

Executive summary

In the Beijing Declaration adopted in 1995 by the Fourth World Conference on Women, participating Governments expressed their commitment “to advance the goals of equality, development and peace for all women everywhere in the interest of humanity”. To assess whether these goals are being achieved, *The World's Women* is produced by the United Nations every five years, as called for in the Beijing Platform for Action.

The World's Women 2010: Trends and Statistics presents statistics and analysis on the status of women and men in the world, highlighting the current situation and changes over time. Analyses are based mainly on statistics from international and national statistical agencies. The report covers several broad policy areas – population and families, health, education, work, power and decision-making, violence against women, environment and poverty. The main findings are summarized below.

General population patterns, families

In today's world, there are 57 million more men than women. This surplus of men is concentrated in the youngest age groups and steadily diminishes until it disappears at about age 50, thereafter becoming a surplus of women owing to their longer life expectancy. A surplus of men characterizes the world's most populous countries – China and India – hence the large surplus of men worldwide. In most other countries, there are more women than men. The surplus of women in older age groups is significant and is increasing, with obvious implications for health care and other social needs.

People are marrying at older ages than in the past – especially women. In Europe, the average age at which women first marry is 30 or older in many countries. In some less developed countries, however, such as Mali, Niger and several other countries in sub-Saharan Africa, the average age at which women first marry is still below 20. As family-building often starts with a marriage, the consequences for fertility is obvious. Globally, fertility declined to 2.5 births per woman, but women who bear more than five children are still common in countries where women marry early. Early marriage and high fertility limit such women's opportunities for education and employment and can severely diminish their chances for advancement in life.

Once constituted, maintaining families and caring for family members lies primarily on the shoulders of women, who spend, on average, more working hours per day than men.

Health

In all regions, women live longer than men. However, social, cultural and economic factors can affect the natural advantage of women compared to men. For example, in developing countries

where pregnancy and childbirth can be life-threatening, women's exposure to risks associated with pregnancy and childbirth tend to equalize life expectancies between the sexes; whereas in developed countries, the adoption of unhealthy behaviours by women, such as smoking and drinking, can also equalize life expectancy. The data reveal that, globally, non-communicable diseases are already the most important causes of death for both men and women.

Achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that relate to health is important for improving the quality of life of all people. The past decades saw considerable reductions in child mortality worldwide, which is one of the eight MDGs. However, Africa continues to have high rates of child mortality despite intensified efforts to reduce it. Another MDG is to improve maternal health. Access to prenatal care and birth delivery attendance by skilled health personnel are essential to achieving this goal. Findings show there have been increases in the proportion of women receiving prenatal care but much still needs to be improved.

The Beijing Platform for Action recognized that social and cultural factors often increase women's vulnerability to HIV and may determine the course that the infection takes in their lives. Recent data show that in sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa and the Middle East, women account for more than half of people living with HIV/AIDS. The toll exacted by HIV/AIDS on the lives of women extends beyond their physical health to the families and communities that depend on them.

Education

There is progress – albeit slow and uneven – in the literacy status of adult women and men around the world. However, reflecting the persistent disadvantages they face, women account for two thirds of the world's 774 million adult illiterates – a proportion that is unchanged over the past two decades. Gender disparities in adult literacy rates remain wide in most regions of the world. However, there is a reason to look toward future decades with optimism as improvement in access to education eventually raises literacy levels. In almost all countries, literacy rates for the young are higher than those for adults. The vast majority of young people in the world are literate and improvements in youth literacy rates have been accompanied by declining gender disparities.

Primary enrolment of girls and boys is increasing across the world. Outstanding gains have been registered in several less developed regions of the world, particularly Africa and South-Central Asia. Yet several countries in these regions are still far from attaining universal primary education. Measurable progress has been made towards greater gender parity in primary enrolment, with gender gaps diminishing in most regions of the world. Positive global trends in primary enrolment, however, obscure uneven progress and some slippage or stagnation. While the overall progress in primary education in the past decade is encouraging, major barriers stand in the way of progress: 72 million children – 54 per cent of them girls – are out of school. The evidence indicates that much remains to be done to keep the world on track to meet the goal of universal primary education.

There is increased participation in secondary education. However, progress in secondary enrolment lags behind that in primary education. Compared to participation at the primary level, a

significantly lower proportion of the official secondary-school age population attends school. In addition, gender disparities in secondary enrolment are wider and occur in more countries than at the primary level. Due to the unprecedented expansion of the tertiary student body over the past two decades, one of the most noticeable improvements in women's enrolment is registered at the tertiary level. Men's dominance in tertiary education has been reversed globally and gender disparities currently favour women, except in sub-Saharan Africa and Southern and Western Asia. The distribution of tertiary enrolment across various fields of study brings to light the gender dimension of, and inequalities in, participation in tertiary education. Gender differences in tertiary participation are apparent throughout the world, with women predominant in the fields of education, health and welfare, social sciences, humanities and art, while they remain severely underrepresented in the fields of science and engineering.

Work

Globally, women's participation in the labour market remained steady in the two decades from 1990 to 2010, hovering around 52 per cent. In contrast, global labour force participation rates for men declined steadily over the same period, from 81 to 77 per cent. In 2010, women's labour force participation rates remain below 30 per cent in Northern Africa and Western Asia; below 40 per cent in Southern Asia; and below 50 per cent in the Caribbean and Central America. The gap between participation rates of women and men has narrowed slightly in the last 20 years but remains considerable. The smallest gender gaps are in the early adult years and the widest in the prime working ages.

Employment levels in the services sector continue to grow for both women and men. In the more developed economies, the labour force – especially the female labour force – is employed predominantly in services. This sector accounts for at least three quarters of women's employment in most of the more developed regions and in Latin America and the Caribbean. In contrast, agriculture still accounts for more than half of the employment of women and men in sub-Saharan Africa (excluding Southern Africa) and of women in Southern Asia. In those regions, the majority of workers – women to a greater extent than men – are in vulnerable employment, being either own-account workers or contributing family workers.

Over the years, women have entered various traditionally male-dominated occupations. However, they are still rarely employed in jobs with status, power and authority or in traditionally male blue-collar occupations. Relative to their overall share of total employment, women are significantly underrepresented among legislators, senior officials and managers, craft and related trade workers, and plant and machine operators and assemblers; they are heavily overrepresented among clerks, professionals, and service and sales workers. Horizontal and vertical job segregation has resulted in a persistent gender pay gap everywhere. While the gender pay gap is closing slowly in some countries, it has remained unchanged in others.

In spite of the changes that have occurred in women's participation in the labour market, women continue to bear most of the responsibilities for the home: caring for children and other dependent household members, preparing meals and doing other housework. In all regions, women spend at least twice as much time as men on unpaid domestic work. Women who are

employed spend an inordinate amount of time on the double burden of paid work and family responsibilities; when unpaid work is taken into account, women's total work hours are longer than men's in all regions.

Like their adult counterparts, girls are more likely than boys to perform unpaid work within their own household. In the less developed regions, many young girls aged 5-14 take on a large amount of household chores, including care-giving, cooking and cleaning, and older girls do so to an even greater extent. While boys also do household chores, their participation rate is not as high as that of girls. Moreover, girls generally work longer hours than boys, whether they are engaged in housework only, employment only or both. Long hours of work affect children's ability to participate fully in education. Analysis shows that school attendance declines as the number of hours spent on household chores increases – and declines more steeply for girls than for boys.

Power and decision-making

Around the world, a lack of gender balance in decision-making positions in government persists. Women continue to be underrepresented in national parliaments, where on average only 17 per cent of seats are occupied by women. The share of women among ministers also averages 17 per cent. The highest positions are even more elusive: only 7 of 150 elected Heads of State in the world are women, and only 11 of 192 Heads of Government. The situation is similar at the level of local government: female elected councillors are underrepresented in all regions of the world and female mayors even more so.

In the private sector, women are on most boards of directors of large companies but their number remains low compared to men. Furthermore, the “glass ceiling” has hindered women's access to leadership positions in private companies. This is especially notable in the largest corporations, which remain male-dominated. Of the 500 largest corporations in the world, only 13 have a female chief executive officer.

Violence against women

While rates of women exposed to violence vary from one region to the other, statistics indicate that violence against women is a universal phenomenon and women are subjected to different forms of violence – physical, sexual, psychological and economic – both within and outside their homes.

Perpetrators of violence against women are most often their intimate partners. Women are abused physically and sexually by intimate partners at different rates throughout the world – yet such abuse occurs in all countries or areas, without exception. Younger women are more at risk than older women and since the consequences of such violence last a lifetime it has a severely adverse impact on women's family and social life.

Female genital mutilation – the most harmful mass perpetration of violence against women – is declining for the young girls compelled to suffer it. However, it is still reported in a number of countries at high levels.

At the same time, in many regions of the world, longstanding customs put considerable pressure on women to accept being beaten by their husbands, even for trivial reasons. Whether for burning the food, venturing outside without telling their husband, neglecting children or arguing with their husband, in quite a few countries a very high percentage of women consider such behaviour sufficient grounds for being physically hit.

Environment

Poor infrastructure and housing conditions as well as natural hazards disproportionately affect women from the less developed regions in terms of unpaid work, health and survival. More than half of rural households and about a quarter of urban households in sub-Saharan Africa lack easy access to drinking water. In most of those households, the burden of water collection rests on women, thereby reducing the amount of time they can spend on other activities, whether income-earning, educational or leisure.

Lack of access to clean energy fuels and improved stoves in sub-Saharan Africa and parts of Southern and South-Eastern Asia continue to have a major impact on health. Women are more exposed than men to smoke from burning solid fuels because they spend more time near a fire while cooking and more time indoors taking care of children and household chores, thus increasing their likelihood to develop respiratory infections, pulmonary disease and lung cancer. Furthermore, several natural disasters in the less developed regions, such as the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, claimed more female than male lives, suggesting that more needs to be done in terms of providing equal access to information and life-skills development.

All these environmental factors will continue to disproportionately affect women as long as gender-differentiated roles and expectations in the household, family and community life are maintained. At the same time, the participation of women in environmental decision-making, particularly at a high level, remains limited, thus restricting the integration of women's issues and gender perspectives into policy-making on the environment.

Poverty

In some parts of the world, women and girls are often more burdened by the poverty of their household and their environment than men and boys. At the household level, data show that certain types of female-headed households are more likely to be poor than male-headed households of the same type. In Latin America and the Caribbean and the more developed regions households of lone mothers with children have higher poverty rates than those of lone fathers with children. In the same regions, poverty rates are higher for women than for men when living in one-person households.

At the individual level, women's lack of access to and control over resources limits their economic autonomy and increases their vulnerability to economic or environmental shocks. Compared to men, lower proportions of women have cash income in the less developed regions. Existing statutory and customary laws still restrict women's access to land and other types of property in most countries in Africa and about half the countries in Asia. Moreover, significant

proportions of married women from the less developed regions have no control over household spending, including spending their own cash earnings, particularly in countries from sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia.

Availability of gender statistics

The World's Women 2010 has benefited from an increase in the availability of gender statistics in the last 10 years. The majority of countries are now able to produce sex-disaggregated statistics on population, enrolment, employment and parliamentary representation. In addition, gender statistics in some newer areas are becoming available. For example, statistics on child labour are now collected by a larger number of countries. Similarly, surveys on time use and on violence against women were conducted in both developed and developing countries although international standards in these two statistical fields have not yet been fully developed.

At the same time, important developments with respect to some international standards and guidelines have advanced the development of gender statistics. In 2003, the definition of informal employment was adopted, paving the way for improved measurement of informal sector and informal employment. A resolution on the statistics of child labour was adopted in December 2008, thus establishing statistical measurement standards for child labour. In recent years several international standard classifications have been established by intergovernmental bodies, including those relating to occupations, economic activity, and functioning, disability and health.

However, the preparation of *The World's Women 2010* was hampered by the fact that statistics in certain domains are not available for many countries. Furthermore, even the statistics that are available are often not comparable because concepts, definitions and methods vary from country to country. Data are also lacking in detail in many cases. Gender issues cannot be adequately reflected if existing sex-disaggregated statistics are classified into categories that are too broad or are not further disaggregated by relevant characteristics, such as age, residence or educational level. Finally, the quality of data varies across countries. One or more of the above-mentioned shortcomings are often encountered in data related to international migration, maternal mortality, causes of death, vocational education, access to and use of information and communication technologies, the informal sector and informal employment. The same is true of data on occupations, wages, unemployment and underemployment, decision makers in government and the private sector, and household poverty.

In other areas, the absence of internationally agreed measurement standards and methods has resulted in a lack of gender statistics relating to disease prevalence, home-based workers, access to credit, the worst forms of child labour, human trafficking, femicide, intrahousehold poverty, individual ownership of land and losses associated with natural disasters.

In conclusion, increasing the capacity to produce reliable, accurate and timely statistics, in particular gender statistics, remains a formidable challenge for many countries.