

# Why aren't there more women in the labor force across the globe?<sup>[1]</sup>

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**Source:** Motto

**Format:** Article

**Publication Date:** 16 May 2017

## AVAILABILITY

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## EXCERPTS

Gallup and the International Labor Organization (ILO) recently released a landmark report on global attitudes toward women and work.

Based on a study conducted across 142 countries and territories, the report finds that the majority of both men (66%) and women (70%) prefer that women participate in paid work.

These results hold true across the world, including in regions where women's labor force participation is notoriously low. For example, in Northern Africa, where the female labor force participation rate is only 23%, 79% of women and 57% of men believe that women should be allowed to work outside the home.

Globally, the results are correlated with age, marital status, geographic location and educational achievement. Perhaps not surprisingly, young women (ages 15 to 29) are more likely to prefer participating in paid work than their older peers, as are single women, women living in urban areas and women who have reached higher levels of education.

This leads to one question: If men and women largely agree that paid work is acceptable for a woman — and women want to work — why does the global female labor force participation rate continue to lag so very far behind that of men? According to the report, 76% of men and only 50% of women work globally — a 26% gap.

According to the study, men and women alike report managing the responsibilities of work and family to be the greatest challenge facing working women, followed by the related issue of affordable childcare. While variations exist at the country and territory level, views do not differ significantly by region or level of development.

Separate research from the ILO suggests that paid family leave policies could help address this issue. In particular, leave that is specifically earmarked for fathers encourages a more equal distribution of childcare and household chores. Flexible working arrangements and on-site or publicly-funded quality childcare could further reduce the disproportionate burden of family and care responsibilities on working women.

In Brazil, for example, researchers established a causal relationship between childcare and female labor force participation: a study of more than 4,000 children concluded that increased access to government-funded childcare resulted in an increase in mothers' employment from 36% to 46% in less than one year. Likewise, research exploring the expansion of after-school care in Chile suggests a positive correlation between publicly funded childcare and female labor force participation in the country. This trend appears to hold true across regions, as similar correlations have been documented in an array of countries, including Sweden and Russia.

The Gallup-ILO findings and related policy trends discussed here are significant not only to women, but also to households, communities and countries seeking economic growth in the global economy. Evidence indicates that women are more likely than their male counterparts to reinvest higher proportions of their income into the health and education of their children, creating a virtuous cycle in which families grow healthier and more stable over time. Women are also less likely to partake in risky financial investments and more likely to make decisions that benefit the entire community.

Ultimately, increasing women's labor force participation can drive sustainable economic growth and contribute to global poverty reduction. This is in our shared interest, as suffocated opportunity is the enemy of global prosperity and stability.

In the words of Gallup's Chairman and CEO Jim Clifton, "The world needs to advance gender equality and empower women at work. Not just for the benefit of women, but for the benefit of all humankind."

-reprinted from Motto

**Related link:**

**Region:** International <sup>[3]</sup>

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