



# LinkedIn Opportunity Index 2021

How men and women across Asia Pacific feel about today's opportunities

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# Foreword

In 2020, as we figured out how to thrive in the new normal, opportunities came in new and unconventional ways. For most of us, it meant surviving first, adapting second, and then finally figuring out how to put our best foot forward. In our third edition of the LinkedIn Opportunity Index study – which aims to find out the goals of people across Asia Pacific and the perceived barriers standing in their way – it was disappointing to see that the pandemic has affected women disproportionately.

LinkedIn's vision is to create economic opportunity for every member of the global workforce. We believe women are equal contributors to the workforce but our research shows they continue to receive far fewer opportunities compared to their male counterparts. This year, the study spans seven markets across the Asia Pacific region and we surveyed over 10,000 respondents, both men and women, to find out their aspirations and concerns. While there's no doubt we've seen progress in workplace diversity as conversations around the topic have grown, our study shows there's plenty of room to expand further and make a real impact with more action.

I sincerely hope our research will ignite important conversations and drive the changes many of us want to see. I believe that more can be done to encourage people to adopt a broader mindset, especially when it comes to gender roles, and implement policies that champion women both in the workplace and at a national level. Together, we can level the playing field.

## **Feon Ang**

Vice President

Talent and Learning Solutions

Asia Pacific

# Key findings

- **Despite increased recognition on the importance of gender equality, women still face inequality in the workplace**

69% of men and women believe that gender equality is critical to building a fairer society, and 56% of people in the region recognise that gender equality has improved since their parents' age. Yet, this year's Opportunity Index reveals women still face significant inequalities in the workplace. In fact, amid the pandemic, the economic slowdown has affected women more than men.

- **Job security is important to anyone, but women are still looking for employers who treat them as an equal**

Women are prepared to work hard, but they also want a level playing field. 43% of women are seeking employers that treat them as equals to their male colleagues. Adding to the divide are the high percentages of women who feel they have missed out on a raise or promotion due to gender (60%), get fewer opportunities than men (41%), and get paid lower than their male counterparts (37%).

- **Women feel they lack the necessary time, skills, guidance, and networks to progress professionally**

Significantly more women than men in Asia Pacific experience barriers to success. Despite the added flexibility of working from home due to COVID-19, a lack of time is still cited as the top barrier for women across all countries. This is followed by a lack of skills (mainly in Japan) and professional experience. Women also don't feel supported enough by their professional networks, especially in China and India.

# Where are the opportunities in Asia Pacific?

The seven countries that participated in the survey were ranked according to the availability of in-market opportunities, an assessment on the accessibility of opportunity, the prevalence of in-market barriers, and the difficulty in overcoming barriers.



## India and China continue to top the index in 2021

Once again, both countries rank 1st or 2nd for most of the components that contribute to the index – the same was seen in 2019. The difference between China and India lies in the added number of barriers in China which respondents feel come in the way of achieving every opportunity that is available to them.

## Most notable changes are seen in Australia

Australia moved up three positions since 2019 which could have been driven by improved attitudes as a result of the efficient management of the COVID-19 crisis. However, Australians also have a cautious attitude towards in-market barriers which only allowed them to rise to third place.

## The Philippines and Singapore drop

Respectively, these countries are now ranked 4th and 5th, a slight drop from the previous year as a result of Australia's increase. This change is driven by a perception of both fewer opportunities as well as increasingly difficult barriers to overcome.

## Malaysia and Japan rank last

Ending the list is Malaysia in 6th position, and Japan continues to be ranked in 7th place. Both these countries report fewer opportunities as well as difficult barriers which make it difficult for individuals in these markets to achieve their goals.



# How differently do men and women perceive their world?

This year's LinkedIn Opportunity Index focussed on measuring men and women's confidence in achieving personal and professional success. This is especially important as we enter the uncertain post-COVID era, so we asked men and women to share what's troubling them the most, and what they believe it takes to succeed in this evolving "new normal."

## The economic slowdown has affected women more than men

The worst global economic recession in history since the Great Depression has had a dampening effect on the outlook of both men and women across Asia Pacific. 62% of women and 60% of men feel that the economic situation of their country has worsened in 2020 compared to 2019. However, compared to men (49%), fewer women (45%) have confidence that the economy will improve in the next 6 months.

## More women face difficulties finding employment

With slowing economic growth affecting every country, albeit some harder than others, 67% of working professionals across Asia Pacific have suffered negatively when looking for job opportunities. India (89%) and the Philippines (71%) saw greater employment struggles, and overall, more women (68%) than men (66%) felt that the lack of job opportunities was caused by COVID-19.

The top employment difficulties reported were:

Finding employment



Pay cuts



Reduced working hours



## Men are more optimistic about their financial future

It might be no surprise that personal finances took a hit in 2020, but what is surprising is that men and women differed in both their experience and their outlook. More women (45%) than men (43%) indicated that their financial situation had worsened over the past 12 months, and more men (23%) than women (20%) saw their financial situation improve over the past 12 months. Men are also more optimistic about their future – 45% of men versus 43% of women believe their finances will improve within the next 6 months.



## Women are most concerned about health

Health is often tied to quality of life and confidence in the future. Not surprisingly, health issues such as COVID-19, cancer, AIDS, drug abuse, and mental health topped the list as the most pressing concern among people in Asia Pacific in 2020. 20% of respondents cited health issues as their greatest source of worry, with more women than men (25% versus 20%) raising concerns, particularly in Malaysia. The looming recession is not among the top 5 concerns, but it is ranked 2nd in Japan and worries 8% more men than women.

The top 5 things troubling men and women across Asia Pacific:

Health

Educational quality

Safety and security

Environmental issues

Travel restrictions due to COVID-19

## Getting ahead in life requires hard work and social equality

Men and women across Asia Pacific agree that success is primarily achieved through hard work. On average, 78% of respondents cite hard work as the number one most important ingredient to getting ahead in life.

While most responses between men and women are relatively on par, significantly more women than men (75% versus 72%) cited having equal access to opportunities as one of the most critical requirements for personal success – in particular, 10% more women than men raised this in Japan.

A person's gender, while not among the top 10 factors having influence over one's success, was called out more significantly by women in India (63% women versus 54% men) and Japan (28% women versus 16% men). While not necessarily reflective of the actual situations in these countries, it is indicative of the sentiments of women and their perceptions of opportunity.

### Top 5 things to get ahead in

Working hard



Knowing the right people or having the right connections



Equal access to opportunities



A willingness to embrace change



Having transferable skills



# Opportunities

Opportunities do not guarantee success, but they are certainly a necessary ingredient. Building on our understanding of what men and women believe it takes to succeed in today's world, we asked them to define the opportunities they are actively seeking to help them get there. We asked men and women about their most desired learning, networking and entrepreneurial, job, and social opportunities to uncover gender gaps, different perceptions and barriers.

More men than women indicated a desire to pick up skills related to artificial intelligence (**44% versus 37%**) and cloud computing (**34% versus 28%**)

More women than men were seen to adopt creative thinking skills (**47% versus 44%**) and effective communication skills (**44% versus 42%**)



## Upskilling is a top priority for men and women

When asked what are the most desired learning opportunities, 42% of men and women across Asia Pacific ranked learning new technical skills as number 1, with soft skills coming in a close second at 41%. This comes as no surprise as the speed of new technology has made it critical for professionals to continually upskill in order to stay relevant and keep pace with industry changes.

Significantly more men than women in Australia (21% versus 13%) and Singapore (22% versus 14%) also prioritised finding an internship, while more women than men in the Philippines (42% versus 31%) desired access to higher education.

## More men are seeking new business opportunities

An unexpected effect of the pandemic is an increased interest among men in networking (41% versus 37%) and entrepreneurship (38% versus 34%). This is likely to be driven by the changing employment landscape. An exception to this is seen in the Philippines whereby just as many women are seeking to start their own business, and more women than men (42% versus 37%) are trying to build their professional network.

In the same light, more men than women shared that finding an investor or business partner was of importance (32% versus 27%), and more men than women (38% versus 34%) indicated a new desire to change careers or start their own businesses.

However, another avenue for career advancement that was common among both men and women was mentorship. In fact, slightly more females than males in China (53% versus 51%) and Japan (12% versus 10%) are turning to mentorship from others in the hopes it will advance their career.



## Women want equal treatment in the workplace

Job security, passion for their work, and a good work-life balance are the top 3 opportunities actively sought by more than 50% of men and women.

However, more women than men also seek to find an employer that treats them as an equal (43% versus 40%), and in Japan, significantly more women desire job opportunities that provide security (53% versus 41%) and look for opportunities that offer work-life balance (49% versus 37%).

Women in China also indicated a concern for finding job opportunities that allow them to fully utilise their skills in the workplace (67% women versus 58% men).



### The top 5 social opportunities desired by both men and women:

Keeping my family safe

Keeping myself healthy and strong

Keeping my body and mind active

Spending quality time with friends and family

Being accepted for who I am as a person

## Men and women value health and safety

With regard to social opportunities, what men and women want the most is to ensure the health and safety of their families (61%). This is particularly high among men in India, women in Japan, and women in the Philippines. Other health and safety related opportunities that are ranked in the top 2 opportunities sought across all countries include keeping themselves healthy and strong, and keeping their body and mind active.

While ranked fourth in the region at an average of 56% between men and women, spending quality time with family and friends varies significantly from country to country. Females in the Philippines (66% versus 58%), Japan (54% versus 39%), Malaysia (56% versus 47%) and Australia (49% versus 47%) prioritise spending quality time with friends and family more than men. Whereas, in Singapore, India, and China, spending quality time with family and friends is in demand by more men than women.

It was also found that more women than men in the Philippines (54% versus 43%) and Japan (32% versus 23%) are actively seeking opportunities to be accepted for who they are, which reflects a desire for women to be seen as individuals in these countries.





# Opportunity gaps

With a clearer picture of the opportunities being sought by men and women across Asia Pacific, we now look at the perceived opportunity gaps – what do respondents feel are the barriers holding them back from seizing and succeeding at these opportunities?

## A lack of time and money are holding people back

Men and women both cite a lack of time (64%) and financial status (62%) as the main barriers holding them back. A lack of time manifests as an opportunity gap when people are held back from pursuing their priorities – whether it's to learn new skills, start a side business, or spend more time with family. A lack of financial resources, on the other hand, causes an opportunity gap when people choose jobs based on necessity over passion (the second most desired job-related opportunity), or if it prevents them from keeping their families safe and healthy (the most sought-after social opportunity).

A difficult job market was a significantly greater barrier for men and women in India (66%), Malaysia (62%), and Singapore (63%). Gender differences are also noticeable when it comes to age (a top 5 concern for men only), and confidence (a top 5 concern for women only).



### The biggest opportunity gaps for Men



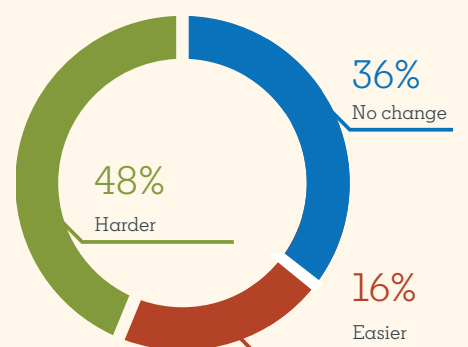
### The biggest opportunity gaps for Women



## COVID-19 has made it harder to close the gap

The pandemic has also disproportionately affected women at work and resulted in a less optimistic stance towards the future – more women than men (68% versus 66%) have had their jobs affected due to COVID-19 and more women than men (23% versus 17%) are facing difficulties with their job search. The most concerning part is that the majority of men and women feel it's harder to overcome these barriers since COVID-19.

Is it harder to overcome barriers since COVID-19?



## Inequality is a significant barrier for women

In addition to the larger macroeconomic factors at play, women also experience inequalities in both the workplace and home. 1 in 3 women (34%) feel this is holding them back from fully accessing their opportunities, promotions, and pay.

## Women report fewer job opportunities than men

41% of women feel they get fewer job opportunities than men, and 37% feel they get paid lower than men – especially women in Singapore (49%), Japan (47%), Malaysia (45%), and China (44%).

## Women report lower salaries than men

At least 1 in 3 women feel that they get paid lower than men, a sentiment that is significantly stronger amongst women in Singapore (51%), Australia (44%), Malaysia (40%), and Japan (40%).

## Women shoulder higher responsibilities at home

45% of working women said that managing family commitments has come in the way of their career development, an issue that is most predominantly seen in India (71%).



69%

of men and women agree that gender equality is important for a fair society

56%

of men and women believe that equality has improved since their parents' times



## Women feel they are lacking confidence and experience

In light of the perceived gender inequalities in the workplace, it may not come as a surprise that significantly more women than men cited a lack of confidence (61%) and insufficient work experience (54%) as the top barriers holding them back. This disparity is especially pronounced in Japan, Malaysia, and the Philippines.

# Organisations can lead the charge for equality in the workplace

While we don't have all the solutions, we believe it's time for businesses to set aside hiring biases based on gender and embrace a diverse workforce by implementing policies that level the playing field.

We believe organisations can facilitate the changes we need by providing women with new learning opportunities and finding the best ways to utilise their skills to build core competencies. In particular, we hope to see companies:

1. Drive conversations around diversity and inclusion in the workplace, which must be supported or even led by our male allies.
2. Increase the number of women in leadership roles.
3. Establish family-friendly policies and implement flexible programmes that support women.
4. Initiate group-mentoring programmes within companies to help women build their networks and be part of strong communities.
5. Help women gain new skills so they can seek out job opportunities.

Ultimately, we hope that by continuing to engage with communities around the world, we can drive dialogues and actions that create economic opportunity for every member of the global workforce.

# About the index

## Our approach

- A quantitative 20-minute online survey with the modified questionnaire and added sections on gender inequality.
- Data collection was conducted in January 2021
- The survey was conducted across seven markets in Asia Pacific including:
  - Australia, China, India, Japan, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Singapore
- Over 10,000 respondents aged 18 to 65 including respondents from various life and career stages, household orientations, geographical locations, and income groups.

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## Our measures of opportunity

### Perception on opportunity

- Availability of in-market opportunities
- Assessment on accessibility of opportunities

### Perception on barriers

- Prevalence of in-market barriers
- Difficulty in overcoming barriers

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## Aggregate score

The index uses “100” as a baseline score for confidence. A higher score represents greater confidence from respondents living in a specific market.

### Research conducted by GfK

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