

# Women and the economy: 30 years after the Beijing Declaration

## Key messages

- ▶ Beijing+30 places women's rights and the role that women play in the economy centre stage. Progress towards equality has occurred over the past thirty years but has been modest and uneven. Crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic, have interrupted that progress.
- ▶ In 2024, 46.4 per cent of working-age women were employed, compared to 69.5 per cent of men. In over 30 years, the gender employment gap has narrowed by only 4 percentage points, with high-income and lower-middle income countries exhibiting the largest reduction. At this pace of progress, achieving gender parity in employment rates globally will take over 190 years.
- ▶ Between 2004 and 2024, progress has been made in reducing gender inequalities in annual earnings per worker, across all country income groups, particularly in low-income countries. However, employed women globally still earn significantly less on average than men, work fewer paid hours, and are overrepresented in informal employment in low- and lower-middle-income countries.
- ▶ Globally in 2024, women worked approximately 6 hours and 25 minutes less per week than men in paid employment. However, women spend 3.2 times more hours on unpaid care work than men. Excessive and unequal care responsibilities keep 708 million women outside the labour force globally.
- ▶ As of 2023, women hold just 30 per cent of managerial positions globally, a modest improvement over the past two decades. Low-income countries have demonstrated significant progress, with women's representation in management rising from 24.7 to 36.5 per cent.
- ▶ Women are 1.6 times more likely than men to experience sexual violence and harassment in the world of work, with young and migrant women being at greater risk.
- ▶ The Beijing Platform for Action remains a powerful force for championing women's rights, including in the world of work. Beijing+30 serves as a reminder that while the pursuit of gender equality remains an ongoing challenge, this pursuit is not just a response to inequality, it is also a powerful solution. Advancing equal opportunities and treatment in the world of work can drive economic development, enhance workplace productivity, and foster resilient societies.

## Introduction

In 1995, the UN's Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing marked a historic commitment to advancing equality, development, and peace for women worldwide. Thirty years later, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA) remains the most comprehensive and influential framework for advancing women's rights.

Twelve critical areas<sup>1</sup> and their related strategic objectives and actions outline the BPfA's overarching commitments to women's rights. For the ILO, the theme of "Women and the Economy" reflects the critical role its constituents continue to play in shaping key policy areas and achieving strategic objectives, drawing on the ILO's extensive body of international labour standards. This critical area provides an in-depth analysis of the various forms of gender-based discrimination in the labour market and their root causes—challenges that remain highly relevant today. Since 1995, "Women and the economy" continues to guide ILO's work on equal opportunities and treatment of men and women in the world of work as reflected in its [Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work](#).

The BPfA was groundbreaking in recognizing unpaid care work as an economic issue and highlighting its impact on women's participation in the labour market. It identified how macroeconomic restructuring processes disproportionately affected women, leading to job losses and pushing many into the informal economy. The BPfA also acknowledged that, due to limited bargaining power, women were often forced to accept low wages and poor working conditions. Moreover, its insights into the impact of violence and harassment on women in the world of work remain highly relevant.

Thirty years on, many of the barriers and constraints identified by the Beijing signatories persist, underscoring the continued urgency of addressing these challenges. In Beijing, the ILO affirmed a powerful truth: "All Women are Working Women". Since its foundation in 1919, the ILO has been a leading advocate for equal opportunities and treatment for all in the world of work, playing a crucial

role in setting international labour standards on topics such as equal pay for work of equal value, non-discrimination in employment and occupation, maternity protection, workers with family responsibilities, and violence and harassment, among other key conventions. Most recently, the 2024 [ILO Resolution concerning decent work and the care economy](#) recognises that a well-functioning and robust care economy is central to human, social, economic and environmental well-being, and it is critical for achieving gender equality.

Overall, during the past thirty years, countries' commitment to promoting equal opportunities and treatment in the world of work has increased as reflected in the growing number of countries ratifying and implementing international labour standards.<sup>2</sup> However, these commitments have not always translated into substantive equality and women's outcomes in the world of work remain uneven and modest.

Beijing+30 serves as a reminder that the pursuit of gender equality remains an ongoing challenge, further complicated by a rapidly evolving world of work. Multiple, overlapping crises - including conflict, debt distress, the cost-of-living crisis, and the COVID-19 pandemic - have deepened inequalities and heightened risks, making urgent action more critical than ever. At the same time, demographic, technological, and environmental transitions are reshaping the labour market, offering both challenges and opportunities for inclusive economic development and gender-responsive policies.

This brief presents an updated and comprehensive statistical snapshot of the current situation of gender equality in the world of work 30 years after the Beijing Platform for Action. Utilising labour market indicators, primary and secondary data, and adopting a multi-dimensional perspective, this brief provides both historical trends as well as more recent insights into the evidence of gender (in)equality in the world of work. As the 2030 deadline for the SDGs draws closer, strengthening this evidence-base is key to inform effective policy action for sustainable change and a world of work that works for all men and women, leaving no one behind.

<sup>1</sup> The twelve critical areas are poverty, education and training, health, violence, armed conflict, economics, power and decision-making, institutional arrangements, human rights, media, environment, and the girl child.

<sup>2</sup> Since 1995, there has been an increase in the number of countries that have formally committed to promoting gender equality in the world of

work. At that time, 126 Member States had ratified the Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100), and 122 Member States had ratified the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111). As of 5 March 2025, we stand at 174 and 175 ratifications of these two fundamental conventions, respectively. Since its adoption, the Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No.190) has been ratified by 49 countries.

## Persistent gender inequalities in the world of work

Gender inequalities in the world of work remain a significant and persistent issue globally. These inequalities are deeply entrenched, and the result of multiple compounding disadvantages that women face in entering, remaining and progressing in employment and obtaining decent work.

Gender inequalities in the world of work are reflected in differences in both employment opportunities and quality of employment. First, women face lower employment rates, reflecting persistent barriers to employment opportunities. Second, disparities persist even within the employed population. Women who are employed, either as wage workers or in self-employment, spend on average

less time working for pay and are over-represented in lower-paying jobs, often with limited access to social protection.

These compounded disadvantages translate into stark differences in the total amount of labour income that men and women earn: collectively in 2024, the labour income earned by all women worldwide amounts to barely over half of that earned by all men.<sup>3</sup> While there has been some progress in closing gender gaps in labour income over the past two decades, these gains have been modest and uneven across regions and country income groups.

Addressing gender inequalities in labour markets requires targeted actions to improve women's access to and opportunities for employment, ensure equal pay for work of equal value, and dismantle structural barriers in and outside of labour markets.

## Gaps in employment opportunities between men and women

The economy's ability to provide equal opportunities and treatment for all can be measured by looking at the share of working-age individuals across different groups who are in employment. When looking at differences in employment rates between men and women, persistent gender gaps can be observed. These are manifestations of deep structural barriers that women still face when entering and remaining in the world of work, preventing them from fully realising their potential.

## Gender gaps in employment remain substantial, with only modest and uneven progress

Gender gaps in employment, as measured by differences in the employment-to-population ratio by gender, remain large across the world.<sup>4</sup> **In 2024, only 46.4 per cent of working-age women worldwide were employed, compared to 69.5 per cent of men – a gap of 23.1 percentage points** (see Figure 1).<sup>5</sup> While the global gender employment gap has narrowed over the past three decades, shrinking from 27.1 percentage points in 1991 to 23.1 percentage points in 2024, this progress has been modest and uneven (see Figure A1 in the Appendix). Crucially, this reduction has been driven primarily by a 6-percentage-point decline in the male employment rate, rather than meaningful gains for women, whose global employment rate decreased by 2.3 percentage points over

<sup>3</sup> Statistics on the contribution of women to total labour income are derived from the August 2024 ILO Modelled estimates on the [Gender Income Gap](#). Labour income includes earnings from wage and self-employment, with the labour income of those not in employment assumed to be zero.

<sup>4</sup> The employment-to-population ratio – defined as the number of persons who are employed as a percentage of the total working-age population (those aged 15 and above) – is a key indicator for assessing these disparities. Unlike labour force participation, which includes both employed and unemployed individuals, the employment-to-population ratio captures the ability of an economy to generate employment opportunities and provides a comprehensive view of gender disparities in actual employment outcomes. In contrast, labour force participation can obscure disparities in employment outcomes, particularly for

women who may be disproportionately represented among the unemployed.

<sup>5</sup> Throughout the brief, unless explicitly mentioned, all statistics at the global, regional and country income group level are derived from the ILO modelled estimates collection. The ILO modelled estimates provide a series of internationally comparable statistics that include both nationally reported observations and imputed data for countries with missing information so that, for every year, global, regional and country income group estimates can be computed with consistent country coverage. For more information on the ILO modelled estimates series, please refer to the [ILOSTAT dedicated page](#).

the same period. This underscores the need for gender-responsive employment policies that create decent employment opportunities by promoting job-rich, inclusive and sustainable growth, and decent work for all (ILO 2023a). **At the current pace, progress remains too slow and achieving gender parity in employment at the global level would take more than 190 years.**

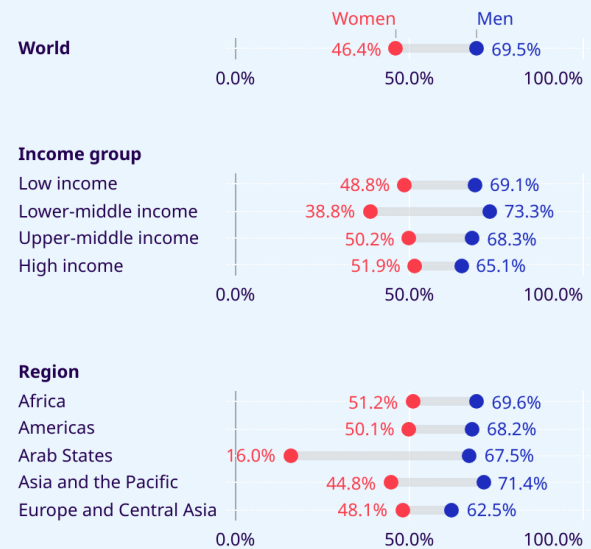
Trends in women’s employment-to-population ratios vary significantly across country income groups and regions (see Appendix Figure A2). In 2024, high-income countries exhibit the smallest gender gaps in employment (13.2 p.p.), primarily due to women’s employment-to-population ratio increasing from 46.8 per cent in 1991 to 51.9 per cent in 2024. In contrast, in low- and upper-middle-income countries, women’s employment rates decreased considerably, by 10.8 percentage points and 7.6 percentage points, respectively.

At the regional level, countries in the Americas have made the most progress in closing gender employment gaps, which declined from 28.7 percentage points in 1991 to 18.1 percentage points in 2024. Importantly, this was driven by a steady increase in women’s employment rate in the region, which reached 50.1 per cent in 2024. In the Arab States, despite a narrowing of the gender gap by 6.9 percentage points, women’s employment-to-population ratio remains the lowest globally (16.0 per cent in 2024), reflecting deep-rooted structural barriers to women’s participation in employment.

### Despite improvements in access to education, young women remain more likely than young men to not be in employment, education or training

Examining employment outcomes across age groups reveals additional insights into the pace of progress towards gender equality. **In 2024, the employment gap between young men and young women aged 15-24 stood at 12.7 percentage points.** While substantial, this gap was notably smaller than the 26-percentage point difference observed for adults aged 25 and above. This narrower gap among youth suggests potential for more equitable employment outcomes as younger generations transition to adulthood. However, the fact that employment gaps amplify as youth transition into adulthood also raises concerns about the accumulation of

► Figure 1. Employment-to-population ratio by gender, 2024



Note: The employment-to-population ratio is defined as the number of people in employment over the number of working-age individuals (100% = all working-age individuals are in employment).

Source: ILOSTAT, ILO modelled estimates, November 2024.

Migrant status also shapes employment opportunities for women. Among migrants, significant gender gaps persist, with migrant women having an employment-to-population ratio of just 48.1 per cent, compared to 72.8 per cent for migrant men (ILO 2024a).

disadvantages over the lifetime, reinforcing gender inequalities across generations.

Over the past two decades, the gender gap in youth employment has narrowed by just two percentage points, with employment rates declining by 6 percentage points for young women and 8.1 for young men. Yet, while the share of young men not in employment, education or training (NEET) has remained stable, **young women’s NEET rate has dropped by 4.6 percentage points globally since 2005** (see Figure 2), reflecting a stronger shift among young women towards participation in education and training - from 31.3 per cent in 2005 to 41.8

per cent in 2024.<sup>6</sup> However, these educational gains have yet to fully translate into meaningful labour market opportunities (Stoevska 2021; Bentaouet Kattan and Murad Khan 2023).

Structural barriers and social mindsets also continue to disproportionately limit young women’s opportunities for employment and skill development, with young women in 2024 still significantly more likely than men to be NEET in most regions and income groups. To close these gaps, policies must go beyond expanding access to education. Targeted measures are needed to support young women’s transition into the workforce by aligning labour, social, and care systems to enable sustainable employment.

► Figure 2. Evolution of women's NEET rate over time and gender gap in NEET rate

Region or income group	Women's NEET rate (2005 - 2024)	Gender gap (2024)
World	32.8% → 28.2%	15.1 p.p.
Low income	32.0% → 37.0%	16.6 p.p.
Lower-middle income	44.0% → 34.9%	22.9 p.p.
Upper-middle income	26.7% → 20.4%	7.3 p.p.
High income	14.6% → 10.7%	0.6 p.p.
Africa	30.3% → 29.6%	12.5 p.p.
Americas	25.6% → 21.3%	8.5 p.p.
Arab States	52.4% → 46.4%	25.2 p.p.
Asia & the Pacific	36.4% → 30.4%	19.0 p.p.
Europe and Central Asia	22.1% → 14.8%	3.5 p.p.

Note: The second column shows the share of women aged 15-24 not in employment, education or training (NEET) between 2005 and 2024, in percentage. The last column shows the difference between women's and men's NEET rates in 2024, in percentage points (p.p.).

Source: ILOSTAT, ILO modelled estimates, August 2024.

<sup>6</sup> Statistics on the share of young women in education or training in any given year are derived by subtracting the employment-to-population ratio

for young adults (aged 15-24) and the NEET rate from 100. All statistics are derived using the indicators from the ILO Modelled estimates.

## Decent work deficits for women in employment

Even when women are employed, they face stark gender inequalities in how they experience their jobs. This section explores gender inequalities in earnings and the type of work women and men engage in.

### Gender inequalities in earnings have narrowed but remain prevalent

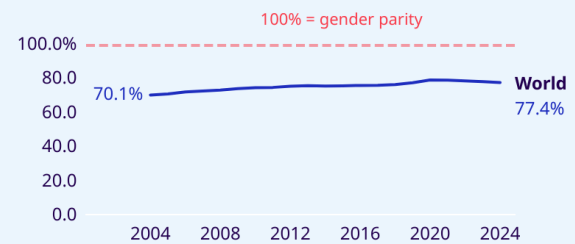
For most people worldwide, earnings from labour are their primary, if not only, source of income, profoundly impacting their financial security and overall well-being. These earnings may come from wages paid by an employer (wage employment), or income generated through independent work (self-employment).

Traditional measures of gender gaps in pay focus on wage workers and find substantial inequalities in wages between men and women. Hourly wage gaps<sup>7</sup> show women employees earning an hourly wage that is 87.1 per cent of men’s hourly wage in low-income countries, 87.0 per cent in lower-middle-income countries, 82.0 per cent in upper-middle-income countries, and 88.5 per cent in high-income countries (ILO 2024b). However, the wage gap reflects the reality of about half of the workers, as self-employment constitutes nearly 50 per cent of the global workforce, 80 per cent in low-income countries and 68 per cent in lower-middle income countries.<sup>8</sup> Self-employed workers are also more likely to be represented in the bottom half of the earnings distribution (ILO 2024b). Moreover, the hourly wage gap, aside from excluding the self-employed, abstracts from differences in paid work hours, with women working significantly fewer hours in paid work.

Considering both wage workers and the self-employed, as well as gender gaps in paid working hours, the gaps in average annual earnings between female and male workers are substantial. **In 2024, female workers earned**

**just 77.4 cents for every dollar earned by their male counterpart.** As seen in Figure 3, the gender ratio in earnings per worker increased by 7.3 cents from 70.1 cents on the dollar in 2004.

► **Figure 3. Gender ratio in earnings per worker, 2004-2024**



Note: The gender ratio in earnings per worker is calculated as the average annual earnings of female workers divided by the average annual earnings of male workers. Earnings account for wage workers and the self-employed.

Source: ILOSTAT, ILO modelled estimates, August 2024.

Across country income groups, the gender ratio in earnings per worker is the highest in high-income and upper-middle-income countries, with employed women earning 73.0 cents and 71.9 cents, respectively, for every dollar earned by employed men (see Figure A3). In contrast, for every dollar earned by male workers in lower-middle-income countries, employed women earned only 55.4 cents, and in low-income countries, this figure drops to 45.7 cents.

Despite limited progress in addressing barriers to employment, as seen through the employment-to-population ratios, there have been significant strides in reducing gender inequalities in earnings per worker between 2004 and 2024 across all country income groups. **The largest improvements have occurred in low-income countries, where female workers’ earnings increased from 33.3 cents per dollar earned by male workers in 2004 to 45.7 cents in 2024** (see Figure A3).

<sup>7</sup> The wage gap refers to the hourly mean factor-weighted gap. The hourly wage gap is transformed into an hourly wage gender ratio for ease of comparison and is calculated as the average hourly wage of women divided by the average hourly wage of men.

<sup>8</sup> Statistics on the share of self-employment in total employment are derived from the [ILO modelled estimates of employment by sex and status in employment, Nov. 2024](#).



► **Women with disabilities face even lower earnings**

When discrimination based on gender compounds with other grounds of discrimination such as disability, it can reinforce inequalities in pay. On average, across a sample of 30 countries with available data on wage and disability, where nearly half (14) are developing economies, employees with disabilities earn 12 per cent less per hour than employees without disabilities. Women with disabilities face additional challenges when it comes to pay, as compared to their male counterparts. For a sample of 14 countries for which the average pay can be disaggregated by sex and disability, women with disabilities earn 6 per cent less on average than men with disabilities in high-income countries, and 5 per cent less in low- and middle-income countries ([Ananian and Dellaferrera 2024](#)).

**Women on average spend fewer hours per week in paid employment**

Significant gender differences also arise in the number of hours worked for pay per week, as shown in Figure 4.

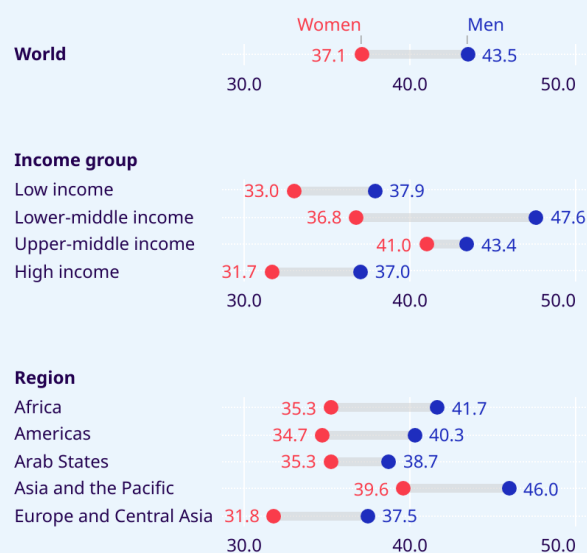
**Globally in 2024, employed women worked approximately 6 hours and 25 minutes less per week than men in paid employment, a gap that persists across all regions.** This gap has remained largely unchanged since 2005, reflecting enduring inequalities in labour markets that restrict women’s economic opportunities. However, it is interesting to note that both men and women are working around 2 hours less per week on average in 2024 compared to 2005.

Importantly, while this indicator highlights critical gender gaps in time devoted to paid work, it fails to capture broader gender inequalities in time allocation across all forms of work, including unpaid care and domestic work. In all regions of the world, women consistently work longer hours than men when both paid work and unpaid care work are accounted for ([ILO 2018](#)). In other words, while women spend less time on paid work, they spend more time in unpaid care work limiting their opportunities to be in the labour market on equal footing as men.

**Women are more likely than men to engage in informal work in low- and lower-middle income countries**

Another area with significant inequalities is the informal employment<sup>9</sup> of women and men. Globally, most workers

► **Figure 4. Mean weekly hours worked per employed person by gender, 2024**



Note: Data on hours of work refer to paid hours actually worked per week in the main job regardless of working time arrangements (e.g. full-time and part-time).

Source: ILOSTAT, ILO modelled estimates, November 2024.

are engaged in informal employment, often lacking social protection, decent working conditions and collective representation. The informal employment rate in 2024 was higher for men (60 per cent) than for women (55 per cent). However, this gender pattern does not hold across all regions or country income groups, as seen in Appendix

<sup>9</sup> Informal employment refers to working arrangements that, either in practice or by law, are not covered by national labour legislation, income taxation, or entitlements such as social protection or

employment guarantees. The informal employment rate is calculated as the proportion of informal employment within total employment.

Figure A4. **In low-income and lower-middle-income countries, where informality is far more common, women have higher informal employment rates than men by 4.9 and 2.3 percentage points, respectively.** Conversely, in upper-middle-income and high-income countries, men have higher informal employment rates than women by around 2 percentage points.

Overall, informal employment shares have decreased across all income groups and regions, with the decline

being more pronounced for women. Nevertheless, progress has been slow. **Although informal employment shares are decreasing, informal employment has risen in absolute terms.** Total informal employment has increased by 335 million people since 2004, reaching 2.0 billion in 2024. This reflects severe deficits in employment quality for both women and men, with women in low-income and lower-middle-income countries disproportionately represented in vulnerable jobs.

## Modest progress in addressing occupational segregation

Across many sectors and occupations, women are overrepresented in roles that are typically undervalued, leading to low pay and unacceptable working conditions. This is reflected in both horizontal and vertical segregation in the labour market.

As of 2023, women hold only 30 per cent of managerial positions globally, highlighting a persistent gap from the desired parity (see Figure 5). Nevertheless, this represents a modest improvement of approximately 3.5 percentage points over the past two decades.

Notably, **low-income countries have demonstrated significant progress, with women's representation in management rising from 24.7 to 36.5 per cent.** In contrast, lower-middle-income countries have experienced a decline in women's representation in recent years. There is substantial variation across regions too. In 2004, the Arab States had a mere 8.6 per cent of women in management roles. Since then, they have achieved substantial progress, though women still comprise less than a quarter of managerial positions. Conversely, countries in Asia and the Pacific have faced stagnation and, in some cases, regression since 2004. The Americas are progressing towards gender parity, with women holding 40.3 per cent of management roles.

Over the past 30 years, the number of women as employers has grown significantly,<sup>10</sup> however they still remain a minority among business owners. Globally, for

every woman employer, there are close to three male employers highlighting gender gaps in entrepreneurship (ILO 2025).

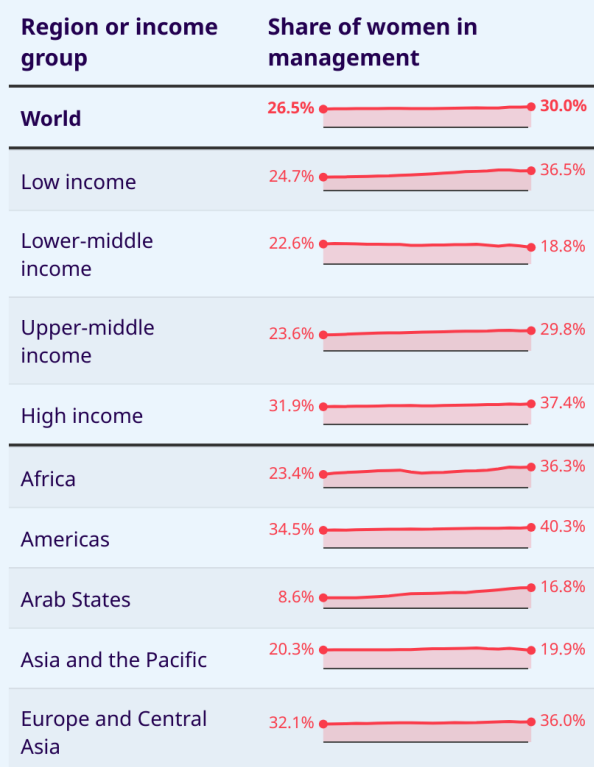
Beyond women's position in management and entrepreneurship, gender segregation across various occupations is persistent and rooted in prevailing gender stereotypes and social norms. Figure A5 in the Appendix shows that women are overrepresented in occupations related to nursing, childcare and cleaning, with women holding 75 per cent or more of these positions. In contrast, men overwhelmingly dominate at 98 per cent in fields such as heavy truck drivers and machinery repairs. This horizontal occupational segregation is also reflected within managerial roles. For instance, in long-term care services more than 86 per cent of managers are women, and conversely women represent only 10.8 per cent of all construction managers (see Figure A6 in the Appendix).

<sup>10</sup> Employers are those workers who, working on their own account or with one or a few partners, hold the type of jobs defined as a "self-employment jobs" (i.e. jobs where the remuneration is directly dependent upon the profits derived from the goods and services produced), and, in this capacity, have engaged, on a

continuous basis, one or more persons to work for them as employee(s). The rate of employers is the share of employers in total employment.



► **Figure 5. Share of women in managerial positions over time, 2004-2023**



Note: The female share of employment in managerial positions conveys the number of women in management as a percentage of total employment in management based on the International Standard Classification of Occupations - category 1 of ISCO-08.

Source: ILOSTAT, ILO modelled estimates, November 2024.

## Barriers to women’s participation in employment and job quality

Women continue to face multiple barriers that limit both their employment opportunities and the quality of jobs available to them. These barriers are deeply rooted in structural inequalities, discriminatory social norms, and economic policies that fail to account for the different needs of both women and men. Discriminatory practices in the world of work continue to extend to all aspects of employment and occupation, including recruitment, remuneration, career advancement, dismissal, and social security provisions and coverage. Unfair treatment, which also includes violence and harassment, creates hostile and

Horizontal sectoral segregation is prevalent among migrant workers. Over 80 per cent of migrant women were employed in the services sector compared to 60.8 per cent of migrant men, with a much smaller share of migrant women employed in the industry sector (12.2 per cent) as compared to migrant men (31.7 per cent). This reflects both the increasing global demand for health, social and care services due to demographic shifts as well as persistent gendered occupational segregation. Within the services sector, care employment represents an important source of jobs for migrant women. Almost one in three migrant women are in care employment, working in roles such as domestic workers, childcare workers, nurses or doctors, as compared to 19.2 percent of non-migrant women (ILO 2024a). This points to the existence of global care chains where migrant women, most often from low- and middle-income countries, take on care responsibilities in high-income countries and affluent households, often leaving their own dependents in the care of relatives or hired domestic workers (ILO 2018).

There are many factors that contribute towards occupational segregation as described in the next section. Addressing them requires tackling gender biases throughout the life cycle, especially those formed early in life, ensuring fair access to education and employment opportunities and an enabling environment including economic policies that address structural inequalities and are responsive to women’s needs, voice and agency.

unsafe environments that undermine individuals’ dignity, well-being, and equal access to opportunities. The cumulative effect of the many forms and layers of discrimination before and after entering the labour market impacts women’s outcome in the economy.

## Women’s excessive and unequal care responsibilities are a key hindrance to gender equality in the world of work

Around the world, **more than 16 billion hours per day are devoted to unpaid care work, with women and girls engaging in approximately 76 per cent of this**

**time.** In other words, women work 3.2 times more in unpaid care work than men. Among the 23 countries for which repeated time use survey data is available, between 1997 and 2012, women’s time spent on unpaid care decreased by only 15 minutes per day, from 4 hours and 23 minutes, while men’s time spent on unpaid care fell, rather than increased, by 8 minutes, from 2 hours and 35 minutes, reflecting persisting gender norms. In all regions of the world, women consistently work longer hours than men when both paid work and unpaid care work are accounted for. However, too many of their working hours are unpaid (ILO 2018).

Unpaid care work is particularly time consuming, often involving drudgery, for women and girls living in poverty, those residing in countries with scarce public services, basic infrastructure, or social protection, those in rural areas, single-parent households, and carers for young children or grandchildren not yet of school age. Despite making a fundamental contribution to our societies and economies, this work is largely unrecognised and undervalued in dominant measures of economic progress such as GDP (UN 2024a).

When excessive, unpaid care work can hamper women’s economic opportunities and their wellbeing. **Recent ILO estimates reveal that family responsibilities are the primary contributor to the gender employment gap.**<sup>11</sup> In high-income countries family responsibilities contribute up to 80 per cent to the gender employment gap, while in up to 62 per cent in low-income countries (ILO 2024c).

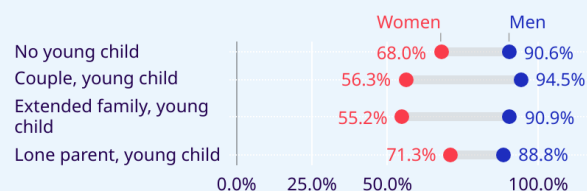
In addition, in 2023, 748 million people cited care responsibilities as the reason for being outside the labour force, accounting for over 30 per cent of inactive people globally (ILO 2024d). This global figure masks stark differences between men and women. **Care responsibilities account for 45 per cent - or 708 million - of women outside the labour force globally and for only 5 per cent of men, or about 40 million.** This gap is particularly large in the Arab States and the Asia and the Pacific region.

The unequal distribution of unpaid care work between men and women is exacerbated for individuals with young children, which further widens the gender gap in labour force participation for this group. Globally, 34 per cent of

prime-age adults, those aged 25 to 54, have at least one child under the age of six.<sup>12</sup>

**Women without children are more likely to participate in the labour force than those with young children in couples or extended families, by 11.7 and 12.8 percentage points, respectively** (see Figure 6). Globally, lone mothers of young children have a higher labour force participation rate (71.3 per cent), exceeding that of women without young children by 3.3 percentage points, reflecting their need to earn an income.

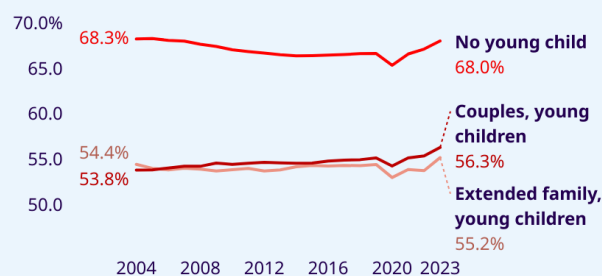
► **Figure 6. Prime-age labour force participation rate by gender and household type, 2023**



Note: The label "young child" refers to households with at least one child under the age of six.

Source: ILOSTAT, ILO modelled estimates, November 2023.

► **Figure 7. Prime-age labour force participation rate of women by household type, 2004-2023**



Source: ILOSTAT, ILO modelled estimates, November 2023.

Encouragingly, **since 2004, labour force participation among prime-age women with young children in couples and extended families has risen by 2.5 and 0.8 percentage points** (see Figure 7). In contrast, men’s high

<sup>11</sup> Family responsibilities refer to the combined effect of marriage and young child rearing.

<sup>12</sup> Among those with young children, 53.4 per cent reside in couple households, 43.2 per cent in extended family households, and 3.4 per

cent in lone parent households, predominantly as single mothers. For a detailed description of each household type please see: <https://ilostat ilo org/blog/women-with-young-children-have-much-lower-labour-force-participation-rates/>

participation rates show far smaller changes when they have young children. Given this diverging pattern, the **gender gap in labour force participation for couples and extended families with young children is approximately two-thirds higher than for individuals without young children.**

Beyond labour force participation, unequal care responsibilities shape the type and quality of work women do. Data from 85 countries show that women with care duties are more likely to be contributing family workers and own-account workers, by 3.9 and 1.8 percentage points respectively, than those without. Caregivers, both

### Despite some progress, significant gaps in social protection coverage persist

Social protection is key to reducing economic insecurity, ensuring access to healthcare, tackling gender inequalities at home and work, and supporting peoples' well-being throughout life. Despite some progress, major gaps remain in coverage—particularly in maternity and paternity leave, child/family benefits, unemployment benefits, disability benefits, pensions and other cash benefits, as well as social health protection—leaving many women at risk of poverty.

Care leave policies are a crucial aspect of social protection. Over the period of almost 30 years, **between 1994 and 2023, the share of countries with paid maternity leave legislation has slightly increased from 95.7 per cent to 97.8 per cent.** Moreover, during this time period, **the global average duration of paid maternity leave has increased from 12.8 weeks to 17.6 weeks.**

Besides the duration, the adequacy of paid maternity leave determines a woman's economic security to support herself and her child. As mandated by the ILO Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. [183](#)), 97 out of 177 countries offer paid maternity leave for at least 14 weeks with cash benefits equal to at least two-thirds of a woman's previous earnings paid through social protection or mixed schemes. Of these, 71 countries provide full pay, covering 100 per cent of previous earnings ([ILO Global Care Policy Portal](#)).

Over the past 30 years, **the share of countries offering paid paternity leave has also notably expanded, from 24.8 per cent in 1994 to 57.2 per cent in 2023.** However, the global average duration of paternity leave remains

men and women, are more likely to be in informal employment than non-caregivers, but the gap is wider for women (5.2 vs. 2.9 percentage points). The disparity is highest in the Arab States (19.1 percentage points) and lowest in Europe and Central Asia (2.8 percentage points) ([ILO 2018](#)).

These persistent inequalities urgently call for policies in line with the ILO 5R Framework for Decent Care Work that recognise, reduce and redistribute unpaid care and reward and guarantee representation of care workers ([ILO 2024e](#)).

low, only rising from 6 days in 1994 to nearly 10 days in 2023 ([ILO Global Care Policy Portal](#)).

Another area of social protection where gaps are observed is pensions. Globally, women are less likely than men to receive a contributory pension, reflecting their lower participation in formal employment and overrepresentation in occupations or sectors which are often not covered by labour and social security legislation. **In 2023, globally, 63.2 per cent of men above statutory retirement age receive a contributory pension, compared to only 49.2 per cent of women.** While more women receive a tax-financed old age pension than men (34.2 versus 26.9 per cent), such benefits are often means-tested and often provide very modest benefit levels that are often insufficient to ensure a decent living standard ([ILO 2024f](#)).

Social assistance schemes are another area of social protection where, despite an increase in coverage over time, considerable gaps remain. **Globally, 37.3 per cent of persons in vulnerable situations received social assistance in 2023, up from 26.7 per cent in 2015.** Disaggregated by gender, 36 per cent of women in vulnerable situations received such benefits, a share that is slightly lower than 38 per cent of men ([ILO 2024f](#)). This low coverage of social assistance schemes has important implications for both women and men, who remain reliant on these schemes due to their limited access to contributory social protection mechanisms, lower earnings and limited asset ownership.

A key factor constraining the coverage and adequacy of social protection and care policies is the lack of fiscal space needed to address gender inequalities and promote decent work in the labour market, particularly in low and

middle-income countries. Close to 60 per cent of low-income countries are estimated in debt distress or at high risk of it, a number that has doubled since 2015 ([ILO 2023b](#)). The high cost of debt-servicing is often borne by women who disproportionately rely on essential public services and social protection as a result of structural inequalities. Alongside reducing the costs of debt

servicing, expanding fiscal space involves implementing gender-responsive tax policies, the expansion of domestic borrowing and official development assistance, amongst other measures that provide an enabling economic environment and strengthened international cooperation ([UN 2024b](#)).

## Women's representation in social partner organizations has improved but requires further strengthening

Employers' and workers' organizations play a vital role in advancing gender equality and women's participation and representation in decision-making processes. Social dialogue, including through collective bargaining and workplace cooperation, can play a crucial role in pay and working conditions while also addressing critical issues such as violence and harassment in the world of work and other forms of discrimination. By fostering inclusive decision-making, it helps shape a more resilient labour market.

**Women's growing presence in trade unions and employers' organizations is a promising development that enhances the effectiveness of social dialogue. Today, women's unionization rate is higher than that of men worldwide (18 versus 16 per cent), after decades**

## Violence and harassment at work put women, particularly those from vulnerable groups, at great risk

Violence and harassment at work is a pervasive and persistent phenomenon globally, with over one fifth of individuals having experienced it over their working life. More than three in five victims of violence and harassment at work said it has happened to them multiple times, and for the majority of them, the last incident took place within the last five years ([ILO 2022a](#)).

**Women are 1.6 times more likely than men to experience sexual violence and harassment at work (8.2 per cent of women compared to 5.0 per cent of men),**

of being a minority, signalling an important shift. However, they continue to be overrepresented in unorganized sectors such as domestic workers and underrepresented in the leadership positions, with only one in three unions (34 per cent) having women on executive committees around the globe ([ILO 2024f](#)). Encouragingly, recent trends show an increasing share of **Employers and Business Membership Organizations reporting that women comprise at least 30 per cent of board members, from 19 per cent in 2017 to 26 per cent in 2023. Furthermore, 30 per cent of EBMOs globally have a female CEO (ILO and IOE 2024)**. Strengthening women's representation in employer and worker organizations, and policymaking bodies amplifies their influence and drives of systemic change toward labour policies and practices that promote equal opportunities and treatment for all.

with those experiencing different forms of discrimination often being at greater risk. For instance, young women were twice as likely as young men to have experienced sexual violence and harassment at work, and migrant women were almost twice as likely as non-migrant women to report sexual violence and harassment at work. Sex-disaggregated data also indicate that violence and harassment at work is more likely to occur among women who experienced discrimination based on skin colour, race, ethnicity, or nationality, whereas among men this is more strongly associated with disability status ([ILO 2022a](#)).

Violence and harassment at work and its associated psychosocial risks have profound impact on workers'

physical and mental well-being, employment and productivity. Initial results from pilot surveys in West Africa reveal far-reaching effects, with nearly half of the victims reporting negative mental health impacts and a quarter reporting negative physical health impact. Loss of motivation and loss of productivity at work are also important consequences, with one to five per cent of

victims having stopped working altogether ([Rakotonarivo and Postolachi 2024](#)). Preventing and addressing violence and harassment, including by taking into account discrimination within occupational safety and health (OSH) management systems, can be one of the most direct entry points to mobilize stakeholders to tackle root causes of violence and harassment at work ([ILO, 2024e](#)).

## Navigating through transitions

Technological advancements, climate change and demographic shifts are reshaping the world of work in faster and more profound ways than seen before. They may have significant implications for equality of opportunities and treatment for all men and women. If not properly managed, these transitions risk deepening existing gender inequalities and reversing the modest progress achieved so far.

The rise of generative artificial intelligence (AI) has the potential to fundamentally transform the world of work. Globally, 13 per cent of employment could be affected by augmentation, where AI can assist but not completely replace human roles, while only 2.3 per cent of jobs are at risk of automation, where most tasks could be replaced by generative AI. However, women are potentially impacted by both automation and augmentation to a greater extent than men. In fact, **women are twice more likely than men to be affected by automation (3.7 per cent of women compared to 1.4 per cent of men), with the impact even more pronounced in high-income countries (7.8 per cent of women compared to 2.9 per cent of men)** ([Gmyrek et al. 2023](#)). Well designed and managed technological advancements have the potential to enhance both women's and men's employment opportunities, but they can also perpetuate traditional gender roles and inequalities.

Climate change has also far-reaching repercussions for the world of work in terms of loss of livelihoods, jobs and incomes, increased safety and health risks, declines in productivity and increase in unpaid care work. Women, particularly in vulnerable and disadvantaged situations,

may bear the brunt of the economic disruption caused by climate change. At the same time a transition towards a greener economy presents challenges and opportunities for employment generation and social inclusion. The ILO estimates that significant investments in green transition to achieve net zero carbon emissions could generate an additional 37.2 million jobs by 2030, with women gaining a smaller share of additional job creation than men by 46 percentage points ([ILO 2024i](#)). Unless intentional efforts are made to ensure a gender-responsive just transition, as called by the ILO 2023 [Just Transition Resolution](#), women risk being excluded from emerging opportunities and left behind in the transition process ([ILO 2024j](#)).

Alongside these technological and environmental shifts, **demographic changes are expected to have a significant impact on the labour market**. In many countries, populations are aging, and the demand for care workers - especially in healthcare, childcare, and elder care - is set to increase dramatically. Yet, care work remains undervalued, and in many parts of the world it is disproportionately carried out by women, often in informal or low-paid roles. As demographic pressures increase, the need for care workers will grow, but so too will the challenge of ensuring that care work is adequately distributed, valued, remunerated, and supported, as well as care services are high-quality, affordable, adequate and accessible. According to ILO estimates, investing in integrated and coherent care policy packages could generate 299 million jobs by ([ILO 2022b](#)), boosting women's employment rate to a global average of 56.5 per cent in 2035 and reducing the global gender wage gap<sup>13</sup> from 20.1 per cent in 2019 to 8.0 per cent in 2035 ([ILO 2023c](#)).

<sup>13</sup> The gender wage gap refers to gender gaps in monthly earnings from wage employment, which are not adjusted for differences between

men and women in the composition of their labour force characteristics, such as age, education and occupational concentration.



## Conclusions and prospects

Thirty years ago, the Beijing Declaration and Plan of Action recognized the critical role that women play in the economy and called for urgent action to ensure their rights, including in the world of work. Today, women's contributions are undeniable. Yet, gaps between men and women persist at work, and equal opportunities and treatment require deliberate and sustained efforts.

Women still face barriers both in accessing and remaining in employment. At the global level, the gap in employment between women and men has reduced slowly and modestly, mainly driven by a decline in male employment. Encouragingly, women with young children have increased their labour force participation, the share of young women not in employment, education or training has reduced and the share of women holding managerial positions has modestly increased.

When women are employed, the data shows they are more likely to experience decent work deficits, whether it is in terms of the likelihood of engaging in informal employment, or in terms of gender-based discrimination in pay / earnings. Women also work more hours than men overall, when considering both unpaid and paid work, but they spend fewer hours in paid employment compared to men. This highlights enduring gender-specific patterns in time allocation and indicates that while unpaid work is not compensated, it comes at the individual cost of lost opportunities and foregone earnings, predominantly affecting women.

Social protection coverage and care leave policies have also seen some improvements. However, women's excessive and unequal responsibility for unpaid care work, compared to men, remains the main obstacle for women to access decent work and exacerbates gender inequalities in the wider world of work. **Addressing this requires comprehensive policy measures that recognize, reduce, and redistribute unpaid care and reward and guarantee representation of care workers.** It also necessitates a **more comprehensive measurement of time use across different unpaid work activities**, as well as **alternatives to GDP** that better capture all dimensions of the world of work. A

sound macroeconomic framework is also needed to foster an enabling environment that ensures the fiscal space necessary to invest in policies that promote gender equality and decent work for all.

Another critical factor shaping individuals' experiences in the world of work is violence and harassment, yet data on this issue remain limited. **Greater efforts are needed to systematically prevent, and address violence and harassment in the world of work to ensure more equal and safer working environments for all.** Preventing and managing violence and harassment and its associated psychosocial risks, including those arising from discrimination, will be critical in the future of work, and OSH provide a strategic entry point.

Structural barriers to the advancement of gender equality include social norms and gender stereotypes related to men and women's expected roles and responsibilities and the value of different forms of work. These represent a root cause of much of the gender inequalities in the world of work, and hamper women's equal access to decent work by exerting a strong influence on occupational segregation, discrimination in pay, women's underrepresentation and voice in social dialogue processes, the unequal sharing of unpaid care work, and the prevalence of violence and harassment.

**Comprehensive and effective policies and programs across and within sectors are needed to move the needle on more egalitarian gender norms.**

In a global context of multiple trends and transformations, the evolving nature of the world of work presents great opportunities, but also additional challenges. It is only by effectively managing technological, environmental, and demographic transitions, that we can continue to advance and achieve gender equality and consolidate the progress achieved so far, ensuring a more inclusive and equitable future for all.

By advocating for women's economic empowerment and labour rights, the Beijing Platform for Action remains an inspirational blueprint for advancing equal opportunities and treatment for all men and women including in the world of work. ILO's international labour standards are instrumental in delivering on the Beijing Platform for Action ensuring social justice for all men and women.



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## Acknowledgements

This report was jointly prepared by the Data Production and Analysis Unit of the ILO Department of Statistics, under the supervision of Steven Kapsos and Rafael Diez de Medina, and the Gender, Equality and Diversity and Inclusion (GEDI) Branch of the Conditions of Work and Equality Department (WORKQUALITY) of the ILO, under the supervision of Sukti Dasgupta, Chidi King and Emanuela Pozzan. The report was written by Paloma Carrillo, Marta Golin and Donika Limani from Statistics,

and Anam Parvez Butt, Sofie Lambert and Ira Postolachi from GEDI. The authors especially acknowledge the contributions of the ILOSTAT microdata team and the many colleagues of the GEDI Branch. The authors wish to thank Marie-Claire Sodergren for her helpful guidance and suggestions, and Christina Behrendt, Valeria Esquivel, Rosalia Vazquez-Alvarez, Veronika Wodsak and Jae-Hee Chang for their review and valuable inputs. The underlying database of international labour market indicators used to produce the estimates was prepared by the Data Production and Analysis Unit.

## Appendix

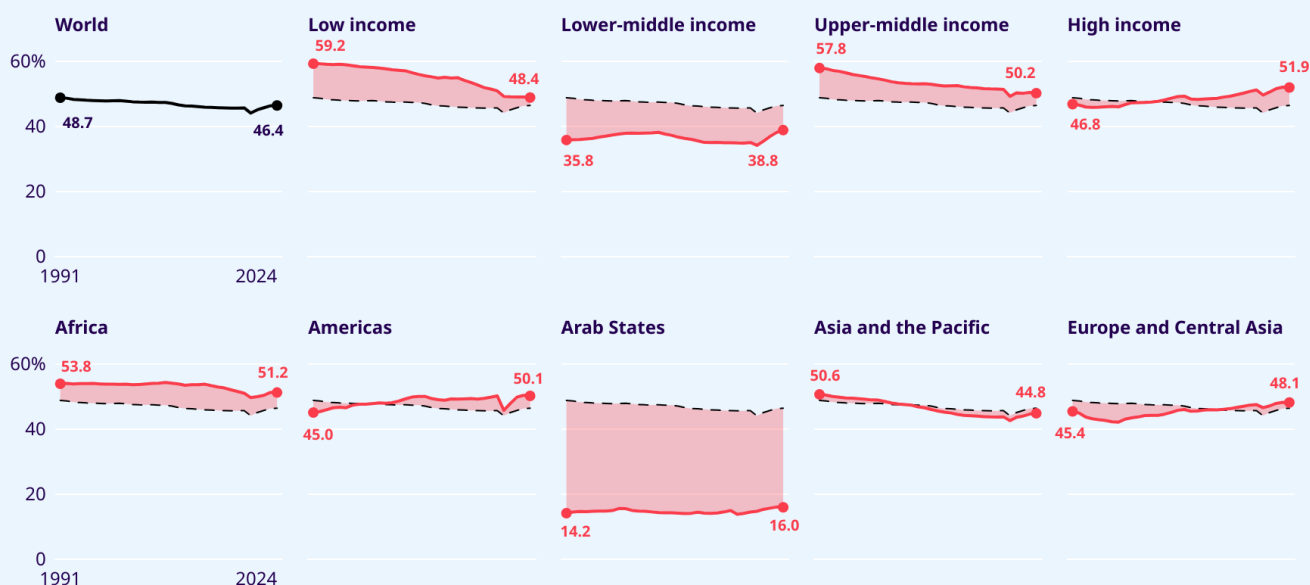
► Figure A1. Gender gap in employment-to-population ratio, 1991-2024



Note: The employment-to-population ratio is defined as the number of people in employment over the number of working-age individuals. The gender gap is calculated as women's employment-to-population ratio minus men's, and expressed in percentage points (p.p.). Negative numbers indicate lower employment-to-population ratios for women than for men.

Source: ILOSTAT, ILO modelled estimates, November 2024.

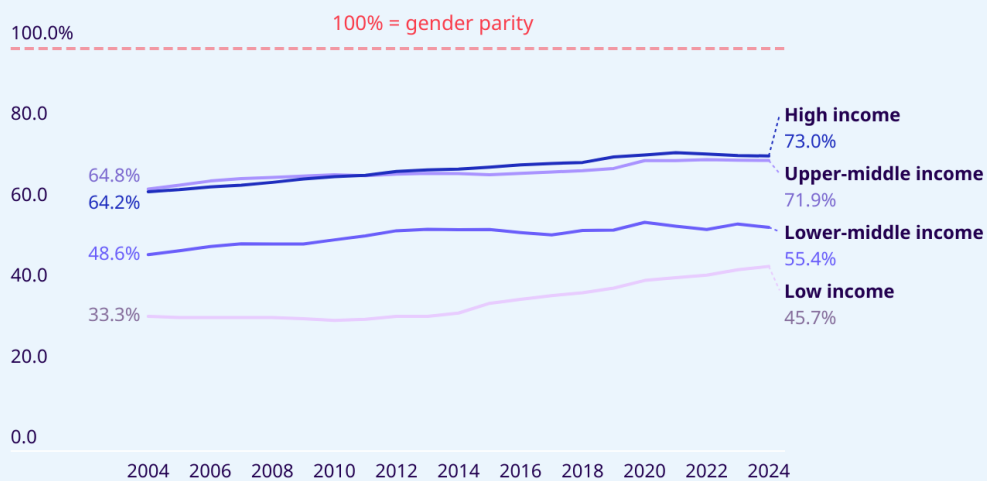
► Figure A2. Women's employment-to-population ratio, 1991-2024



Note: Women's employment-to-population ratio is defined as the number of working-age women in employment over the total number of working-age women (100% = all women aged 15 and above are in employment).

Source: ILOSTAT, ILO modelled estimates, November 2024.

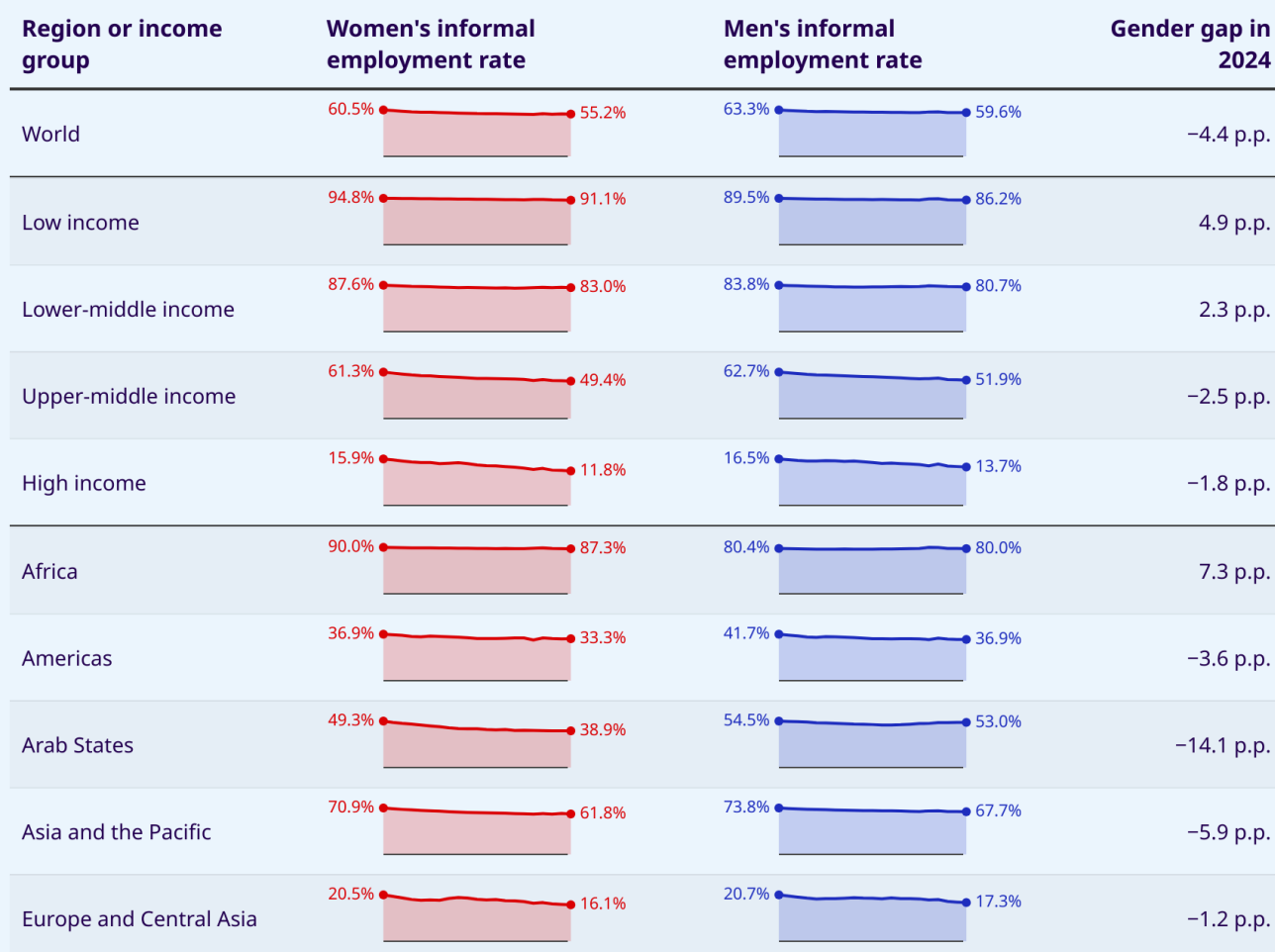
► **Figure A3. Gender ratio in earnings per worker by income group, 2004-2024**



Note: The gender ratio in earnings per worker is calculated as the ratio of the average earnings of female workers over the average earnings of male workers.

Source: ILOSTAT, ILO modelled estimates, August 2024.

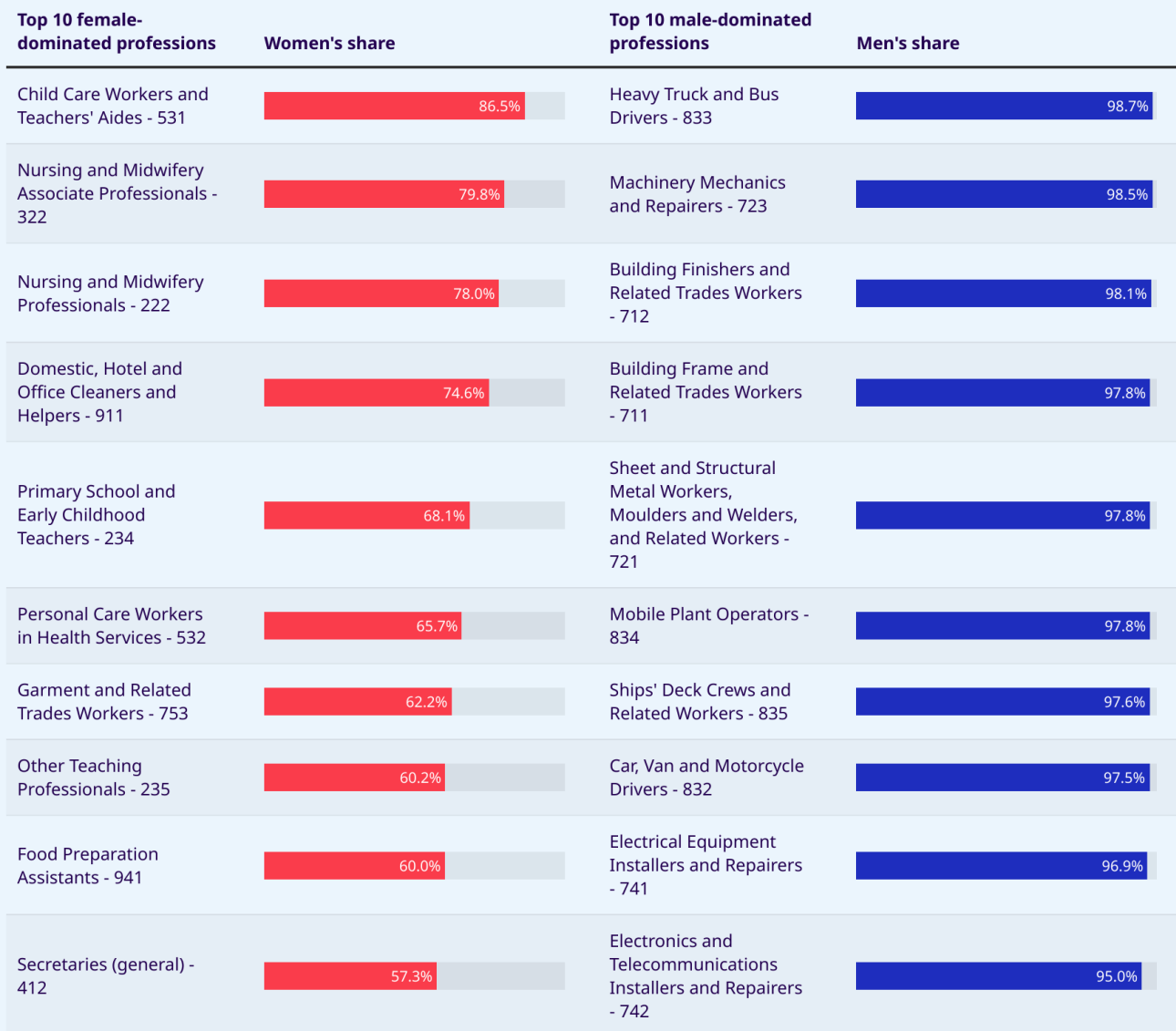
► Figure A4. Trends in informal employment rate by gender, 2004-2024



Note: The gender gap in informal employment rates is calculated as the difference, in percentage points, between women's rate and men's rate.

Source: ILOSTAT, ILO modelled estimates, November 2023.

► **Figure A5. Top gender-segregated occupations using ISCO-08 minor groups**

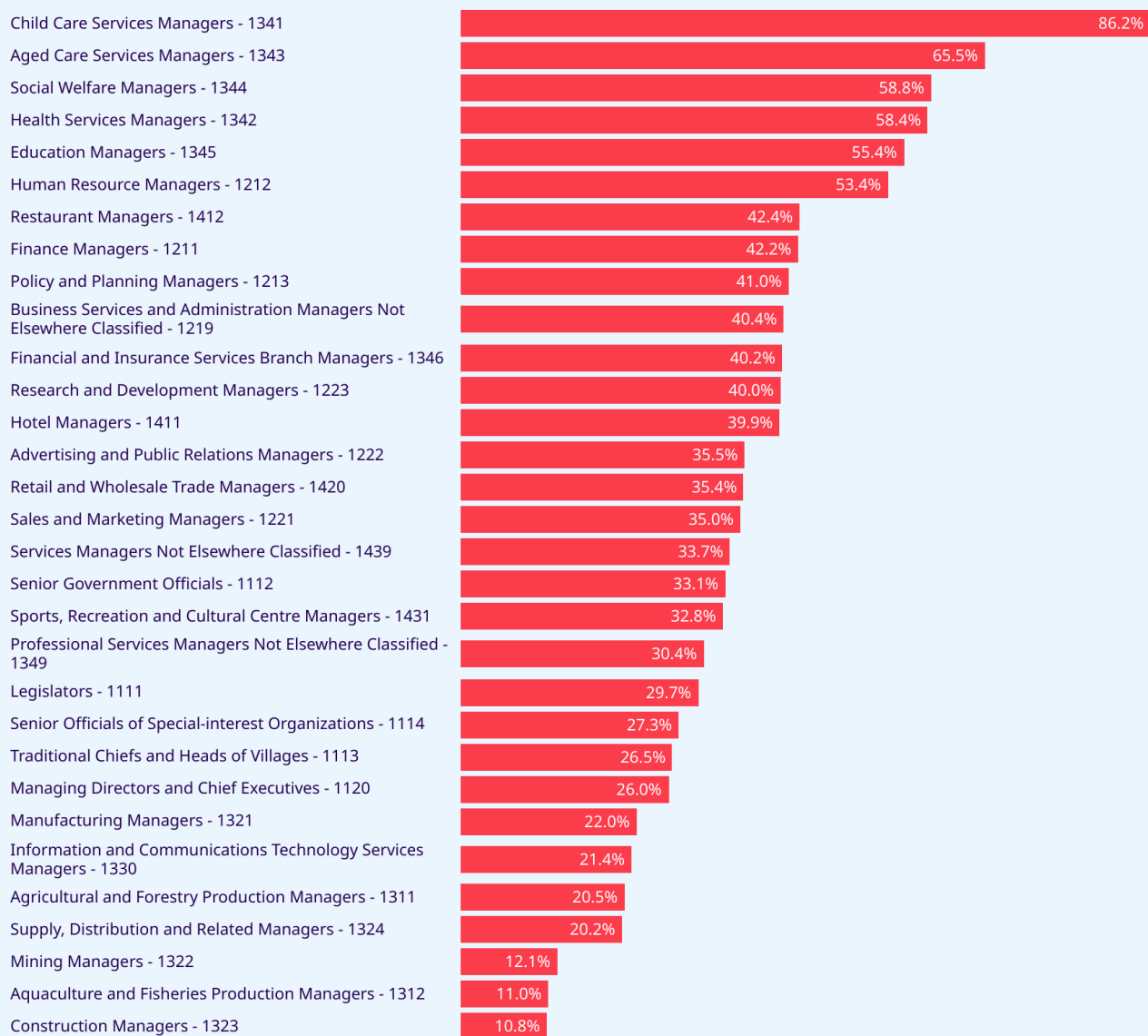


Note: Data are weighted averages based on International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO-08) minor groups for the latest available data in 126 countries, representing 57% of global employment. The bars show the share of women and men in each of the listed professions.

Source: Authors' own calculations using ILOSTAT Microdata Repository.



► **Figure A6. Share of women in managerial occupations using ISCO-08 unit groups**



Note: Data are weighted averages based on International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO-08) unit groups for the latest available data in 83 countries, representing 30% of global employment. The bars show the share of women in each listed occupation. The listed occupations are all unit group occupations that belong to ISCO-08 major group 1 - Managers.

Source: Authors' own calculations using ILOSTAT Microdata Repository.

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