

## Do men and women in the Philippines have equal economic opportunities?

*Jose Ramon G. Albert  
and Jana Flor V. Vizmanos*

 The World Economic Forum (WEF) has listed the Philippines the best performer in gender outcomes in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) since 2006. In 2016, the country proved its leadership does not end in Asia when WEF ranked it 7th among 144 countries assessed worldwide (WEF 2016). However, the organization still noted the country still needs to address its gender gap in political empowerment as well as economic participation and opportunities (Figure 1).

This *Policy Note* examines the gender gap issues on economic opportunities in the country by looking at trends in select indicators of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and other statistics.

### **Gender gap in labor participation**

A key labor market indicator is the labor force participation rate, defined as the total

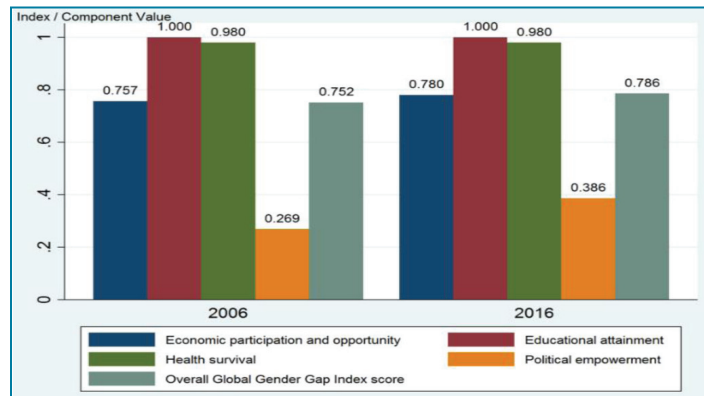
percentage of working-age persons (i.e., aged 15 years old and over) who are part of the labor force.<sup>1</sup> In the case of the Philippines, fewer women are part of the labor force than men. About four in five working-age Filipino men are part of the labor force, while only half of women aged 15 years and over are in the labor force (Figure 2). This gap had only decreased by 2.5 percent from 2005 to 2015. This slow progress in women's labor participation is noticeable across the entire ASEAN region (Figure 3).

<sup>1</sup> The working-age population aged 15 and over can be divided into three groups, namely, the employed, the unemployed, and those who are neither. The labor force or economically active population comprises the employed and unemployed. The unemployed consists of working-age persons who are (1) without work, (2) currently available for work, and (3) seeking work or not seeking work because of the belief that no work is available, or awaiting results of previous job application, or because of temporary illness or disability, bad weather or waiting for rehire or job recall. Those who are not in the labor force (i.e., who are neither employed or unemployed) include stay-home spouses, students, persons with disability, retired persons, and seasonal workers, as well as discouraged workers not actively seeking employment.

*PIDS Policy Notes* are observations/analyses written by PIDS researchers on certain policy issues. The treatise is holistic in approach and aims to provide useful inputs for decisionmaking.

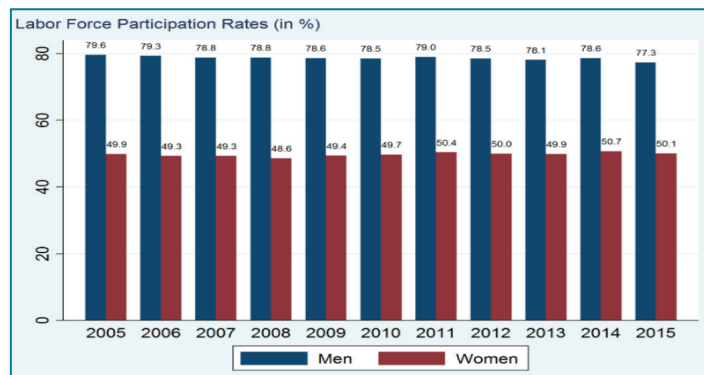
The authors are senior research fellow and research analyst, respectively, at PIDS. The views expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the PIDS or any of the study's sponsors.

**Figure 1. Global gender gap index overall score and components for the Philippines, 2006 and 2016**



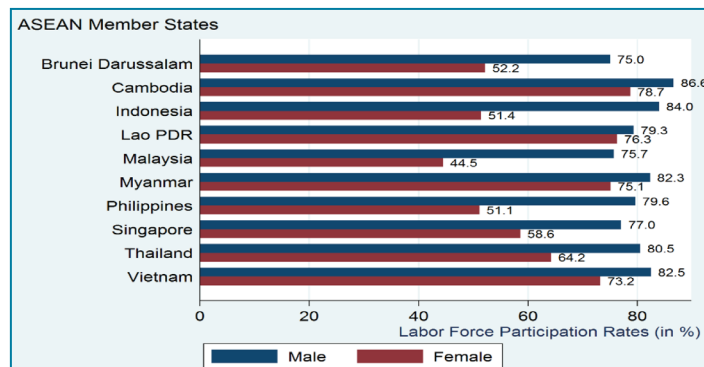
Source: WEF (2016)

**Figure 2. Labor force participation rate by sex in the Philippines, 2005–2015**



Source: Decent Work Statistics-Philippines, PSA (various years)  
 Note: Data are obtained from averages of the quarterly Labor Force Survey conducted by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA)

**Figure 3. Labor force participation rate by sex in ASEAN member-states, 2014**



Source: Key Indicators of the Labour Market, ILO (various years)  
 Note: Data are modelled International Labour Organization estimates.

### Gender gap in employment and unemployment

One of the economic indicators governments closely watch is the unemployment rate, or the ratio of the total number of unemployed to the corresponding labor force. Information on unemployment by sex reveals links to a country's social and cultural aspects and traditions.

Across the ASEAN member-states, unemployment rates had generally decreased from 2000 to 2015 (Figure 4). They were also higher among youth (aged 15–24) than adults (aged 25 and over).

In the Philippines, unemployment rates for both sexes had gone down from about 1 in 10 in 2000 to about 1 in 20 in 2015. However, while unemployment rates for women had dropped faster than for men, the rates remained higher among women aged 15–24 than men.

While the unemployment rate provides a summary of labor market conditions, examination of total unemployment rates alone can be deceptive (Albert 2014). Looking at the rather equal unemployment rates by sex may lead one to think that women in the Philippines who join the labor force have similar economic opportunities as men. Data disaggregation across sectors, however, shows that the sexes are situated differently in the job market (Figure 5).

Latest data show that about a third (35.8%) of working men in the country are engaged in agriculture, over two-fifths (43.9%) in services, and a fifth (20.2%) in industry.

Meanwhile, working women are predominantly in the services sector (71.0%). The rest of them are in the industry (10.0%) and agriculture sectors (19.0%).

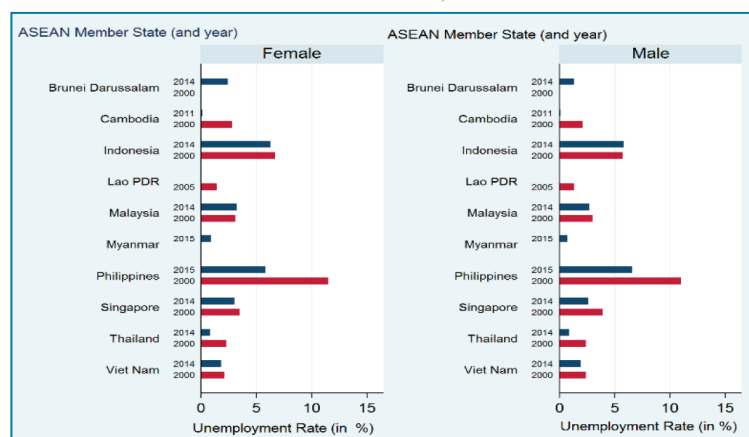
Two decades ago, half of working men were employed in agriculture, about 3 out of 10 worked in services, and a fifth were in the industry sector. In the mid-1990s, working women were also dominant in services, but with a relatively smaller share (56.5%). The rest were in agriculture (29.9%) and industry (13.6%). The industry sector employed only a small proportion of men and an even smaller share of women despite its capacity to provide better quality jobs.

### Gender gap in vulnerable employment

Vulnerable employment, such as self-employment and family work, is often characterized by inadequate earnings, low productivity, and poor conditions that undermine workers' fundamental rights. However, women in several ASEAN member-states, like the Philippines, tend to have a bigger share of employment in these types than men do (Table 1). As a result, they are less likely to have formal work arrangements and more likely to lack decent working conditions, adequate social security, and voice.

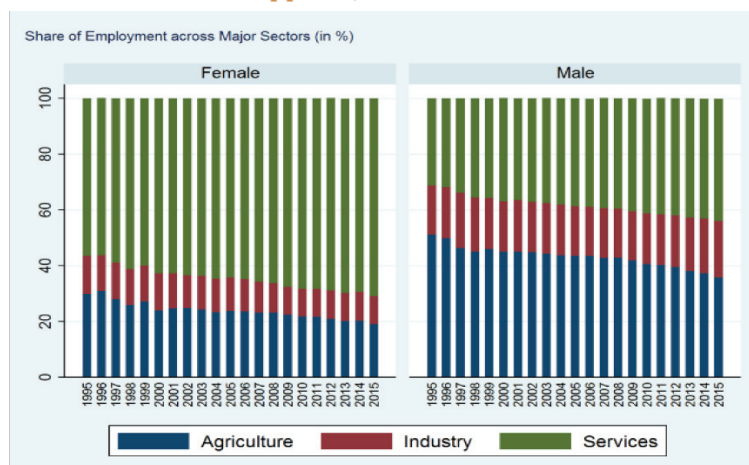
While the proportion of workers in vulnerable employment in the Philippines has decreased over the past 15 years, the gap between men and women remained. About 7 in 20 men are in vulnerable employment compared to 8 in

**Figure 4. Unemployment rate among men and women in ASEAN member-states, 2000–2015**



Source: Sustainable Development Goals indicators, UNSD (n.d.)

**Figure 5. Share of employment by sex across major sectors in the Philippines, 1995–2015**



Source: Decent Work Statistics-Philippines, PSA (various years)

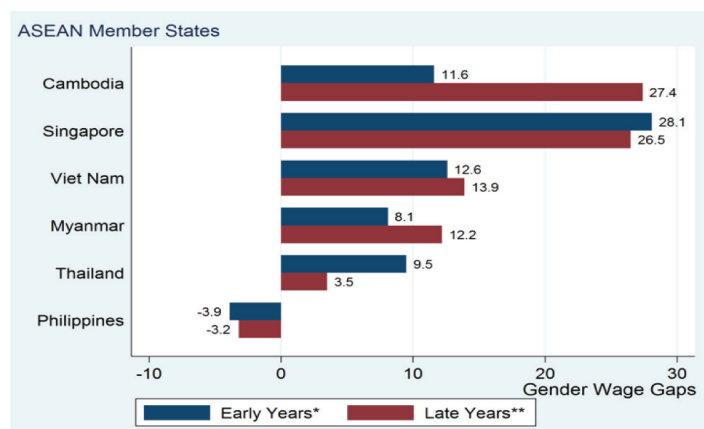
20 for women. This means a bigger share of employed women in the country are engaged in jobs lacking decent working conditions. These women either work with unregistered companies in the informal economy or as unpaid family workers. These working conditions provide them limited opportunities for social mobility, participation in unions, and social protection.

**Table 1. Proportion of self-employed and unpaid family workers in total employment by sex in ASEAN member states, 2000–2014**

ASEAN Member-State	Vulnerable Employment, Male (% of male employment)		Vulnerable Employment, Female (% of female employment)	
	Earliest Year	Latest Year	Earliest Year	Latest Year
Brunei Darussalam	...	...	...	...
Cambodia	80.9 (2000)	58.8 (2012)	87.9 (2000)	69.7 (2012)
Indonesia	60.1 (2001)	24.2 (2013)	69.6 (2001)	47.5 (2013)
Lao PDR	...	...	...	...
Malaysia	22.8 (2000)	19.6 (2014)	22.7 (2000)	23.6 (2014)
Myanmar	...	...	...	...
Philippines	43.2 (2000)	36.1 (2013)	46.7 (2000)	42.0 (2013)
Singapore	12.2 (2001)	10.6 (2013)	7.3 (2001)	6.2 (2013)
Thailand	55.1 (2000)	54.4 (2013)	59.5 (2000)	57.8 (2013)
Viet Nam	76.9 (2000)	56.6 (2013)	83.2 (2000)	69.0 (2013)

Source: *Key Indicators of the Labour Market*, ILO (various years)

**Figure 6. Gender wage gap in ASEAN member-states, 2000–2011**



Source: Global wage database, ILO (n.d.)

\* Early years generally mean 2001, except for Cambodia (2004), Singapore (2000), and Viet Nam (2007)

\*\* Late years generally mean 2011, except for Cambodia (2009), Myanmar (2008), and Viet Nam (2010).

### Gender gap in wages

The gender wage gap refers to the difference between gross average nominal monthly wages of male and female employees expressed as a percentage of gross average nominal monthly wages of male employees. Contrary to the

scenario in other ASEAN member-states, women in the Philippines seem to be slightly earning more than their men counterparts on the average (Figure 6).

Tables 2 and 3 reveal that high-level positions generally have wages favoring women, who also have the lion's share of the occupation. Moreover, the gender gap in farming, forestry, and fishing has now favored women over men.

However, men, who are working as technicians and associate professionals, clerks, service workers, and shop and market sales workers, are better compensated in the country despite women having the bigger share in employment. Among various occupation groups, the professionals group showed the widest disparity in average wages between the sexes. Moreover, occupations with a higher share of male workers, such as trades, plant and machine operation, labor and unskilled

work, and those classified under special occupations, also provide better compensation for men than women.

### What needs to be done

Labor and employment statistics examined here showed that women still face disadvantages compared to men when they are employed, especially in terms of vulnerable employment. For the latter, a fundamental issue is unpaid work (in family businesses). Unpaid work also extends to unpaid care work, which is not shown in statistics on labor outcomes. The gender pay gap seems to favor women in the Philippines, but averages mask disparities between the sexes in pay differentials among various occupational groups.

Government needs to ensure that economic opportunities are equal for both sexes. It should examine the reasons behind the domination of one sex or the other in some occupations, as well as the persistence of gender wage gaps in some sectors and occupations. It also needs to address gender-based barriers that hinder opportunities for capacity development and career advancement. Lastly, it needs to provide more social protection for those engaged in the informal economy and address issues about unpaid work, both in the production of goods or services that are consumed by those within or outside a household, as well as in care activities within a household.

About two decades ago, a time use survey was piloted in two barangays. The said survey

**Table 2. Gender wage gap by major occupation group: Philippines, 2001–2015**

Major Occupation Group	Year			
	2001	2006	2011	2015
Officials of government and special-interest organizations, corporate executives, managers, managing proprietors, and supervisors	-2.3	3.9	-3.2	-3.3
Professionals	10.8	12.3	10.6	8.5
Technicians and associate professionals	5.9	13.6	11.9	11.3
Clerks	5	-3.2	5.7	3.7
Service, shop, and market sales workers	33	37.2	34.3	30.8
Farmers, forestry workers, and fishermen	20.5	25.1	13.3	-19.6
Trades and related workers	19.4	24.8	26	27.5
Plant and machine operators and assemblers	0.6	0.3	-1.1	6.0
Laborers and unskilled workers	20.4	30.9	27.1	26.5
Special occupations	39.0	37.3	36.8	5.7
Total	-3.9	2.7	-3.2	-5.4

Source: Decent Work Statistics-Philippines, PSA (various years)

Note: Data are obtained from averages of the quarterly Labor Force Survey conducted by the PSA; data shown in table are only for selected years though a longer time series is available from the PSA website.

**Table 3. Female share in occupational employment by major occupation group: Philippines, 2001–2015**

Major Occupation Group	Year			
	2001	2006	2011	2015
Officials of government and special-interest organizations, corporate executives, managers, managing proprietors, and supervisors	59.0	57.9	52.1	46.6
Professionals	68.1	68.8	68.3	66.9
Technicians and associate professionals	49.1	50.9	51.3	51.1
Clerks	67.1	64.1	62.0	62.2
Service, shop, and market sales workers	53.3	51.2	50.8	51.2
Farmers, forestry workers, and fishermen	17.0	15.2	14.7	17.3
Trades and related workers	28.3	25.1	20.8	15.4
Plant and machine operators and assemblers	8.1	9.2	11.0	14.1
Laborers and unskilled workers	45.4	44.1	42.1	40.1
Special occupations	14.8	12.2	20.5	15.8
Total	38.5	38.7	39.3	39.6


Source: Decent Work Statistics-Philippines, PSA (various years)

Note: Data are obtained from averages of the quarterly Labor Force Survey conducted by the PSA; data shown in table are only for selected years though a longer time series is available from the PSA website.

comprehensively measured the allocation of time to different tasks by different individuals on a daily or weekly basis (Hirway 2016). Its results provided the then National Statistical Coordination Board a mechanism to generate estimates of gross domestic product (GDP) by sex and adjusted GDP by sex, which accounted for unpaid house work of women and men. The Philippine Statistics Authority should also conduct a National Time Use Survey to examine not only unpaid house work but also the extent of time poverty among women and men.

The public and private sectors also need to consider possibilities of unfair working conditions between the sexes in all occupations. They should examine practices that may contribute to gender biases in the workplace, including issues about compensation and sexual harassment.

Ultimately, everyone should be more gender sensitive in thought, word, and deed. It is the responsibility of all to work for gender equality, making sure that every person, regardless of sex, gets equal opportunity so

that no one, no woman, or man, will be left behind as the country takes its path toward economic development. 

## References

- Albert, J.R. 2014. Is growth really jobless? PIDS Policy Notes No. 2014-16. Makati City, Philippines: Philippine Institute for Development Studies. <http://dirp4.pids.gov.ph/webportal/CDN/PUBLICATIONS/pidspn1416.pdf> (accessed on January 15, 2017).
- Hirway, I. 2016. Unpaid work: An obstacle to gender equality and economic empowerment including women's labour force participation. Presentation at the UN ESCAP Meeting on Sex-Disaggregated Data for the SDG Indicators in Asia and the Pacific, Bangkok, May 25–27. [http://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/Session\\_2Ab\\_Unpaid\\_Work\\_and\\_Domestic\\_Care\\_Indira\\_Hirway.pdf](http://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/Session_2Ab_Unpaid_Work_and_Domestic_Care_Indira_Hirway.pdf) (accessed on January 17, 2017).
- International Labour Organization (ILO). Various years. *Key Indicators of the Labour Market*. Geneva, Switzerland: ILO. <http://www.ilo.org/global/statistics-and-databases/research-and-databases/kilm/lang--en/index.htm> (accessed on January 15, 2017).
- . n.d. Global wage database. Geneva, Switzerland: ILO. [http://www.ilo.org/travail/areasofwork/wages-and-income/WCMS\\_142568/lang--es/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/travail/areasofwork/wages-and-income/WCMS_142568/lang--es/index.htm) (accessed on January 15, 2017).
- Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA). Various years. *Decent Work Statistics-Philippines*. Quezon City, Philippines: PSA. <http://dews.psa.gov.ph/> (accessed on January 15, 2017).
- United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD). n.d. Sustainable Development Goals Indicators global database. New York, NY: UNSD. <http://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/database/> (accessed on January 15, 2017).
- World Economic Forum (WEF). 2016. *The Global Gender Gap Report 2016*. Geneva, Switzerland: WEF. <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2016/the-global-gender-gap-report-2016/> (accessed on January 17, 2017).

For further information, please contact

The Research Information Department  
Philippine Institute for Development Studies  
18th Floor, Three Cyberpod Centris – North Tower  
EDSA corner Quezon Avenue, Quezon City  
Telephone Nos: (63-2) 372-1291 to 92  
E-mail: [jalbert@mail.pids.gov.ph](mailto:jalbert@mail.pids.gov.ph); [publications@mail.pids.gov.ph](mailto:publications@mail.pids.gov.ph)

The *Policy Notes* series is available online at <http://www.pids.gov.ph>. Entered as third class mail at the Quezon City Central Post Office under Business Mail Permit No. 3C-15-12-494. Valid until December 31, 2017.