
The gender pay gap in the health and care sector

A global analysis in the time of COVID-19



World Health
Organization

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Contents

Foreword	v
Acknowledgements	vi
Abbreviations	vii
Executive summary	viii
1. INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Why a report on the gender pay gap in the health and care sector?	5
2. THE HEALTH WORKFORCE ACROSS THE WORLD	8
2.1 Global and regional employment in the health and care sector	8
2.2 Employment in the health and care sector and degree of economic development	10
3. THE GENDER PAY GAP IN THE HEALTH AND CARE SECTOR	13
3.1 The raw gender pay gap in the health and care sector	13
3.2 Beyond the raw gender pay gap: identifying gender pay difference within subgroups	17
3.3 A factor-weighted analysis of the gender pay gap in the health and care sector	24
3.4 Comparing the gender pay gap in the health and care sector to the gaps in other economic sectors	27
4. FACTORS DRIVING THE GENDER PAY GAP IN THE HEALTH AND CARE SECTOR	29
4.1 The gender pay gap across the hourly wage distribution in the health and care sector	29
4.2 Labour market characteristics of women and men in the health and care sector across the hourly wage distribution	35
5. DECOMPOSING THE GENDER PAY GAP IN THE HEALTH AND CARE SECTOR	49
5.1 Simple decomposition: the explained and unexplained part of the gender pay gap in the health and care sector	49
5.2 Full decomposition: isolating the contribution from age and occupational category in the explained part of the gender pay gap in the health and care sector	59
5.3 What lies behind the unexplained part of the gender pay gap?	67
5.3.1 The motherhood gap in the health sector	67
5.3.2 The degree of feminization and wages of workers in the health and care sector	74
6. EMPLOYMENT CHARACTERISTICS AND THE GENDER PAY GAP OVER TIME IN THE HEALTH AND CARE SECTOR	79
6.1 The size and characteristics of the health and care workforce over time in selected countries	79
6.2 Evolution of the gender pay gap in the 21st century	88
7. THE EFFECT OF COVID-19 ON EMPLOYMENT AND EARNINGS IN THE HEALTH AND CARE SECTOR	93
7.1 The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the employment of wage workers in the health and care sector: the cases of Canada, Mexico and the United States	95
7.2 The changing characteristics of wage workers in the health and care sector as result of the COVID-19 pandemic: the cases of Canada, Mexico and the United States	99
7.3 The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on earnings among wage employees in the health and care sector: the cases of Canada, Mexico and the United States	110
7.4 The COVID-19 pandemic and earnings among workers in formal and informal employment in the health and care sector: the case of Mexico	120

8. THE WAY FORWARD TOWARDS REDUCING GENDER PAY INEQUALITIES IN THE HEALTH AND CARE SECTOR	125
8.1 Policy considerations	126
1: Targeted and gender-disaggregated wage data for the health and care sector	126
2: Decent jobs in the health and care sector	126
3: Social dialogue	127
4: Tackle the explained part of the gender pay gap by expanding education, fostering experience and reducing occupational segregation	127
5: Tackle the unexplained part of the gender pay gap by counteracting the undervaluation of highly feminized sectors and improving work-life balance to achieve gender parity in the workplace	128
6: Expansion of formal employment in countries where informality is a significant feature of the workforce	130
8.2 Towards more gender-responsive employment in the health and care sector	131
 Annex 1: National data sources	 132
Annex 2: Methodology for decomposing the gender pay gap in the health and care sector	135
Annex 3: Global financial crisis and the evolution of employment in the health and care sector in selected countries	138
 References	 141

Foreword

The COVID-19 pandemic, with its profound and devastating effects in terms of human suffering, economic losses and social disruptions,¹ has exposed the interconnectedness of our societies and the extent of inequalities within and between countries.

A common agenda,² as called for by the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General, is critical to rebuilding our world on more equal, inclusive and sustainable grounds. The declaration on the commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the UN advocates a renewed social contract, anchored in human rights.

A human-centred recovery from the pandemic requires increasing global investment in universal social protections, accelerating the creation of decent work and committing to closing gender inequalities. This entails, among others, reconsidering how we value women's work and the relative importance of sectors within the economy. In so doing, we need to do better in giving greater value to what matters most to people.

This report takes an important step in this direction by providing the most comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the gender pay gap in the health and care sector – a sector in which women predominate. Evidence shows that while being ever present, women wage earners are paid approximately 20% less than men and that only a small fraction of this gap is due to differences in the characteristics and endowments of women and men.

Occupational segregation along gender lines, the underrepresentation of women in the highest paid occupations and the “motherhood penalty” seem to play a more important role in gender pay disparities.

Not only is the gender pay gap large in the health and care sector, low pay is also prevalent and working conditions very demanding. This reflects the undervaluation of the sector and explains the growing difficulties that some countries face in filling the rising demand for health and care workers. This is unfair and unsustainable. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown how vital the sector and its workers are in keeping families, societies and economies going.

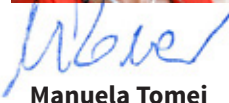
The time has arrived for policy-makers and governments, social partners, academia, civil society and individuals to drive effective action for the recognition and fairer valuation of the contribution of these workers to our health, well-being and resilience. The global call for large-scale investment in the care economy, including through the creation of more and better jobs, would go a long way towards achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 3, 5 and 8, as recognized in the seminal work of the United Nations High Level Commission on Health Employment and Economic Growth.

We hope governments, workers' and employers' organizations, and other stakeholders will use the data and evidence in this report to generate the necessary policy dialogue and decisions that will eliminate the gender pay gap in the health and care sector.




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¹ See the World Health Organization (WHO) Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Dashboard (<https://covid19.who.int/>) for a count on the impact of the pandemic in terms of casualties, and the latest estimates from the International Labour Organization (ILO) that show the job and income loss due to COVID-19 across regions, as of February 2022 ([wcms_806092.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/public/eng/mediacentre/pressreleases/20220201.pdf) (ilo.org)).

² See *Our Common Agenda – Report of the Secretary-General* (https://www.un.org/en/content/common-agenda-report/assets/pdf/Common_Agenda_Report_English.pdf).

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