

► Policy Brief

August 2020

► The gender divide in skills development: Progress, challenges and policy options for empowering women

Key findings

- **Gender gaps** persist globally in women's access to skills development and participation in the labour market. The main challenges women face include **gender biases in occupational choices; barriers to education and training**, especially in rural and informal economies; **sociocultural and economic constraints**; and **low representation of women in STEM subjects**. To address these challenges, countries need to: i) include a gender focus in national skills development policies and strategies; ii) create gender-sensitive training environments; iii) create opportunities for women in technology-intensive areas; iv) create opportunities for men in social and care work; v) promote role models; and vi) encourage and enable women to participate in lifelong learning opportunities.
- In light of the **COVID-19 pandemic**, women and girls are bearing the brunt of **care responsibilities** during school closures. Overcoming the gender digital divide is essential to allow women to participate equally in digital learning and teleworking where possible – in addition to challenging traditional gender roles.

The gender gap in education and employment: What progress has been made?

If you are a woman, you might be lucky enough to live in one of the 76 countries in the world where women are no longer at a disadvantage to participate in education.¹ Yet even if you do, you are still less likely to find a job than your male counterpart.

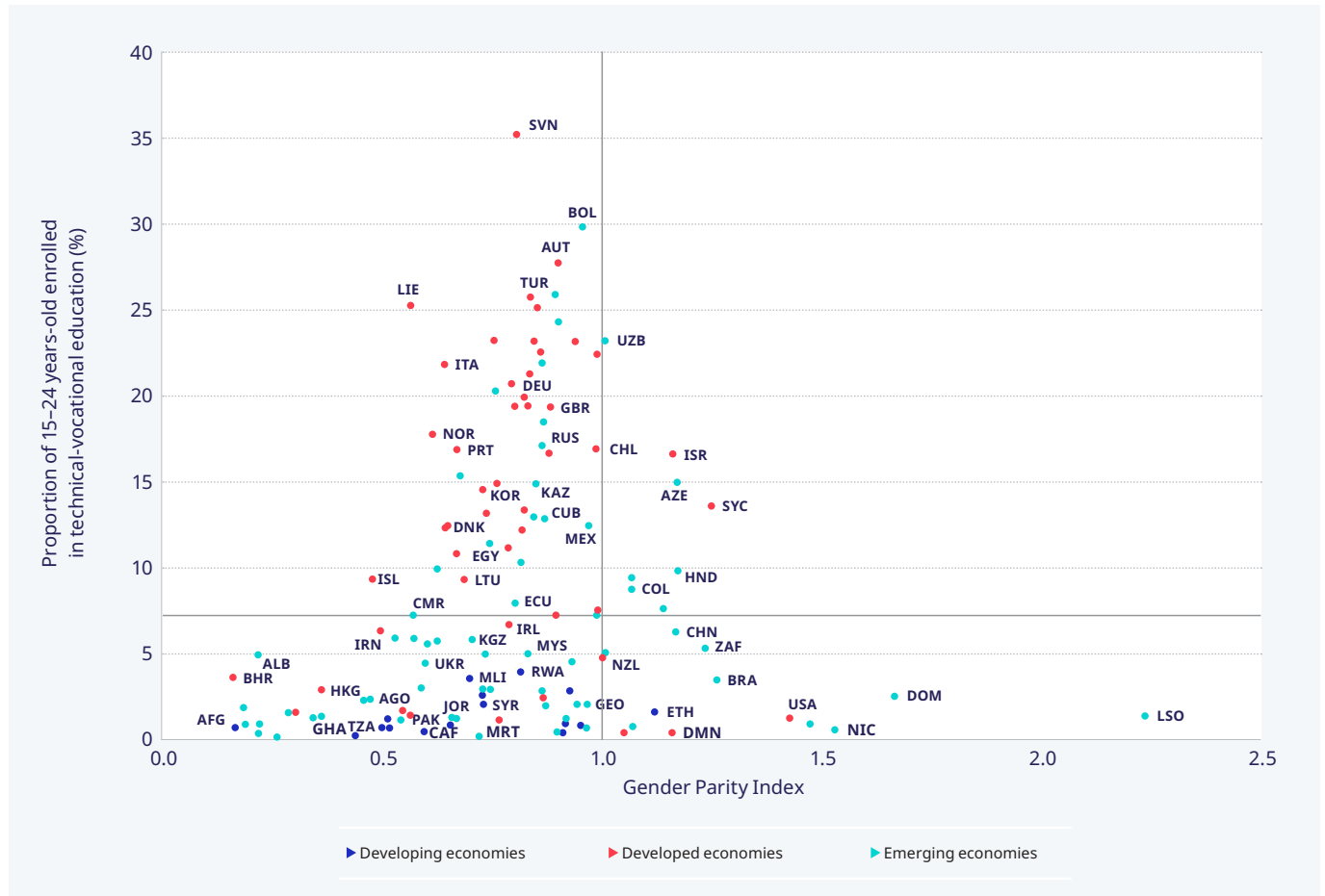
Except for certain countries where female participation is still low, girls are catching up with boys in primary school enrolment. For secondary education, approximately the

¹ This number was calculated using 2017 World Bank data on the gender parity index for enrolment in three different levels of education (primary, secondary, and tertiary). Only countries where data was available for all three indicators were retained to obtain this figure, which was calculated based on which countries achieved a score on the gender parity index of more than 1 on average across the three different levels of education. Available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.TER.ENRR.FE>.



Portrait of Vololona Rasamoelison, 37 years old and mother of two. Photographer: Crozet M.

► Figure 1: Gender parity in participation in technical-vocational programmes (latest year available)



Note: Each point on the graph corresponds to one country.

Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2019, SDG Target 4.3 – Quality TVET and tertiary education

same number of countries shows higher enrolment rates for females as for males. In tertiary education, female enrolment is higher than male in a majority of countries (World Bank 2017).

Comparable global statistics on skills development are lacking due to the heterogeneity in systems across countries. This includes statistics for formal technical and vocational education and training (TVET), non-formal education and training, and apprenticeship in the informal economy. Selected Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) indicators, however, collect participation rates of young males and females in technical and vocational programmes. Figure 1 shows that only 31 out of 133 countries achieved gender parity in technical-vocational education, with gender disparity in TVET enrolment persisting regardless of the national level of development.

Enrolment in formal and non-formal education and training for men and women differs across regions, as reflected in the regional estimates provided in figure 2. While the participation rate of youth and adults in education and training in the Americas, Europe and Central Asia is almost twice the cross-region average, rates in Africa, the Arab States, Asia and the Pacific are much lower – for both men and women.

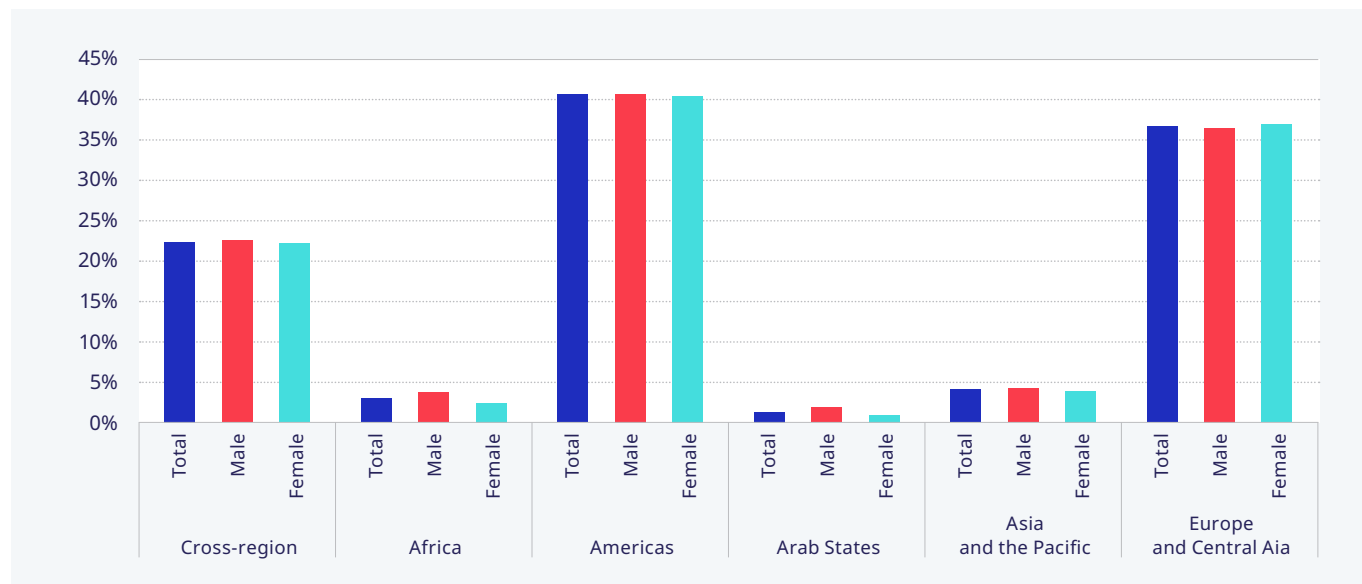
There are a number of key gender gaps in the labour market at the global level, as identified by the ILO *World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends for Women* (ILO 2018a). First, women remain much less likely to participate in the labour force than men.² Second, those women who do participate in the labour force are also less likely to find employment (figure 3), and this gender gap in employment is projected to grow in both developing and emerging

² The labour force participation rate comprises the proportion of a country's working-age population that is employed (salaried or non-salaried) and those looking for work.

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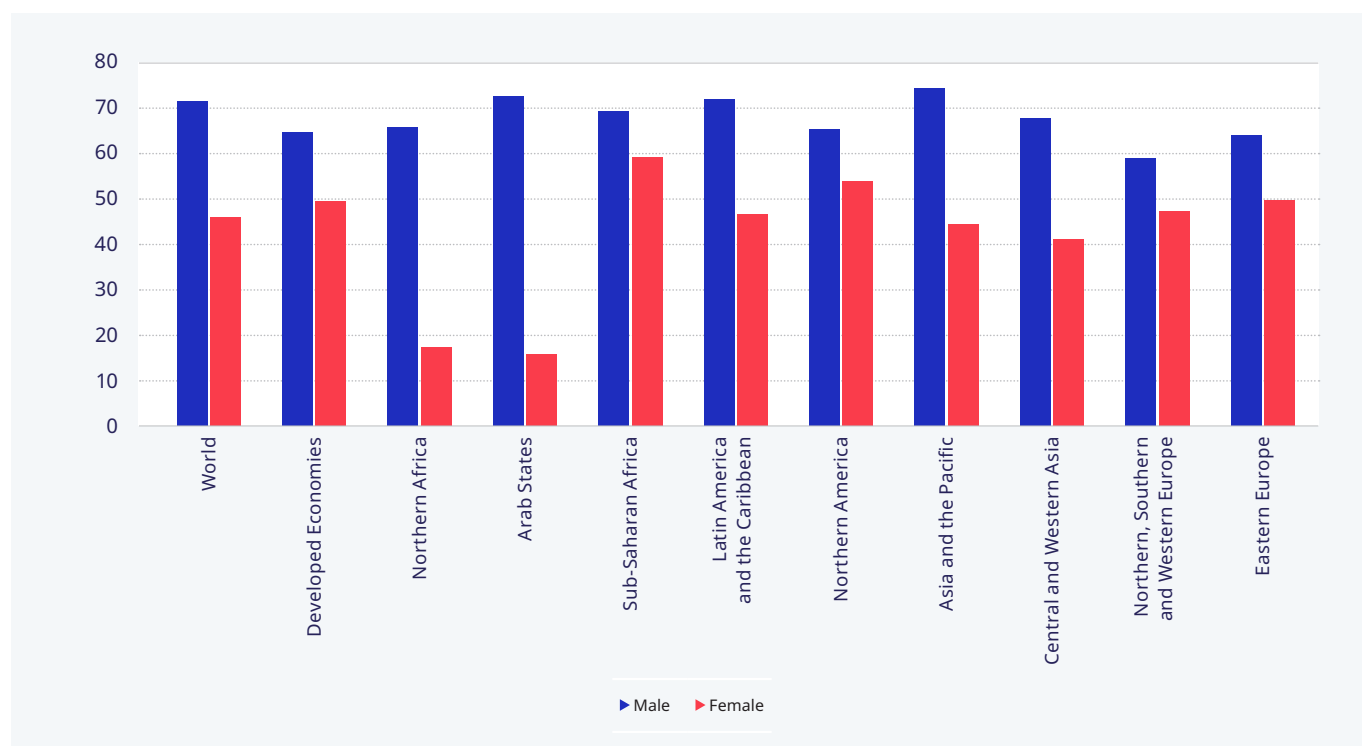
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► **Figure 2: Participation rate of youth and adults in formal and non-formal education and training in the last 12 months (latest year available)**



Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2019, SDG Target 4.3 – Quality TVET and tertiary education, available at <http://tcg.uis.unesco.org/target-4-3-quality-tvet-and-tertiary-education/>.

► **Figure 3: Employment-to-population ratios,³ by region, latest available year (percentage)**



Source: ILO, 2016. World and regional aggregates, table R2, "Employment to population ratio".

³ The employment-to-population ratio is defined as the proportion of a country's working-age population that is employed (salaried or non-salaried).

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countries. Large differences between regions point to persistent social and cultural factors that hinder women's employment in certain regions of the world. Third, more women are in vulnerable employment,⁴ particularly as contributing unpaid family workers.

Box 1. The ILO on gender equality in the world of work

The ILO promotes gender equality in the world of work as a matter of fundamental labour rights, but also from an economic efficiency argument. Where girls are educated and trained equally with boys, and women participate equally with men in economic life, children's health and education improve, and the economy grows faster and more equitably, as human capabilities are fully mobilized.

For more detail on the ILO's stance on gender equality and work, see two fundamental equal rights labour standards: The Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100), and the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111).



Secretary. Procter & Gamble production site. Multinational manufacturer of laundry detergents. Cairo. Photographer: Crozet M.

What are the main challenges?

Occupational choices and opportunities remain gender biased

Despite the progress that has been achieved in girls' and women's education, occupational segregation remains a predominant feature of training and labour markets, limiting women's choices and confining them to lower-paid and lower-status jobs than men. Not only are women over-represented in some occupations (and under-represented in others), segregation often also occurs within occupations, with men holding the more responsible jobs (UNDESA 2015). This vertical segregation is usually not associated with higher levels of skills or experience.

Figure 4 shows that men continue to hold more jobs in crafts, trades, plant and machine operations, and managerial and legislative occupations, while women work more often as clerks, service workers, and shop and sales workers. Interestingly, on average, European countries show stronger patterns of occupational segregation than developing countries.

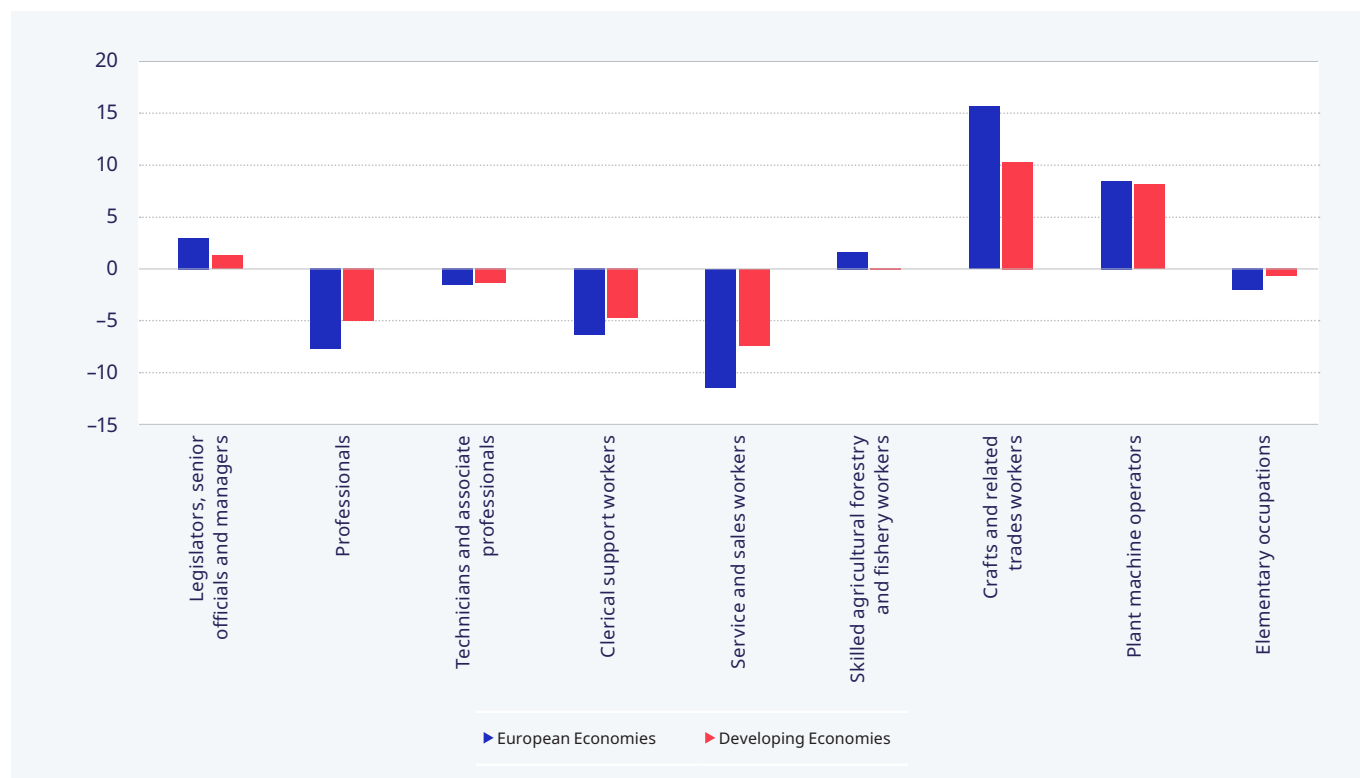


Female dentist working at home in Saigon. Photographer: Deloche P.

⁴ People in "vulnerable employment" comprises contributing family workers and own account workers (as opposed to wage and salaried workers). Since contributing family workers and own account workers often also work outside the scope of labour legislation, social security regulations and relevant collective agreements, they are often members of the informal economy.

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► Figure 4: Differences in average shares of major occupational groups by sex in selected developed and developing economies, latest year available after 2000



Note: Calculated as follows: “share of persons employed in occupational group x in total employment, males” minus “share of persons employed in occupational group x in total employment, females”.

Source: Data drawn from the ILOSTAT webpage available at <https://ilostat.ilo.org/>.

Trends over time in most regions show a persistent over-representation of men in industry, with women moving out of the agriculture sector directly into the service sector, in particular education and health. The exception is Asia, where women have also moved into manufacturing.

Skills development undoubtedly offers a means of broadening occupational choices, but higher shares of women in training for certain occupations do not automatically translate into higher shares of female employment in those fields (European Commission 2018).

Women still face more barriers to education and training, especially in rural, informal and traditional economies

While there is evidence at the global level of progress in women’s access to education and training, this overall view

obscures the wide discrepancies that exist across and within countries.

Women in rural areas face the challenge of combining education and training with farming, household, community and care responsibilities. Educational and training provision that is available is often difficult to reach and insufficiently flexible. These difficulties are particularly acute in traditional societies where families are often less willing to invest in a girl’s education because of established practices of early marriage, low remuneration for women’s work, familial reservations regarding women working outside their homes, and expectations that girls and women will do most of the household chores. Consequently, educational disadvantage accumulates throughout women’s lives as basic education is often a prerequisite for further skills development.

Discrepancies in literacy between women and men persist, with 63 per cent of illiterate adults being female.⁵ However, global trends are promising. Among women, the youth

⁵ Data drawn from the UNESCO, Institute of Statistics (UIS) website, available at: <http://uis.unesco.org/en/topic/literacy>.



Girl and her father on their way to school. Bangkok. Thailand. Photographer: Crozet M.

literacy rate is 20 percentage points higher than the elderly literacy rate, compared with 10 points difference between younger and older men. Women thus have made more progress than men in this regard and the pattern is true for all developing regions (UNESCO/UIS 2019).

Women are also much more often employed as contributing family workers than men, and in lower- and middle-income countries, more women are informally employed, which also limits their chances of accessing education and training (ILO 2018b). In addition, women are under-represented in informal apprenticeships, the traditional training system prevalent in many countries with a large informal economy. Analysis of the informal sector in West Africa showed that women tend to acquire skills through unstructured, informal on-the-job learning, rather than by way of informal apprenticeship with an experienced master craftsman in a small firm, as men tend to do (Nordman and Pasquier-Doumer 2012).

For women, higher skills levels do not (yet) mean better jobs

Higher levels of education generally lead to a lower proportion of people “neither employed nor in education or training” (NEET). Yet even where girls and women are able to acquire skills for work, they often face social, cultural, economic and practical constraints that pose barriers to

their making full use of those skills through obtaining appropriate work. Thus, in low-income countries, women are more likely than men to be among the NEET (ILO 2020b). Moreover, in many developing countries, tertiary education is not as readily accessible to women as to men.

Where public provision of maternity leave and childcare is lacking, childbearing remains one important reason why women either leave the labour force, thereby ceasing to use their skills, or it is the reason they are unable to enter it at all.

There is also an element of skills mismatch in regional labour markets. Recent ILO research shows that, in OECD countries, the incidence of over-education (for one’s held position and occupation) tends to be higher for women than for men (Sparreboom and Tarvid 2017). In several countries in the Arab region and in North Africa, high unemployment rates among female university graduates suggest that women are at a disadvantage in gaining work appropriate to their education and skills (ILO 2018a).

In many developing countries, women are over-represented in out-migration and the resulting “brain drain”. According to OECD’s Database on Immigrants in OECD and non-OECD Countries (DIOC), there is little difference between males and females with low or intermediate educational attainment. For the highly educated, however, women of non-OECD countries outnumber men with an emigration rate of 19.8 per cent versus 16 per cent for men. Among

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Box 2. Gender mainstreaming in training institutions in Central America: ILO's FOIL Project

The national training institute in Costa Rica, *Instituto Nacional de Aprendizaje* (INA), with support from the Spanish-funded project FOIL, was the first of several national vocational training institutions in Central America to embark on a comprehensive gender mainstreaming strategy, with the objective of improving the employability of women.

INA conducted a gender analysis of the structure and procedures of the Costa Rican labour market and the services provided to the public. Even though 50 per cent of trainees are women, 27 out of 37 training programmes showed clear gender segregation, with trainees on a few programmes comprising 90 per cent of a single sex. The programmes with strong female participation corresponded more often to lower-productivity, lower-paid and lower-status jobs. Drop-out rates for women were particularly high in programmes where they were under-represented. Following the recommendations of the diagnostic study, an INA gender policy was drafted, including a five-year action plan for 2013–17.

In view of the success of this work in Costa Rica, the FOIL approach has been shared with other national training institutions in Central America that collaborate in a network of training institutions, *Red de Institutos de Formación Profesional* (RedIFP). In Panama, for instance, the *Instituto Nacional de Formación Profesional y Capacitación para el Desarrollo Humano* (INADEH) (National Institute for Human Development) advanced a strategy to make the national TVET system more gender-inclusive. In 2018, an assessment was carried out to analyse women's access to and participation in TVET programmes, and based on those assessments the INADEH developed a road map to improve gender equality in TVET. The road map included short-term measures such as information campaigns to challenge and change gender stereotypes around technical occupations and offered pilot courses in technical areas specifically targeting women. Long-term measures aimed to increase the number of female TVET instructors, as well introduce pilot childcare facilities in selected training centres.

Note: For further information, see the ILO's FOIL project webpage at: <https://www.ilo.org/sanjose/programas-y-proyectos/formacion-orientacion-insercion-laboral/lang-en/index.htm>.

highly educated OECD country emigrants, gender differences are minor (OECD and AFD, 2019).

Women still lag behind in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects

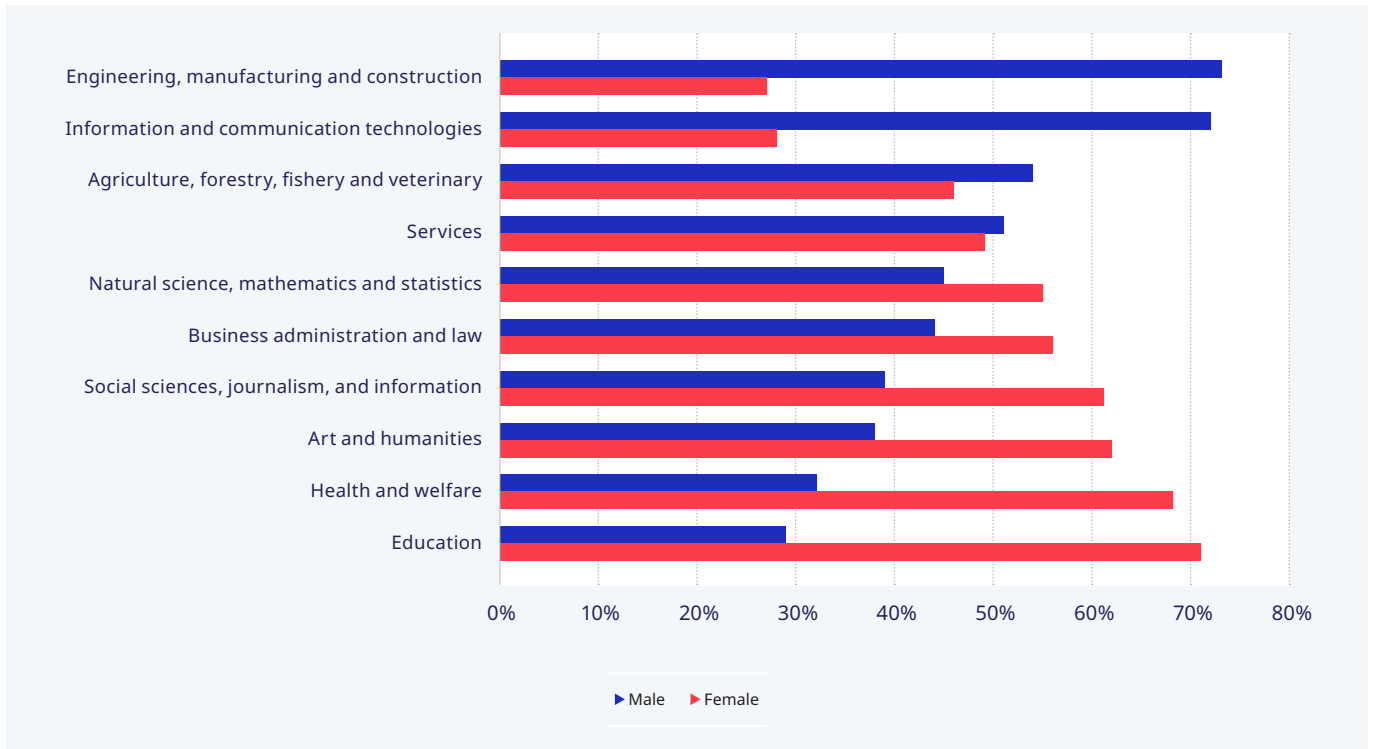
More men than women continue to pursue careers in engineering, manufacturing and other technology-related subjects. A clear gender pattern emerges in higher education, indicating that male students constitute the vast majority in engineering, manufacturing and construction, as well as information and communication technologies. Female students, on the other hand, outnumber male students in the social sciences, the humanities, health and welfare, and education. Due to the increase in female enrolment between 2000 and 2015 women now account for a higher proportion of students in natural sciences, mathematics and statistics (see figure 5).

The gender differences in upper secondary TVET are even more marked than in higher education. Female students in upper secondary TVET programmes are often predominantly enrolled in fields such as food and nutrition, cosmetology and sewing. Across the OECD countries, less than one in ten female graduates of upper secondary technical and vocational training and education programmes completes a course in engineering, manufacturing or construction. By contrast, more than half of male trainees graduate from a programme in one of these fields (OECD 2012). According to data collected by ILO's Inter-American Centre for Knowledge Development in Vocational Training in 2017, the choice of technical and vocational training programmes in Latin America also continues to show a clear gender bias (ILO/CINTERFOR 2017). As can be observed in figure 6, women are mainly represented in TVET institutions with a trade and services profile (e.g. SENAC) and less in those with a focus on industry and agriculture (e.g. SENAI, SENATI and SENAR). In TVET institutions covering all sectors, the gender

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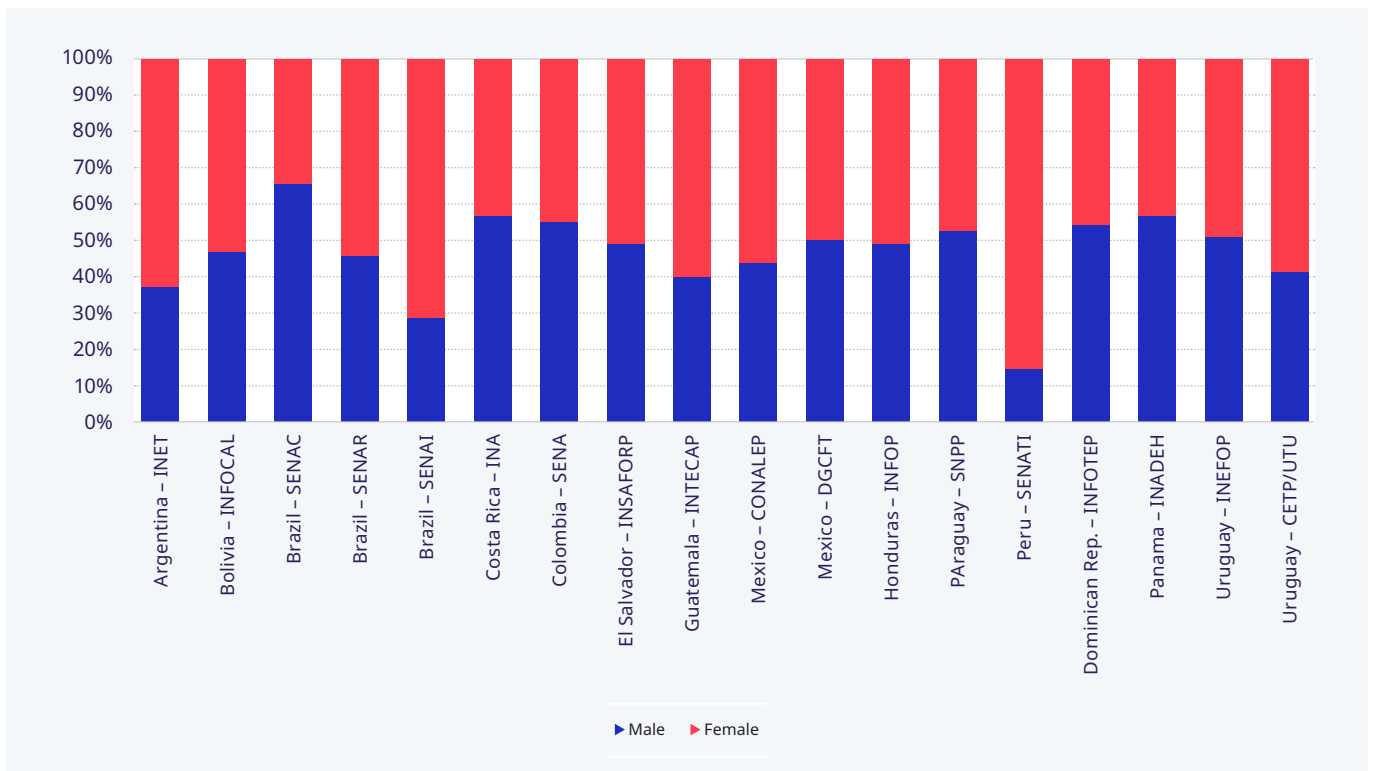
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► **Figure 5: Share of female and male students enrolled in higher education, by field of study, global average**



Source: UNESCO, 2017.

► **Figure 6: Trainees in Latin American TVET institutions segregated by gender (percentage)**



Source: Data drawn from the ILOSTAT webpage available at <https://ilostat.ilo.org/>.

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differences, while still existing, are less marked. In Colombia (SENA), Costa Rica (INA), Panama (INADEH), Paraguay (SNPP) and the Dominican Republic (INFOTEP), for instance, women account for more than 50 per cent of participants.

What are the most promising policy options?

Devising appropriate and targeted responses on the basis of women's diverse contexts

Women are a heterogeneous group, differing in many and various ways, including age, cultural background, as well as level of education and the type of work they currently do. Any intervention aimed at redressing gender bias in skills development should be based on a good understanding of how different groups of women are affected by socio-economic and political power relations, and thus by gender inequalities in institutions, the market, the community and the household. Data collected should be disaggregated not only by sex, but also by educational attainment and other relevant factors.

Efforts to encourage women to participate in education, training and productive employment, including in hitherto male-dominated occupations, need to be: i) targeted to the specific context and group selected for intervention; ii) designed to overcome the range of existing barriers (training fees, timing, facilities, etc.) and to respond flexibly to different needs; and iii) designed to address questions of status associated with different jobs and to open up these social perceptions to challenge.

Including a gender focus in skills development policies and strategies

Skills development policies present a vision of the skills system that a country is aiming to build. Meeting the demand for skills at national, sectoral or local level means extending training opportunities across all segments of society. Policies therefore need to identify barriers to equal access for women and men, and particularly for disadvantaged groups such as people with disabilities, migrants, or women from rural areas. These policies should be anchored in existing good practices and introduce measures to further improve access to and quality of training.



Walter Reed Project lab. HIV research programme. Nairobi, Kenya. Photographer: Lord R.

Ways to give practical effect to gender-specific policies include identifying indicators and setting-specific targets with regard to, for example,

- equal participation of women and men in training programmes;
- equal participation of women and men in the design and delivery of skills programmes and trainings;
- equal participation of women and men in the management of skills development systems and institutions;
- lowering gender segregation both within and between occupations; and
- enhancing the uptake of STEM subjects by women.

The shared responsibility of government, employers and workers is a key principle in the successful implementation of policies to bring about change. For an example of this tripartite approach in Bangladesh, see box 3.

Box 3. Promoting gender equality in TVET: The Bangladesh TVET Reform Project

Between 2007–15, the ILO TVET Reform project worked with the Government of Bangladesh through its National Skills Development Council (NSDC) secretariat. In collaboration with ILO support, the NSDC took up an initiative to boost the rate of female participation in TVET and the National Strategy on Promoting Gender Equality in TVET was developed with the involvement of a broad range of stakeholders from the private and public sectors, as well as active cooperation from an informally organized gender working group. A primary objective was to ensure that specific gender concerns were integrated into the NSDC action plan to implement the national skills policy.

The National Strategy for Promotion of Gender Equality in TVET aimed to:

- ▶ increase female participation in formal TVET institutions from 24 per cent to 40 per cent by 2020;
- ▶ increase the quota for female teachers in TVET from 13 per cent to 30 per cent;
- ▶ establish quotas for women in TVET management at a minimum of 10 per cent;
- ▶ ensure female-friendly environments in both training centres and workplaces;
- ▶ create linkages between industry demands and TVET institutions to improve supply of required skills;
- ▶ establish extensive gender-responsive support systems and counselling services;
- ▶ include skills training for workers in the informal economy; and
- ▶ establish an adequate data management system to capture sex-disaggregated data on TVET.

The ILO project and the national strategy achieved a range of improvements in the situation of girls and women in TVET institutions; though some goals and timelines were found to be too ambitious, e.g. increasing female TVET teachers. The following are some of the long-term achievements of the project:

- ▶ the female enrolment rate in formal TVET institutions increased to almost 27 per cent in 2019 and the target for 2020 is 35 per cent;
- ▶ all female students are covered by stipends;
- ▶ in the last five years, four polytechnic institutes and eight technical schools and colleges for women were brought into existence;
- ▶ almost all formal TVET institutions are now equipped with female toilets and common rooms;
- ▶ the number of residential facilities for women was increased in all new TVET institutions;
- ▶ the Directorate of Technical Education (DTE) developed gender mainstreaming guidelines in TVET; and
- ▶ all 118 TVET institutions under the DTE received gender training.

Note: For further details, see https://www.ilo.org/dhaka/Whatwedo/Projects/WCMS_222688/lang-en/index.htm.

Improving outreach of skills development systems to the excluded

Several measures have proved effective in extending the outreach of skills development systems. As a basic requirement, girls' participation in free, good-quality basic education – on an equal basis with boys – needs to be ensured. Awareness campaigns for parents, and meals provided at school, have also proved effective in traditional and poor communities.

Flexible hours for all types of formal and informal skills development allow for better integration of training with household or childcare duties, or seasonal agricultural work, for women (and men) currently excluded from available training options by these constraints. Other proven measures for increasing outreach are the provision of safe and female-friendly transport to schools or training providers near underserved areas; incentives for male and female teachers and trainers to work in remote areas; and expansion of infrastructure and facilities,

Box 4. Training for Rural Economic Empowerment (TREE) for women in Pakistan

Several ILO projects in Pakistan have focused on developing skills for employment of women in rural regions where female labour force participation is extremely low. Using the ILO's TREE methodology, economic opportunities were assessed, feasibility studies conducted, and training needs assessed on the basis of trainees' existing skills and interests. Vocational training was supplemented with core skills for improved employability, including teamwork, negotiation and conflict management, all of which had the additional benefit of building trainee confidence.

The training programmes helped women to take up non-traditional occupations, including managerial positions in the manufacturing industry. In the embroidery value chain, more lucrative employment on high-end, higher-priced work is dominated by men, while women mainly work for intermediaries as home-based workers on piece-rate terms. The project organized one-year, apprenticeship-style, competency-based training for 100 rural women conducted by a renowned designer and four master craftsmen from Karachi. Three of these women trainees received further training in business skills and went on to start their own businesses, now procuring orders from designers.

Lessons learned from the projects include:

1. Training must be strongly related to skills or products in demand.
2. A successful approach used to engage employers was presenting "opportunities for women" as a smart business/ investment strategy.
3. Employers should be involved at the planning and implementation stages. In the case of garment manufacturing, potential employers were invited to assess the trainees' progress. In the case of the rural embroiderers' project, groups of trainees travelled to meet designers and show them the quality of their work. Employer visits to the training centres, before hiring the trained women, helped to build employer confidence in the women's capabilities.
4. Providing transport facilities increased participation rates and reduced drop-out rates.
5. Combining technical and vocational training with information on reproductive health rights proved useful in empowering women socially.

Note: For further information on the TREE methodology see the ILO's website available at: https://www.ilo.org/skills/projects/WCMS_731670/lang-en/index.htm.

including providing accommodation for women and men from underserved areas. Mobile training facilities and community-based training targeting local labour market needs have proved effective in reaching rural women (for a case study on the success of outreach interventions in Pakistan, see box 4).

To increase women's participation in informal apprenticeships, stereotypes of both male and female master craftsmen need to be addressed so that recruitment practices are based on talent, behaviour and competence, and not on the gender of the applicant. Discrimination can also be reduced by stimulating demand for apprenticeships through involving women's groups to encourage members to approach master craftsmen for training, and by encouraging women entrepreneurs to accept apprentices (ILO 2012).

Enabling women to participate in lifelong learning and transitions

Lifelong learning⁷ can be instrumental in helping women and men navigate transitions and to prevent them from being left behind in the fast-changing world of work. However, structural barriers such as training costs and time as well as dependence on digital training devices can keep women from participating in and benefitting equally from lifelong learning opportunities (ILO 2019a and 2020a).

There are several approaches to increase women's access to and participation in lifelong learning. First, skills training delivery should be made more flexible, as shorter or modular training courses would allow women to reduce the time needed away from work or home. Second, training-related active labour market programmes which offer

⁷ Lifelong learning encompasses formal and informal learning from early childhood and basic education to adult learning, combining foundational skills, social and cognitive skills, and skills needed for specific jobs, occupations or sectors.



Portrait of a young woman in her police uniform, sitting in the back of a trunk in the old city of Bhaktapur, Nepal. Photographer: Crozet M.

second chance, basic and foundational skills courses can support women with inadequate formal education. Similarly, non-formal technical, vocational or core work skills training specifically targeted at women can facilitate their transition into the labour market. Training programmes should also aim at promoting the return to work for women either after childbirth, following a period of parental leave or care for the elderly, or as a result of long-term unemployment due to unpaid family care responsibilities. Lastly, closing the digital gender divide should also be a focus of gender-responsive lifelong learning initiatives (ILO 2019b).

Creating gender-sensitive training environments

Teachers and trainers, as well as managers of training institutions should receive gender awareness training to raise and address gender issues and avoid – or where necessary challenge – stereotypes. They can help sensitize employers and encourage them to offer on-the-job training, including apprenticeships, enterprise attachments or internships, to both women and men. Establishing gender-

sensitive approaches that foster teamwork, equality and respect should include:

- ▶ training materials that display images of women and men performing similar jobs;
- ▶ safe and secure school facilities;
- ▶ separate sanitation and accommodation facilities;
- ▶ rules against sexual harassment; and
- ▶ interactive learning methods and role-playing (where both men and women play the roles of “leader” and “follower”).

Using counselling, mentoring and positive role models to create opportunities for women in technology-intensive areas

Counselling should identify inaccurate and stereotypical perceptions of the occupations appropriate to young women and men that arise through their different socialization processes and their own perceptions of their

Box 5. Women in STEM Workforce Readiness and Development Programme

Women across Southeast Asia face a variety of challenges that reduce entry, retention and advancement in STEM-related industries. To address these issues, since 2017, the ILO's Women in STEM Workforce Readiness and Development Programme strengthened linkages between private sector firms, employers' and workers' organizations, and vocational training centres across three industries in three countries: the electrical and electronics industry in Thailand, the automotive and information and communications and technology (ICT) industry in Indonesia, as well as in the information and technology and business process outsourcing industry in the Philippines. These rapidly evolving industries were selected as they present significant projected skills gaps and opportunities for women in the next decade.

The programme empowers and supports career development of female secondary or post-secondary TVET graduates, under-employed women working in entry-level STEM-related jobs, and mid-level skilled women working in STEM fields. The support strategy follows four complementary lines of action:

1. In consultation with the private sector, industry-specific skills needs are identified to develop action plans for STEM-related skills development and improving the employability of women.
2. Women receive skills upgrading tailored to their specific needs. This includes pre-employment technical and employability skills training for female TVET graduates, upskilling for those in low-skilled jobs and high-end technical skills or leadership and managerial training for those already working in mid-skilled positions.
3. Job placements for women in STEM-related positions are facilitated through a continuous collaboration with private sector firms throughout the programme.
4. A company-level peer support and mentorship programme organized by and within participating firms seeks to strengthen retention and advancement of women workers through a work-based learning programme on critical soft skills, such as critical thinking, teamwork and self-organization.

Note: Further details of the ILO's Women in STEM Workforce Readiness and Development Programme are available at: https://www.ilo.org/asia/projects/WCMS_619723/lang-en/index.htm.

abilities. Teacher, parent and counsellor support is crucial to encouraging young people to examine these perceptions and to raise girls' interest in non-traditional occupations, in particular in STEM areas.

Girls' enthusiasm for what may be unfamiliar directions can be encouraged by building confidence generally as well as exploring new occupational choices, such as those in environmental engineering, installation of solar water heaters or pesticide control. Other means of opening up girls' choices include facilitating contacts and discussions with practitioners, especially female practitioners, through girls' days or career events, and involving families and wider communities in awareness raising and information sharing about potential careers, for example through open days at training centres. Scholarships, temporary quotas for

selected training programmes, and awards for successful professionals in non-traditional occupations have also proved useful in reducing occupational segregation.

Successful practitioners are encouraged to act i) as role models, showing it is possible to break through gender barriers; and ii) as mentors to provide invaluable insights into overcoming prejudice. Professional networks of women can offer mentoring to younger colleagues and raise awareness among employers and other professionals by exchanging experience and offering targeted training. Employers, training providers, schools and the wider community all have roles to play in creating a supportive and motivating environment conducive to the recruitment of women into higher positions in technology-based fields and in administration and management.



Woodwork class at Fe y Alegría school in Lima, Peru. Photographer: Crozet M.

The impact of COVID-19 on women's employment and skills development

Emerging evidence on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic suggests that women's economic and productive lives are and will be affected disproportionately and differently from men (UN 2020). First, women are over-represented in occupations that are at the frontline of dealing with the pandemic, such as in health care or social assistance, thereby increasing their risk of contracting COVID-19 at the workplace. Second, in many countries, the disproportionate rate of job losses for women in the first round of layoffs is a result of occupational gender segregation. Women make up most of the workforce in the service sectors which have been hit particularly hard by lockdowns, including retail, hospitality and tourism. Third, as women take on greater

care demands at home due to school or care system closure, their jobs will also be more affected by cuts and lay-offs. Hence, the crisis is decimating women's work opportunities, and risks rolling back the fragile gains made in female labour force participation over the last years.

Regarding skills development, first results of an interagency survey for TVET providers and policy-makers on addressing the COVID-19 pandemic⁷ show that with the closure of schools and training centres, infrastructural gaps in terms of internet and electricity are likely to deepen inequality in access to education and training. Especially in countries where internet access is expensive and data access through mobile phones is low, gender gaps in digital skills and access to digital devices and the internet are likely to translate into lower participation of girls and women in digital learning opportunities, and to further exacerbate gender inequalities in access to skills and lifelong learning (GSMA 2020).

⁷ As of May 2020, respondents from 126 countries participated in the ILO-UNESCO-WBG Survey for TVET providers, policy-makers and social partners on addressing the COVID-19 pandemic (ILO 2020c). See also ILO website on the pandemic, available at: <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/coronavirus/lang-en/index.htm>.

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Apprentices in training at the CFTPS Training Center in Diego-Suarez, Madagascar. This center is supported by the ILO and provides trainings for young people in difficult situations. Photographer: Crozet M.

Additional ILO Resources

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► **Further information**
Skills and Employability Branch
Employment Policy Department
International Labour Office
www.ilo.org/skills

► For more information, visit the Global Public-Private Knowledge Sharing Platform on Skills for Employment
www.skillsforemployment.org

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