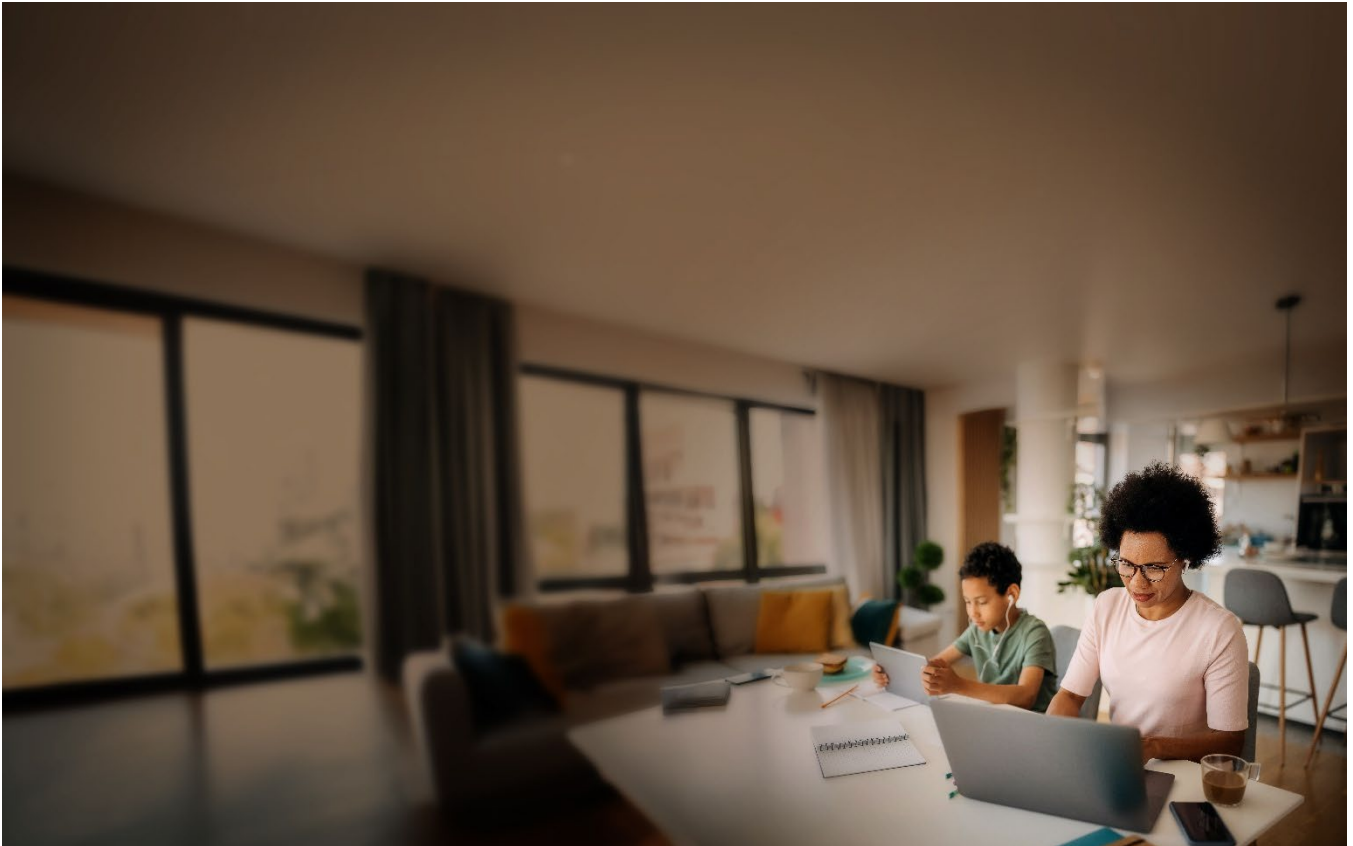


NEWS RELEASE

A remotely balanced workforce



Remote work can be a double-edged sword for women. Source: Shutterstock.

PRETORIA - The COVID-19 pandemic unwittingly became a huge, focused experiment in remote and flexible work. While the advantages of working away from a fixed office space were clearly prompted by the pandemic, the number of people working remotely continues to increase as the workplace changes.

But, according to the [World Economic Forum](#), remote work can be a double-edged sword for women. Few people understand this better than [Dr Olebogeng Selebi](#) and [Professor Wesley Rosslyn-Smith](#) of the [Centre for the Future of Work](#) (CFoW) at the University of Pretoria (UP).

“As the future of work disrupts the workplace, our focus shifts to how these changes will affect career equality, particularly in terms of remote work, which has become more common across serviced-based corporate businesses post-COVID-19,” Dr Selebi says. “We know that remote work brings the flexibility needed to balance work and life demands, but also potentially exacerbates inequalities. It can empower women by enabling greater work-life balance and participation in the labour force. Conversely, it can also intensify work-family conflict due to higher family role expectations, and may reinforce biased perceptions of women. Amid the challenges, deep-

rooted cultural values hindering gender equality are still prevalent in many cultures.”

Economic empowerment is a cornerstone of achieving gender equality, yet significant gaps that hinder progress remain. In South Africa, women continue to face challenges in accessing economic opportunities, despite policies aimed at promoting inclusion.

South Africa has made inroads into gender equality by supporting transformation in the workplace. According to Stats SA, over the past decade, male participation rates in the economy increased by 1.7%, while female rates rose by 4.9%.

Family restrictions

“However, women are still limited by decisions that restrict mobility, such as the choice to have a family,” Dr Selebi says. “Caregiving responsibilities are of particular importance in access to the future of work because they directly influence workforce participation, economic empowerment and gender equality.”

A significant consideration for women residing in rural areas is the limited availability of childcare services. This scarcity implies that, despite the increased employment opportunities afforded by remote work, these women still need to secure adequate childcare arrangements.

“Remote work, though flexible, still necessitates dedicated working hours, thereby precluding the possibility of simultaneously managing childcare responsibilities,” Dr Selebi points out. “Consequently, the challenges associated with childcare persist, even in the context of home-based employment.”

The traditional division of labour places a heavier caregiving burden on women, which can limit their career progression, educational opportunities and participation in higher-paid, skilled jobs. As the future of work evolves, it becomes essential to ensure that these responsibilities do not become a barrier to entry for a significant portion of the workforce.

To address the above concerns, these UP researchers are undertaking a study targeting women in service-based companies which will significantly enhance understanding and contribute to shaping the future of work.

“By examining the intersection of gender, caregiving responsibilities and employment in a sector that is central to a country’s economy, the research will yield insights that are pivotal to crafting gender-sensitive policies and fostering a conducive work environment,” Dr Selebi says.

The data will be collected from professional services firms, which are ideal for revealing the connection between remote work and gender equality due to their diverse workforce, structured career paths and reliance on knowledge-based work. These firms often implement remote-work policies, allowing for a clear comparison of gender-specific outcomes. Additionally, their emphasis on measurable performance metrics and career progression provides robust data to analyse the impact of remote work on gender equality in terms of career advancement, work-life balance and job satisfaction.

In essence, this research holds the promise of informing a more inclusive, equitable and productive future of work for Africa, where the unique contributions of women are fully realised and valued.

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This story was originally featured in the [Re.Search magazine](#). Check out [Issue 10](#) of the magazine, which details some of our

work, from advancing the field of wound care to understanding supermassive black holes.

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ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

The University of Pretoria (UP) is one of the largest contact and residential universities in South Africa, with its administration offices located on its Hatfield Campus in Pretoria. This 115-year-old institution is also one of the largest producers of research in South Africa.

Spread over seven campuses, it has nine faculties and a business school, the [Gordon Institute of Business Science](#) (GIBS). It is the only university in the country with a [Faculty of Veterinary Science](#), which is ranked the best in Africa. UP has 120 academic departments and 92 centres and institutes, accommodating more than 56 000 students and offering about 1 100 study programmes. It has the most academic staff with PhDs (70%), NRF-rated researchers (613).

The 2025 Times Higher Education subject rankings placed UP first in South Africa in the fields of [Accounting](#) and [Finance](#); [Architecture](#); [Electrical and Electronic Engineering](#); Law; Sport Science; and Veterinary Science. UP's Faculty of Law has been ranked as the top law school in Africa for a remarkable eighth consecutive year.

Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) ranked the University among the top five in Africa, as part of their [2024 World University Rankings \(WUR\)](#). UP was the only South African university featured in the [2023 World University Rankings for Innovation \(WURI\)](#), falling within in the 101-200 range of innovative universities.

For more information, please go to www.up.ac.za