

Women, Childcare and Social Norms in the Philippines

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December 2021

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- **Even with significant economic progress and high levels of gender equality, female labor force participation remains persistently low in the Philippines, with less than half of women in the labor market.** This represents unrealized economic potential, with estimates showing that if women's employment increased by 0.5 percentage points per year, it would increase GDP per capita by almost 10 percent by 2050.
- **Childcare and social norms limit Filipinos women's labor force participation.** Being married and having a young child aged 0 to 2 years old decreases the probability of women's participation in the labor market by 7-14 percentage points, but the presence of domestic help reduces this negative effect.
- **Family responsibilities also influence the types of employment women engage in.** Women engaged in wage work tend to cluster either in low-skilled positions, due to economic necessity or high-skilled positions, because of high levels of education. Women earn more than men on average, but women at the bottom of the wage distribution earn much less than men, partly due to their desire to work in jobs that offer more flexible hours and work arrangements but do not offer adequate returns to their skills.
- **The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted established patterns of work and school, accelerating the adoption of distance learning and remote work where possible.** This has resulted in additional domestic work which women seem to have absorbed a disproportionate share of. Although employment rates have rebounded since then, recovery has been slower for women as they have held on to additional childcare and domestic responsibilities.
- **Results from the 2021 Women Work and Childcare survey reveal that women's reluctance to join the labor force seem to be based on beliefs about the role of women in the household as well as the belief that mothers working outside the home can negatively affect children.** As such, higher access to childcare may not lead to a significant increase in women's labor force participation.
- **Addressing gendered social norms with policies is challenging, but the literature points to interventions such as media campaigns, behavior change communication, and attitude change interventions as possible solutions to shifting cultural norms about women's work and to narrowing gender gaps in the labor market.**
- **While the changing nature of work with the COVID-19 pandemic has increased the weight of domestic work on women, it also presents new opportunities to raise women's participation in the labor market.** Policies which support more flexible work arrangements, strengthen support for women entrepreneurs, scale efforts to reskill and upskill women to help them find and secure more productive work in the new normal as well as policies which encourage firms to expand opportunities for women who want to reenter the labor market could provide pathways for women to become economically active.



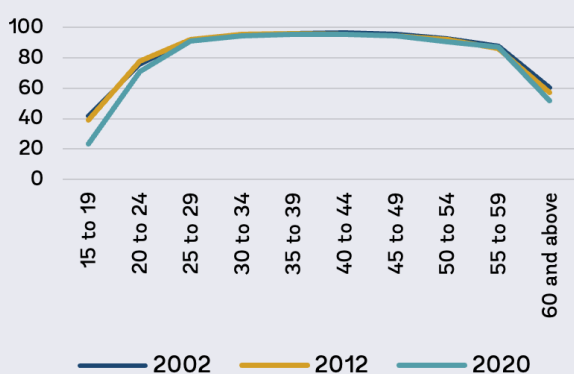
I. What is Holding Back Women's Participation in the Labor Market?

The Philippines is a leader among Asian countries in gender equality by almost every measure with one exception: low female labor force participation. The country ranks 1st among all Asian countries and 17th globally for gender equality according to 2021 World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report, having closed 78.4 percent of its overall gender gap. Women have held major political positions, are prominent in the business community and face few legal barriers. However, women's labor force participation has been persistently low over the past three decades despite considerable economic growth—at 49 percent, the country's female labor force participation in 2019 was one of the lowest in the East Asia and Pacific region, while the gender gap in labor force participation was the second-highest after Indonesia. This represents a missed opportunity for growth and increased prosperity, as estimates show that an increase in women's labor force participation by 0.5 percentage points per year would increase GDP per capita by almost 10 percent by 2050, bringing the country closer to upper-middle-income status.¹

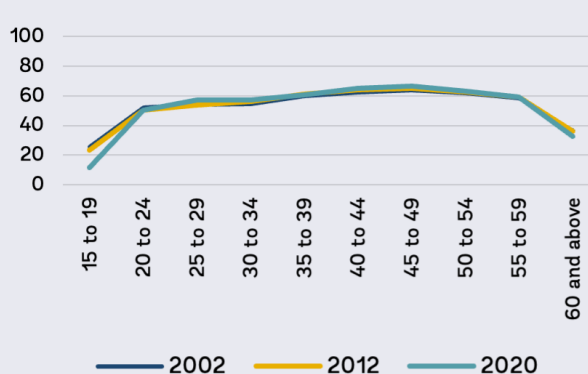
Women's participation in the labor force is lower than men's at every stage of the life cycle, while also following a very different trajectory. Men's labor force participation rises steeply between the 20-24 age group to the 25-29 age group, increasing 20 percentage points, then remains consistently high, reaching its peak at the 40-44 age group before declining sharply after reaching age 60 (Figure 1a). Participation rates among women, on the other hand, rises incrementally, reaching its peak at the 45-49 age group before similarly experiencing a sharp decline after age 60 (Figure 1b). This trajectory, lacking a sharp increase and reaching its peak at a relatively older age group suggests that women wait until children are sufficiently grown before seeking work or reentering the labor market. Also, while the labor force participation rate among men reaches its peak at 95 percent, even at its highest, the participation rate among women only reaches 67 percent.

FIGURE 1 Labor Force Participation, by Gender and Age Group, 2002–2020, Percent

a. Male Labor Force Participation



b. Female Labor Force Participation



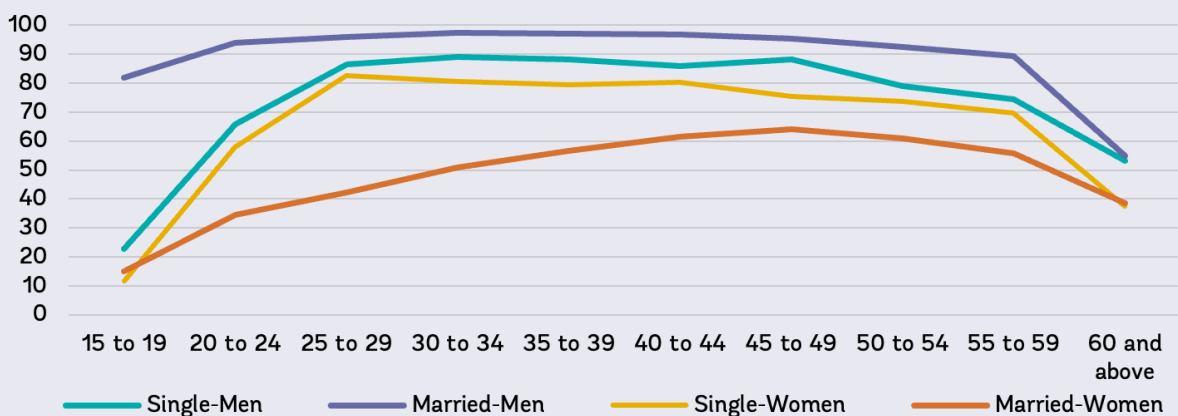
Source: Based on data from the 2002–2020 Labor Force Surveys.

1 Findings in this brief are from the World Bank report (2021). "Overcoming Barriers to Women's Economic Empowerment in the Philippines".




Married women, in particular, consistently have the lowest rates of labor force participation when compared to single women and men, whether single or married. Throughout the life cycle, the largest gaps in labor force participation are consistently between married men and married women. These gaps are largest at the 20-24 age group, where married women have a participation rate of 35 percent compared to married men at 96 percent, and persist through the peak reproductive ages between 25 to 39. Participation rates among married women are also much lower relative to single women, with the largest gap occurring at the 25-29 age group², where 83 percent of single women are active in the labor force, compared to 42 percent of married women (Figure 2). The low rates of participation among women at the critical ages of 20 to 39 is particularly striking as it hampers their ability to build their careers and gain specialized knowledge and skills, limiting the scope of roles they are able to take when they join or reenter the labor market.

FIGURE 2 Labor Force Participation by Gender and Marital Status, 2020, Percent



Source: Based on data from the 2020 Labor Force Survey.

² Excluding the 15-19 age group



Generally, when women work, they appear to perform better than men on average, working at higher occupational and pay levels, but this hides significant gaps. Women tend to cluster either in low-profile/low-pay occupations, to avoid falling further into poverty, or in high-profile/high-pay occupations, advantaged by their education levels. On average, the daily wage of women is 5 percent higher for women than for men. However, at the bottom of the pay distribution, the daily wage is over 50 percent higher for men than for women; women's earning disadvantage is partly due to their desire to work in jobs that offer more flexible hours and work arrangements but offer lower returns to their qualifications. At the top of the distribution, the daily wage is about 20 percent higher for women than for men because they have significantly higher education and qualifications. Yet, the concentration of women in high-skill positions declines considerably when they have young children.

Childcare and gendered social norms, which place the responsibility of family care on women, appear to hold back women's participation in the labor market. While economic inactivity among men and single women are primarily driven by market or health related reasons such as age, disability, education, training or awaiting the results of a job application, nearly 90 percent of economically inactive women cite household and family duties as the main reason for not seeking work. Empirical analysis on the factors which could help explain women's labor force participation reveal that being married and having a young child are associated with a 7-14 percentage points reduction in the probability of women's participation in the labor market. In contrast, the presence of someone to help fulfill childcare and household obligations is associated with an increase in the probability of women's active participation in the labor market. These results are consistent with the results from the 2019 World Values Survey (WVS), which reveal that over 80 percent of Filipinos agreed with the statement "A man's job is to earn money while a woman's job is to look after home and family", suggesting that a significant share of Filipinos continue to hold traditional social attitudes which favor the father's role in providing for the family and the mother's role in caring for the children and the household. Results from a recent survey on women's work and childcare further support these findings, which are further discussed in Section III.

Family responsibilities also affect women who work, influencing the type of jobs they are able to take. At the peak reproductive ages between 25-39 years old, which also correspond with heavier domestic duties, married women and women with young children (ages 4 and below) more frequently engage in nonwage work compared to single women. These differences are largely driven by the share of women working in private establishments (68 percent among single women compared to 44 percent among married women), as well as the large share of self-employment among married women and women with young children, which are, respectively, 19 and 16 percentage points higher compared to single women. Family obligations also appear to lead women to work fewer hours—while single women aged 25-39 spend more time at work compared to single men, married women and women with young children spend less time at work compared to their male counterparts, and are also more likely to cite personal and family reasons as the main reason for working less than 40 hours per week. Together, these suggest that even when married women are able to work, they more frequently choose employment options that offer flexibility to perform their responsibilities both at work and in the home.

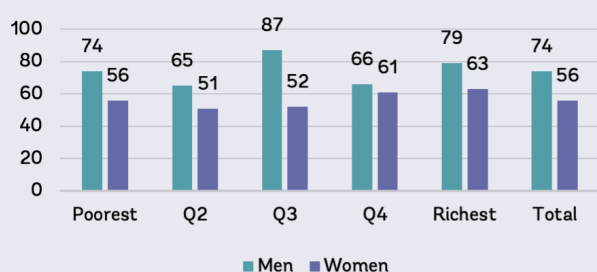
II. COVID-19: Challenges and Opportunities for Women's Work

The COVID-19 pandemic severely affected the country's economy, resulting in high rates of unemployment for both men and women. Data from the 2020 Labor Force Survey (LFS) reveal that shocks to employment and labor force participation were most severe in the second quarter of 2020, with unemployment rates tripling from 5.3 percent to 17.7 percent between January and April 2020. Approximately 20 percent of men and 19 percent of women who had been working in the first quarter of 2020 either lost their jobs or left the labor force entirely by April 2020, slightly raising the gender gap in labor force participation by 1.8 percentage points.

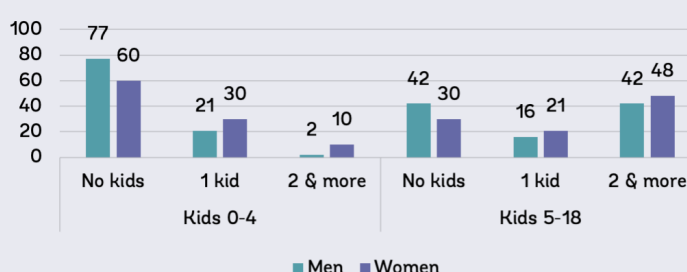
Although employment rates have rebounded since then, women's recovery has lagged behind that of men. Data from the first two rounds of the Household High Frequency Survey (HFS) show that among Filipinos who reported working in March 2020 but lost their jobs in August 2020, 74 percent of men reported working again by December 2020, compared to 56 percent of women (Figure 3a). Women who had no young children (aged 4 and below) in the household were also much more likely to have found work again by the end of 2020, particularly when compared to women who had two or more young children in the household, with reemployment rates of 60 percent and 10 percent, respectively (Figure 3b).

FIGURE 3 December Job Recovery, 2020, Percent

a. December Job Recovery, by Gender and Quintile, 2020



b. December Job Recovery, by Gender and Number of Children in the Household, 2020



Source: Based on data from the 2020 Household High-Frequency Survey, Round 2.

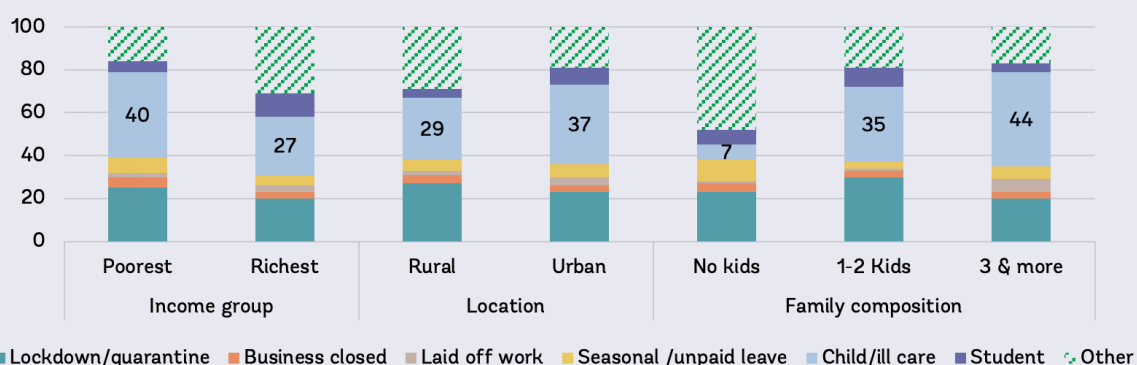
Note: Q = quintile.

The changing nature of study and work brought on by the pandemic have added to women's domestic burden. The pandemic severely disrupted established patterns of work and school, accelerating the adoption of distance learning and remote work where possible. Although this confers some benefits, it also results in additional housework that women seem to have absorbed a disproportionate share of. Data from the LFS reveals that among those who had work in January 2020 but were no longer working or were out of the labor force by April 2020, 24 percent of women cited housekeeping as the main reason for no longer working, compared to 1 percent of men; among married women, 36 percent cited this reason for no longer working, compared to 6 percent of single women. These findings are consistent with HFS data which reveal that by December 2020, 33 percent of women cited caring for children or sick relatives as the primary reason for not working—a 23 percentage point increase from the share of women who cited this reason in August

2020. Together, these suggest that women bore much of the initial addition in domestic work at the start of the pandemic, and, with household members continuing to study or work at home, this has persisted through end of 2020, acting as another barrier to women's work.

Women from poorer households seem to be more negatively affected with the additional responsibilities from childcare. Results from the December 2020 round of HFS further reveal that while childcare and caring for sick relatives was the most cited reason for not working among women in both the poorest and the richest quintiles, women from poorer households were still much more likely to cite this as a reason for not working. In addition, women in households with children were also more likely to cite this reason for not working, with the share increasing with the number of children in the household (Figure 4). This suggests that although women have generally been affected by the increase in domestic work and childcare, the effects are even more magnified for women from poorer households, who are more likely to have a larger number of dependents and are less likely to be able to afford to hire help with childcare and domestic work.

FIGURE 4 Reason for Women Not Working, by Location, Income Group, and Family, December 2020, Percent



Source: Based on data from the 2020 Household High-Frequency Survey, Round 2.

Note: Student option was included in Round 2 but not Round 1.

The increase in women's childcare responsibilities could be driven in part by distance learning. With face to face learning paused since the start of the pandemic, parents have had to add overseeing children's education as they study remotely, adding to their childcare duties. Results from the December 2020 round of HFS show that women are much more likely to assist with distance learning, with a quarter of female household heads reporting that they are the primary person assisting with distance learning, compared to 10 percent of male household heads. Moreover, women from poorer households could also be disproportionately affected with the shift to distance learning particularly due to the lack of access to resources to help with remote learning and reliance on paper-based modules. The HOPE survey finds that only about 10 percent of students aged six to eight were able to use learning modules on their own, requiring an average of three to four hours of supervision per day.

Despite the consequences of COVID-19 on women's work, the pandemic has also changed established work patterns that could encourage more women to be economically active. The pandemic has accelerated the adoption of remote work across various sectors of the economy, providing an opportunity for more women to participate in the labor force, particularly as it provides increased flexibility for women while reducing or eliminating long commutes to and from work. The rise of e-commerce also provides a valuable opportunity for women to become entrepreneurs as it allows women to tap into new and growing online markets, including those that were traditionally male-dominated sectors, while similarly providing them with flexibility in work hours, location and activities (IFC 2021).

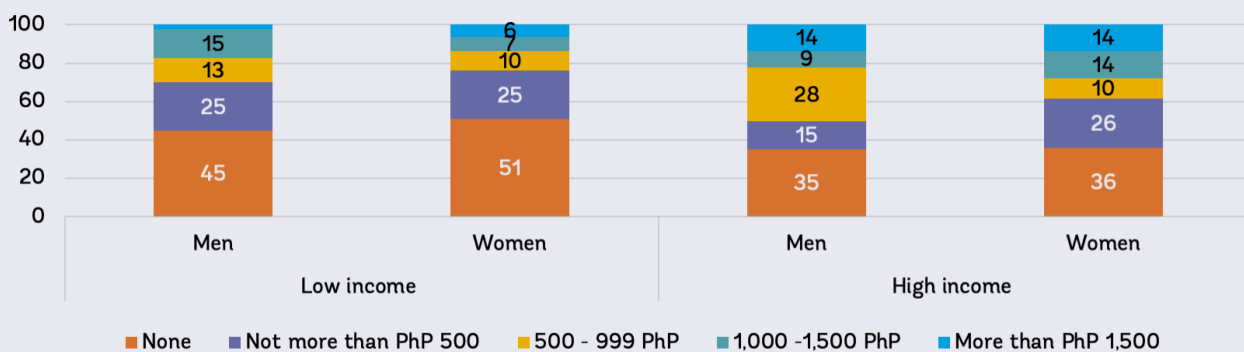


III. Women's Work and Childcare: Findings from a Perceptions and Time-Use Survey

Mothers continue to be the primary caregivers to children in the household, with fathers also contributing to this role. Data from the 2021 Women Work and Childcare survey³ show that around 31 percent of respondents name the mother as the primary caregiver, while 28 percent indicate that both the mother and the father share the role. Overall, primary care is provided by family members, whether by the parents or other relatives, with a marginal role given to babysitters or domestic helpers.

Although women spend much more time on domestic work and caregiving, willingness to use childcare services continues to be limited among both men and women. While men spend more time at work, spending an average of 33 hours per week in their job compared to an average of 26 hours per week for women, women allocate much more time on domestic work and caregiving, spending an average of 30 percent more hours per week than men on these tasks. Despite this, a considerable share of women continue to indicate a reluctance to pay for childcare. While reluctance is higher among women in low income households, with over half refusing to pay anything for childcare, a considerable share of women in high income households similarly report a reluctance to pay (Figure 5).

FIGURE 5 Amount Willing to Pay per Week for High-Quality Childcare, Percent



Source: Women work and childcare survey, 2021.

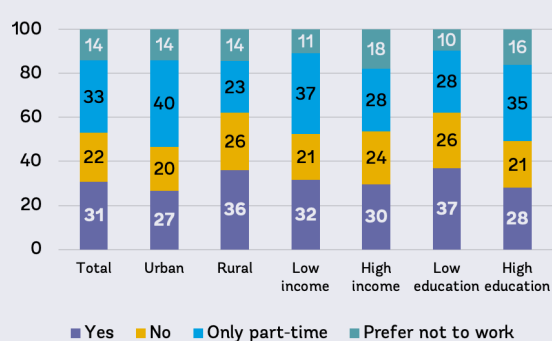
Even with the increased domestic work brought about by the pandemic, higher access to childcare services may not lead to a significant increase in women's labor force participation. Both men and women reported an increase in the number of hours spent in domestic work and childcare since the start of the pandemic, with 54 percent of women and 49 percent of men saying they have spent more time on domestic activities and 64 percent of women and 56 percent of men saying they have spent more time on childcare since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis. Despite the increased domestic work, only 27 percent of non-working women believe that their current childcare arrangement is a constraint to working outside the home. Even among those who perceive

³ The Women Work and Childcare survey comprises five modules on employment and income, domestic obligations and time use, perceptions about childcare, attitude towards women's work and socio-demographic characteristics. Fieldwork was conducted over a two-week period, from April 25 to May 8, 2021. The survey was prepared by the World Bank in consultation with the National and Economic Development Authority of the Philippines.

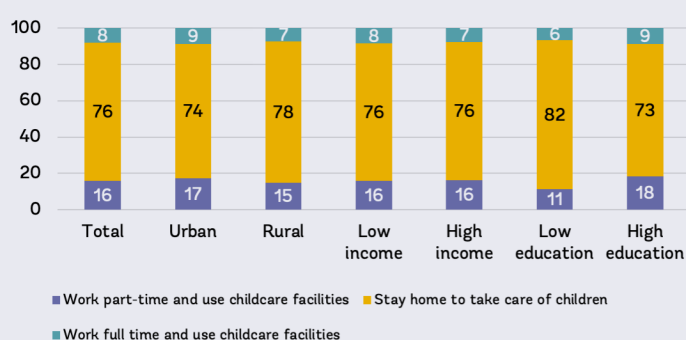
their childcare arrangement as a constraint, only 31 percent believe that having more access to childcare outside the home can help them join the labor market, while 33 percent believe that it will help them engage in part-time work (Figure 6a). The share of women who prefer not to work is higher among women from high income households, which suggest that income security could actually deter women from joining the labor market. When asked about what they perceive to be the best work-childcare arrangement, women overwhelmingly say that it is best for women to stay home and take care of the children, regardless of location, education level and income group, further supporting earlier findings on the prevalence of gendered social norms (Figure 6b).

FIGURE 6 Women's Opinions on Childcare Arrangements and Women's Work, Percent

a. Would more access to childcare outside the home help women join the labor market?



b. What are the best work-childcare arrangements?



Source: Women Work and Childcare survey, 2021.

Note: Question in panel a is for nonworking women constrained by childcare arrangements, and question in panel b is for all women.

Women's reluctance to join the labor force seem to be broadly based on beliefs about the role of women and men in the household, as well as beliefs that mothers working outside the home can negatively affect children. Over 75 percent of men and over 80 percent of women agree that a man's job is to earn money while a woman's job is to take care of the home and the family, supporting the results of the WVS which reveal that a large share of Filipinos continue to hold traditional social attitudes. Another factor that could dissuade women's participation in the labor market could be beliefs about the negative consequences of mothers working outside the home, with 76 percent of women agreeing that it could affect the emotional and psychosocial development of young children and with 80 percent agreeing that mothers working outside the home affects children's performance in school.

Women tend to replicate their childhood parental model in organizing their family-work life when there is a child under school age. About 61 percent of women believe that the mother should stay home and the father should work full time when there is a child under school age, which closely mirrors how respondents' parents organized their family-work life, with 66 percent of respondents indicating that this was the parental model they grew up with. It is not surprising, then, that 38 percent of women perceive childcare and other family obligations as the main obstacle to a mother's return to work. However, it is also worth noting that 14 percent of women do cite the gap in work experience as the main obstacle preventing mothers to return to work, which suggest that there is room to implement programs that help women reenter the labor force after a period of absence.

IV. What Can Policy Do?

Support more flexible work arrangements, particularly remote work models. The pandemic has accelerated the adoption of remote work models, which could incentivize more women to enter the labor force given that it provides flexibility that is compatible with care work while reducing or eliminating time spent commuting to and from work. The Philippine House of Representatives' proposed amendment of the Telecommuting Act (Republic Act 11165) to expand work from home capabilities and support would be an important step forward in this regard.

Scale efforts in reskilling and upskilling of women. The increased adoption of remote work models presents an important opportunity for women who would otherwise be unable to join the labor force due to domestic work and childcare as well as women who lost their jobs in the pandemic. However, they may not be able to take advantage of this opportunity if they lack the skills to benefit from this shift. Scaling efforts to provide women the opportunity to acquire new skills in fields such as ICT and other STEM-related fields could help them find and secure more productive work in the "new normal".

Strengthen support for women entrepreneurs. Findings from this report also suggest that e-commerce could be a valuable tool in increasing labor force participation among women as it allows them to set their work location and their work schedule, allowing them to grow their business while engaging in domestic work and childcare. Support could take the form of skills training which could include financial literacy, marketing and inventory management or expanding access to credit, particularly for women entrepreneurs engaged in e-commerce.

Encourage firms to expand opportunities for women who wish to reenter the labor force. Data from the Women Work and Childcare survey reveal that 14 percent of women cite having a gap in work experience as the main obstacle in reentering the labor force. Returnship programs, which typically provide women with mentorship and skills training, could help women reenter the labor force.

Address gendered social norms which affect women's participation in the labor market. Addressing gendered social norms with policies is challenging, but the literature points to interventions such as media campaigns, behavior change communication, and attitude change interventions as possible solutions to shifting cultural norms about women's work and to narrowing gender gaps in the labor market. Examples of interventions include (1) an intervention in India in which families were shown informational videos aimed at improving familial support for women's work outside of the home; (2) a study in Saudi Arabia showing that men tended to overestimate other men's opposition to women's work and female students tended to underestimate their peers' intentions to work, but both groups showed changes in opinion and behavior when presented with the correct statistics; and (3) a project in India in which a nongovernmental organization held regular classroom discussions on gender roles and discrimination in schools, leading to increased support for gender equality and more gender-progressive behavior (Jayachandran 2021). Overall, programs which help incentivize women to join or reenter the labor force could act as a mechanism to improve women's labor force participation and could break the persistence of gendered social norms across generations by reinforcing the belief that having children and/or taking a break from work should not be a major hindrance to women's career prospects.

Produced by the
Philippine Women's Economic Empowerment Program
of the World Bank with support from the
Australian Government



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