

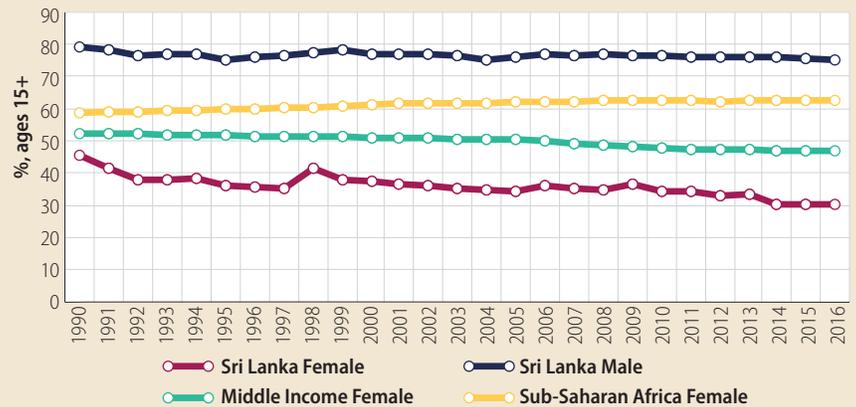


Getting to Work: Unlocking Women's Potential in Sri Lanka's Labor Force



- **Sri Lanka** has the 14th-largest gender gap in labor force participation globally: **36% for women versus 75% for men in 2016**.
- Despite significant progress in women's health and education, **female labor force participation in Sri Lanka has remained consistently below** middle income country averages and even declined in recent years.
- This presents a significant challenge to the country's growth and equity goals. With the rapidly aging population, it is imperative to **bring more women into the work force**.
- **Young women have the highest unemployment rate in Sri Lanka** (29% for the 15-24 age group in 2016), and the gender gap in youth unemployment has widened since the end of the civil war.
- **Women are paid less than men** in both the public and private sectors.
- **While the raw gender wage gap has narrowed over time**, it is increasingly determined by discrimination and less so by qualifications.
- **Women are concentrated in low skill jobs** and find it even harder to move up the ladder now than before the end of the conflict.

Labor Force Participation Rates, Sri Lanka and Comparators, 1990-2016



Source: World Development Indicators, 2017

Women's versus men's average monthly wage – all provinces, all sectors, 2015



Source: World Bank, Getting to Work: Unlocking Women's Potential in Sri Lanka's Labor Force, 2017

What is holding Sri Lankan women back from realizing their economic potential?



1) Household roles and responsibilities

Housework and care for children and the elderly falls disproportionately on women. Marriage and childbirth undermines women's labor market activity while marriage enhances men's labor market activity. Women's participation in the labor force is further impeded by social norms against women's mobility outside the home.



2) Human capital mismatch

Women are not entering educational fields or acquiring the skills that are demanded by the labor market. In part encouraged by parents, men are more likely to study engineering and computer science while women prefer to queue for scarce public sector jobs. Furthermore, women are vastly underrepresented in technical and vocational education and training (TVET), partly due to the lack of transportation.



3) Gender discrimination

Both quantitative and qualitative analysis reveal gender discrimination in job search, hiring, and promotion processes. Women face significant barriers in entering high-skill and management jobs. They are also at high risk of gender-based violence on public transportation (80 percent of women experience sexual harassment while using public transportation), in other public spaces, and at workplaces.

Recommendations



1

Recommendation

Reduce barriers to women's participation in paid work, particularly through child care services and safe transportation.



2

Recommendation

Strengthen girls' and boys' early orientation to career development and to acquiring the education and skills that prepare them for labor markets.



3

Recommendation

Educational institutions should better prepare female students and match them to high skill and high paying jobs.



4

Recommendation

Ensure gender equal labor laws and nondiscriminatory workplace environments through ethical branding and zero tolerance policies toward sexual harassment.



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