

Gender ROI™ Insight Series



21 Women in part-time and temporary employment

Shifting perceptions about the value of non-traditional work models critical to combat gender discrimination

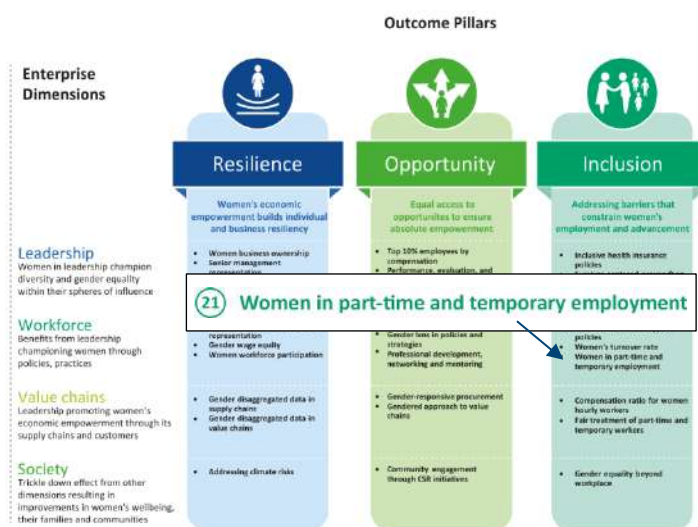
Covid-19 highlighted the insecurity of part-time and temporary work for millions of people, predominantly women, and the road back to stability has been tough. Discrimination against those in non-standard work remains an issue right up to board level, challenging policymakers and business leaders to think differently about better ways to support this under-valued talent pool.

Like beauty, value tends to be in the eye of the beholder. What's regarded as valuable by one person or organisation may not be perceived as such by others. Faced with subjectivity, how to assess what is seen as relatively valuable? Data on what's rewarded and what is not.

Such data-based evidence is proving crucial in tracking stubborn patterns, gaps and inequities across the world of work, particularly post-Covid-19. Policymakers and organisations now have unparalleled access to detailed workforce information – and the overall picture is depressing. The pandemic and ensuing economic crisis set back global efforts to improve vulnerable workers' access to the labour market and what the International Labour Organisation (ILO) calls 'decent work'.

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As a United Nations-ILO paper, *Decent Work and Economic Growth*, found, while many Asia-Pacific nations successfully limited the health impacts of Covid-19, "nearly all have paid a price in terms of increased unemployment, insecurity and poverty. Women, children and migrant workers are among those most likely to suffer as losses cascade through the region".



Sweef Capital Gender ROI™ indicators

Women have been the hardest-hit across the world. In many countries, women still carry the primary burden of family care and household responsibilities. This channels them into poorly paid, lower-grade and insecure part-time or casual employment – 'flexible work' – in industries such as health and aged care, whose business and operating models rely on contingent workforces largely dominated by women.

A part-time worker is defined as an employee whose working hours are fewer than comparable full-time employees. Temporary employment



The Sweef Capital Gender ROI™ identifies gender equality and diversity gaps and informs interventions to build resilience, equal opportunity and inclusion. This Insight Series explores how each indicator contributes to delivering social, financial and economic returns: <https://sweefcapital.com/gender-roitm/>

includes fixed-term, project or task-based contracts as well as seasonal or casual work. Workers can choose non-standard employment (NSE) arrangements for flexibility reasons (voluntary) or be forced to take what's on offer (involuntary). Bald statistics, though, can mask an array of complex socioeconomic factors influencing work choices at all levels.

Regardless of individual circumstances, the uneven power dynamics and social perceptions of the value of NSE models are well-documented, with workers' arrangements plagued by instability, poor training and promotion prospects and a lack of bargaining power. For women in particular, flexible work often proves a career cul de sac and a pathway to poverty.

As business and political leaders search for new ways to build sustainable growth in coming decades, Sweef Capital Managing Director, Ms Jennifer Buckley, is among those arguing for urgent action to address embedded barriers facing women. "These unresolved issues are a drag on growth prospects everywhere," she says. "On top of the moral imperative to change, smart enterprises see the value of attracting and retaining talented women, regardless of how they're employed. Organisations that support women in flexible work as they would any valued employee see the benefits in talent retention, work quality, workforce stability, innovation capacity and the leadership pipeline."

Sweef Capital is pioneering regional investment in women-led growth businesses in the Asia-Pacific, applying private equity and social impact frameworks to organisations in its growing portfolio. Ms Buckley says investors are missing a huge opportunity to tap this under-valued talent pool.

"The entrepreneurs we speak with are prepared to think big and be bold in growing their businesses in sustainable ways," she says. "They're committed to delivering social and environmental and well as financial value and creating flexible work for people across their operating footprint, including home-based businesses and women suppliers in micro-enterprises. They look after them. There's both commercial pragmatism and community legacy in this strategy."

Ironically, dynamic Asian enterprises may end up setting benchmarks for wealthier countries like Australia, where measures to address gender inequality have achieved mixed results. Last November Australia's Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) warned of a 'part-time promotion cliff', as new data revealed entrenched career discrimination against people in non-traditional work models, which tend to be dominated by women.

Major private sector employers must report workforce data on an annual basis. In 2022-23, while 21 per cent of Australian employees worked part-time, only seven per cent of managers were employed part-time. And despite a few employers leading the way, the WGEA says availability of part-time management roles has remained stubbornly low in recent years, with an increase of just one per cent from 2018-19.

That's no surprise to Capital Human Founder and Managing Director, Ms Manita Ray, a gender lens investment specialist and veteran of Australia's financial services industry. "We see this across every sector, whether it's government, not for profit, or the private sector," Ms Ray says. "You need to go beyond the number of women in an organisation to look at the proportion of women in leadership and decision-making roles that offer commensurate salaries. Women tend to have a disproportionately higher amount of part-time roles and, as a result, lower pay."

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- Manita Ray, Capital Human



A seasoned international consultant, Ms Ray established Capital Human to work with the financial sector, government and other organisations to help close the gender gap in Australia. In a hopeful sign of changing priorities, the firm has been working with independent fund manager Breakthrough Victoria (BV) to develop its diversity, equity and inclusion plan (see breakout).

For Ms Buckley, change will accelerate when more leaders embrace the benefits of investing in women as business owners, leaders and high-value employees, especially as part of efforts to combat climate change and strengthen community resilience. “The evidence is in,” she says. “The next step is action.”#

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Data and determination needed to address gender barriers

‘Flexible work’ is often code for physical exhaustion and career setbacks in women’s relentless juggle of professional work and care and household duties. In Australia, non-standard employment arrangements such as part-time and project work come at a cost. Such models generally lack the status of full-time roles and women who opt for flexible work will earn less due to working less. It is not merit, but the ‘motherhood penalty’ and care responsibilities force many talented women out of contention for development opportunities and key leadership roles.

For Capital Human Founder and gender and finance specialist, Ms Manita Ray, the status quo must change, fast, if organisations and industries are to address the underutilisation and outflow of talented women from the industry. “Change is not only coming to this industry – it’s here,” Ms Ray says. “While there’s not regulation (yet), there is pressure on investors to have better gender diversity.” The firm works with asset managers, family offices, foundations and other organisations to understand the risk of gender, race and social inequality to their investments and organisations.

Capital Human has been working with Breakthrough Victoria (BV), an investment company that manages the Victorian Government’s Breakthrough Victoria Fund, to further its approach to diversity, equity and inclusion. Ms Ray says the company was established to drive innovation and as a responsible investor, being a leader in this space was important. BV’s mandate includes improving the wellbeing of Victorians. This has translated into an approach that includes multiple social dimensions – adopting an intersectional approach – and importantly, looking beyond the ‘quantity’ of women.

Capital Human assessed BV’s policies, processes and practices and consulted with leaders to map out objectives that would deliver this mandate. Recommendations were made to identify and strengthen the leadership pipeline for diverse leaders, to create an environment to encourage inclusive and diverse entrepreneurship, and in their continuing work in gathering diversity data on their investments.#

For more about Capital Human, go to: <https://capitalhuman.co/>. Visit Breakthrough Victoria: <https://breakthroughvictoria.com/>



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