

Human Rights Council: Topic 1

Addressing inequality of job opportunities for women in light of Covid-19

Background:

The gender gap in employment has been an undeniable reality in the past few centuries. According to the ILO (International Labour Organisation), to participate in the labour force one must be employed or searching for employment. Hence, as reported from an update made in March 2018, the global labour force participation rate for women is close to 49% while for men, it's 75%. That is a difference of 26 percentage points, with some regions facing a gap of more than 50 percentage points.

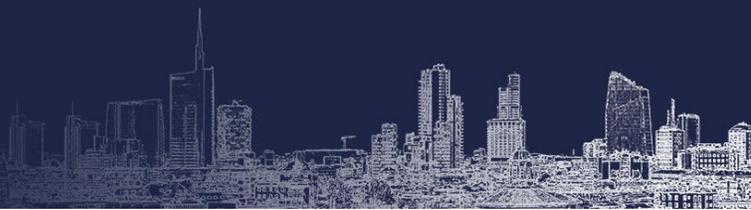
There has been progress over the last decades: more girls are going to school, fewer girls are forced into early marriage, more women are serving in parliament and positions of leadership, and laws are being reformed to advance gender equality. Nevertheless, despite these gains, according to the UN many challenges remain: discriminatory laws and social norms remain pervasive, women continue to be underrepresented at all levels of political leadership, and 1 in 5 women and girls between the ages of 15 and 49 report experiencing physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner within the most recent year. In addition, The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic could reverse some of the progress that has been made on gender equality and women's rights.

Current situation:

Following the Corona Virus outbreak of 2019; "as many as 2 million women are considering taking a leave of absence or leaving the workforce altogether"¹ warns "Women in the Workplace", the largest comprehensive study of the state of women in corporate America.

Covid-19 has intensified childcare and household pressures, so companies are at risk of losing women in leadership. Working mothers are enduring additional pressure during stay-at-home orders. They are spending 15 more hours weekly on domestic labor than men, according to business strategy advisers Boston Consulting Group. And Catalyst, a non-profit focused on helping companies better serve women, reports that women are twice as likely as men to be responsible for homeschooling.

¹ "Women in the Workplace." 2020. [https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/McKinsey/Featured Insights/Diversity and Inclusion/Women in the Workplace 2020/Women-in-the-Workplace-2020.pdf](https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/McKinsey/Featured%20Insights/Diversity%20and%20Inclusion/Women%20in%20the%20Workplace%202020/Women-in-the-Workplace-2020.pdf).



MOTHERS ARE MORE LIKELY THAN FATHERS TO CONSIDER SCALING BACK OR LEAVING BECAUSE OF COVID-19

% of employees who have considered changing their work situation during the Covid-19 crisis

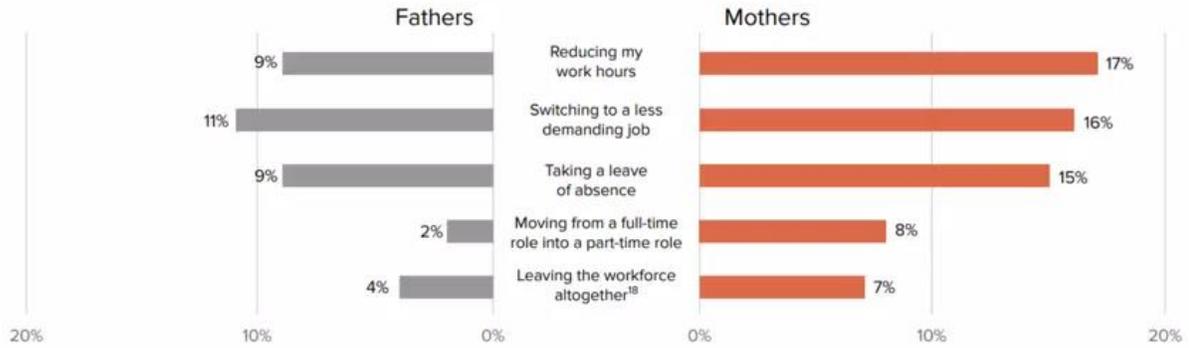


Figure 1) Gender differences among parents regarding continuing to work during the Covid-19 pandemic²

MOTHERS ARE MORE LIKELY THAN FATHERS TO FEEL JUDGED FOR CAREGIVING DURING COVID-19

FATHERS MOTHERS

Since the start of the Covid-19 crisis, % of parents who have experienced . . .

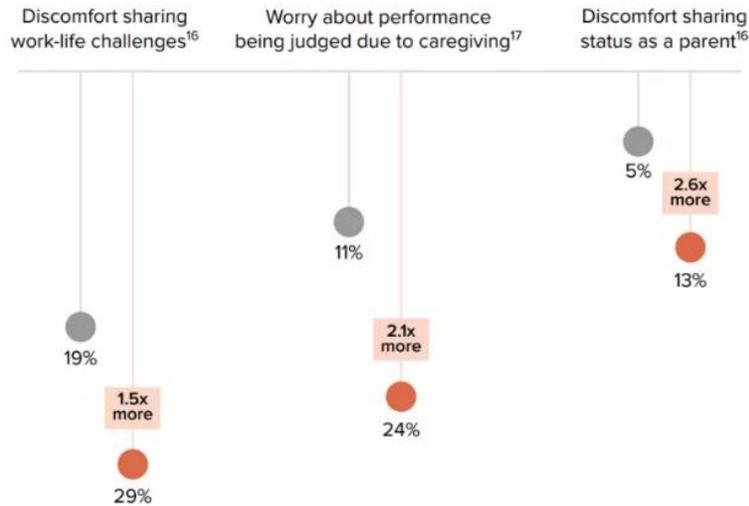


Figure 2) Gender differences regarding perception of parenting during the Covid-19 pandemic³

² "Women in the Workplace." 2020. [https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/McKinsey/Featured Insights/Diversity and Inclusion/Women in the Workplace 2020/Women-in-the-Workplace-2020.pdf](https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/McKinsey/Featured%20Insights/Diversity%20and%20Inclusion/Women%20in%20the%20Workplace%202020/Women-in-the-Workplace-2020.pdf).

³ *Ibid.*



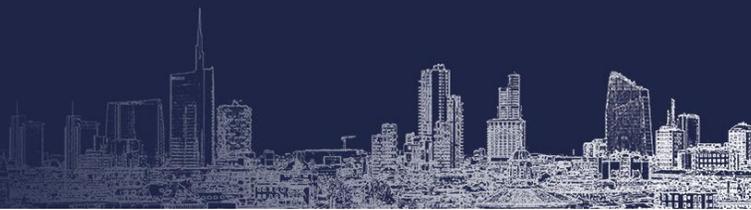
Possible solutions:

According to “UN Women”⁴:

Several common tools and strategies could help improve the status of women in the UN system. They are briefly described here, accompanied by the most recent UN Women data on usage, as well as examples and other resources.

- [Gender balance strategies](#) – These may include steps to increase gender awareness, enhance monitoring and accountability, and improve the work environment through appropriate human resource policies.
- [Temporary special measures to improve the status of women](#) – These can include targeted recruitment and promotion, training programs for women, and numerical targets. All are aimed at ensuring gender balance in recruitment and promotion, and at rectifying past and current discrimination against women.
- [Staff selection systems](#) – There are fewer female applicants than male at every level, indicating that the UN system as a whole struggles to attract female applicants.
- [Exit interviews](#) – Surveying departing staff provides insights into organizational barriers to staff recruitment and retention.
- [Work-life balance and flexible work arrangements](#) – Related UN Secretariat policies include:
 - [Flexible working arrangements](#)
 - [Staggered working hours](#)
 - [Compressed work schedule](#)
 - [Scheduled break for extended learning activities](#)
 - [Telecommuting](#)
 - [Part-time work](#)
 - [Family leave, maternity leave and paternity leave](#)
 - [Adoption leave](#)
 - [Parental leave as special leave without pay](#)
 - [Special leave in cases of death or emergency](#)
 - [Breastfeeding policy](#)

⁴ "Strategies and Tools | How We Work: Gender Parity in the United Nations." UN Women, www.unwomen.org/en/how-we-work/gender-parity-in-the-united-nations/strategies-and-tools.



Further reading:

- [Article on Women's equality and Covid-19](#)
- "Women in the Workplace." 2020. [https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/McKinsey/Featured Insights/Diversity and Inclusion/Women in the Workplace 2020/Women-in-the-Workplace-2020.pdf](https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/McKinsey/Featured%20Insights/Diversity%20and%20Inclusion/Women%20in%20the%20Workplace%202020/Women-in-the-Workplace-2020.pdf).
- "COVID-19 and Gender Equality: Countering the Regressive Effects." *McKinsey & Company*, 15 July 2020, www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/covid-19-and-gender-equality-countering-the-regressive-effects.
- "COVID-19 and Women." *Ministry for Women* |, 31 May 2020, www.women.govt.nz/news/covid-19-and-women.
- "The Economic Devastation Of COVID-19 Is Hitting Women Particularly Hard." *HuffPost*, 27 May 2020, www.huffpost.com/entry/women-coronavirus-lost-jobs_n_5e90a363c5b685fbc7d4a557.
- "The Impact of the Coronavirus Pandemic on Gender Equality." *VOX, CEPR Policy Portal*, www.voxeu.org/article/impact-coronavirus-pandemic-gender-equality.

Bibliography:

- "Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment." *United Nations Sustainable Development*, www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality/.
- "Strategies and Tools | How We Work: Gender Parity in the United Nations." *UN Women*, www.unwomen.org/en/how-we-work/gender-parity-in-the-united-nations/strategies-and-tools.
- Taylor, Julia B. "How Coronavirus Could Do Real, Long-term Damage to Women's Careers." *CNBC*, 15 July 2020, www.cnbc.com/2020/07/14/how-coronavirus-could-do-long-term-damage-to-womens-careers.html.
- "Women in the Workplace." 2020. [https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/McKinsey/Featured Insights/Diversity and Inclusion/Women in the Workplace 2020/Women-in-the-Workplace-2020.pdf](https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/McKinsey/Featured%20Insights/Diversity%20and%20Inclusion/Women%20in%20the%20Workplace%202020/Women-in-the-Workplace-2020.pdf).
- "Women's Health and Empowerment in the Workplace." *UNFPA - United Nations Population Fund*, www.unfpa.org/womens-health-and-empowerment-workplace.