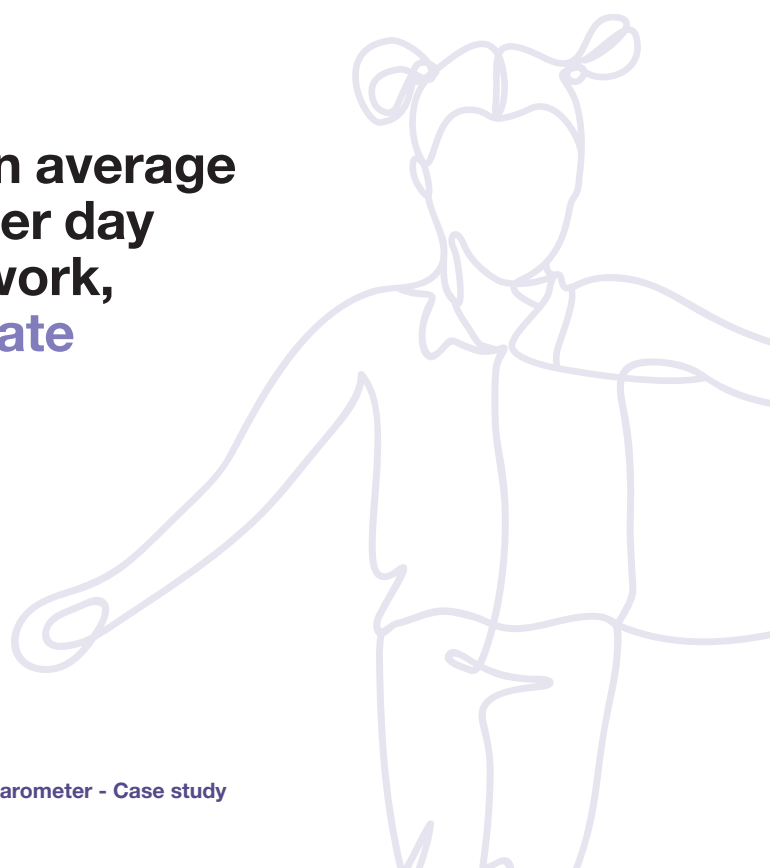
In recent years, there has been significant empirical research in labour economics and women's and gender economics, delving deeply into the complexities of the care economy. This expanding field, which encompasses diverse countries, consistently highlights a notable trend: individuals engaged in unpaid care work within families tend to experience reduced employment rates and, for those who are employed, often encounter lower wages. Referred to as the "family care penalty", this pattern underlines the significant challenges faced by caregivers in balancing their family responsibilities with their economic participation in the workforce (Folbre and Song, 2020; Azcona et al., 2020).

Exploring unpaid care work presents challenges in cross-country comparisons due to the lack of standardized measurement methodologies, leading to data inconsistencies. However, despite these challenges, the gender disparity in the distribution of unpaid care work within nations remains consistently evident. Research conducted worldwide underscores the disproportionate burden borne by women in unpaid care work compared to men. For instance, a comprehensive study in 2019 across 75 countries revealed that, on average, women's engagement in unpaid care work exceeds that of men by a factor of 3.2. This study found that women spend an average of 272 minutes per day on unpaid care work, while men dedicate only 84 minutes (Charmes, 2019).

Only few studies have estimated the value of unpaid care in China (ILO and UN Women, 2023). Dong and An (2015) used multiple methodologies, such as the opportunity cost, income, and replacement methods, to estimate China's unpaid care work, resulting in a range of 25.1% to 32.2% of GDP. Addressing sample selection bias, an author employed propensity score matching (PSM) to ascertain the paid market wage rate of surveyed individuals active in the labour market (Li, 2017). Subsequently, Li employed the Heckman two-step model and Mincer wage equation to estimate the reservation wages of individuals not engaged in the labour market. His analysis suggested that the value of unpaid care work in China represented approximately 45% of GDP.



Women spend an average of 272 minutes per day on unpaid care work, while men dedicate only 84 minutes



Definition and measurement

- The opportunity cost method operates under the assumption that individuals involved in unpaid care work could potentially be engaged in paid work within the labour market. It calculates the market wage for their labour as the opportunity cost to estimate the value of their unpaid care work. One advantage of this method is its simplicity, as it does not require differentiation between specific categories of unpaid care work during estimation. However, due to variations in market wage rates among individuals, the opportunity cost of unpaid care work differs from person to person, resulting in varied valuations of the work. Moreover, individuals with unpaid care responsibilities may encounter barriers in accessing the labour market, which can affect the estimation. While the opportunity cost method provides insights into the individual's opportunity cost, it tends to overestimate the value of unpaid care work in the economy (Miranda, 2011).

- The replacement cost method operates under the assumption that unpaid care work could be outsourced to hired professionals, and it calculates the cost of hiring such individuals as the wage rate for unpaid care work. This cost could be equivalent to the salary of either a specialist or a generalist worker.

- The specialist method assumes that distinct unpaid labour tasks are handled by specialized service providers (e.g., cooking by a chef, cleaning by a janitor, etc.), and it relies on the market wage rate of these professionals to gauge the value of unpaid care work. While this approach offers the advantage of a more detailed categorization of occupations related to unpaid care work, thereby improving estimation accuracy, it also poses challenges. Disparities in labour productivity and motivation between family members and professional service providers engaged in care work may arise. Trained professionals might demonstrate higher productivity, potentially resulting in an overestimation of the value of unpaid care work (Giannelli et al., 2012). In contrast, family members may possess greater intrinsic motivation to provide unpaid care, suggesting that using professional wages could underestimate its value.

- The generalist method assumes that all unpaid care work is performed by a general domestic service worker, valuing it based on this worker's market wage rate. This approach benefits from the ease of access to wage rates for domestic service workers or housekeepers (Dai and Zhan, 2010). However, its limitation lies in the fact that not all forms of unpaid care work can be effectively outsourced to domestic service providers, which poses challenges in determining a market value for such tasks (Liu et al., 2019).

- The output-based approach to valuing unpaid care labour involves assessing the value it generates by multiplying the quantity of unpaid care labour products and services by their corresponding market prices. This method aligns with the approaches used in the system of national accounts (SNA), making it theoretically more comparable to GDP. By considering the added value of various activities, it generally avoids overlooking the value of "simultaneous activities." However, implementing this method requires precise accounting of the quantity and market price of each unpaid care labour product and service, which involves extensive data collection (Liu, 2012). Consequently, it is rarely utilized in empirical research.

Source: International Labour Organization and UN Women, 2023.

The literature review underscores the substantial contribution of unpaid care work to the GDP of the countries under investigation. Moreover, most studies analysing gender disparities in the value of unpaid care labour suggest that women's unpaid care work holds a significantly higher value compared to men's. Nonetheless, inconsistencies in the design of time-use questionnaires and differences in the definition of the labour force impede a comprehensive comparison of the value of unpaid care work across countries. Furthermore, many countries face a scarcity of data regarding changes in the value of unpaid care work over time.

Estimates of the value of unpaid care work: summary of literature

Dong and An (2015)	China	2008	Opportunity cost, income and replacement methods	25.1% - 32.2%
Li (2017)	China	2008	Opportunity cost method	45%
Wang and Zhang (2015)	China - Gansu	2008	Linear substitution model	34.6%
Liao (2018)	China	2011	Opportunity cost, specialist and generalist methods	30%
Wu (2018)	China - Zhejiang	2015	Output method	22% - 30.3%

The recent report from the ILO analysed the economic implications of unpaid care work in China. Drawing upon data from urban wage structures and household income surveys, the report applied diverse methodologies to evaluate the value of this often overlooked labour and its impact on the economy relative to the GDP (ILO and UN Women, 2023). The findings revealed a significant share of the GDP attributed to unpaid work, ranging from 22.37% to 30.29% in 2008 and 20.94% to 29.78% in 2018, highlighting its substantial economic contribution.

Notably, the report emphasised that this contribution should not fall below the 25% threshold, indicating its importance for economic stability. Additionally, the report underscored the significant involvement of women in this domain, with their contribution to unpaid care work nearly double that of men. These findings are consistent with prior international research, as evidenced in the 2023 report by the ILO and UN Women.



Most studies analysing gender disparities in the value of unpaid care labour suggest that women's unpaid care work holds a significantly higher value compared to men's

Policy recommendations to tackle the gender gap in unpaid care responsibilities

In a recent analysis of global policies and practices regarding caregiving, the ILO has synthesised strategies for addressing unpaid care responsibilities within the framework of the "5Rs": **Recognise, Reduce, Redistribute, Reward, and Representation** (ILO and UN Women, 2023). **"Recognise"** entails challenging entrenched gender norms surrounding unpaid care, disputing the notion that such duties are inherently feminine, and acknowledging the inherent value of this labour in policy formulation and implementation. This includes advocating for support and recognition of paid caregiving roles. **"Reduce"** focuses on minimizing the time spent on unpaid care tasks through the provision of public infrastructure and services. **"Redistribute"** involves equitably reallocating caregiving responsibilities between genders and among families, states, and communities. **"Reward"** centers on ensuring fair wages and dignified working conditions for paid caregivers. Finally, **"Representation"** emphasizes the importance of granting caregivers the right to voice their concerns and engage in collective bargaining (Addati et al., 2018).

Developing a comprehensive system to ensure the availability of affordable, high-quality care services necessitates a multifaceted policy strategy. This strategy entails encouraging men to actively engage in caregiving, combating discrimination in the labour market, and reinforcing support structures for women with caregiving responsibilities (ILO and UN Women, 2023). Businesses can be incentivized to adopt family-friendly policies, introduce flexible work arrangements, and establish caregiving facilities. Furthermore, investments should be directed towards enhancing community-level services and amenities to improve accessibility and affordability.

Effecting meaningful change demands a collective societal effort to challenge entrenched patriarchal norms in labour division, foster awareness about men's shared responsibility in unpaid caregiving, and advocate for equitable distribution of caregiving duties between genders (ILO and UN Women, 2023). Without addressing deeply ingrained attitudes, even measures such as expanding public services will only marginally alleviate the burden of unpaid caregiving for women, failing to address the underlying dynamics of gender roles within households. These findings resonate with the conclusions drawn in the original study.

To fully acknowledge the economic importance of unpaid care work, it is essential to expand the System of National Accounts (SNA) to include activities with clear economic value through satellite accounts. This expansion would strengthen the national economic accounting system's ability to inform economic management effectively (ILO and UN Women, 2023). To achieve this, the government should support academic research aimed at developing household satellite accounts that accurately capture the value of unpaid care work and explore their practical implementation. National research funding should be allocated to conduct comprehensive studies on the nature of unpaid care work, its distribution across genders, and its relationship with economic development stages, cultural factors, and emerging trends (ILO and UN Women, 2023). These endeavours should foster academic discussions and policy assessments to advance the marketisation, specialisation, and professionalisation of unpaid care work.

As China implements the "three-child policy," local authorities are rolling out family-friendly initiatives. These include extending maternity leave and expanding parental leave for fathers. Leading corporations such as Tencent, Huawei, and Skyworth are tackling childcare and education challenges by establishing their own kindergartens or partnering with schools, colleges, and universities. This not only enhances employee well-being and strengthens their connection to the company but also addresses families' demand for high-quality childcare (ILO and UN Women, 2023). Some Chinese firms offer flexible working hours, allowing employees a one-hour commuting window. These developments reflect a concerted effort to support working parents and foster a more inclusive workplace environment.



It is essential to provide support and incentives to encourage men to share more of the childcare responsibilities

Government at various levels should strengthen the enforcement of current policies and devise new initiatives to aid employers in offering these services to their workforce, regardless of gender. Potential measures to explore include offering tax advantages or similar incentives to private enterprises (ILO and UN Women, 2023). Furthermore, it is essential to provide support and incentives to encourage men to share more of the childcare responsibilities, thereby alleviating the burden on women. This can be achieved through implementing family-friendly policies in workplaces.

Examples of such policies may include:

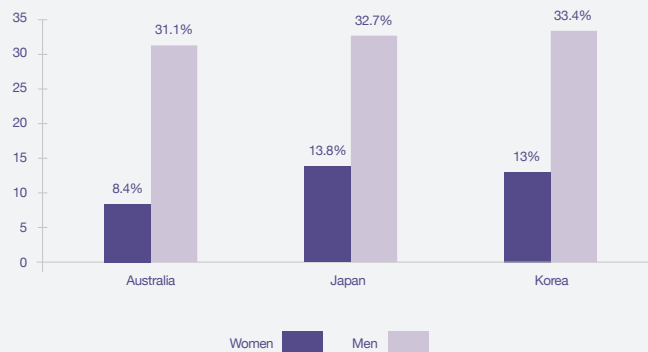
- Expanding access to paid paternity leave, parental leave, and other caregiving leaves, while encouraging men to actively embrace these benefits to foster their uptake and ensure a fair distribution of caregiving responsibilities.
- Introducing legislation that mandates employers to offer flexible work hours and remote work options for employees with caregiving responsibilities. Additionally, providing incentives such as tax breaks or subsidies can encourage businesses to adopt these practices.
- Establishing a government-led cost-sharing mechanism and monitoring system to ensure the effective implementation of these policies, thus promoting consistency and accountability.
- Offering support for unpaid caregivers to re-enter the workforce through initiatives like vocational training, lifelong learning opportunities, and incentivizing employers to hire returning caregivers through tax incentives or other programs.
- Enhancing social security coverage for unpaid caregivers by increasing pension contributions for parents who took breaks from employment for caregiving duties. Providing care credits for low-income individuals during periods of income loss due to caregiving can further support their financial stability.
- Developing mechanisms to recognize unpaid caregiving work in calculating eligibility for social security benefits. This is particularly important for individuals who temporarily leave the workforce to care for children or family members.

Gender gap employment by economic sectors

Men and women in the Asian countries under investigation are notably underrepresented in certain industries and occupations. Consequently, women often find themselves concentrated in sectors with predominantly female demographics and lower wages, along with facing numerous barriers to career advancement (OECD, 2023). The existence of "glass ceilings" hindering women's progression to higher echelons of the career hierarchy, such as managerial roles, may exacerbate this imbalance.

Factors such as the expansion of the service and public sectors, which tend to employ a significantly larger proportion of women than men across many countries, alongside the overall increase in female workforce participation, contribute significantly to the high levels of segregation observed across industries and occupations (Ngai and Petrongolo, 2017). As underlined in the figure below, the disparity is nearly threefold across the surveyed countries. For instance, in Australia, only 8.4% of women are employed in the industrial sector, while the figure stands at 31.1% for men. Hence, in Australia, the gender gap in industrial employment surpasses threefold, marking the most significant disparity among the three countries examined.

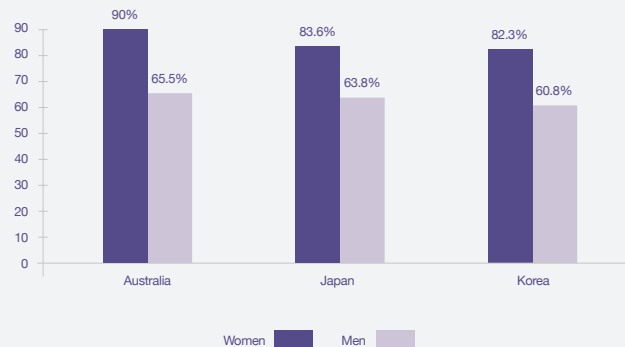
Figure 10. Share of employed working in industries, 2022



Source: chart based on OECD Data.

Across OECD countries, women made up 55% of all service sector employees in 2020 (ILO, 2022). Whereas, in the countries under investigation as the figure below shows, women outnumber men in professions related to services by 30% on average.

Figure 11. Share of employed working in services, 2022



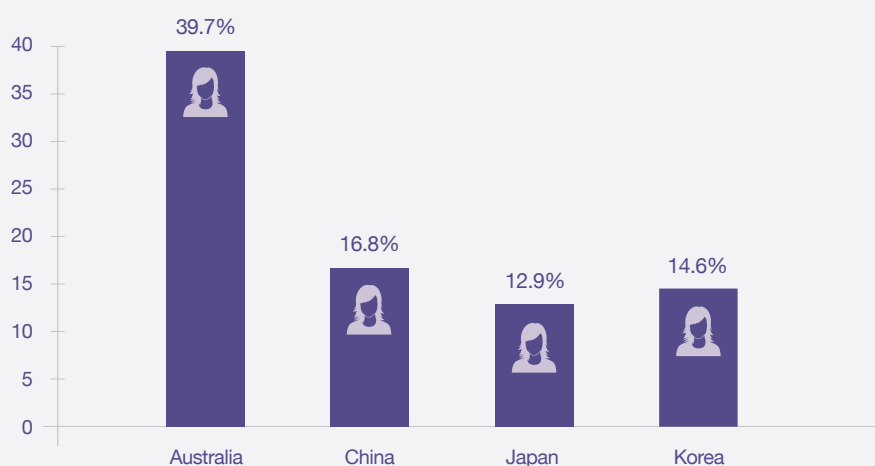
Source: chart based on OECD Data.

Women in leadership positions

There has been some progress in the representation of women on corporate boards and in senior management in large companies. Nonetheless, in OECD countries, women make up only 25% of boards, 33% of management positions, and 10% of executive posts.

The graph below shows that Australia (40%) has the largest share of women in managerial posts. While these are encouraging findings, it is important to stress that the share of female executives has been constant for some years and is no longer increasing even in countries that appear to be at the forefront of gender equality.

Figure 12. Share of female managers, 2022



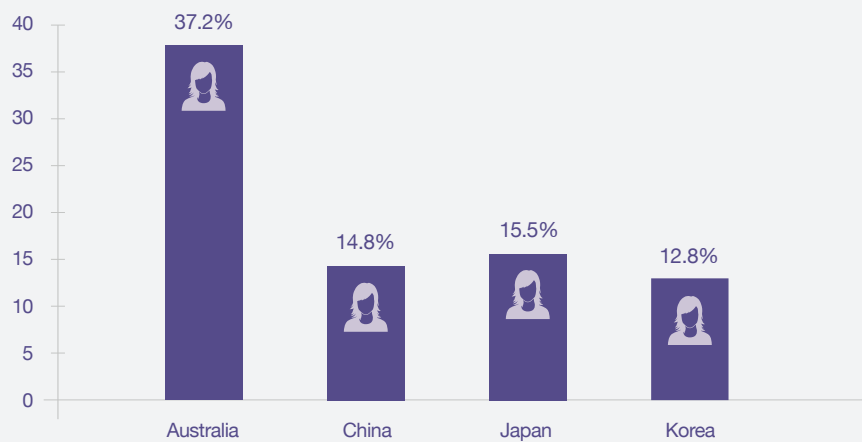
Source: chart based on OECD Data.

Although many countries currently lack this information, listed firms are required to report on their gender equality situation (Women's Forum, 2023). Even though more than two-thirds of OECD countries mandate or recommend disclosing senior management gender distribution, only a few of them require or recommend reporting board gender breakdown. **Therefore, implementing legislative actions emphasising the disclosure of gender disparities within companies will be essential to narrow the gender gap of the leadership within companies.**

More than half of OECD and G20 nations have instituted gender quotas or targets, with evidence suggesting that progress in these regions has been notably accelerated (Women's Forum, 2023). **Nevertheless, the effectiveness of government- and/or private-sector-led initiatives in broadening the pool of female talent, enhancing standards, and mitigating unintended consequences such as numerous board posts or nominations tied to families remains paramount.** Success stories in a range of jurisdictions without quotas or targets highlight the importance of such measures.

Despite some progress in increasing gender diversity on corporate boards, women continue to be underrepresented, constituting less than a quarter of board members in public companies globally (Women's Forum, 2023). According to data from the OECD and G20, women held approximately 25.4% of board directorships in 2021, marking a significant increase from 14.7% in 2013 (OECD, 2023). While advancements for women on boards have been notable, progress has been slower compared to their representation in corporate management roles. Over the same period, the percentage of women in corporate management positions rose from 30.3% in 2013 to 33.7% in 2021 (OECD, 2021).

Figure 13. Female share of seats on boards of the largest publicly listed companies, 2022



Source: chart based on OECD Data.



Implementing legislative actions emphasising the disclosure of gender disparities within companies will be essential to narrow the gender gap of the leadership within companies

Rethinking gender-related policies

Commendable efforts by the government, such as utilizing health and employment insurance data to identify and address barriers to maternity leave within firms, are steps in the right direction and should be further fortified where necessary. As part of a comprehensive approach, it is essential to expand opportunities for part-time employment, particularly to incentivize mothers to remain active in the labour market. Drawing inspiration from successful models in countries such as Sweden and Germany, where policies enable employees with children to reduce their working hours while maintaining proportional remuneration and retaining social security rights, offers valuable insights for enhancing work-life balance and parental support systems.

Promoting greater flexibility in working hours emerges as a pivotal strategy, especially considering that only 8.4% of wage workers in Korea currently benefit from flexible working arrangements, a stark contrast to EU countries where three-quarters of employees enjoy such flexibility. There is clear room for improvement in Korea. Encouraging companies to adopt practices like flexible starting and finishing times, spreading working hours across weeks or months, and offering options for remote or teleworking can significantly enhance the balance between work and family life. The government should take an active role in advocating for these measures during enterprise and sectoral negotiations, facilitating the exchange of information on best practices in working time flexibility and the resulting improvements in work organisation.

Effectively addressing discrimination is essential for fostering a harmonious work environment. It is crucial to ensure that employees face no penalties in terms of remuneration or career advancement for utilizing parental leave, working part-time, or taking advantage of working time flexibility. Policy measures should encompass imposing stricter sanctions on employers, enhancing the capabilities of the labour inspectorate to enforce anti-discrimination laws rigorously, and streamlining the process for workers to lodge discrimination complaints with labour courts. These steps are pivotal in creating a fair and inclusive workplace for all employees.

Improving efforts to advance gender equality in to advance gender equality in employment is essential. Korea's current affirmative action plans aimed at monitoring progress in achieving gender equality within companies should be strengthened. Introducing wage transparency measures, drawing inspiration from successful models in other countries, could play a significant role in addressing gender pay gaps. This comprehensive approach, which includes legal reforms, workplace initiatives, and government advocacy, has the potential to transform the labour landscape in Korea, creating a more inclusive, equitable, and family-friendly work environment.



PART II. — PERCEPTION OF THE RESPONDENTS IN ASIA-PACIFIC

This section offers a detailed examination of gender inequality within Asia-Pacific, compared with global trends. The survey delves into perceptions, experiences, and attitudes regarding gender-related disparities, drawing from a representative sample across the region. It presents a comprehensive analysis of the findings, highlighting nuances within Asian countries, while also providing a comparative outlook on a global scale.

The Women's Forum survey encompassed 10 countries (France, Germany, Italy, UK, US, Canada, Japan, China, Australia, and South Korea). A total of 5,000 citizens were interviewed, employing a representative sample of the national population aged 18 and above from each country (quota method). The survey was conducted online between June 23rd and July 21st, 2023.

A unified recognition of gender inequalities in Asia-Pacific and the G7

The Asia-Pacific region demonstrates a significant awareness of gender inequality, as evidenced by substantial percentages acknowledging issues related to rights and workplace equality. While the G7 average for recognizing gender inequality stands at 73%, Asia-Pacific aligns closely with this global awareness, registering a similar result of 74%. However, a notable perception gap between women and men emerges within the region, with 79% of women acknowledging gender inequality compared to 69% of men—a notable 10-point difference. This disparity may underscore the direct impact of such inequalities on women's lives.

The findings reveal notable differences in perceptions among countries in Asia-Pacific. Korea stands out with the highest recognition at 81%, whereas China reports the lowest at 64%. These variations may be attributed to distinct cultural, economic, and political factors inherent to each country, shaping the way gender inequality is perceived and understood.

In the professional domain, stereotypes and personal experiences exacerbate perceptions of gender inequalities. Roughly 49% of respondents from Asia-Pacific endorse the stereotype suggesting inherent disparities in natural aptitudes between men and women, perpetuating the notion that men excel in scientific subjects while women excel in literary subjects. This perpetuation further widens gender gaps in education and career paths. Comparatively, within the G7 countries, while these stereotypes are less prevalent, they remain significant, with 39% of respondents supporting the idea of gender-based differences in natural aptitudes.

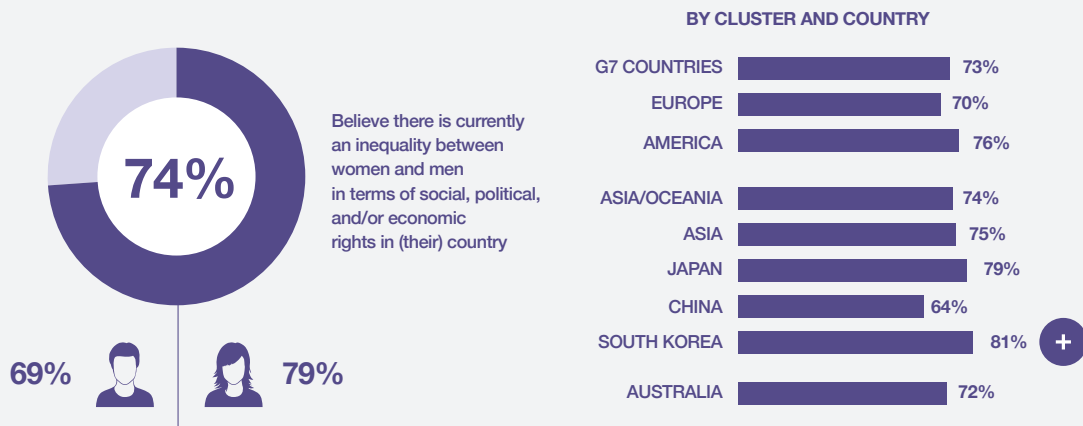


A significant 51% of respondents in Asia-Pacific believe that men are naturally more ambitious than women

Figure 14. Perception of gender equity

Almost three citizens out of four from the Asia-Oceania area believe there is currently an inequality between women and men in terms of social, political and/or economic rights in their country

Question: « To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements ? »
(Basis: all countries)



Source: Women's Forum (2023), The Women's Forum Barometer on Gender Equity focused on perception versus Reality, July 2023.

In the Asia-Pacific region, stereotypes regarding women in the workplace are more prevalent than in G7 countries. A significant 51% of respondents in Asia-Pacific believe that men are naturally more ambitious than women, while in the G7, only 29% hold this belief.

Moreover, the higher percentage of respondents in this region who perceive gender inequality at work as insignificant compared to the G7 underscores the urgent need to raise awareness and implement policies addressing workplace disparities, such as the salary gap and opportunities for career advancement. **It is noteworthy that 41% of individuals in this region view the salary gap as a minor gender issue, contrasting with 26% in the G7 countries.** Similarly, 43% of respondents from Asia-Pacific believe that gender inequality in the workplace is not a significant issue, compared to 34% in the G7.

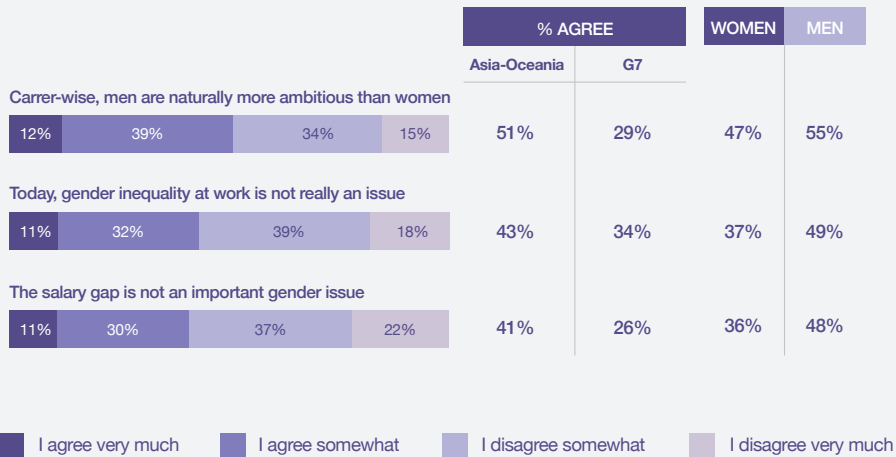
In particular, 48% of Japanese and 60% of Chinese respondents believe that gender inequality in the workplace is not a significant issue. **The perception of the salary gap as an insignificant gender issue is notably widespread among the Chinese (59%) and Koreans (46%).**

In examining the workplace experiences of women, Asia-Pacific mirrors the troubling findings observed in G7 countries, revealing deeply entrenched gender disparities. Approximately 30% of women in the region report receiving lower pay than their male counterparts for equal competencies, echoing concerns about wage parity observed in G7 countries. These disparities extend to caregiving roles, with variations observed across different clusters in Asia-Pacific

Figure 15. Perception of gender inequality at work

Women at work: important differences in perception between Asia-Oceania and the G7 area

Question: « To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements ?»
(Basis: all countries)



Source: Women's Forum (2023), The Women's Forum Barometer on Gender Equity focused on Perception versus Reality, July 2023.

Figure 16. Perception of gender inequality at work within countries

Women at work: differences within the Asia-Oceania cluster

Question: « To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements ?»
(Basis: all countries)

% AGREE	ASIA-OCEANIA	ALL COUNTRIES	G7	EUROPE	AMERICA	ASIA	JAPAN	CHINA	SOUTH KOREA	AUSTRALIA
Carrer-wise, men are naturally more ambitious than women	51%	36%	29%	25%	26%	57%	49%	66%	55%	33%
Today, gender inequality at work is not really an issue	43%	36%	34%	31%	32%	43%	48%	60%	21%	42%
The salary gap is not an important gender issue	41%	32%	26%	26%	26%	44%	26%	59%	46%	33%

Source: Women's Forum (2023), The Women's Forum Barometer on Gender Equity focused on Perception versus Reality, July 2023.

Figure 17. Perception of gender wage gap inequality

30% of women from Asia and Oceania have experienced being less paid than male colleagues having equal competences, a proportion similar to the G7 average

Question: « Yourself, have you ever...»
(Basis: Asia/Oceania - To women)



Source: Women's Forum (2023), The Women's Forum Barometer on Gender Equity focused on Perception versus Reality, July 2023.

The survey data underscores the profound impact of caregiving responsibilities on women's careers in the Asia-Pacific region, frequently leading to significant career interruptions that hinder their professional progression. Alarming, close to half of the surveyed women have had to take breaks from their careers for at least a month to fulfill caregiving obligations, a scenario notably less common among men (47% compared to 28%). This pattern closely mirrors the situation within the G7 cluster, where a comparable share of women (46%) encounter similar challenges. These findings highlight the pervasive nature of career interruptions related to caregiving responsibilities across both regions.

In the countries under investigation, there's a subtle variance between women and their G7 counterparts regarding breaks from work lasting one month or more (a 19-point gender gap compared to 21 points) or breaks extending to a year or more (a 20-point gender gap compared to 24). However, significant gender disparities emerge in the preference towards part-time employment, with a 13-point gender gap in the Asia-Pacific, widening to 19 points in G7 countries.

Upon closer examination of the Asia-Pacific cluster, notable trends emerge. China exhibits the most significant gender gap in monthly career interruptions, with a disparity of 24 points. However, it shows the lowest gap in yearly interruptions, with a difference of 15 points. Additionally, China presents noteworthy reverse gender gaps regarding promotion refusal. Intriguingly, nearly a quarter of Chinese men (24%) have declined promotions, while a comparatively smaller proportion of women in this region, around 18%, have done so.

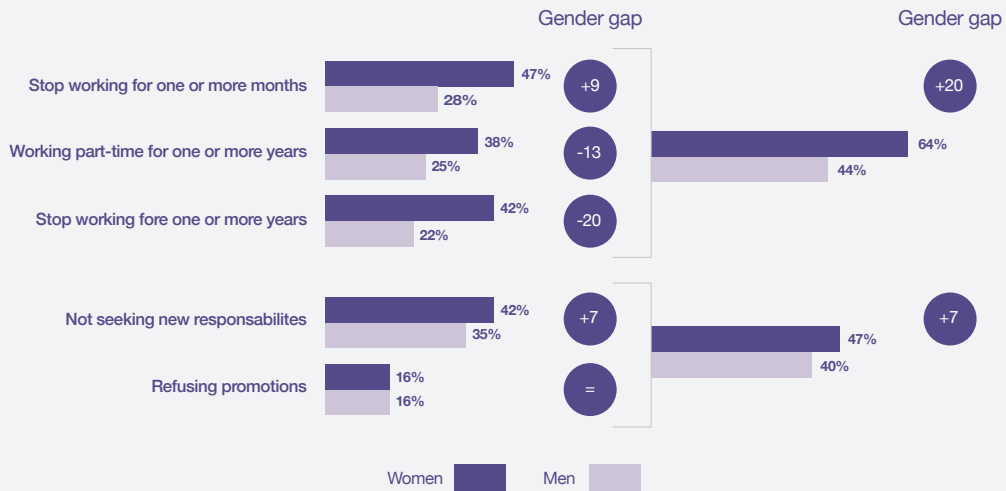
“ Close to half of the surveyed women have had to take breaks from their careers for at least a month to fulfill caregiving obligations ”

While respondents in Asia-Oceania agree more strongly than those in the G7 that women "can't have it all, if they want to be a good mother, they have to accept to partly sacrifice their professional career" (60% compared to 48%), it is noteworthy that similar shares in both geographical areas believe that "It is more difficult for a woman than for a man to have a successful career because she has to accept to partly sacrifice her family life" (70% compared to 68%).

Figure 18. Career fragmentation among women respondents due to unpaid care

Women's careers are more fragmented than men's, mainly due to the career breaks they take to care for someone else, which has an impact on their responsibilities and promotions

Question: « Have you already done the following things to take care of someone ? »
(Basis: Asia/Oceania)

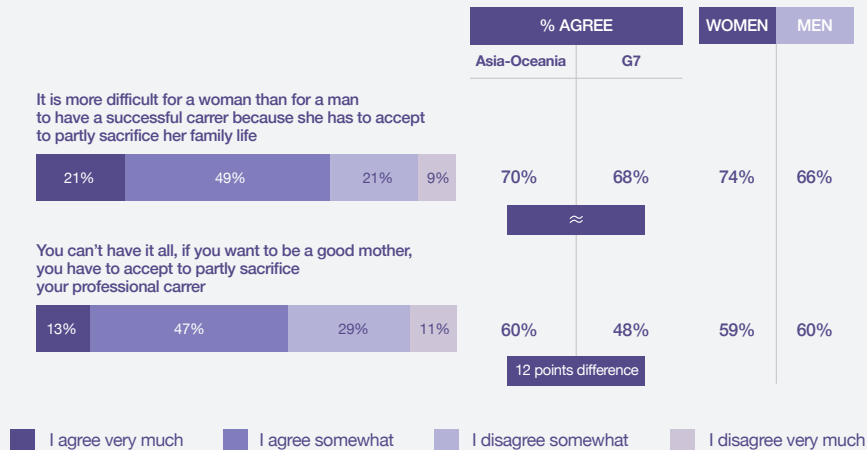


Source: Women's Forum (2023), The Women's Forum Barometer on Gender Equity focused on Perception versus Reality, July 2023.

Figure 19. Perception of gender inequality in the workplace linked to motherhood

General opinions about being a mother and having a career

Question: « To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements ? »
(Basis: all countries)



Source: Women's Forum (2023), The Women's Forum Barometer on Gender Equity focused on Perception versus Reality, July 2023.

The trends observed in career interruptions, coupled with the caregiving responsibilities data, underscore individuals' resilience and adaptability in the face of challenges. When compared to the G7, the Asia-Pacific region reports fewer occurrences of part-time work or prolonged career breaks due to caregiving duties. Moreover, there's a reduced inclination among individuals in this region to embrace the notion of "having it all". Nevertheless, despite these distinctions, career interruptions persist as a significant obstacle to women's career advancement, constraining their prospects for attaining higher positions and financial security.

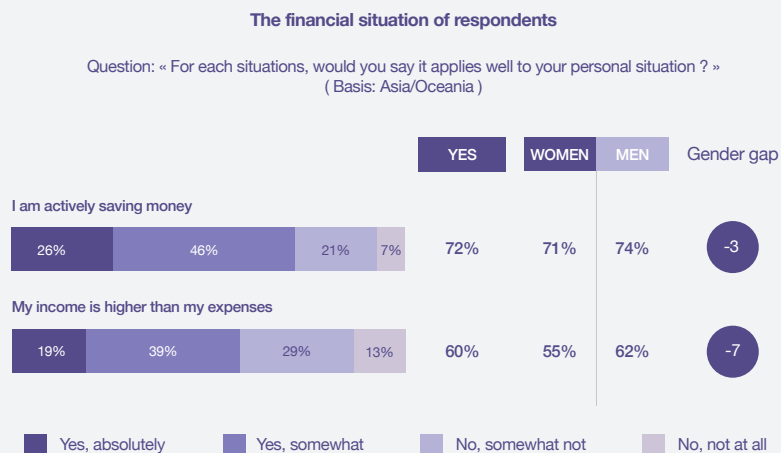
Financial security emerges as a key factor in addressing gender inequalities

A significant majority of individuals in the Asia-Pacific region, totaling over two-thirds (67%), are aware of their salary's value, mirroring responses from G7 nations (68%). However, it is essential to underscore the gender gaps and substantial differences between China and Japan concerning this aspect.

It is also noteworthy to highlight the significantly smaller gender gap, which stands at just 3 points compared to the 8-point difference in the G7 cluster. Impressively, in China, 82% of respondents demonstrate awareness of their salary value, the highest score in this metric, while only 53% of active individuals in Japan report the same, marking the lowest score.

In the Asia-Pacific region, women exhibit strong financial habits, with 71% actively saving money, surpassing their counterparts in the G7, where this figure stands at 64%. Additionally, 55% report that their income exceeds their expenses, slightly higher than the 53% reported in G7 countries. Despite potential financial challenges stemming from salary disparities, there is unanimous agreement among all citizens for educational initiatives on financial literacy to empower women in effectively managing their finances.

Figure 20. Financial situation of respondents



Source: Women's Forum (2023), The Women's Forum Barometer on Gender Equity focused on Perception versus Reality, July 2023.



84% of respondents express strong support for the advancement of women's financial literacy through training programs and women's support networks, a sentiment echoed in the G7

In this context, 84% express strong support for the advancement of women's financial literacy through training programs and women's support networks, a sentiment echoed in the G7. Notably, this figure rises to an impressive 93% in China.

The survey also explores whether women face fewer personal life pressures and exhibit greater resilience in addressing overall mental health challenges. The data reveals that 26% of women in Asia-Pacific have encountered sexual harassment or assault, whether in public spaces, workplaces, or private life. Comparatively, in the G7 cluster, the prevalence is higher, with 34% of women reporting such experiences. A closer examination within the Asia-Pacific countries highlights a significant concern in Australia, where the percentage rises to 42%, notably above the 26% regional average. Nonetheless, this average remains lower than the rates observed in Europe and America (35% and 40%, respectively).

Globally, concerning reproductive choices, 36% of women in Asia-Pacific express feeling significant pressure regarding decisions about reproduction and personal life, such as choosing to become a mother or opting for singlehood. Comparatively, the pressure experienced by women in the G7 countries is slightly lower, with 33% acknowledging this phenomenon. Notably, this pressure is substantially higher in China, where 42% of women report feeling it.

Figure 21. Perception of freedom in making personal choices

Women in Asia and Oceania suffer much more than men from pressure on their reproductive choices and from sexual harassment

Question: « Yourself, have you ever... »
(Basis: Asia/Oceania)




Source: Women's Forum (2023), The Women's Forum Barometer on Gender Equity focused on Perception versus Reality, July 2023.

Figure 22. Perception of freedom in making personal choices per countries

Inequalities and violence in private lives, per country, gender and gender gap

Question: « Yourself, have you ever...»
(Basis: Asia/Oceania)



	ASIA-OCEANIA	G7	EUROPE	AMERICA	ASIA	JAPAN	CHINA	SOUTH KOREA	AUSTRALIA
Been in charge of organizing by yourself your household and your family's life	48%	52%	48%	64%	43%	44%	47%	38%	61%
Felt a strong pressure when it comes to your reproductive choices and personal life	36%	33%	31%	36%	35%	31%	42% ⁺	32%	38%
Been sexually harassed or even assaulted	26%	34%	35%	40%	21% ⁻	22%	17%	23%	42% ⁺
Had difficulties accessing specific health facilities	26%	33%	36%	32%	23%	26%	27%	17%	34%

Source: Women's Forum (2023), The Women's Forum Barometer on Gender Equity focused on Perception versus Reality, July 2023.

Figure 23. Perception of gender inequality in mental health

How women feel vulnerables to mental health conditions, per country

Question: « Personally, do you feel vulnerable to the following mental health conditions »
(Basis: All countries - to women)

% YES	ASIA-OCEANIA	G7	EUROPE	AMERICA	ASIA	JAPAN	CHINA	SOUTH KOREA	AUSTRALIA
Depression	42%	44%	44%	44%	35%	30%	43%	33%	61% ⁺
Anxiety disorder, phobia pr PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder)	41%	41%	41%	47%	34%	32%	40%	29%	61% ⁺
Obsessive-compulsive disorder	31%	22%	20%	29%	31%	19%	49% ⁺	26%	31%
Eating disorder (i.e. anorexia/bulimia/binge eating disorder, etc)	30%	26%	27%	26%	28%	18%	45% ⁺	22%	36%
Substance abuse disorder	19%	11%	10%	15%	18%	9%	32% ⁺	12%	24%
Schizophrenia, bipolar or related disorders	20%	13%	11%	15%	18%	15%	27% ⁺	14%	24%

4 to 9 pts difference

Source: Women's Forum (2023), The Women's Forum Barometer on Gender Equity focused on Perception versus Reality, July 2023.

Overall, a strong commitment to change prevails throughout the Asia-Pacific region, as well as in the G7 countries. In Asia-Pacific, 86% of respondents prioritize gender equality based on competence rather than gender, slightly lower than the 92% in G7 countries. However, addressing gender inequality remains a significant priority for both regions, with 75% expressing this commitment in Asia-Pacific and 73% in G7 countries.

Opinions within the Asia-Pacific region vary widely. Notably, 80% of Chinese respondents advocate for equal treatment for women, contrasting with a higher figure of 94% among Australians. Regarding the fight against gender inequality, the Japanese exhibit the lowest level of conviction at 62%, which falls below Australia's 71%. Meanwhile, the Chinese express stronger opinions, with 84% advocating for gender equality

Addressing gender inequalities requires collective action from citizens. For example, 72% of men in the Asia-Pacific region who acknowledge these disparities believe that men play a crucial role in reducing them, a sentiment echoed by 76% in G7 countries. Notably, Koreans are less likely than their Chinese counterparts to advocate for action, with only 67% of men in Korea endorsing this view compared to 82% in China. While there is unanimous support for educating about gender bias across the countries under investigation and in G7 countries, the endorsement of corrective measures, such as withdrawing subsidies and grants from educational institutions with less than 40% female enrollment in STEM courses, is strongly favored in China (79%), in contrast to 59% in the entire Asia-Pacific cluster.

Figure 24. Attitudes toward achieving gender equality among respondents

Almost three citizens out of four from the Asia-Oceania area believe there is currently an inequality between women and men in terms of social, political and/or economic rights in their country

Question: « To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements ?»
(Basis: all countries)



Source: Women's Forum (2023), The Women's Forum Barometer on Gender Equity focused on Perception versus Reality, July 2023.

Main Findings

The survey provides a comprehensive overview into the complex landscape of gender inequalities across the Asia-Pacific region and the G7 countries. Despite widespread acknowledgment of these disparities, significant differences persist between the experiences of men and women, as well as among the various countries within these regions.

The data reveals persistent stereotypes and biases that perpetuate gender disparities in education, the workplace, and personal life decisions. Despite gradual progress, challenges such as the gender pay gap and caregiving responsibilities continue to impede women's advancement and financial stability.

Addressing these inequalities requires a multifaceted approach that includes raising awareness, implementing effective policies, and promoting financial literacy. There is a collective call to action, with both men and women recognizing the importance of their roles in reducing gender disparities. Moving forward, it is crucial for governments, organizations, and individuals to collaborate in creating a more equitable society where everyone has equal opportunities and rights, regardless of gender.



PART III. — POLICY

RECOMMENDATION AND CALL TO ACTION FOR REACHING GENDER EQUALITY IN THE WORKPLACE

In the pursuit of fostering inclusive, equitable, and thriving workplaces, the implementation of comprehensive policy frameworks is imperative. As societies progress towards greater gender equality and diversity, it becomes increasingly evident that systemic changes are necessary to address entrenched disparities. The following proposal outlines a multifaceted approach aimed at advancing equal opportunity, promoting work-life balance, ensuring transparent pay practices, and fostering parental leave equality.

Based on the literature review and data analysis

Comprehensive equal opportunity framework:

- Conduct training programs to sensitize employers and employees on the advantages of workplace diversity.

Flexible work advancement policies:

- Encourage companies to offer flexible work arrangements without hindering career progression.
- Regularly monitor and assess the impact of part-time work on promotion chances and wage disparities.

Transparent pay and recruitment practices:

- Strengthen pay transparency legislation for fair comparison of remuneration packages.
- Advocate for policies addressing discrimination in recruitment processes and conducting regular gender pay audits.
- Encourage companies to disclose average earnings by gender, empowering employees to negotiate fair compensation.

Parental leave equality:

- Implement policies to encourage fathers to take parental leave, reducing the gender gap in utilisation.

Addressing unpaid care work:

- Develop and implement care policies that recognize, reduce, and redistribute unpaid care work.
- Provide social security for women with care responsibilities.
- Support initiatives to promote a more equal distribution of unpaid care work between men and women.

Comprehensive gender equality tax reforms:

- Adjust household tax policies for neutrality considering the family as a whole.
- Explore differentiated taxation to prevent disincentives for the partner with lower income to work.
- Regularly review and update tax policies to align with gender equality goals.

Recommendations tested with the respondents of the Women's Forum Barometer

76% of the respondents are in favour of reserving part of the parental leave for exclusive and non-transferable use by fathers.

79% of the respondents are in favour of requiring companies to publish an index (score out of 100) showing wage gaps.

88% of the respondents are in favour of providing quality and affordable childcare and elder care.

77% of the respondents are in favour of disclosing the names of companies where there are wage gaps between men and women for equal skills.

— SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In concluding this comprehensive analysis of workplace dynamics in Australia, China, Japan, and Korea, it becomes evident that while progress has been made, significant challenges remain on the path to achieving gender equality. Through an objective lens, this report has underlined the multifaceted nature of these challenges, highlighting structural barriers, cultural norms, and systemic inequalities that continue to impede the full participation of women in the workforce.

Indeed, the significant disparity in labour force participation rates between OECD countries and Asia/Pacific countries, coupled with the persistent gender gap, highlights the pressing need for targeted interventions to dismantle barriers hindering female workforce participation. While Australia leads with effective policies promoting gender equality, challenges persist across the region. Japan, China, and Korea struggle with wider gender gaps, with Korea notably facing a gender employment gap of 18.6 percentage points, higher than the OECD average of 12 percentage points.

In Korea's evolving labour market, advancements in female educational attainment have driven the female employment rate from 50% in 2000 to an impressive 57% in 2017. However, entrenched segmentation persists, particularly evident in the dichotomy between regular and non-regular employment, with women disproportionately represented in low-wage positions. This divide is pronounced, with 37% of women in full-time roles occupying such positions compared to 15% of men. Moreover, 30% of mothers and 12% of fathers navigate non-regular employment, lacking essential social security coverage and parental leave benefits.

Despite legislative efforts to address the “long hours culture”, Korea's full-time workers still average 46.8 hours per week, surpassing the OECD average. Recent measures reducing the maximum working week reflect a proactive approach to promoting work-life balance and enhancing productivity. Yet, traditional norms such as the “after work social culture” continue to shape the labour market, impacting women's participation and perpetuating unpaid caregiving roles.

Over 30% of female employees in Korea and more than 53% in Japan are engaged in non-regular employment contracts, perpetuating the wage gap and contributing to disparities in job quality and social protection. Compounded by traditional norms and cultural expectations, this segmentation creates significant challenges for working parents, particularly women, who navigate the delicate balance between professional aspirations and familial duties.

Moreover, the prevalence of temporary employment contracts further exacerbates economic instability, with rapid turnover rates amplifying financial uncertainty, especially for female employees. In Korea, for instance, 30.7% of women are engaged in temporary employment, highlighting the pronounced gender disparity in job security. Similarly, in Japan, while overall numbers are lower, the gender gap in temporary contracts remains significant, reflecting entrenched gender dynamics within the labour market.

The persistent gender pay gap remains a significant challenge, reflecting entrenched structural inequities across various dimensions of work. In Korea, the gender pay gap among full-time employees is as high as 31.1%, exacerbated by disparities in non-regular employment. Similarly, in Japan, despite a reduction in the gender pay gap, full-time workers still face a significant disparity of 22.1%. Australia, however, shows progress with the smallest gender pay gap among surveyed countries at 9.9%, indicating the effectiveness of ongoing efforts to promote workplace equality. Nevertheless, these disparities underscore the urgent need for comprehensive strategies to address systemic barriers and promote fair remuneration practices, ensuring equal opportunities for all individuals to thrive in the workforce.

Enhancing pay transparency is a crucial step towards gender pay equality, mirroring global efforts. Recent legislation, including bans on pay confidentiality and mandates for gender pay disclosure, marks significant progress. Monitoring the impact of these reforms is essential, alongside fostering transparent job classifications to ensure fairness in recruitment and promotion. Commitment to a gender-balanced talent pool and addressing biases is key to achieving lasting change.

Effective parental leave policies are also instrumental in promoting gender equality by facilitating women's seamless reintegration into the workforce after childbirth. In countries such as Japan and South Korea, generous parental leave entitlements, including provisions for both mothers and fathers, aim to redistribute caregiving responsibilities and promote gender-balanced participation in the workforce. However, despite the comprehensive benefits available, the utilization of parental leave programs remains low in Korea, with only about 23% of mothers receiving maternity leave benefits from the national Employment Insurance Fund. Structural barriers such as limited coverage under employment insurance, stringent eligibility criteria, and relatively low payment rates contribute to the underutilization of parental leave entitlements, highlighting the need for ongoing reforms to maximize the potential of these policies in fostering work-family balance and gender equality.

The issue of unpaid care work remains a significant challenge worldwide, with women disproportionately burdened by these responsibilities. The economic implications are substantial, with unpaid care work contributing a significant share to the GDP. Recognizing the value of unpaid care work and implementing policies to address the gender gap in caregiving responsibilities are essential steps toward achieving gender equality and economic stability. By adopting the "5Rs" framework and developing comprehensive policy strategies, governments can promote a more equitable distribution of caregiving duties and support both men and women in balancing work and family responsibilities. Moreover, expanding the System of National Accounts to include unpaid care work and investing in research and policy initiatives will further advance the recognition and professionalization of caregiving roles.

The gender gap in employment across sectors in Asian countries reveals significant disparities, with women facing barriers to advancement and representation. For instance, in Australia, men dominate the industrial sector at 31.1%, while women comprise only 8.4%.

In light of the data presented, it is evident that while there has been progress in advancing gender diversity in corporate leadership, significant disparities persist. Notably, Australia leads with 40% representation in managerial positions, showcasing positive strides, albeit with stagnant growth in female executive representation. The implementation of legislative measures mandating gender diversity reporting is crucial to address these imbalances effectively. While gender quotas or targets have accelerated progress in some nations, broader efforts are necessary to ensure sustained advancement and mitigate unintended consequences. Despite notable gains, the underrepresentation of women on corporate boards globally underscores the ongoing need for concerted action to foster true gender equality in leadership positions.

In moving forward, it is imperative that governments, employers, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders work together to enact meaningful change. This includes implementing policies that promote pay equity, expand access to affordable childcare, and support work-life balance for all employees. It also requires fostering a culture of inclusion and diversity within organizations, where women are empowered to thrive and contribute their full potential.

Ultimately, achieving gender equality in the workplace is not just a moral imperative but also an economic necessity. By harnessing the talents and contributions of all members of society, we can build stronger, more resilient economies and create a brighter future for generations to come. As we reflect on the findings of this report, let us commit ourselves to taking concrete steps towards a more equitable and inclusive world.



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