

Addressing Multiple Sources of Discrimination at Work

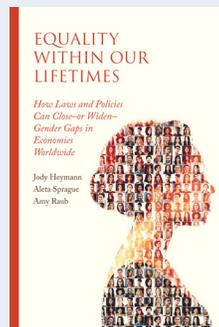
Key Findings

- Nearly all countries (93%) take some approach to prohibiting gender discrimination at work—yet women from marginalized groups often lack full legal protections.
- 83% of countries prohibit employment discrimination based on both **gender and religion**.
- 82% address both **gender and race/ethnicity**.
- 80% address **gender and disability**, though just 59% guarantee reasonable accommodations at work, which are critical to equal rights in practice.
- 64% address both **gender and social class**.
- Only 47% of countries protect against employment discrimination based on both **gender and citizenship**.
- A mere 35% of countries prohibit employment discrimination on the basis of **sexual orientation**. Even fewer—17%—ban discrimination based on **gender identity**.

About Equality within Our Lifetimes

For more information and a full list of studies summarized in this brief, see [Chapter 3](#) of the open-access book [Equality within Our Lifetimes: How Laws and Policies Can Close—or Widen—Gender Gaps in Economies Worldwide](#) (Jody Heymann, Aleta Sprague, and Amy Raub; University of California Press, 2023).

Building and analyzing a law and policy database that covers 193 countries, *Equality within Our Lifetimes* systematically examines how far we've come and how far we have to go in adopting evidence-based solutions to close gender gaps in employment, income, leadership opportunities, and more.



Multiple and Intersectional Forms of Discrimination

Race and Ethnicity

In workplaces as elsewhere, racial and ethnic discrimination often intersects with discrimination based on gender, family status, national origin, and religion.

- In Belgium, a study found that women with names indicating they were from an Arab or North African country—signaling not just their ethnicity but likely their Islamic faith—were less likely to be selected to interview for a cognitively demanding role than either men of the same background or women with Belgian names, despite having comparable qualifications.
- In Mexico, a study found that single White women were more likely than married White women to be invited for a job interview. Both groups were more likely to get a callback than Indigenous women; married Indigenous women were the most disadvantaged.
- In Canada, “racialized” workers earn 81 cents for each dollar earned by White workers; “racialized” women earn 56 cents for each dollar earned by White men.

Social Class

In many contexts, social class discrimination intersects with gender discrimination and racial/ethnic discrimination.

- In the U.S., an experimental study found that “higher-class” male applicants, whose CVs listed hobbies associated with higher income and wealth, were invited to interview 16% of the time; “higher-class” women received callbacks only 4% of the time. Meanwhile, callback rates among the “lower-class” applicants were 6% for women and 1% for men.
- In India, women who belong to disadvantaged castes experience greater wage inequality than other women.
- In Brazil, Afro-Brazilian households are twice as likely to be experiencing poverty as White households, while in South Africa, Black residents own just 4% of the land, compared to 72% owned by White residents.

Religion

The combined effects of religious and gender discrimination can bear significant consequences for women's employment outcomes:

- In Greece, a study found that Pentecostal women were 27% less likely than Greek Orthodox women to receive a callback for an open position, whereas Pentecostal men were only 19% less likely to get a callback.
- In Britain, analysis of the 2011 census found that Muslim women were more economically disadvantaged than any other group.
- In Canada, Arab, West Asian, and South Asian Muslim women, Buddhist and Sikh Asian women, and Hindu South Asian women are all less likely to hold managerial positions than Christian White women, or men from their same religious and ethnic background.



Migration Status and Foreign National Origin

Migration status and national origin have been linked with disadvantages in employment:

- In Israel, immigrant women are less likely than immigrant men to find work, and women from Asia and Africa fare worse than women who emigrated from Europe.
- In China, migrant women's earnings are among the lowest of all workers, and the income disadvantages of being a migrant woman are more than double the combined individual disadvantages of being (1) female and (2) an unregistered migrant.
- In many countries, migrant workers are among the most likely to face explicit restrictions on employment due to pregnancy, which can easily cost them both their jobs and their legal status.

Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Gender Expression

Across countries, employment discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) remains rampant.

- In Austria, a study found that women whose CVs listed a past leadership position in a gay and lesbian social organization were 12–13% less likely to be invited to interview than equally qualified women whose application materials included no indication of sexual orientation.
- In the E.U., a 2012 survey found that 60% of trans women and 43% of trans men reported experiencing discrimination while looking for a job within the past year.
- In the U.K., research has shown that while both gay men and lesbians face hiring discrimination, gay men are particularly likely to be turned down for stereotypically male jobs, and lesbians face higher discrimination for stereotypically female jobs.

Disability

Extensive research has documented discrimination against people with disabilities in the workplace, and women with disabilities experience unique forms of stigma and bias.

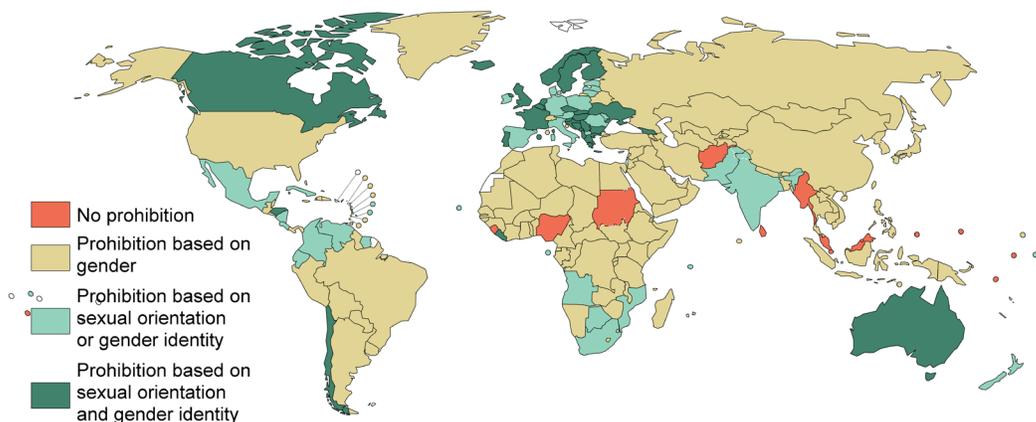
- In the U.S., a study found that men and women with disabilities were 75% and 89% more likely, respectively, to experience an involuntary job loss than men and women without disabilities.
- In South Africa, an analysis found that structural discrimination on the basis of sex, race, age, and disability all compounded one another, with particularly severe consequences for the income and employment of Black women.
- Research has found that women with disabilities—and in particular women of color with disabilities—experience higher rates of harassment at work.

Age

Gender discrimination and age discrimination intersect across the life course.

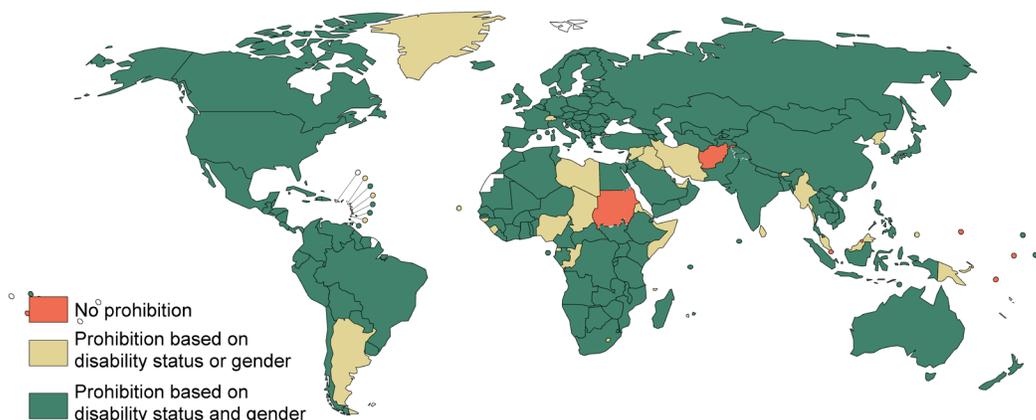
- A study of the French financial sector found that 25-year-old women were far less likely to receive an interview for a long-term contract than equally qualified 25-year-old men; 37-year-old women experienced no such discrimination, suggesting employers were discriminating against young women they presumed could soon become mothers.
- A study of 9 European countries found that although men and women ages 50 and older participate in training at similar rates, men are significantly more likely to have their training funded by their employer, while women pay the costs themselves.
- In Germany, a study found that the “unexplained” component of the gender wage gap continued to increase for workers over age 45—suggesting that both age and

Is there at least some prohibition of discrimination at work based on both sexual orientation and gender identity?



Source: WORLD Policy Analysis Center, *Discrimination at Work Database*, 2021

Do countries prohibit discrimination at work based on both disability status and gender?



Source: WORLD Policy Analysis Center, *Discrimination at Work Database*, 2021

gender discrimination were playing a consequential role.

Addressing Gaps in the Law

Though nearly all countries (93%) now address employment discrimination on the basis of sex/gender, striking legislative gaps continue to leave women from marginalized groups vulnerable:

- 17% of countries fail to prohibit discrimination based on gender as well as discrimination based on religion.
- 18% of countries fail to prohibit both gender and racial/ethnic discrimination at work. Twice as many (36%) lack protections against both gender and social class discrimination, which may be used as a proxy for racial discrimination in contexts where historical discrimination created large social class differences across racial and ethnic groups.
- 20% of countries still fail to prohibit employment discrimination on the basis of disability as well as gender, while 41% fail to guarantee reasonable accommodations at work.
- 35% of countries lack protections against employment discrimination on the basis of gender and age, an important area for further action particularly given the aging of the global workforce.
- 53% of countries fail to explicitly address discrimination based on gender as well as discrimination based on citizenship, while 52% lack protections covering both gender and national origin.
- 65% of countries fail to explicitly prohibit employment discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation; 83% have yet to address gender identity.

Trends across Income Groups and over Time

Protections vary across country income groups—yet countries at all income levels have gaps.

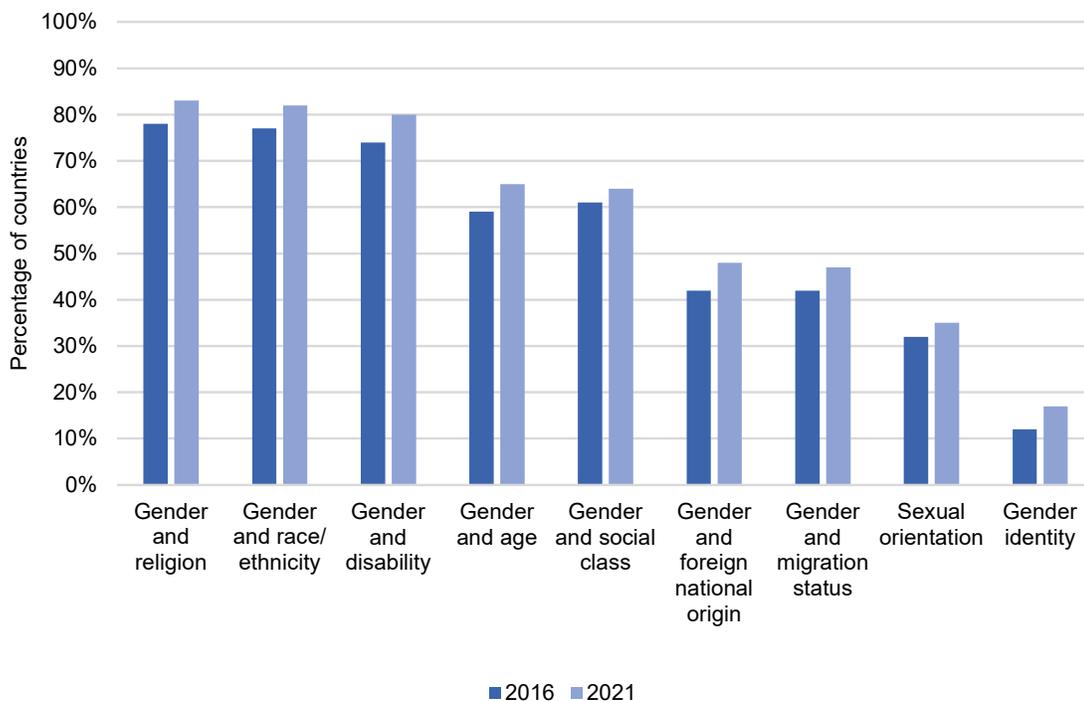
- Low-income countries are the most likely to recognize the importance of prohibiting discrimination based on gender and migration status (56%, compared to 45% of high-income countries) and religion (85%, compared to 79% of high-income countries).
- Middle-income countries are most likely to address gender and social class (77%, compared to 40% of high-income countries).
- High-income countries have the most protections against discrimination based on gender and disability (86%, compared to 67% of low-income countries) and based on sexual orientation (62%, compared to 7% of low-income countries) and gender identity (36%, compared to 4% of low-income countries). Nevertheless, though more common in high-income countries, at least some protections for all groups are found in countries spanning every region and income group.

Protections in every area are increasing over time.

- For example, the share of countries covering both gender and disability discrimination at work rose from 74% in 2016 to 80% in 2021.
- Over the same period, protections based on gender identity increased from 12% to 17%.



Are countries increasingly prohibiting multiple sources of workplace discrimination against women?



WORLD Policy Analysis Center

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Additional Resources

Global Maps: Prohibitions of Multiple Discrimination

- [Is there at least some prohibition of discrimination at work based on race/ethnicity and gender?](#)
- [Is there at least some prohibition of discrimination at work based on social class and gender?](#)
- [Is there at least some prohibition of discrimination at work based on migration status and gender?](#)
- [Is there at least some prohibition of discrimination at work based on age and gender?](#)

Age Discrimination

For more information about the global state of protections against age discrimination in hiring, pay, training, promotions/demotions, and termination, see the following fact sheet:

- [“Age Discrimination at Work”](#)

Intersectional Discrimination and Structural Employment Inequalities

In addition to ensuring legal protections against multiple forms of discrimination, it is critical to recognize that women from marginalized groups commonly face “intersectional” discrimination (unique barriers, biases, and inequalities faced by women from a particular group that are not faced by other women or by men from the same group). It is also essential to address the structural discrimination that leaves broad swaths of women workers, particularly domestic workers, uncovered by basic labor laws.

For more information about these topics, see:

- [Chapter 3, *Equality within Our Lifetimes: How Laws and Policies Can Close—or Widen—Gender Gaps in Economies Worldwide*](#) (Jody Heymann, Aleta Sprague, and Amy Raub; University of California Press, 2023)

