



PRESS STATEMENT | 7 MARCH 2024  
*For Immediate Release*

---

## **MALAYSIAN WOMEN IN THE WORKFORCE**

**7 MARCH, 2024** - Social and Economic Research Initiative (SERI) is delighted to announce the successful completion of our research forum event supported by Microsoft Malaysia. The forum took place earlier today, in conjunction with celebrations for International Women's Day. As a think tank committed to promoting inclusive policy focused on improving equality and equity in our society, gender-based income and employment equality takes precedence.

With a focus on women's career development and opportunities, the forum discussed findings from our research paper '**Malaysian Women in the Workforce: Charting a Path for Inclusive Employment**'. Shedding light on the complex issues faced by women in the workforce, we gathered data from 400 Malaysian women with different career and education backgrounds, to gauge the cause of the disparity between the high rate of female graduates in Malaysia, and the low employment rate.

### **Findings from Assessment of Malaysian Women's Workforce Behavior and Decision-Making Process**

In 2023, Malaysia's labour force participation rate was recorded at 55.8%, while Malaysian men's participation rate was 81.9%. This significant gap implies issues in gender equity within the workforce. SERI assessed multiple factors such as age, education level, locality, family situation and cultural influence to pinpoint and discuss such gaps. Finding that:

- a) **The interplay of family and cultural issues strongly shapes the career trajectories of Malaysian women:** Respondents identified the family as a supporting presence, but also as a key responsibility impacting their career projection. Prioritization of family and cultural norms, and conforming to traditional gender roles are one of the main reasons that Malaysian women face issues in career seeking and progression.
  
- b) **Horizontal gender segregation trends persist in both Malaysia's education and employment landscape:** The study finds that women still predominantly occupy non-STEM fields, regardless of their educational background. Being employed in traditionally 'female-dominated' professions, a notable mismatch between education and career is persistent for women in Malaysia's job market. This presents issues such as the leaky pipeline phenomenon.
  
- c) **Job mismatch and ethnicity both impact women's transition from labour to employment:** Presenting a significant mismatch in female graduates in STEM fields, and their ability to find employment in these same careers. Other than the lack of job opportunities and skill issues for women, ethnicity also plays a key role in their careers.

SERI's forum accordingly facilitated dialogue aimed at exploring how these factors create systemic and gender biases for women in Malaysia's workforce. Ms. Nurul Izzah Anwar contributed to this discussion, highlighting that the women inclusivity should be the continues guide that promoted and encouraged the community to participate in woman empowerment.

Taking part in our panel discussion event were also women from different backgrounds and experiences, including:

- Ms. Adilah Junid (Director of Legal and Government Affairs, Microsoft Malaysia)
- Madam Hajah Mahuran Saro Dato' Haji Sarik (Vice President Group Research, Development and policy and Malaysia Professional TalentCorp)

- Ms. Sakinah Alzian (Research Analyst, SERI Malaysia)

Through this forum, SERI focused on supporting dialogue aimed at making a difference in the Malaysian workforce and society. Prioritizing family values, SERI advocates for policies that prioritize women's equal participation in Malaysia's workforce, including reform that ensures fair employment practices, enhances parental leave provisions, access to equal pay and career opportunities, and more.

***"People commonly accept men easily and tend to be judgemental towards women, even in a women-dominated industry," a 24-year-old study participant from Selangor***

***Don't think about making women fit in the world, think about making the world fit in women'***

***Gloria Steinem (Journalist and Social Political Activist)***

*SERI is a non-partisan think-tank dedicated to the promotion of evidence-based policies that address issues of inequality, particularly at the intersection of technology and society. For more information, please visit [www.seri.my](http://www.seri.my) or email us at [hello@seri.my](mailto:hello@seri.my).*