



Asia-Pacific
Economic Cooperation

Economic Policy Report 2020: The Role of Structural Reform in Gender Empowerment

Empowering women to participate fully in economic undertakings is essential for creating strong economies and inclusive societies.

The game changer is, and has always been, equal access. Policies ensuring equal access should span a woman's lifetime.

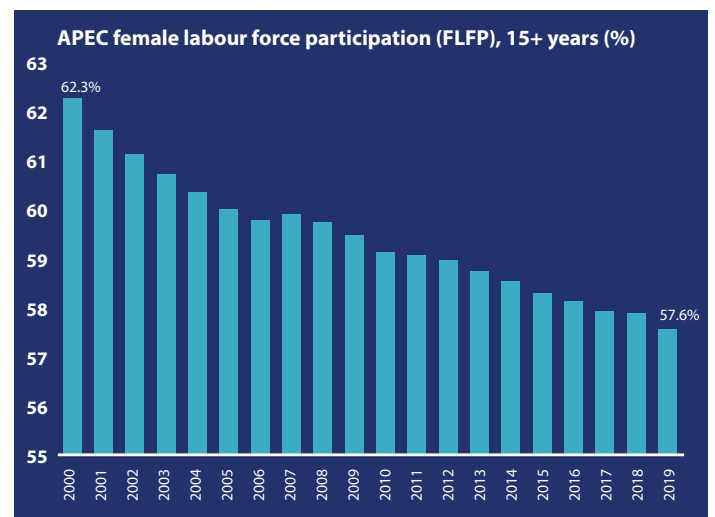
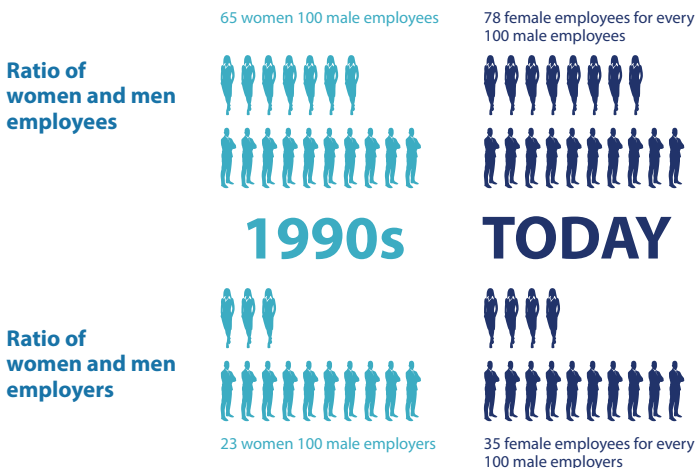


- Access to education
- Access to family income and assets
- Access to employment, credit, financial services
- Access to affordable childcare services
- Access to leadership positions
- Access to support mechanisms to address violence against women

Women's economic participation has improved but remains persistently low.

Over 30 years, women have gradually been able to access better work opportunities, while the chances to gain leadership positions have improved.

But in the last two decades, female labour force participation has declined.



The Role of Structural Reforms

Structural reforms are measures that change institutional and regulatory policies to break down barriers to economic engagement.

While gaps still remain, APEC has made definitive strides towards reducing regulatory barriers to increase women's participation in the economy:

- Removing discriminatory legal barriers
- Addressing unequal practices relating to employment and wages
- Expanding maternity benefits and providing parental leave
- Making available affordable childcare services
- Addressing gender-related issues to expand women's access to labour markets and credit markets

Challenges

Outdated mindsets

Certain cultural factors impede the region's progress towards achieving economic empowerment for women.

- Expectations that women should bear a greater share of domestic responsibilities
- Barriers restricting women's participation in leadership roles, both in the public and private sectors
- Lack of women's representation in policy decision-making bodies responsible for ensuring equal treatment, access and opportunities for women

Lack of sex-disaggregated data

A lack of comprehensive sex-disaggregated statistics could prevent policymakers from formulating better-informed and well-targeted policies to improve the status of women in the economy and society.

Policy Recommendations

Political will

Facilitating the enactment of laws and regulations that help ensure access and opportunities for women across economic sectors.

Public and private partnerships

Strengthening partnerships to provide different perspectives essential in determining and implementing structural reforms.

STEM and digital skills

Updating and/or providing technological skills, including addressing historically low levels of participation in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).

Strengthening enforcement

Paying attention to the enforcement of laws, including the imposition of penalties so that what is adopted is also implemented to ensure better and safer conditions for women at home and in the workplace.

Countering the economic effects of COVID-19

Upskilling/reskilling women with digital skills, supporting MSMEs (many of which are women-led or women-owned), making available critical resources to protect women against violence, and supporting flexible and remote work arrangements to maintain productivity.

Ensure inclusiveness

Being mindful that women from vulnerable groups face additional layers of discrimination, requiring more nuanced and responsive policy approach to widen their opportunities and access.

APEC could be a venue to help shape the agenda on women's issues in the region by being at the forefront of discussions on advancing women's economic empowerment, guiding member economies toward the implementation of policies that increase women's participation in economic development.

COVID-19

The pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on women in terms of:



- **Employment:** Sectors such as travel and tourism, retail, and food services employ many women for front facing work.



- **Domestic responsibility:** Employed women will also likely perform childcare and household tasks while working from home, affecting their productivity.



- **Violence:** Observed increase in domestic abuse cases from confinement and financial stress, while support services, including workforce and temporary shelters have been significantly reduced, trapping victims with their abusers.