

Global Gender Gaps in Career Breaks

Introduction

One of the most notable disruptions the Covid-19 pandemic has inflicted on traditional work in recent years has been a rise in career breaks. In response, LinkedIn launched its [Career Breaks profile feature](#) in March 2022, allowing members to capture their life experiences and skills learned during a work pause. This research note examines gender differences in career break profile listings for members in 16 countries across three regions as of June 2024.

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Key Insights

- **More women list career breaks on their profiles than men.** Across the 16 countries analyzed, the share of women who list a career break on their profiles is 63.5% larger than the corresponding share of men. On average, 28.8% more women list a career break than men globally.
- **Women mainly pause their careers to parent, men to develop professionally.** Globally, 33.6% of women list a full-time parenting career break compared to 7.3% of men. This percentage is three times higher than the next highest career break for women, travel at 11.2%, and more than double the top career break for men, professional development at 15.3%.
- **Both genders dedicate the most time to parenting and caregiving.** Globally, women's top two longest career breaks are for parenting and caregiving, which respectively last a median of two and 1.5 years. Men's longest breaks are split evenly across parenting, caregiving, and a gap year, each lasting a median of 12 months.
- **Women take career breaks earlier than men.** Globally, women report their first career break after a median of 8.9 years of work, which is 1.4 years earlier than men, whose median pre-break tenure is 10.3 years.
- **Women and men return to pre-break industries at different rates.** Globally, the Hospitals and Healthcare industry sees the highest return rate for women (50.2%) after a career break, which is 7.2 percentage points higher than men's return rate in the same industry. Men's highest return rate is in Financial Services (46.2%), however their largest relative advantages are in Accommodation and Food Services and Technology, Information and Media, where their return rates are 6.8 and 6.6 percentage points higher than women's, respectively.

Global Gender Gaps in Career Breaks

More women list career breaks on their profiles than men

Examining gender differences in career break listings on LinkedIn highlights the unique challenges and opportunities women face in the workforce. I compare LinkedIn members who list a career break on their profile by gender in 16 countries across three regions as of June 2, 2024. While less than 1% of members list a career break for most countries, women comprise a larger share of this group than men in all the countries examined (Figure 1).

Globally, women are 63.5% more likely to list a career break on their profiles than men. Regionally, Europe and the Middle East have the largest share of women career break listers, followed by Asia and the Pacific, and the Americas. Across countries, Germany (2.3), Ireland (1.2%), Australia (1.2%), and the UK (1%) have the largest shares of women career break listers.

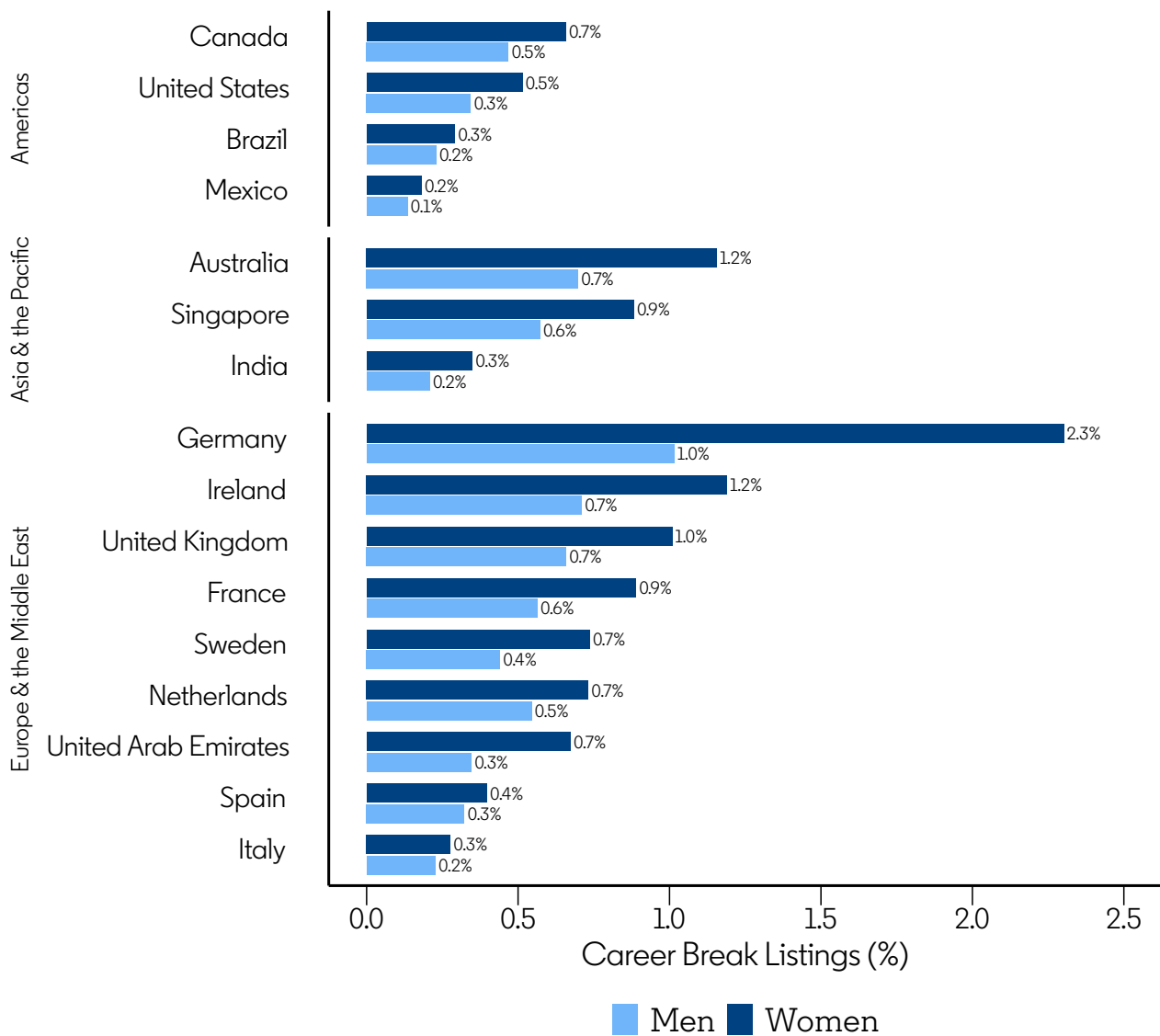
Similarly, a higher number of women list a career break than men in most countries (Table 1). On average, 28.8% more women list a career break than men across all countries. This gap is consistent across regions, with an average of 33.2% more women in Europe and the Middle East listing a career break than men, followed by the Americas and Asia and the Pacific, with 25.0% and 20.7% more women career breakers, respectively.

At the country level, Sweden has the largest gap, with 54.8% more women listing a career break than men. France (53.2%) and Germany (51.4%) are close behind with over 50% gaps between the number of women and men career breakers. India is the exception, with 20.4% fewer women than men listing a career break. This is likely due to the skew in LinkedIn membership towards men in this fast-growing market. Nonetheless, a higher share of Indian women list career breaks than men.

These findings underscore the need for supportive policies and practices that address women's specific needs and promote gender equality in the workplace. Understanding the different motivations for taking career breaks by gender, as I explore in the next section, can further inform these policies and ensure they effectively support all employees.

Global Gender Gaps in Career Breaks

Figure 1. Share of career break listers by gender, country, region



Source: LinkedIn Economic Graph

Global Gender Gaps in Career Breaks

Region	Country	Career Break Listers (%)		Difference in # of Women vs. Men Career Break Listers (%)
		Men	Women	
Americas	Brazil	0.2	0.3	29.2
Americas	Canada	0.5	0.7	24.8
Americas	Mexico	0.1	0.2	2.7
Americas	United States	0.3	0.5	43.2
Asia & the Pacific	Australia	0.7	1.2	47.1
Asia & the Pacific	India	0.2	0.3	-20.4
Asia & the Pacific	Singapore	0.6	0.9	35.3
Europe & the Middle East	France	0.6	0.9	53.2
Europe & the Middle East	Germany	1.0	2.3	51.4
Europe & the Middle East	Ireland	0.7	1.2	45.6
Europe & the Middle East	Italy	0.2	0.3	33.3
Europe & the Middle East	Netherlands	0.5	0.7	14.3
Europe & the Middle East	Spain	0.3	0.4	19.2
Europe & the Middle East	Sweden	0.4	0.7	54.8
Europe & the Middle East	United Arab Emirates	0.3	0.7	0.1
Europe & the Middle East	United Kingdom	0.7	1.0	27.2

Table 1: The share of members who list a career break on profile by country and gender and the percent difference between the number of women career break listers compared to men for each country. Negative numbers indicate that the number of women is lower relative to men.

Source: LinkedIn Economic Graph

Women pause their careers to parent, men to develop professionally

Women and men take career breaks for different reasons. For members who specified a career break type, I calculate the share of members by each type over all types to identify gender differences in these reasons (Figure 2). Full-time parenting represents the top career break type among women globally and regionally by far. Globally, 33.6% of women list a full-time parenting career break compared to 7.3% of men. This figure is three times higher than the next highest career break type for women globally, travel at 11.2%, and over two times that of men's top career break type globally, professional development at 15.3%. Regionally, women in Asia and the Pacific have the highest share of full-time parenting career break listers of all regions at 36.5 while women in the Americas have the lowest at 32.6%.

At the country level, Brazil and Italy exhibit the largest gender gaps within their regions. The share of Brazilian and Italian women listing a parenting break, 29.4% and 23.2% respectively, is around tenfold the share of men at 2.8% and 2.4%. Australia and India lead in parenting break gender gaps for Asia and the Pacific. The share of women who list a parenting break in Australia (36.0%) and India (38.0%) is over four times that of men (8.1% and 8.7% respectively).

Global Gender Gaps in Career Breaks

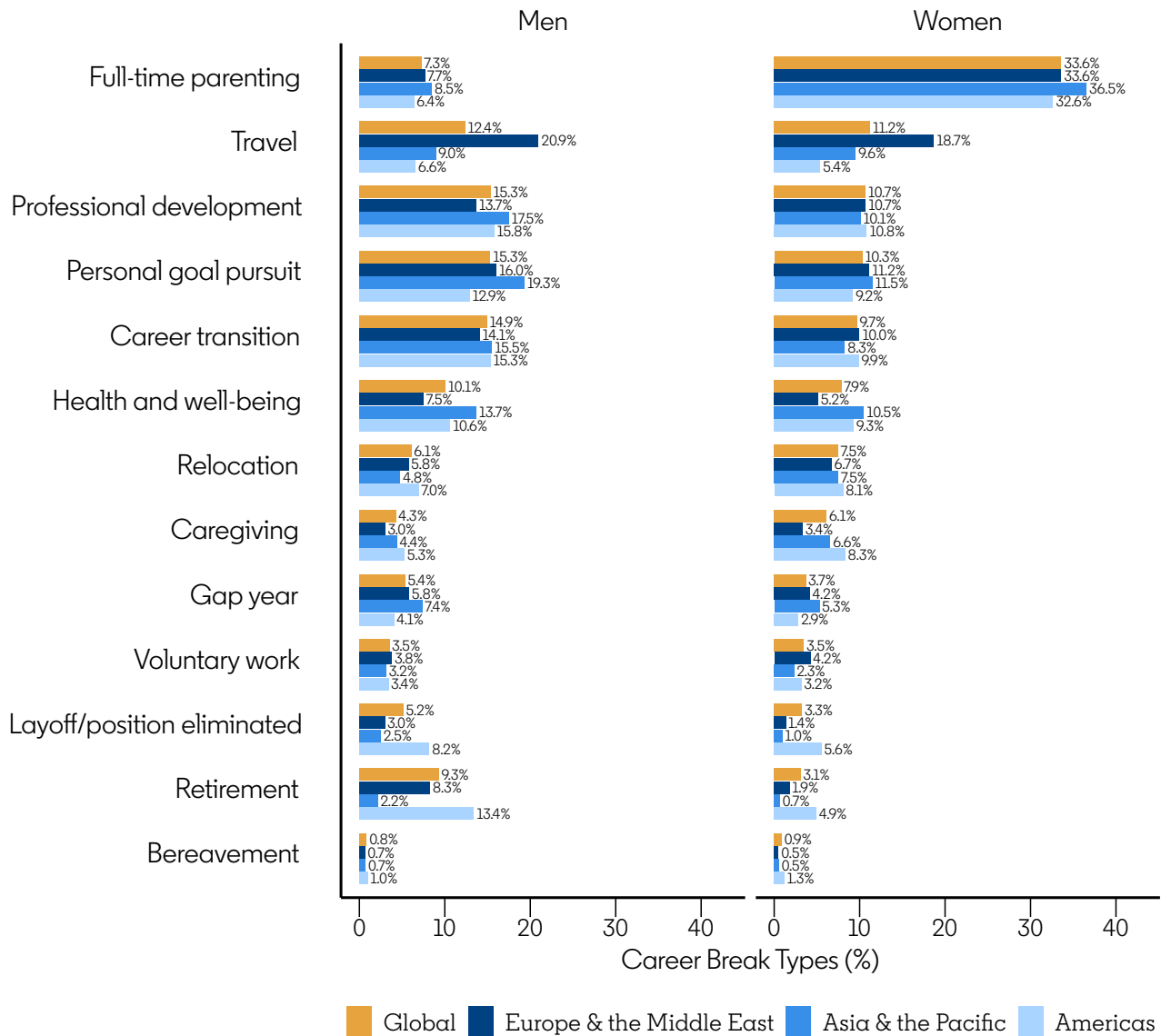
Moreover, a pattern emerges across regions where the most common career break type for men aligns with the second most common type for women. Specifically, in Europe and the Middle East, travel is the leading career break type for men at 20.9%, and the second most common for women, at 18.7%. In Asia and the Pacific, personal goal pursuit tops the list for men with 19.3%, and is similarly important for women, who list it as their second most common break type at 11.5%. The Americas show a similar trend, where professional development is the most common career break type for men at 15.8%, while ranking as the second most common for women at 10.8%.

This alignment extends to other career break types. Across all regions, career transition, professional development, and personal goal pursuit are among men and women's most common career break types after their top reasons. Additionally, bereavement is consistently the least common career break type for both genders. Caregiving ranks closely for both genders in Europe and the Middle East (10th for women and 11th for men) and Asia and the Pacific (8th for women and 9th for men). However, in the Americas, caregiving ranks higher for women (6th) compared to men (10th) and retirement ranks higher for men than women (3rd compared to 10th, respectively).

These insights demonstrate the importance of understanding the diverse motivations behind career breaks to create inclusive policies that support women's career progression and overall well-being in ways that account for and extend beyond parenting and caregiving. In the next section, I examine gender differences in the lengths of these career breaks, which is also crucial for assessing how the duration of time spent away from work impacts career trajectories differently for women and men.

Global Gender Gaps in Career Breaks

Figure 2. Share of career break types by gender and region



Source: LinkedIn Economic Graph

Both genders dedicate the most time to parenting and caregiving

Full-time parenting represents the longest-lasting career break type for men and women (Figure 3). However, women's parenting career breaks span a median of two years, twice as long as men's globally. Moreover, women's second-longest career break type is caregiving, which typically lasts a median of 17 months. In contrast, men's longest career break type is a three-way tie between full-time parenting, caregiving, and a gap year, each lasting a median of 12 months.

Global Gender Gaps in Career Breaks

In all regions, parenting and caregiving constitute the longest career breaks for women. For men, the results vary, and gender disparities are evident in the duration of these breaks. Women in the Americas and Europe and the Middle East spend double the amount of time away from work for parenting (35 and 18 months respectively) as men (18 and 9 months). This disparity is slightly less pronounced in Asia and the Pacific, where women's median parenting break is 26 months compared to men's 16 months.

The regional pattern for caregiving breaks is similar. In Asia and the Pacific, women report a median pause of 17 months for caregiving compared to 10 months for men. In the Americas, women spend a median of 19 months caregiving compared to men's 14 months. Europe and the Middle East have the smallest gap, with women's caregiving breaks lasting a median of 16 months compared to men's 12 months. Notably, caregiving represents the longest-lasting career break for men in this region, followed by a gap year, which usually lasts 11 months for both genders, and parenting and personal goal pursuit, which are tied at a median of 9 months. Conversely, in Asia and the Pacific, men's longest breaks after parenting are dedicated to personal goal pursuit and a gap year (tied at 13 months), followed by caregiving, which lasts a median of 10 months and represents the same amount of time typically spent on professional development and volunteer work.

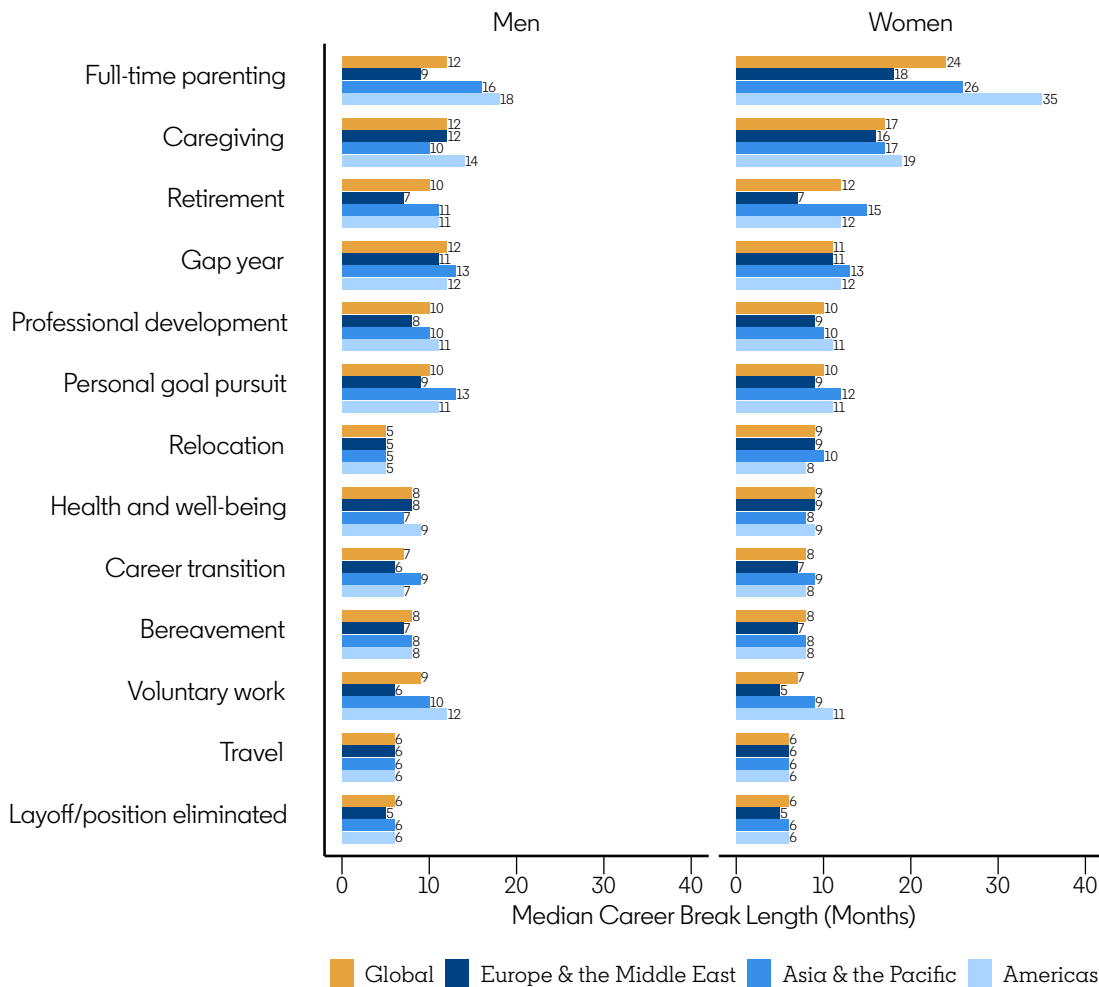
At the country level, parenting break lengths vary within regions. In the Americas, women and men in the U.S. experience the longest median breaks, spanning 39 and 20 months respectively, while Canadian women and men have the shortest at 21 and 13 months. In Europe and the Middle East, Irish women and men lead in median parenting pauses at 34 and 17 months respectively, with Swedish counterparts reporting the shortest breaks lasting 14 and 7 months. In Asia and the Pacific, parenting breaks range from a high of 33 and 21 months for Indian women and men to a low of 16 and 11 months for Australian women and men.

Regarding caregiving, Brazilian women and men report the longest caregiving breaks in the Americas, at 22 and 15 months respectively, while Mexican women and men indicate the shortest at 12 and 9 months. In Europe and the Middle East, women in the United Arab Emirates (U.A.E.) and men in Italy list the longest caregiving breaks at 20 and 18 months respectively, while German and Italian women and U.A.E. men report the shortest at 14 and 10 months. In Asia and the Pacific, caregiving breaks span a high of 20 months for Indian women and 10 months for Indian and Australian men to a low of 12 and 8 months for Singaporean women and men.

Recognizing how the duration of career breaks varies by type is essential for evaluating how time away from work affects career trajectories for women and men differently. These findings emphasize the value of policies that support longer breaks for parenting and caregiving, especially for women.

Global Gender Gaps in Career Breaks

Figure 3. Median career break length by gender, type, region



Source: LinkedIn Economic Graph

Women take career breaks earlier than men

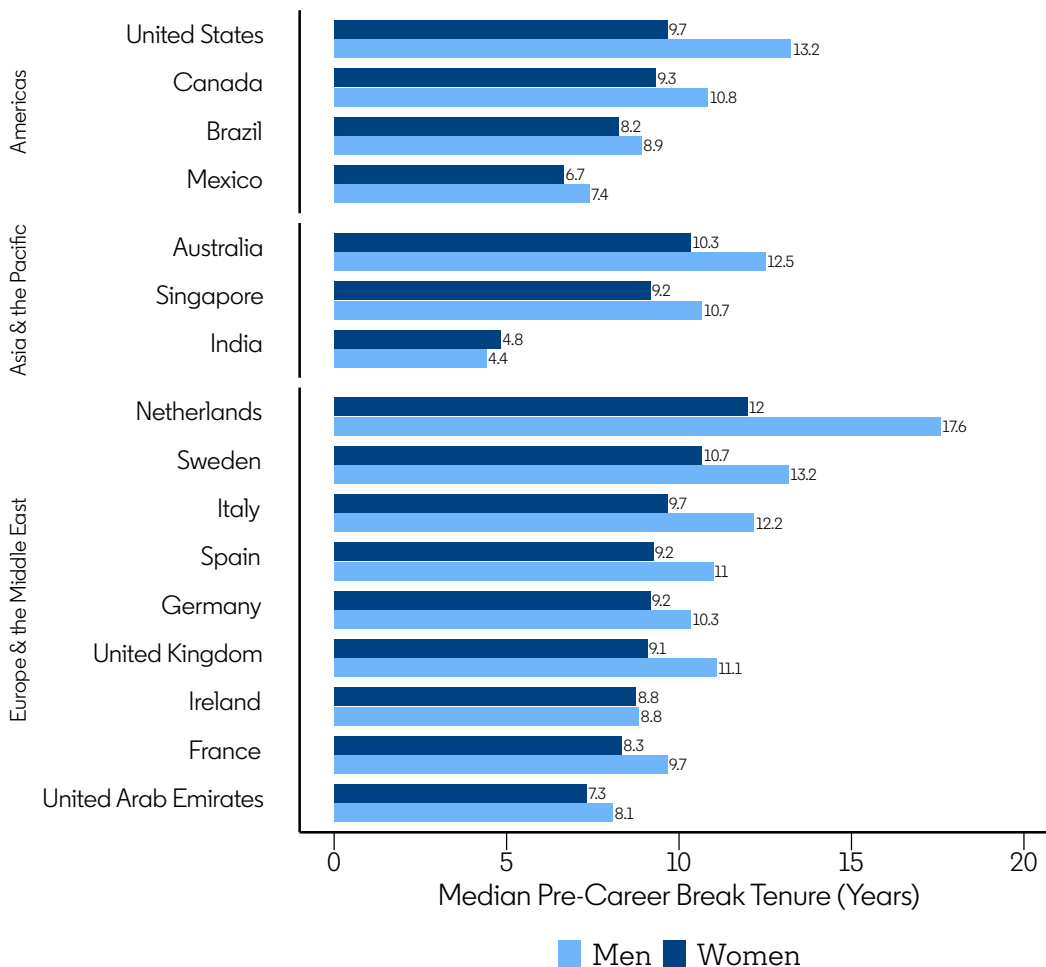
This section expands on the previous analysis by delving into gender differences in career break timing and their implications for career progression. Globally, women report their first career break after a median of 8.9 years of work, which is 1.4 years earlier than men, whose median pre-break tenure is 10.3 years. Regionally, the Americas show the widest gender gap, with women listing a break after 9.3 years, 2.6 years earlier than men, who typically work for 12 years before their first break. Europe and the Middle East follow, where women indicate their first break after 9.1 years, 1.7 years earlier than men. In contrast, in Asia and the Pacific, men list their first career break after working a median of 6.1 years, which is 8 months earlier than women, who report their first break after 6.7 years of work.

Global Gender Gaps in Career Breaks

Across countries, the Netherlands shows the largest gap in tenure prior to a career break, with women reporting their first break after a median of 12 years of work, 5.6 years earlier than men. This is followed by the U.S., where women's median pre-career break tenure is 9.7 years, 3.6 years earlier than men's. Next in line are Sweden and Italy, where women's median pre-career break tenures are 10.7 and 9.7 years respectively, 2.5 years earlier than men's. Ireland has the smallest gender gap, with women reporting a career break after a median of 8.8 years of work, just one month earlier than men. India is the exception, with men listing their first career break 5 months earlier than women, after 4.1 years of work.

These findings suggest that the earlier timing of career breaks for women could potentially disrupt their career progression, making it more challenging for them to advance long-term. As such, they stress the need for policies and practices to help women maintain and advance their careers, such as flexible work arrangements, re-entry support, and tailored career development programs.

Figure 4. Median pre-career break tenure by gender, country, region



Source: LinkedIn Economic Graph

Global Gender Gaps in Career Breaks

Women and men return to pre-break industries at different rates

Finally, I compare the global share of women and men who returned to the same industry after a career break, focusing on the top ten industries with the highest gross returns across both genders (Figure 5). Differing return rates to various industries matter because they can indicate underlying gender disparities in career opportunities, support, and challenges. Globally, women have higher return rates in four of the top ten industries: Hospitals and Healthcare (50.2%), Education (33.0%), Government Administration (31.3%), and Retail (27.3%). Meanwhile, men dominate in returns to the remaining six: Financial Services (46.2%), Professional Services (44.5%), Manufacturing (43.3%), Technology, Information and Media (38.6%), Accommodation and Food Services (33.0%), and Administrative and Support Services (25.5%). Moreover, women's greatest relative advantage is in Hospitals and Healthcare and Education, where their return rates are 7.2 and 6.2 percentage points higher than men's return rate in the same industries. Men's largest relative advantages are in Accommodation and Food Services and Technology, Information and Media, where their return rates are 6.8 and 6.6 percentage points higher than women's, respectively.

This pattern is consistent in Europe and the Middle East. Women have the highest return rates in Hospitals and Healthcare (48.6%), Government Administration (33.9%), Education (33.0%), and Retail (28.3%). Men, on the other hand, dominate in Manufacturing (45.7%), Financial Services (45.5%), Professional Services (42.7%), Technology, Information and Media (36.8%), Accommodation and Food Services (35.0%), and Administrative and Support Services (25.9%). Notably, the largest gaps favoring women are in Education and Government Administration, with return rates 6.5 and 6.2 percentage points higher than men's. Conversely, men have higher return rates in Accommodation and Food Services and Technology, Information and Media, by 7.6 and 4.5 percentage points respectively.

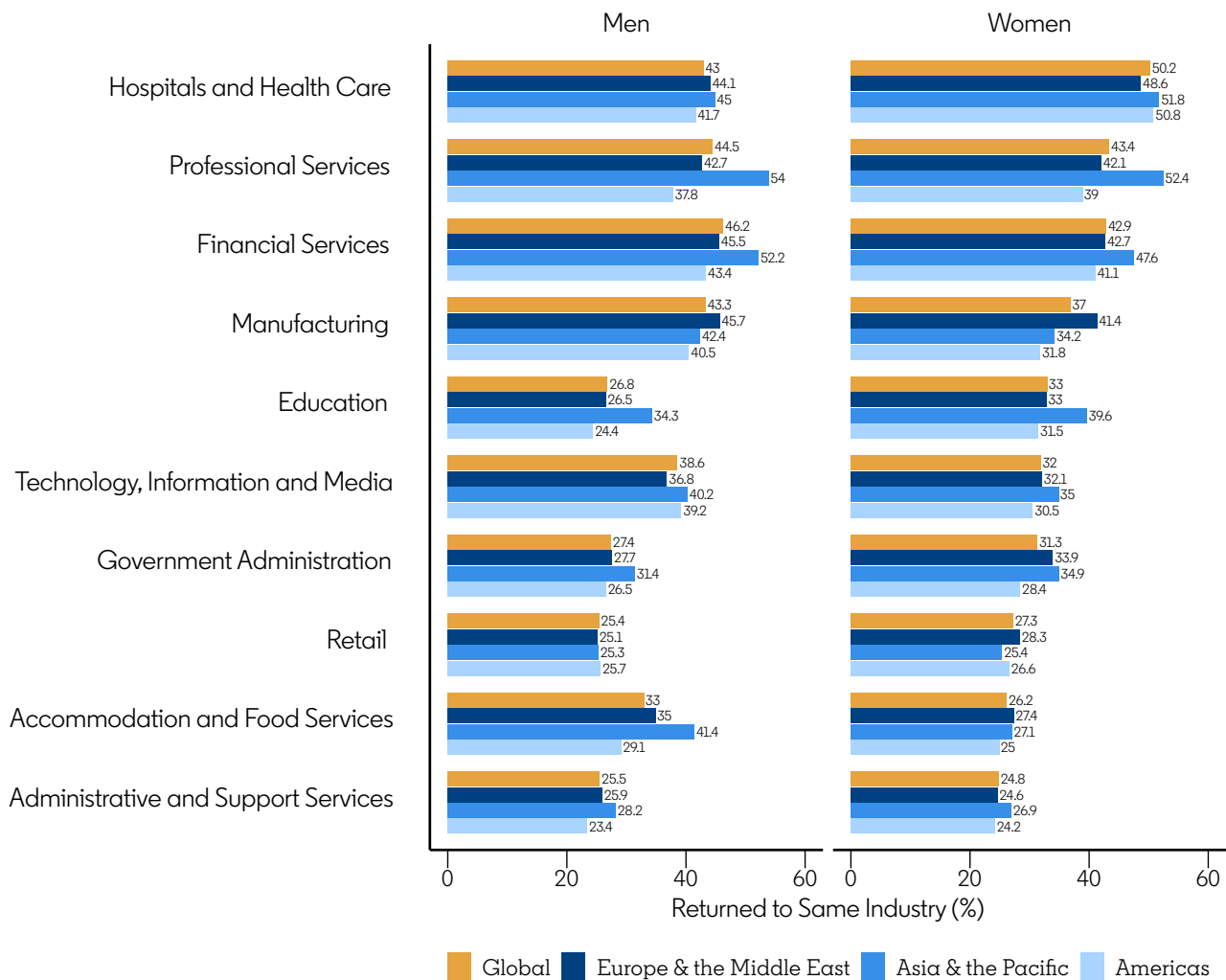
In Asia and the Pacific, the trend is similar. Women lead in Hospitals and Healthcare (51.8%), Education (39.6%), Government Administration (34.9%), and Retail (25.4%). Men have higher return rates in Professional Services (54.0%), Financial Services (52.2%), Manufacturing (42.4%), Accommodation and Food Services (41.4%), Technology, Information and Media (40.2%), and Administrative and Support Services (28.2%). The most significant gaps favoring women are in Hospitals and Healthcare and Education, with return rates 6.8 and 5.3 percentage points higher than men's. Men, however, have higher return rates in Accommodation and Food Services and Manufacturing, by 14.3 and 8.2 percentage points respectively.

In contrast, the Americas show a different pattern. Women lead in six of the top ten industries: Hospitals and Healthcare (50.8%), Professional Services (39.0%), Education (31.5%), Government Administration (28.4%), Retail (26.6%), and Administrative and Support Services (24.2%). Men have higher return rates in Financial Services (43.4%), Manufacturing (40.5%), Technology, Information and Media (39.2%), and Accommodation and Food Services (29.1%). The largest gaps favoring women are in Hospitals and Healthcare and Education, with return rates 9.1 and 7.1 percentage points higher than men's. Men's rates surpass women's in Technology, Information and Media and Manufacturing, by 8.7 percentage points.

Global Gender Gaps in Career Breaks

These industry-specific return patterns are valuable for developing targeted policies that facilitate re-entry and career advancement for both women and men.

Figure 5. Top 10 post-career break industries by gender and region



Source: LinkedIn Economic Graph

Closing remarks

Women and men take career breaks at different rates and stages in their careers for various reasons and durations. While both genders dedicate significant time to parenting and caregiving, women often prioritize these activities, taking longer and earlier career breaks that impact their long-term career advancement. Ultimately, all workers, and especially women, could benefit from tailored, flexible workplace policies and cultures that encourage career breaks, for and beyond parenting and caregiving, to promote their wellbeing, creativity, skill-building, and work-life balance.

Global Gender Gaps in Career Breaks

Methodology

This analysis is restricted to members who listed a career break on their profiles as of June 2, 2024. Post-career break industry comparisons are restricted to members who indicated start and end dates for their career breaks.

Data and Privacy: This body of work represents the world seen through LinkedIn data, drawn from the anonymized and aggregated profile information of LinkedIn's 1+ billion members around the world. As such, it is influenced by how members choose to use the platform, which can vary based on professional, social, and regional culture, as well as overall site availability and accessibility. In publishing these insights from LinkedIn's Economic Graph, we want to provide accurate statistics while ensuring our members' privacy. As a result, all data show aggregated information for the corresponding period following strict data quality thresholds that prevent disclosing any information about specific individuals.

Gender Classification: We recognize that some LinkedIn members identify beyond the traditional gender constructs of “man” and “woman.” If not explicitly self-identified, we have inferred the gender of members included in this analysis either by the pronouns used on their LinkedIn profiles or inferred based on first name. Members whose gender could not be inferred as either man or woman were excluded from this analysis.