

# The Gap the Economy Cannot Afford



## KEY FINDINGS AT A GLANCE

The AI revolution is a major driving force in the global economy now and for the future. If that transformation unlocks and builds on women's skills and potential, it can benefit everyone and create substantial economic growth. But if current market trends continue, that transformation will widen gaps that women and girls

face, and AI and technological advances won't meet their potential for benefitting people, the planet, or the economy. The barriers women face to build skills and earn a living already put our food supplies, our health, our security, and our prosperity at risk. We cannot afford the gaps economies face now or in the future.

To reach our full potential, we need to address the barriers that limit women's economic opportunities, workplace safety, and access to education and skills training. This requires making laws and building markets that create opportunities that work for everyone.

### What's the issue?

- Between 2019 and 2022, almost 40% of countries, home to over a billion women and girls, stalled or backslid on opportunities for women.
- At the current rate, it will take 152 years to close the economic gap between women and men.
- Women are legally restricted from performing the same jobs as men in more than half of countries, and they enjoy less than two-thirds of men's legal protections. Ninety-two countries do not have legislation that protects women's pay, and 155 don't have measures to enforce it. Because many women work in the informal unregulated economy, 2 billion are without legal protection or benefits like unemployment.
- Women's education and skilling for jobs of the future is lagging, and AI transformation is at risk of excluding women and girls: young women are twice as likely to be out of education, employment or training, they make up just 35% of STEM graduates.

### What holds women back?

- **Fewer leadership opportunities:** At the current rate, it will take 140 years for women to overcome all the barriers in workplace leadership. Women make up less than a quarter of C-suite roles and just one in five corporate board seats. Companies are less likely to hire women leaders in 2024 than they were in 2021—and now women make up only 36% of new leaders in companies.
- **Lack of finance:** 730 million adult women remain unbanked, and 70% of women entrepreneurs in low-income and emerging economies lack access to financial services like small loans. In the US, just 2% of venture capital funding goes to women-founded businesses.

- **Undervaluing care work:** Women spend 2.6 times more hours on unpaid care than men, providing 12.5 billion hours of care work daily, valued at \$10.8 trillion per year. When men provide care work at home, they don't get paid either—losing even more money in the global economy.
- **Threats to women's safety:** Violence against women limits women's economic participation, increases when crises occur, and is exacerbated by new technologies exposing women to online abuse: nearly 9 in 10 women limit their online presence due to violence, losing access to work and income.
- **Less access to digital options:** women are excluded from jobs of the future: today 785 million women remain offline. Women make up only a third of the STEM workforce, and 16% of traditional energy sectors. 21 million more jobs done by women than by men could be replaced by AI.

### Why does it matter?

- The economic cost is too great to ignore: Opening more opportunities for women in employment and entrepreneurship could boost global GDP by more than 20%. Closing the gap in lifetime earnings between men and women could unlock \$172 trillion.
- If women can build skills to benefit from the AI transition, and can access the finances and opportunities they need to participate in the economy, everybody benefits.

Contact: **Emily Janoch** [emily.janoch@care.org](mailto:emily.janoch@care.org)

Full report <https://www.care.de/media/websitedateien/care-allgemeines/publikationen/studien-reports/care-the-gap-the-economy-cannot-afford.pdf>