

Women Pioneers of Medical Research: Biographies of 25 Outstanding Scientists

Economic and social impact of COVID-19 pandemic reinforcing gender inequalities

WASHINGTON, February 23, 2021 — Countries are inching toward greater gender equality, but women around the world continue to face laws and regulations that restrict their economic opportunity, with the COVID-19 pandemic creating new challenges to their health, safety, and economic security, a new World Bank report says.

Reforms to remove obstacles to women's economic inclusion have been slow in many regions and uneven within them, according to Women, Business and the Law 2021. On average, women have just three-quarters of the legal rights afforded to men. Women were already at a disadvantage before the pandemic, and government initiatives to buffer some of its effects, while innovative, have been limited in many countries, the report says.

—Women need to be fully included in economies in order to achieve better development outcomes,— said David Malpass, World Bank Group President. —Despite progress in many countries, there have been troubling reversals in a few, including restricting women's travel without the permission of a male guardian. This pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities that disadvantage girls and women, including barriers to attend school and maintain jobs. Women are also facing a rise in domestic violence and health and safety challenges. Women should have the same access to finance and the same rights to inheritance as men and must be at the center of our efforts toward an inclusive and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.—

Women, Business and the Law 2021 measures the laws and regulations across 8 areas that affect women's economic opportunities in 190 countries, covering the period from September 2019-October 2020. From the basics of movement in the community to the challenges of working, parenting, and retiring, the data offers objective and measurable benchmarks for global progress toward gender equality. Following the outbreak of the pandemic, this report also looks at government responses to the COVID-19 crisis and how the pandemic has impacted women at work and at home, focusing on childcare, access to justice, and health and safety.

Overall, the report finds that many governments have put in place measures to address some of the impacts of the pandemic on working women. For example, less than a quarter of all economies surveyed in the report legally guaranteed employed parents any time off for childcare before the pandemic. Since then, in light of school closures, nearly an additional 40 economies around the world have introduced leave or benefit policies to help parents with childcare. Even so, these measures are likely insufficient to address the challenges many working mothers already face, or the childcare crisis.

The pandemic has also contributed to a rise in both the severity and frequency of gender-based violence. Preliminary research shows that since early 2020, governments introduced about 120 new measures including hotlines, psychological assistance, and shelters to protect women from violence. Some governments also took steps to provide access to justice in several ways, including declaring

family cases urgent during lockdown and allowing remote court proceedings for family matters. However, governments still have room to enact measures and policies aimed at addressing the root causes of this violence.

“While it is encouraging that many countries have proactively taken steps to help women navigate the pandemic, it’s clear that more work is needed, especially in improving parental leave and equalizing pay,” said Mari Pangestu, Managing Director of Development Policy and Partnerships, The World Bank. “Countries need to create a legal environment that enhances women’s economic inclusion, so that they can make the best choices for themselves and their families.”

Despite the pandemic, 27 economies in all regions and income groups enacted reforms across all areas and increased good practices in legislation in 45 cases during the year covered, the report found. The greatest number of reforms introduced or amended laws affecting pay and parenthood.

However, parenthood is also the area that leaves the most room for improvement globally. This includes paid parental leave, whether benefits are administered by the government, and whether the dismissal of pregnant women is prohibited. Reforms are also needed to address the restrictions women face in the type of jobs, tasks, and hours they can work, segregating them into lower paid jobs. And in 100 economies, laws do not mandate that men and women be paid the same for equally valued jobs.

Achieving legal gender equality requires a concerted effort by governments, civil society, and international organizations, among others. But legal and regulatory reforms can serve as an important catalyst to improve the lives of women as well as their families and communities. Better performance in the areas measured by Women, Business and the Law is associated with narrowing the gender gap in development outcomes, higher female labor force participation, lower vulnerable employment, and greater representation of women in national parliaments.

Reference

[Burn: New Research Blows the Lid Off How We Really Burn Calories, Stay Healthy, and Lose Weight](#)

[Reading Research: A User-Friendly Guide for Health Professionals](#)