

SPOTLIGHT ON GOAL 8

THE IMPACT OF MARRIAGE AND CHILDREN ON LABOUR MARKET PARTICIPATION



INTRODUCTION

In communities around the world, active engagement in the labour force is the key means through which women and men earn a living. It is one of the main ways that working-age individuals can have an independent source of income, and it is an essential means through which women and men ensure decent living conditions for themselves and their families. Moreover, for women, the extent to which they have control over assets and an independent source of income has a significant bearing on their position within their families and communities and on the well-being of their dependents, especially children.¹

Paid work provides a path towards economic independence, overall well-being, human dignity, personal development and self-actualization. However, for all this to be true, employment must be decent – providing adequate earnings, sufficient working time, and safe and secure work environments. Decent employment opportunities must also be available to everyone. Women and men both rely on these opportunities to care for and sustain their families.

Equal opportunity and equal treatment in the labour market are key aspects of decent work, and of sustainable development. But does everyone in society have the same access to decent work? Do women and men have the same opportunities? What is the impact of discriminatory social norms and gender stereotypes on women's labour force participation? To what extent is the participation of women and men linked to their family situation?

Until recently, reliable and consistent global data needed to explore the links between gender gaps in labour force participation, marital status and the presence of children were lacking. In response, the International Labour Organization (ILO) and UN Women have partnered on a joint effort to produce a global dataset with new indicators that allows for the analysis of labour market outcomes from a gender and family perspective. The analysis, based on data from 84 countries, focuses on the ways in which

the labour market participation of women aged 25 to 54 varies by marital status, household type and the presence and age of children. It also looks at the gender gap in labour force participation across these different categories and sub-categories.

The findings point to persistent gender gaps in labour force participation globally and across regions. When the data are disaggregated by marital status and the presence of children, they show that marriage and childbearing often dampen women's labour force participation, while having the opposite effect for men. The specific vulnerability faced by women is driven by discriminatory social norms and gender stereotypes that reinforce their role as caregivers, while simultaneously promoting men's role as breadwinners.

BACKGROUND

Women have various identities within households: They are daughters, wives, mothers (co-parenting or alone), mothers-in-law and grandmothers, among others. These identities are intertwined with ideas about the particular role women have in the household, and what societies and families expect of them. These preconceived ideas, combined with the increased difficulties women face in labour markets, are major determinants of whether or not a woman will participate in the labour force. For many women, having a job can be a crucial step towards empowerment, allowing them to earn their own income. Employment also allows women to develop skills and competencies and fosters greater social integration, including through outward engagement and participation in the economic life of their communities.

This paper introduces a new set of labour market and demographic indicators derived from household-level variables now available in the ILO's Harmonized Microdata collection; it uses them to cast light on the link between household composition and women's labour force participation. The new indicators offer a powerful complement to traditional

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labour market statistics at the country level. The analysis derived from these new indicators provides insights into discriminatory social norms and the gender progressiveness of government policy, the welfare state and other institutions.

The main outcome indicator analysed is the labour force participation rate and, in particular, the participation gap between women and men overall and by marital status, household composition and the presence of children. This gap provides an indication of gender inequality in labour market participation and the effect of various household characteristics on economic and social outcomes for women.

An important limitation of this analysis is its inability to assess the extent or quality of work that women are engaged in. For example, being in the labour force does not necessarily mean a woman is earning a decent income: She may be unemployed (seeking and available for employment), underemployed, working part-time or working as an unpaid labourer in a family enterprise or farm. Additionally, women in the labour force may work few hours, for low wages, often under poor conditions. The measure also does not take into account other sources of income that women may have, including transfers from the state or other sources.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The inverse relationship between women's traditional role as primary caregiver in the household and their labour force participation has been widely studied.² At one end of the spectrum are countries such as Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland, where gendered divisions of labour are less entrenched, childcare services are more widely available, and where men assume greater responsibility for household tasks. In these countries, women are more likely to participate in paid work.³ Labour force participation rates are also high for both women and men in sub-Saharan Africa, where extreme poverty rates are high and subsistence-related work and distress sale of labour are common.⁴ At the

other end of the spectrum are countries and regions where women's labour force participation rates are very low and where traditional gender roles are entrenched. For example, in Pakistan, women's participation in the labour force overall is low – 26.2 per cent among those aged 25 to 54 – and women perform the bulk of unpaid care work in the home.⁵ Research on the determinants of participation for women in Pakistan shows a strong association with child-rearing. Using fertility rates as a proxy for increased childcare demands, Novaira et al. (2019) show that a 1 per cent rise in the female fertility rate in Pakistan is associated with a 2.6 per cent decrease in their workforce participation.

In other cases, women's participation rates are lower than men's but rising, as women take on more paid work; however, women's share of unpaid care work remains unchanged. This leads to long hours spent on paid and unpaid work. The resulting time squeeze has a detrimental effect on women's physical and mental well-being.⁶ The cost is also borne through a greater vulnerability to insecure forms of work and less access to career advancement opportunities.⁷ Recent studies find that mothers of young children aged 0 to 5 years are penalized in the labour market, not only in terms of participation but also in terms of pay and in accessing managerial and leadership positions.⁸ A study on the principal barriers to paid work shows that women are much more likely than men to report unpaid care responsibilities as the main reason for inactivity in the labour force – 41.6 per cent of women compared to 5.8 per cent of men.⁹

The type of household in which women live and the accessibility and availability of care and support networks also show a significant association with women's labour force participation and access to professional development. Whether women live alone, as part of a couple with children, or in extended-family households has a bearing on their participation rates.¹⁰ Studies from Brazil, China and Peru show that women living in extended-family households rely on other adult family members (often female relatives, including a grandmother or aunt) to provide extra help with household

duties and childcare, thereby enabling them to participate in the labour force.¹¹ A similar trend is observed in many other low-income countries.¹² However, research on the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China and on Viet Nam shows that additional family members, especially older adults, increase the care responsibilities placed on women, further dampening women's labour force participation.¹³

KEY FINDINGS

Diverse regional patterns are found in women's labour force participation

The labour force participation rate for women varies widely across regions. Indeed, in Europe and Northern America and in sub-Saharan Africa, women's labour force participation rates are the highest (77.5 per cent and 77.1 per cent, respectively), whereas in Central and Southern Asia and in Northern Africa and Western Asia, they are the lowest (29.4 per cent and 29.2 per cent respectively).¹⁴ The gender gap in labour force

participation is smallest in Oceania, excluding Australia and New Zealand (3.8 percentage points) and the largest in Central and Southern Asia (67.4 percentage points).

These findings reflect a confluence of factors, including norms governing the perceived responsibilities of women, countries' level of development, associated state support for families and children (including access to child allowances and to affordable childcare), the number and type of labour market opportunities, as well as economic pressures to work. For example, in sub-Saharan Africa, where poverty rates are high and family and child benefits are often lacking, women's labour force participation is higher than the global average.¹⁵

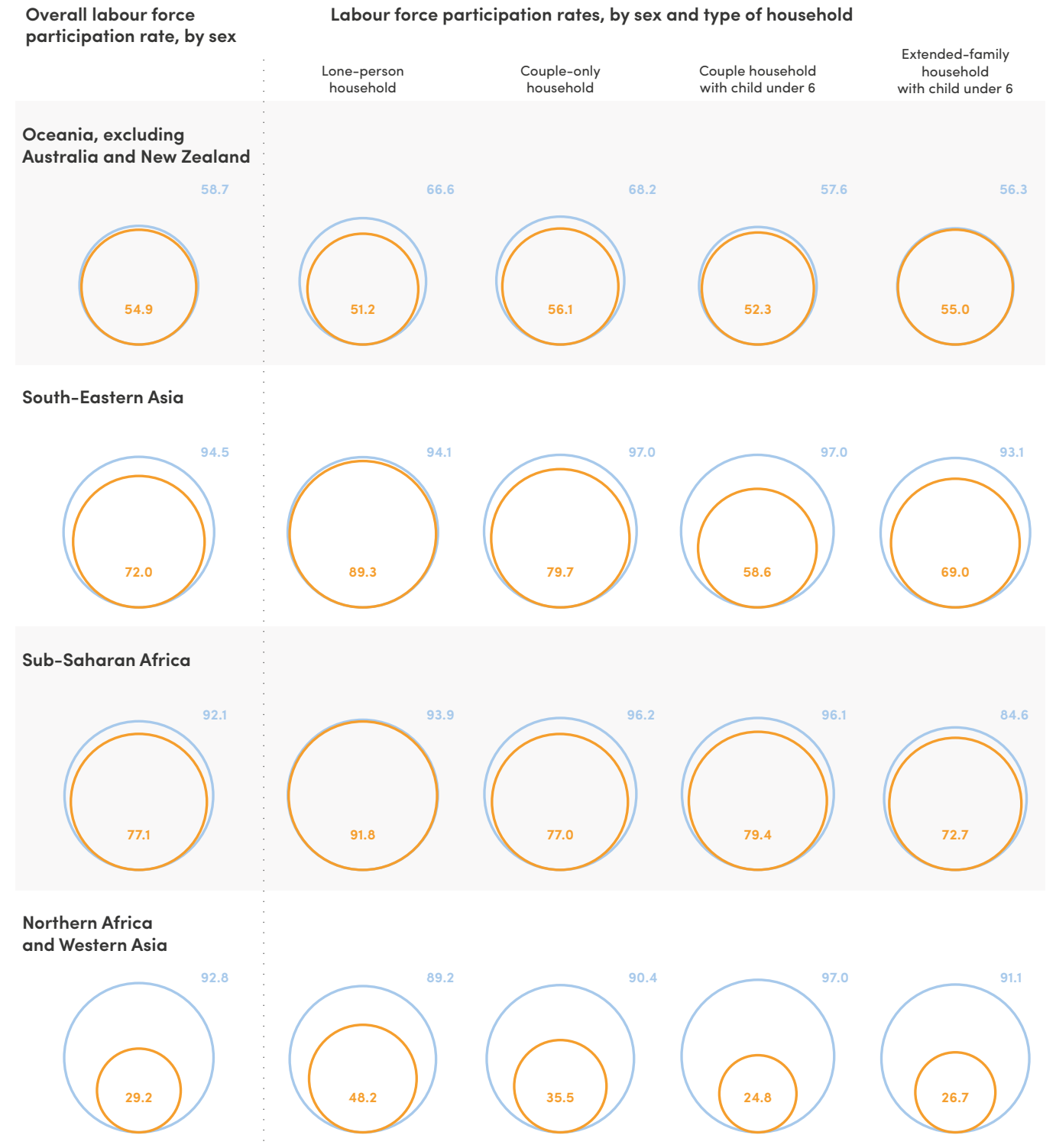
In spite of strong regional differences in women's labour force participation, a number of striking commonalities are found, especially in how such participation varies across household types. Figure 1 compares the average labour force participation rates of prime-working-age women and men (25 to 54 years old) living in different types of households. The main global and regional patterns observed are presented in the sections that follow.

FIGURE 1

LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATES OF WOMEN AND MEN (AGED 25 TO 54), BY REGION AND HOUSEHOLD TYPE (PERCENTAGE)



Source: ILO and UN Women calculations from ILOSTAT database.
 Note: Oceania excludes Australia and New Zealand. For the SDG region of Eastern and South-Eastern Asia, data are shown only for the subregion of South-Eastern Asia due to insufficient country coverage.



○ Male ○ Female

Women's labour force participation varies more than men's across different household types

Men tend to have high labour force participation rates regardless of the type of household they live in. Thus, there is little variation in their participation rates (higher than 92 per cent across all regions, except Oceania). For women, on the other hand, labour force participation rates vary significantly, depending on the household type.

Generally, women in lone-person households have much higher participation rates than women in other types of households. The presence of children reduces women's labour force participation and increases men's, by similar proportions in percentage-point terms. This is an indication that women's realities are different than men's, based on the type of household they live in. Women give up their economic independence (mothers in families) or take on more economic responsibility (lone mothers) as household needs dictate.

The data show that, globally, lone mothers with at least one child under 6 are more likely to be in the labour force than mothers living with a partner and young child (65.8 per cent versus 48.7 per cent, respectively), presumably because they must provide for their household alone. Lone-father households are rare, so unfortunately there are insufficient sampled data to produce reliable estimates on them.

Women living alone have an increased likelihood of being in the labour force

Women living alone are more likely to be in the labour force than women living in any other type of household. This pattern is observed globally and in all regions except Oceania. In sub-Saharan Africa, South-Eastern Asia, Europe and Northern America, and Latin America and the Caribbean, the

maximum observed regional gap between male and female labour force participation rates among individuals living alone is 10 percentage points. This is low when compared to the average gap of 20.4 percentage points between men and women across all household types.

In Central and Southern Asia and in Northern Africa and Western Asia, where the female labour force participation rate is very low (at about 29 per cent on average), the estimated participation rate of women living alone is 67.0 per cent and 48.2 per cent, respectively. In these regions, the labour force participation rates of men and women living alone remain highly skewed, but less so than in any other type of household. Contributing to this more equal participation is the fact that men living alone have lower-than-average labour force participation rates in all regions except sub-Saharan Africa and Oceania. One explanation for this could be social norms that support men's role as the 'provider' when they marry and have children, a stimulus to labour force participation that is not imposed on single men.

Being part of a couple, especially with young children, is associated with lower participation rates for women and higher rates for men

The analysis shows that women, in contrast to men, are more likely to be outside the labour force when they marry and have children, especially young children. Living together with a partner decreases women's tendency to participate in the labour force. This tendency is much more pronounced when the couple has at least one child under 6, in all regions except sub-Saharan Africa.

Globally, women living with a partner, in most cases married to a man, are less likely to be in the labour force than women living alone (64.3 per cent versus 82.4 per cent, respectively), although they have higher-than-average labour force participation rates (the average is 51.6 per cent). For men, living with a partner increases participation

compared to men living alone (94.2 per cent versus 90 per cent, respectively). In couple households, inequality between the sexes in terms of labour force participation is greater than 10 percentage points in every region analysed. This indicates the uneven way in which domestic and economic responsibilities are shared between women and men who are living together. This can be seen most clearly by comparing the gap between female and male labour force participation rates in lone-person and couple households (Figure 1).

Globally, prime-working-age women are least likely to be in the labour force when they are living as part of a couple with young children (48.7 per cent) and in extended-family households with young children (41.1 per cent). The latter are households in which both children and other adult family members, such as grandparents, aunts or uncles, are present. Women living in extended-family households might, on the one hand, have unpaid duties related to elder care, which further exacerbate labour market penalties. On the other hand, they may also have people in the family who can share their care responsibilities, allowing them to participate in the labour market.¹⁶ The new data show that, in these extended-family households, the presence of at least one young child (under the age of 6) reduces female labour force participation further than when children are older (under the age of 18).¹⁷ The opposite pattern is observed for men living as a couple in households with children. This points to the impact of gendered family roles: When living as a couple, and especially with children under 6, men appear to take on the role of breadwinner and women the role of caregiver. It also indicates that, as their children grow older, mothers enter or re-enter the labour force, although it is likely that their careers have been affected by leaving the labour force to care for their children when they were young.

The variation in labour force participation rates for women living alone, with a partner or with a partner

and young children suggests that, although women do have a tendency to leave or remain out of the labour force when they get married (or become part of a couple), this happens more often when they have children.

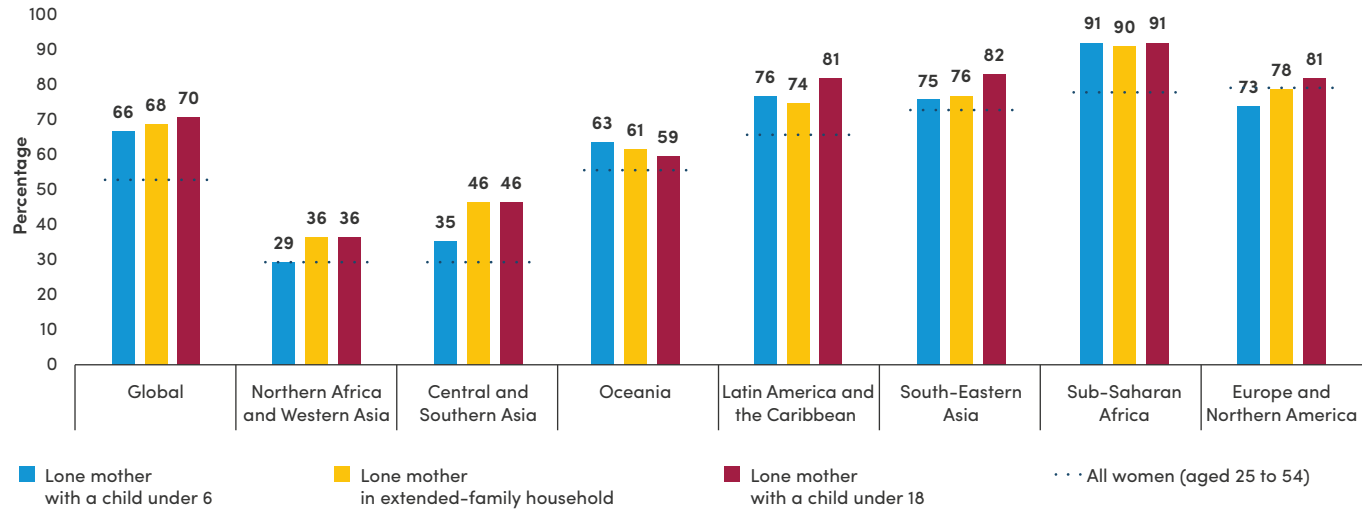
A lone mother is more likely than the average prime-working-age woman to be in the labour force

Labour force participation rates of lone mothers are higher than or equal to the average rate for prime-working-age women globally (65.8 per cent versus 51.6 per cent, respectively) and in all regions, except for Europe and Northern America. There, lone mothers with children under 6 are 5 percentage points less likely to be in the labour force than the average prime-working-age mother in that region (72.7 per cent versus 77.5 per cent, respectively). The high participation rates among lone mothers across most regions likely reflects the economic pressures on women to provide for themselves and their children. The lower participation rate in Europe and Northern America suggests the availability of child maintenance allowances from the state and/or other legal protections that offer some measure of financial security for lone mothers and their children.

In all regions except Oceania, lone mothers with at least one child under 6 are less likely to be in the labour force than lone mothers with at least one child under 18. This is because young children require more care, and mothers are able to enter or re-enter the labour market as their children get older. Lone mothers in extended-family households often have other adult household members that are able to help by caring for the children or by providing an income for the household. The new indicators show that lone mothers living in extended-family households have a higher than average likelihood of being in the labour force. However, variations are found across regions (Figure 2).

FIGURE 2

LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATES OF LONE MOTHERS (AGED 25 TO 54), BY REGION, HOUSEHOLD TYPE AND THE PRESENCE OF CHILDREN



Source: ILO and UN Women calculations from ILOSTAT database.
 Note: Oceania excludes Australia and New Zealand. For the SDG region of Eastern and South-Eastern Asia, data are shown only for the subregion of South-Eastern Asia due to insufficient country coverage.

Childbearing, more than marriage, affects labour force participation

The new statistics show that, although women living with a partner have lower labour force participation rates than women living alone, it is largely the presence of children within a marriage or union that drives the decline in female labour force participation. Having young children and having more children increases the intensity of childcare and domestic work within a household compared to having older, or fewer, children. Having more children, in particular, increases pressure on household budgets. What's more, the responsibility for childcare and domestic work traditionally falls to women, while the responsibility for providing income traditionally falls to men. The particularly large fall in labour market participation for women who are both married and have young children can be explained by gender norms that assume women will take responsibility for increased childcare and domestic requirements in these households. In households

without young children, these requirements are lessened, and women can continue to be employed.

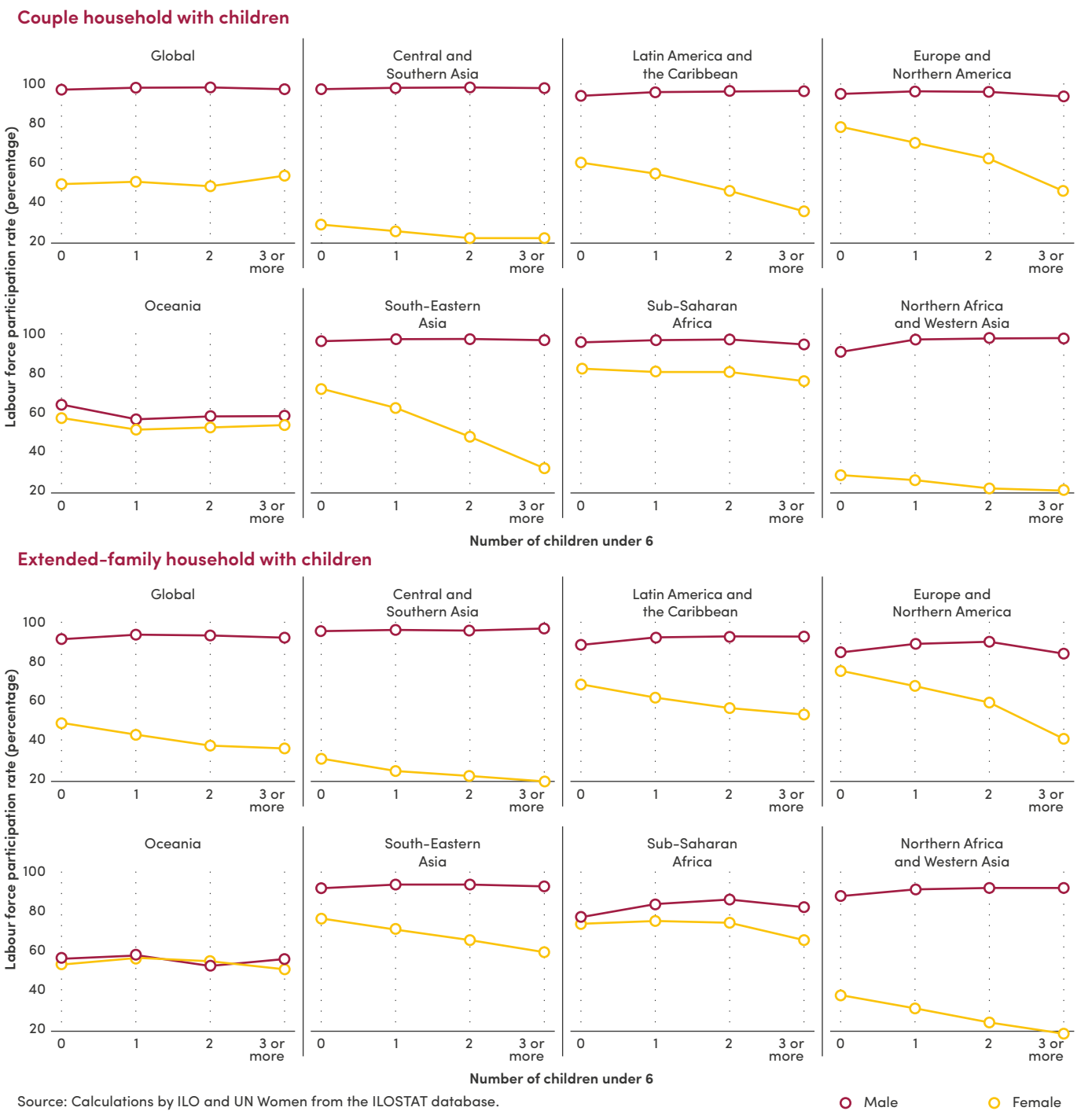
Households with children under 6

The number of children as well as the age of the child(ren) are key factors in determining whether a woman participates in the labour force. As shown in Figure 3, the presence of one child under 6 reduces female labour force participation in both couples with children and in extended-family households with children across the world and in most regions. In most cases, the presence of a second young child further reduces female labour force participation.

For men, in regions other than Oceania, there is an initial 'boost' in their likelihood of being in the labour force with their first young child. This tends to level off, or even fall, with additional children. In sub-Saharan Africa, labour force participation is high among both men and women, with women's participation close to that of men's. However, women's participation is relatively low in extended-family households with young children.

FIGURE 3

LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATES OF MEN AND WOMEN (AGED 25 TO 54) LIVING AS A COUPLE AND IN EXTENDED-FAMILY HOUSEHOLDS, BY REGION AND NUMBER OF CHILDREN UNDER 6



Source: Calculations by ILO and UN Women from the ILOSTAT database.
 Note: Oceania excludes Australia and New Zealand. For the SDG region of Eastern and South-Eastern Asia, data are shown only for the subregion of South-Eastern Asia due to insufficient country coverage.

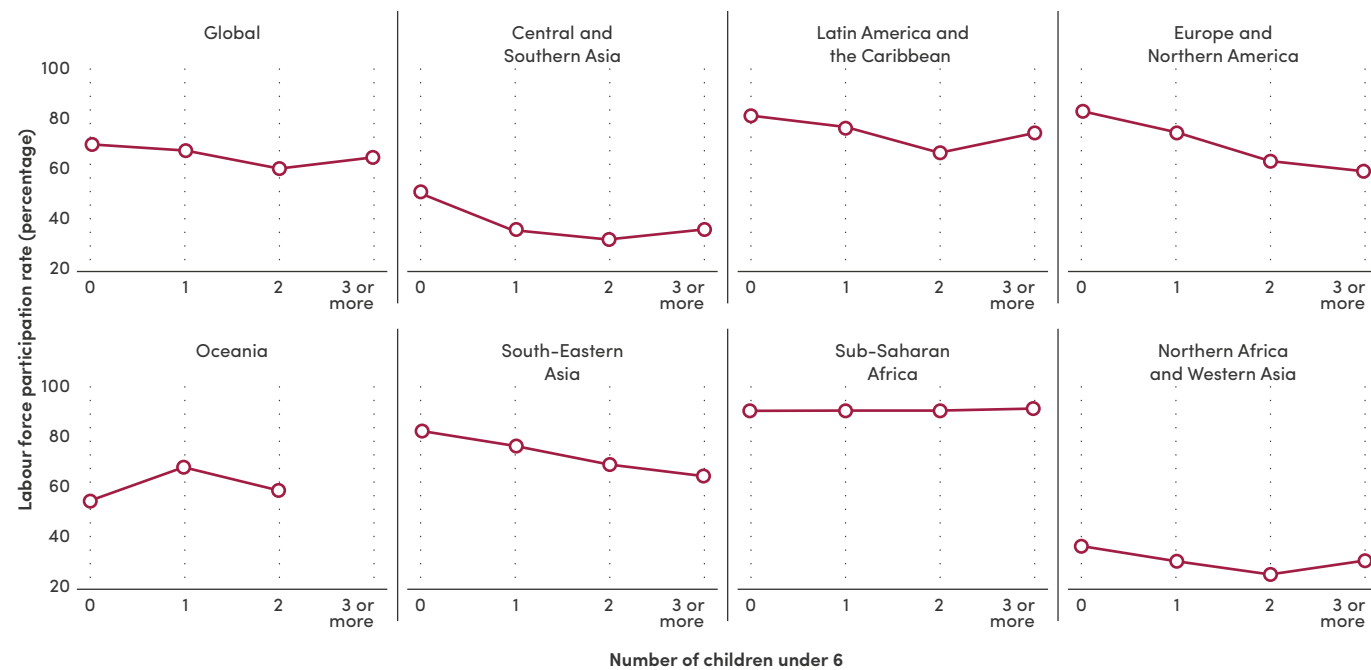
Lone mothers with more than one child

As a group, lone mothers have a very high labour force participation rate relative to prime-working-age women in general. They also tend to have the largest age-based dependency ratio – that is, they tend to live in households in which there are more dependents (persons under 25 and over 54) than prime-working-age adults (25 to 54 years of age). This underscores the point that lone parents (who are mostly women) have greater care burdens, and consequently bear outsized economic costs of raising children; they also require greater support, including

increased access to social benefits and services. Figure 4 shows that lone mothers with a second child under 6 participate less in the labour force than lone mothers with one child (60.6 per cent versus 67.7 per cent, respectively). While further research is needed, this finding can be an indication of several coping strategies: It may signal that children are participating in the labour force to support their mother and siblings, or the mother cuts back on engagement in the labour market to cope with increased care demands. The latter likely results in increased vulnerability to poverty.¹⁸

FIGURE 4

LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATES OF LONE MOTHERS (AGED 25 TO 54), BY REGION AND NUMBER OF CHILDREN UNDER 6



Source: ILO and UN Women calculations from ILOSTAT database.
 Note: Oceania excludes Australia and New Zealand, and data for three or more children under 6 are not presented due to insufficient population coverage for the region. For the SDG region of Eastern and South-Eastern Asia, data are shown only for the subregion of South-Eastern Asia due to insufficient country coverage.

Dependents are more likely to work in lone-parent and extended-family households

Dependents can sometimes participate in the labour force to alleviate the economic strain of a household (which is linked to the household's dependency ratio). Figure 5 shows the labour force participation rates of youth (15- to 24-year-olds) in different regions by household type. It is striking to see that, globally and in all regions, youth in lone-parent and extended-family households are the most likely to be in the labour force (40.7 per cent and 37.9 per cent in lone-parent and extended-family households, respectively, versus 33.5 per cent in households comprising a couple with children).

market before reaching prime working age.

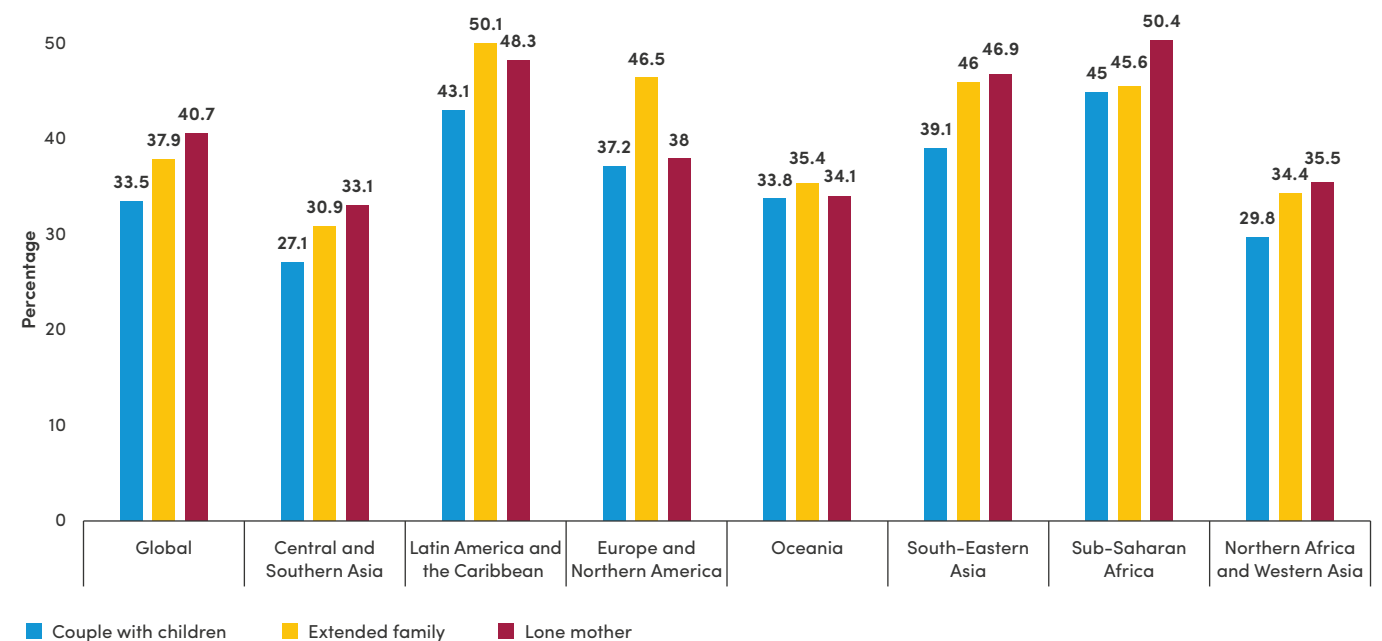
In poorer regions, the gap between youth working in lone-parent households and in households made up of a couple with children is largest. This is presumably because lone-parent households are more frequently economically strained, having more dependents and fewer sources of income.

The same appears true for extended-family households, where there are typically fewer people of prime working age providing for younger and older members. Likewise, in these households we see higher rates of participation among youth.

Extended-family households also have large dependency ratios and likely have fewer resources per household member than households comprised of couples with children.

FIGURE 5

LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATES OF YOUTH (AGED 15 TO 24), BY REGION AND HOUSEHOLD TYPE



Source: ILO and UN Women calculations from ILOSTAT database.
 Note: Oceania excludes Australia and New Zealand. For the SDG region of Eastern and South-Eastern Asia, data are shown only for the subregion of South-Eastern Asia due to insufficient country coverage.

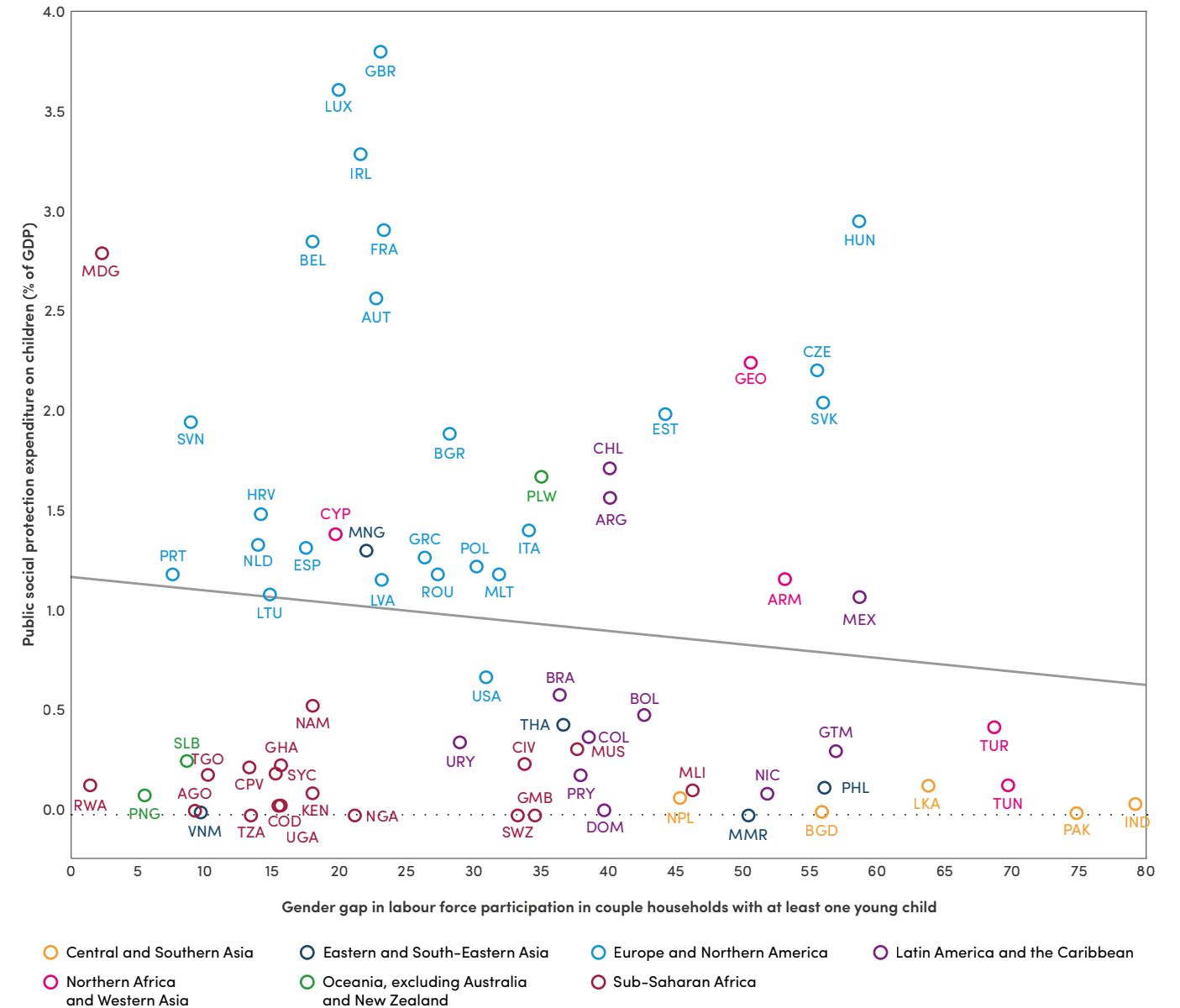
Spending on social protection is associated with reduced gender gaps in labour market participation

Women are key contributors to the economy, and access to decent paid work is central to gender equality. However, as the data show, women’s employment continues to be shaped by domestic and caregiving responsibilities in a way that men’s is not. Across regions, women are more likely than men to interrupt their employment when they marry and have children. Family structures have a bearing on this and, in some cases, place additional burdens on women. This is especially the case for lone mothers, when financial and care needs of dependents fall on their shoulders.

The data are striking in the commonalities observed across regions: Women living together with a partner (married or in a union) and partnered women with children are much more likely than their male counterparts to interrupt

their participation in the labour force to care for dependents. Moreover, while it may be true that men are increasingly taking part in unpaid care and domestic work, including childcare, and women, including married women, are more likely than in the past to engage in paid work, gender gaps remain. These gaps are mostly driven by socially ascribed gender roles. Across countries, inadequate sharing of family responsibilities, combined with a lack of – or insufficient – support services, such as quality and affordable childcare, continue to restrict women’s employment. Data from 71 countries reveal the association between increases in public social protection expenditure on children and the gender gap in labour market participation. As shown in Figure 6, countries with higher expenditure (as a percentage of gross domestic product, or GDP), such as the United Kingdom and Luxembourg, tend to have lower participation gaps. In contrast, countries with little or no expenditure (such as India and Pakistan) have the highest gaps. Across countries, however, investment in childcare support and similar programmes is woefully inadequate.

FIGURE 6
PUBLIC SOCIAL PROTECTION EXPENDITURE ON CHILDREN AND GENDER GAP IN LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION IN COUPLE HOUSEHOLDS WITH AT LEAST ONE CHILD UNDER 6



Source: ILO World Social Protection Database 2017–2019, Annex IV, Table B.17.
 Note: The public social protection expenditure on children is presented as a percentage of GDP. It includes child-related cash transfers, public income-support payments during periods of parental leave and income support for lone-parent families, direct financing and subsidizing of providers of childcare and early education facilities, public childcare support through earmarked payments to parents, and tax exemptions (such as income from child benefits not included in the tax base). It also includes child tax allowances (amounts for children that are deducted from gross income and are not included in taxable income) and child tax credits – amounts that are deducted from the tax liability. The expenditure does not include health expenditure. Data for 71 countries are presented.

CONCLUSION

Insufficient attention to gender analysis, including the role family dynamics and structures play in women's access to employment opportunities, can give rise to policies and programmes that fail to meet women's needs and concerns. The new data and analysis presented in this paper point to the need for an integrated gender perspective in the analysis and evaluation of labour market outcomes, including greater efforts to understand the role unpaid care and domestic responsibilities play in restricting women's participation in the labour force. Marriage and motherhood should not restrict the full participation of women in society. Nor should they be a basis for discrimination, including in the labour market. At the same time, greater recognition is needed of the shared responsibility of both parents and society in bringing up children.

Women within families often assume a central role in caring for dependents, but women's time is not infinitely elastic. Where care demands are not met with public support, the resulting outcome is less time and access to paid work opportunities for women. Through public financing and care delivery, the state plays an important role in helping families meet the growing demands of care. Family and care-related provisions – including paid maternity and parental leave as well as other support services, such as subsidized provision of childcare and early education facilities – can help women and men reconcile family and work responsibilities. Paid maternity and parental leave and related provisions facilitate women's employment and make it possible

for both women and men to spend time caring for their children, and for women to recover from childbirth. Globally, more than 120 countries now provide paid maternity leave and health benefits. In 1974, only Sweden provided paternity benefits; by 2015, 93 additional countries around the world followed suit. Despite these advances, only 41 per cent of new mothers receive maternity benefits.¹⁹

Maternity and parental leave schemes are essential for working parents, but often young children need care beyond the period allotted by these entitlements. Accessible, affordable and quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) services are therefore another key policy lever that not only enhance children's cognitive development, educational achievement and health outcomes, but also allow women (and men that provide care) the opportunity to remain in the labour force. These services should be delivered in ways that respond to the needs of working parents with long and irregular hours, provide decent working conditions, and ensure utmost quality. Access to ECEC across countries is far from universal, and within countries it is unequally distributed. Coverage rates for pre-primary education, for example, reached 39 per cent in developing countries. Some countries, such as Chile and Ecuador, have significantly expanded coverage, including through provision of free community-based ECEC.²⁰ In other cases, access is high among upper-income households and low among the poorest. In Egypt, 65 per cent of children from the richest households have access to ECEC services, compared to 16 per cent of children from the poorest households.²¹

THE ROAD AHEAD: POLICY PRIORITIES

- 1/ **Provide statutory, paid leave to both mothers and fathers.** Threats to job security and suspended earnings are some of the challenges parents (especially mothers) face when adequate safeguards are not in place to allow them to take the time needed to recover from childbirth and care for young dependents. Good working conditions for parents, combined with maternity and parental leave, are essential and can prompt more equal sharing of unpaid care and domestic work between women and men.
- 2/ **Enable access to high-quality, affordable and accessible childcare and care services for older persons in need.** Care services for children and older persons enhance women's employment and complement the unpaid care that families provide. Women in extended-family households, for example, may face increased unpaid duties related to the care of older persons. Care services are key for mitigating the increased demand.
- 3/ **Collect more and better data.** Robust data on women's labour markets outcomes, disaggregated by key characteristics along with household composition and the presence of children, are crucial. More and better data on all aspects of work-family reconciliation policies are needed as well so that programmes can be monitored, policies compared, and countries held accountable for outcomes for women and the families that rely on them for financial security and care needs.

ENDNOTES

- 1 UN Women, 2019a.
- 2 Cebula and Montgomery Williams, 2006; Contreras and Plaza, 2010; Agüero and Marks, 2011. Additional country-specific studies include: Varol, 2017; Chen and Ge, 2018; Sa'ar, 2017; An and Kazuyo, 2018; Ismail and Poo Bee Tin, 2012; Tsai, 2017; Cristia, 2008.
- 3 de Laat and Sevilla-Sanz, 2011; Uunk, 2015.
- 4 UN Women, 2019a.
- 5 ILOSTAT, 2019; UN, 2020.
- 6 UN Women, 2019b.
- 7 Cukrowska-Torzewska, 2017; Castaño, Fontanil and García-Izquierdo, 2019. For other relevant reading, see: Bianchi, 2011; Mitra and Singh, 2006; Budig, Misra and Boeckmann, 2012.
- 8 ILO, 2019; ILO, 2018.
- 9 ILO, 2019.
- 10 Idowu, 2019; del Boca and Locatelli, 2006; Apps and Rees, 2005; del Boca, Pasqua and Pronzato, 2009; Padilla-Romo and Cabrera-Hernandez, 2019; Berthelon, Kruger and Oyarzun, 2015.
- 11 Maurer-Fazio et al., 2011; Aragão and Villanueva, 2019.

- 12 ILO, 2019.
- 13 Liu, Dong and Zheng, 2010; An and Kazuyo, 2018.
- 14 Global and regional aggregates presented in this paper are based on the country coverage and methodology described in the Annex available at: <https://ilostat.ilo.org/topics/women/>.
- 15 UN Women, 2019a.
- 16 ILO, 2018.
- 17 In some regions, when all children are over the age of 18, the mother's labour force participation rate is lower than when children are younger than 18. These findings could be explained by women re-entering the labour market when children are between 6 and 18 years old and dropping out again when their children are older, since the household may no longer need a second income as children become more economically independent. However, they may also be due to a woman's age, as she approaches the upper limit of the age band under analysis (25 to 54 years). Indeed, a similar pattern is observed for men, which implies a stronger effect of workers' ages than of having children (when they are over 18 years old).
- 18 Another possibility is that lone mothers have resources sufficient to provide for the family and can thus leave the labour force. In the context of low social provisioning and stigma associated with lone motherhood, this scenario is likely not the norm.
- 19 UN Women, 2020; ILO, 2017.
- 20 UN Women, 2019a.
- 21 UN Women, 2020.

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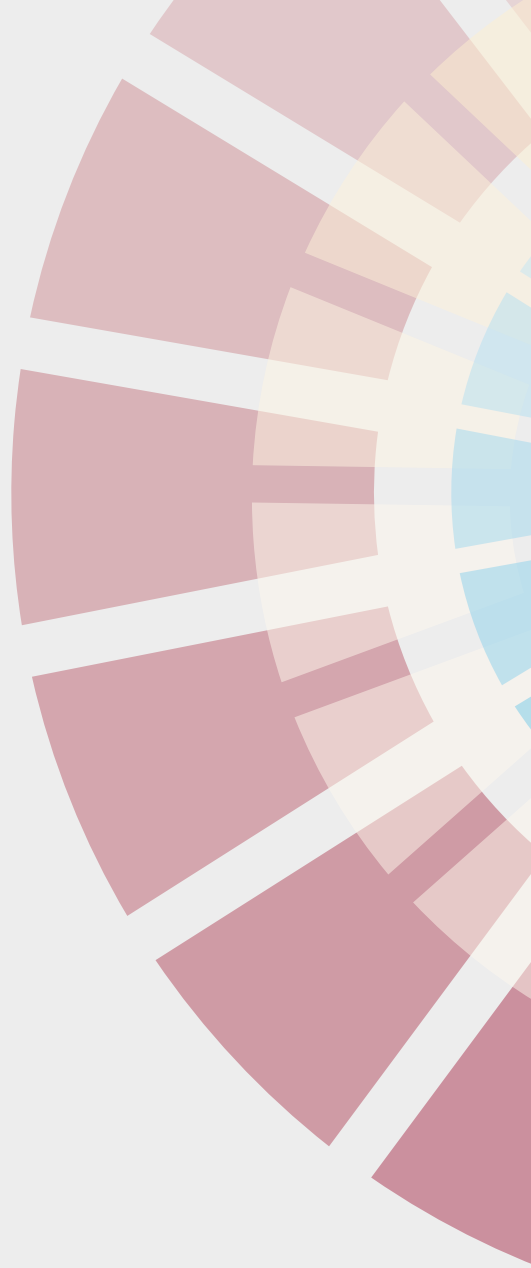
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This Spotlight on the SDGs paper is being released in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to being a health crisis unlike any other in recent history, the pandemic is also an economic and social crisis. Families – and women within them – are juggling an increase in unpaid care work as well as losses in income and paid work. Lone mothers in particular are acutely vulnerable, unable to share the care burden and more likely to work for low pay and in vulnerable occupations.

The restrictions put in place to combat COVID-19 also leave women and their families in precarious positions. Understanding the extent to which women's participation in the labour market is linked to family structures is even more crucial in these uncertain times. This publication, drawing on a global dataset and new indicators developed by UN Women and the International Labour Organization, shows that women's employment is shaped by domestic and caregiving responsibilities in ways that men's is not. The data collected pre-COVID-19 provide insights into the distribution of domestic and caregiving responsibilities within various types of households – insights that are critical at this juncture when policies and programmes are being designed to respond to the pandemic's economic fallout.



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