

The gender pay gap in the health and care sector

A global analysis in the time of COVID-19



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Organization

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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.

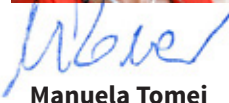
The time has arrived for policy-makers and governments, social partners, academia, civil society and individuals to drive effective action for the recognition and fairer valuation of the contribution of these workers to our health, well-being and resilience. The global call for large-scale investment 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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