



International
Labour
Office

SKILLS FOR EMPLOYMENT

Policy Brief

THE GENDER DIVIDE IN SKILLS DEVELOPMENT: PROGRESS, CHALLENGES AND POLICY OPTIONS FOR EMPOWERING WOMEN

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

If you are a woman, you might be lucky enough to live in one of the 53 countries in the world that have achieved gender parity in education (World Bank, 2010). Yet even if you do, you are still less likely to find a job than your male counterpart.

A recent ILO *Global Employment Trends for Women* identifies a number of key gender gaps in the labour market at the global level (ILO, 2012a). First, women suffer from higher unemployment rates than men, and this gap has widened since 2009. Second, employment-to-population ratios continue to show gender gaps (figure 1), although these gaps are narrowing over time. Large differences between regions point to persistent social and cultural factors that hinder women's employment in

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).

This policy brief outlines what skills development can do to reduce gender inequalities in labour markets. It explains the gender-related challenges that women and men face in gaining access to quality education and training and to decent jobs. It sets out policy choices that have proved effective in practice, building on recent international research and experience from ILO country-level work.

certain regions of the world. The same regional disparities can be observed for labour force participation rates. Third, more women are in vulnerable employment, particularly as contributing unpaid family workers.¹

Educational statistics show a different picture. Except for certain countries where female participation is still low,² girls are catching up with boys in primary school enrolments. For secondary education, approximately the same number of countries shows higher enrolment rates for females as for males. In tertiary education, female enrolments are higher than male in a majority of countries (World Bank, 2012).

¹ The employment-to-population ratio is defined as the proportion of a country's working-age population that is employed (salaried or non-salaried). The labour force participation rate includes those looking for work. Those in "vulnerable employment" comprise contributing family workers and own account workers (as opposed to wage and salaried workers).

² The exceptions are seven countries (five of them in sub-Saharan Africa, where female enrolment is 60% or below).

The ILO supports skills development to improve the employability of workers, the productivity of enterprises and the inclusiveness of economic growth.

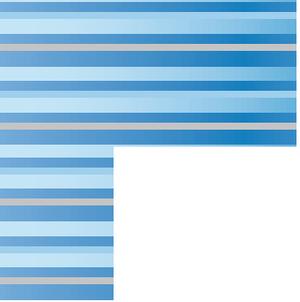
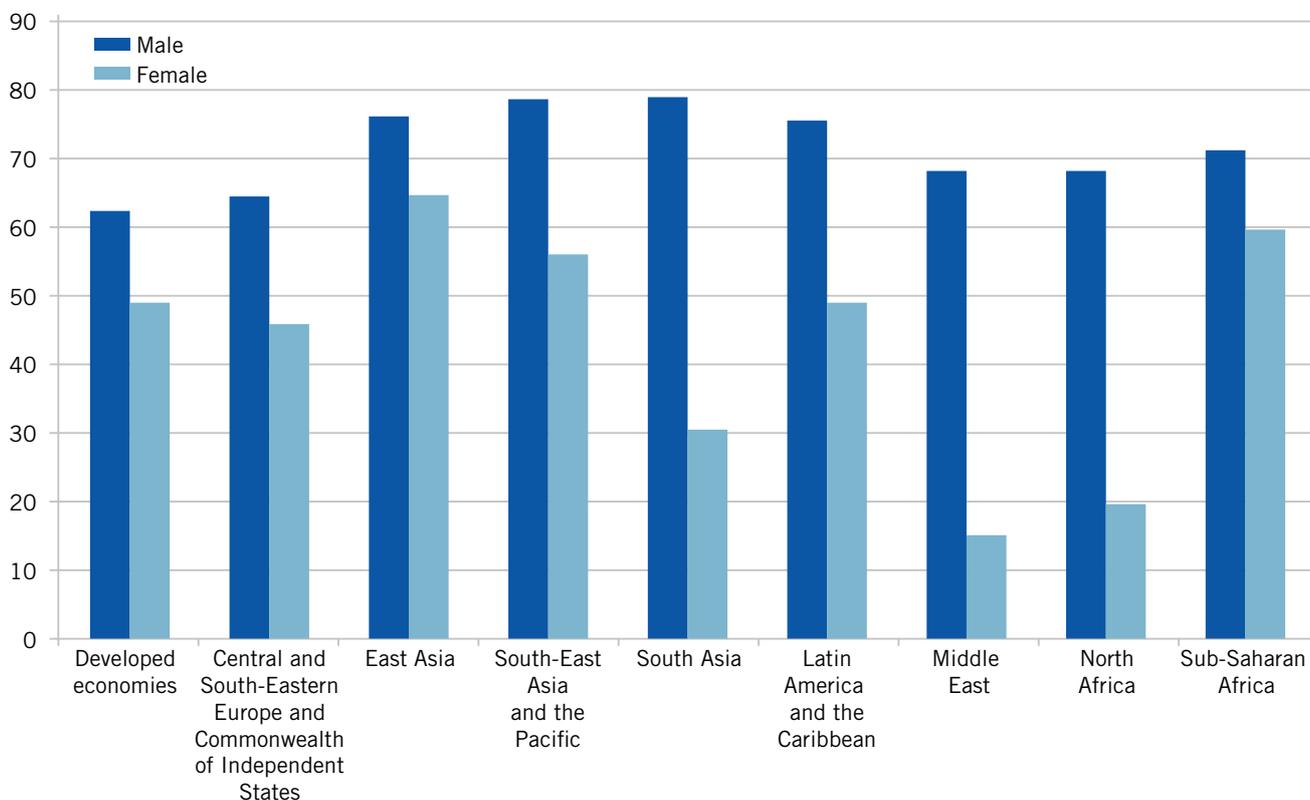


Figure 1. Employment-to-population ratios, by region, latest available year (%)



Source: ILO, 2011, world and region aggregates, table R2, "Employment to population ratio".

Comparable statistics at the global level on skills development, which includes formal technical and vocational education and training (TVET), non-formal education and training, and apprenticeship in the informal economy, are lacking owing to the heterogeneity in systems across countries.

What are the main challenges?

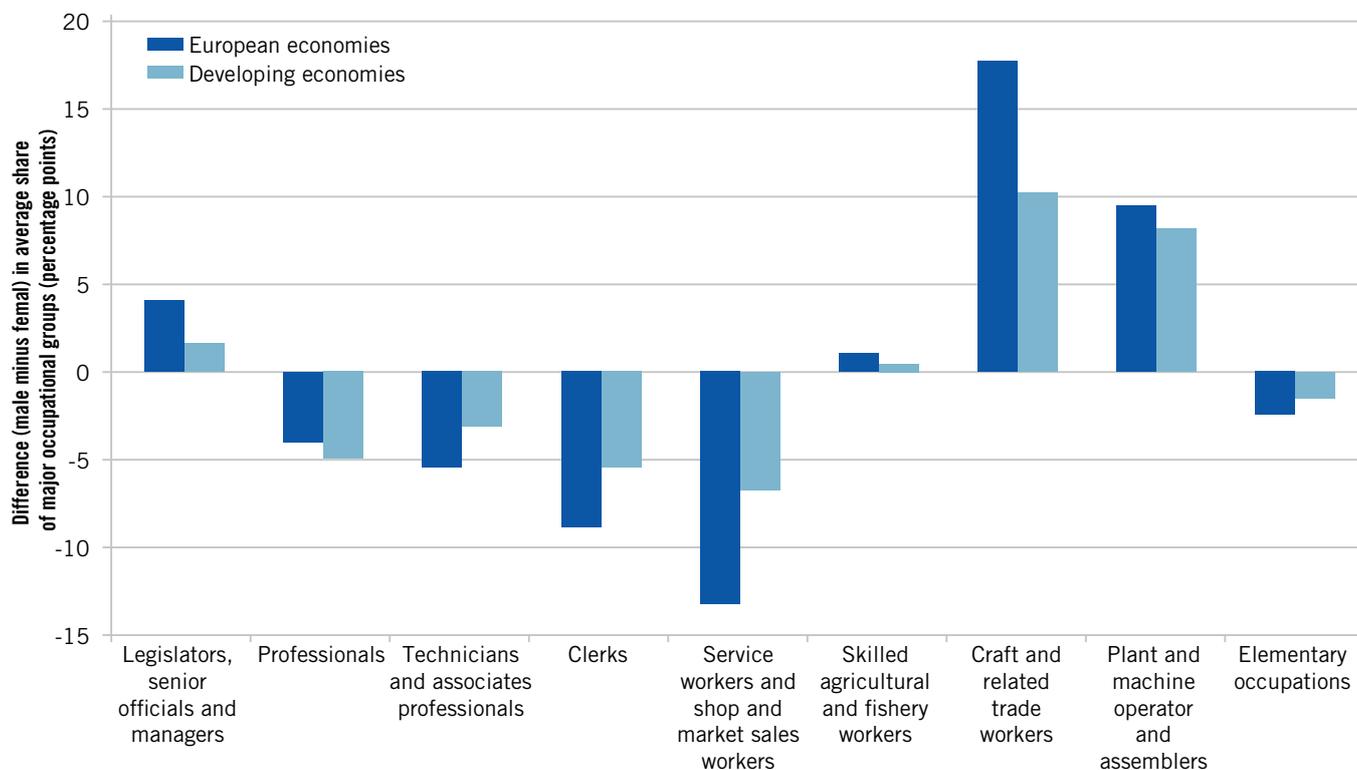
Occupational choices remain gender biased

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 (UNDAW, 2009). This vertical segregation is usually not associated with higher levels of skills or experience.

Figure 2 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.

Figure 2. Differences in average shares of major occupational groups by sex in selected developed and developing economies, latest year available after 2000



Source: *Global Employment Trends for Women (ILO, 2012a)*.

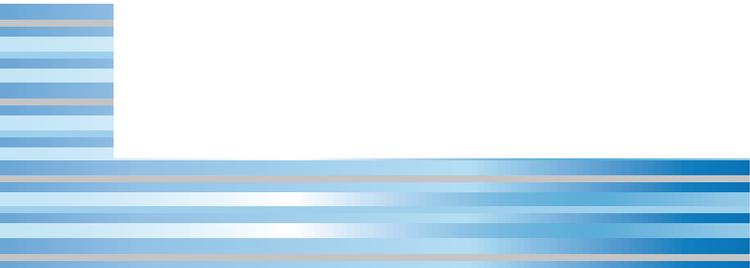
Trends over time in most regions show a persistent overrepresentation of men in industry, with women moving out of agriculture directly into services, in particular education and health. The exception is Asia, where women have also moved into manufacturing.

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, 2009)

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

While there is evidence at 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



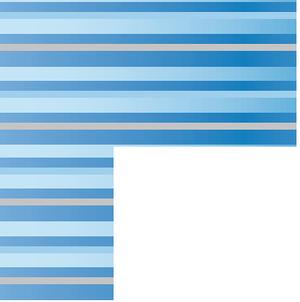
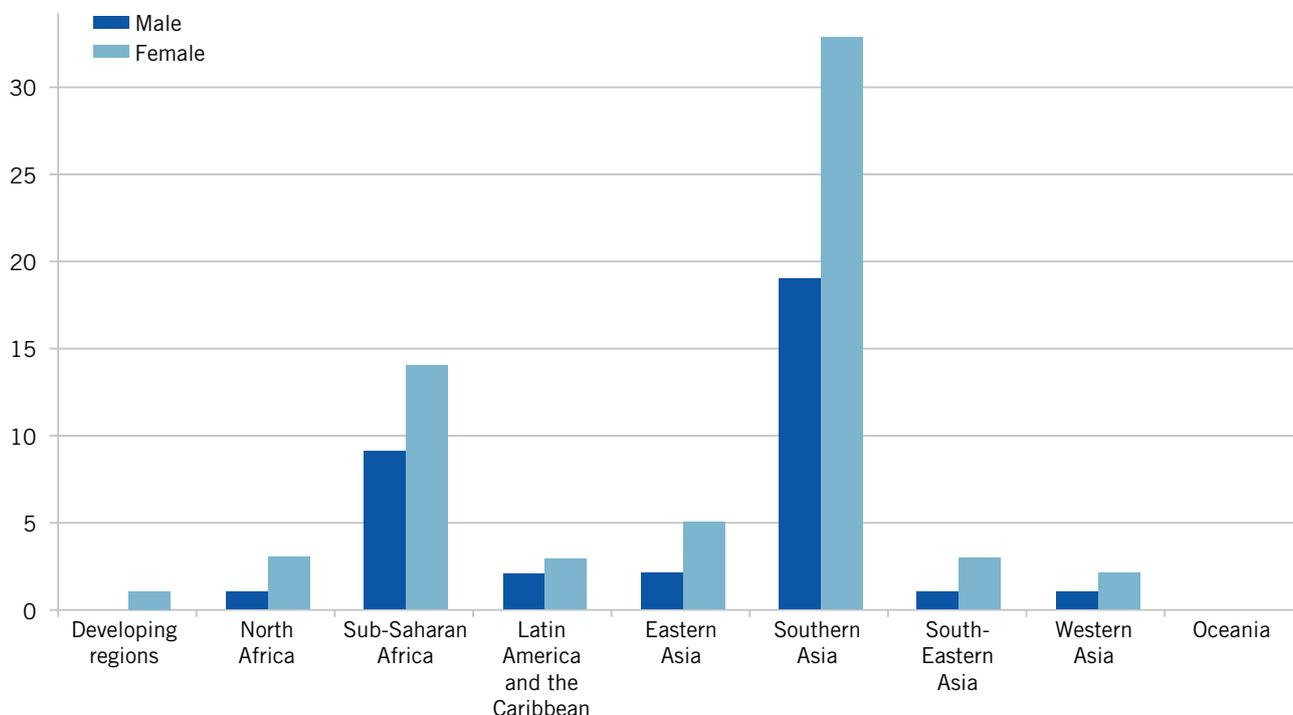


Figure 3. Share of women and men unable to read or write, latest data available (%)



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics database, 2013.

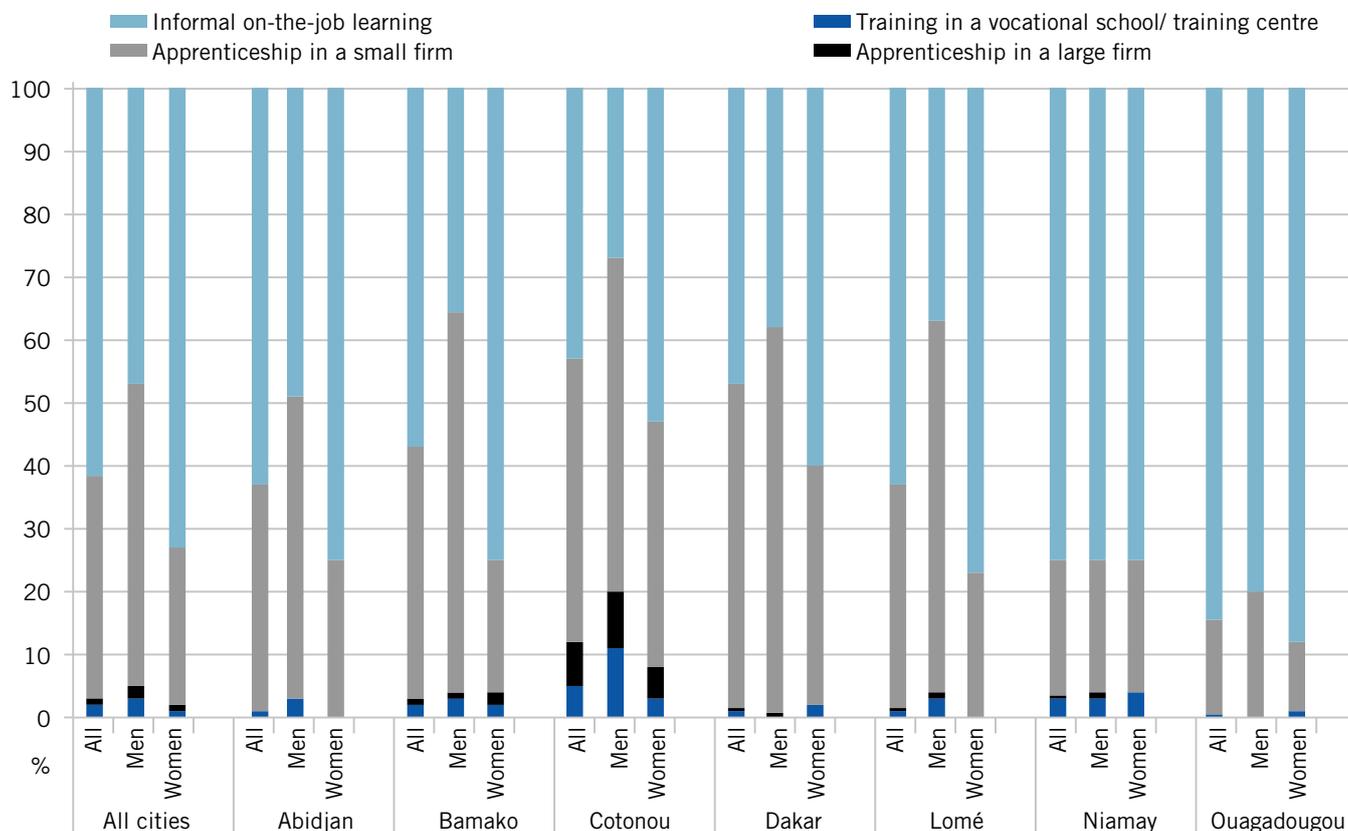
available is often difficult to reach and insufficiently flexible. These difficulties are particularly acute in traditional societies, where families are often less willing to invest in a girl's education because of established practices of early marriage, low remuneration for women's work, familial reservations regarding women working outside their homes, and expectations that girls and women will do most of the household chores. As a consequence, educational disadvantage accumulates throughout women's lives as basic education is often a prerequisite for further skills development.

Figure 3 shows the proportions of illiterate women and men by region. Although marked discrepancies remain, global trends are promising: whereas in 1990 there were 90 literate young women for every 100 literate young men, this number increased to 95 in 2010 (UN, 2012).

Women are also more often confined to informal employment than men, and to unpaid care work, which also limits their chances of accessing education and training (ILO, 2013). In addition, women are under-represented in informal apprenticeship, the traditional training system prevalent in many countries with a large informal economy. According to an analysis of 1-2-3 surveys³ in the informal sector in West Africa conducted in 2002 and 2003, women tend to acquire skills through unstructured, informal on-the-job learning, rather than by way of informal apprenticeship from an experienced master crafts-person in a small firm as men tend to do.

³ 1-2-3 surveys are used around the world to analyse employment in the informal economy. They follow three phases: a household survey, a survey of informal production units, and a household consumption survey.

Figure 4. Distribution of young workers/learners in the informal economy of West Africa, by training, sex and city, 2002–03 (%)



Source: C.J. Nordman and L. Pasquier-Doumer, 2012. Vocational education, on-the-job training and labour market integration of young workers in urban West Africa, working paper, Université Paris Dauphine, Oct.

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 in gaining appropriate work. Thus in low-income countries, there are likely to be more women than men among the NEET (OECD, 2012). In many developing countries, tertiary education is not as readily accessible to women as to men.

Where public provision for 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 are unable to enter it at all.

There is also an element of skills mismatch in some regional labour markets. While there is no clear evidence of a gender dimension in over- or underqualification in OECD countries (Quintini, 2011), 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 the education and skills they have acquired (ILO, 2012a). In the UK, women’s underutiliza-

Box 2. Overcoming traditional occupational gender stereotypes: Palestinian women engineers

Until recently women civil engineers have been almost entirely absent from the construction industry in the Gaza Strip. To address this bias, the Skills Development Training Programme for Female Civil Engineering Graduates was launched in 2011.

The project was implemented by the Community Service and Continuing Education Deanship (CSCED) of the Islamic University in Gaza, in collaboration with the ILO and with support from the Spanish Government. It proceeded in two phases. In the first phase, the university organized training for female graduate engineers through qualified trainers, involving extensive practical work with a focus on the management of construction projects; tasks included writing reports, preparing payments and bids, and working with appropriate software. In the second phase, the women engineers were sent on placements of three to four months with 70 construction companies in the Gaza Strip, organized through contacts provided by the Palestinian Contractors' Union.

As well as providing training and placements, the project helped to change attitudes to the recruitment of women among construction companies and their staff. It was initially difficult for women engineers to work in a male-dominated team, as their male colleagues did not trust their abilities – until they were proved wrong. The project was able to change the stereotypical image of women in construction companies, and most female engineers remained employed by the host companies after the end of the project

Note: Information on this and other case studies presented in this paper is based on project documentation and interviews with ILO project staff..

Box 3. Gender mainstreaming in training institutions in Central America

The national training institute in Costa Rica, Instituto Nacional de Aprendizaje (INA), 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.

The institution conducted a gender analysis of its structure and procedures, of the Costa Rican labour market, and of the services provided to the public. Despite the fact that 50 per cent of trainees were women, 27 out of 37 training programmes showed clear gender segregation, with trainees in 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, a gender policy for INA was drafted, including a five-year action plan for 2013–17. In March 2013, the study, policy and action plan were launched at a national forum on the gender mainstreaming policy of INA.

In view of the success of this work in Costa Rica, the 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). Similar studies are currently being replicated in other countries in the region, to be followed by validation workshops to agree on an action plan and concrete next steps.

The work is being supported by the Spanish-funded project FOIL (Formación, orientación et inserción laboral), implemented by the ILO.

tion of higher-level qualifications has been persistently evident, while the same phenomenon has become apparent for men only recently (Schuller, 2011). Across the EU, women are expected to outnumber men among highly qualified workers aged 25–39 years by 2020, and the proportion of women with low-level qualifications is expected to decline more steeply up to this date. Among the reasons put forward for these trends is government encouragement for investment in skills for women (Cedefop, 2012).

Women also face more barriers than men to becoming entrepreneurs and to starting their own businesses. The main reasons include time constraints (primarily owing to care

responsibilities), lack of access to productive assets such as land and credit, and lack of access to information or relevant networks (World Bank, 2012).

In many developing countries, women are over-represented in outmigration and the resulting “brain drain”. The emigration rate of skilled females (defined as those having at least one year of post-secondary education) in low-income countries was 10.2 per cent in 2000, compared to 6.3 per cent for skilled males. This is attributed mainly to women being discouraged from staying in their native countries by the lack of economic opportunities for women there (Bang and Mitra, 2011).

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

More men than women pursue careers in engineering, mathematics and other science-related subjects. While the percentage of female graduate students in engineering has increased in some countries, including the United States, even there women comprised only 14 per cent of the engineering workforce in 2011, rising from 12 per cent in 2003 (US Congress, 2012; SWE, n.d.). Women still predominate in the “soft sciences”, including the humanities, arts subjects and education.

The gender differences observed in higher education are even more marked in vocational training. 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 all male trainees graduate from a programme in one of these fields. The female shares are highest in the Republic of Korea, where some 30 per cent of graduates in these subjects are women, and Indonesia, where women and men graduate in equal numbers (OECD, 2012).

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 for example age and 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

- targeted to the specific context and group selected for intervention;
- designed to overcome the range of existing barriers (training fees, timing, facilities etc.) and to respond flexibly to different needs;
- 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 practice, and introduce measures to further improve access to and quality of training.

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 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 a recent example in Bangladesh, see box 4.

Improving outreach of skills development systems to those still 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 proved effective in traditional and poor communities.

Flexible hours for all types of both 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. Safe and female-friendly transport to schools or training providers near underserved areas, incentives for teachers and trainers (including female ones) to work in remote areas, and expansion of infrastructure and facilities, including accommodation for women and men from underserved areas, all have great potential for increasing outreach. Mobile training facilities and community-based training targeting local labour market needs have been proved effective in reaching large numbers of women (for a case study in Pakistan, see box 5).

To increase women's participation in informal apprenticeship, stereotypes of both male and female master craftspersons 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 eroded by stimulating demand for apprenticeships through involving women's groups in encouraging their members to approach master craftspersons for training, and by encouraging women entrepreneurs to accept apprentices.

Box 4. Promoting gender equality in TVET in Bangladesh

The Government of Bangladesh, through its National Skills Development Council (NSDC) secretariat, and in collaboration with the ILO TVET Reform Project, has taken the initiative in boosting the rate of female participation in TVET. A national consultation workshop on promoting gender equality in TVET in January 2012 generated recommendations for devising a national strategy on promoting gender equality in TVET. This strategy has subsequently been developed with the involvement of a broad range of stakeholders from the private and public sectors and with active cooperation from an informally organized gender working group. It ensures that specific gender concerns are integrated into the NSDC action plan to implement the recently approved national skills policy.

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

- increase female participation in formal TVET institutions from the current 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;
- establish an adequate data management system to capture sex-disaggregated data on TVET.

Note: For further details, see http://www.ilo.org/dhaka/Whatwedo/Projects/WCMS_106485/lang--en/index.htm.

Box 5. 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 very 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 training on core skills for improved employability, including teamwork, negotiation and conflict management, which also had the benefit of building the trainees' confidence.

The training programmes helped women to take up non-traditional occupations, including managerial positions in 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 craftspersons from Karachi. Three of these women received further training in business skills and have started their own businesses, and are now procuring orders from designers.

Lessons learned from the projects include.

1. Training must be strongly related to skills or products in demand.
2. In order to engage employers, it is best to present "opportunities for women" as a smart business/investment strategy.
3. Employers should be involved at the planning and implementation stage. 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. Visits to the training centres before hiring the trained women helped to build employers' confidence in the women's capabilities.
4. Providing transport increased participation rates and reduced drop-out rates among the women trainees.
5. Combining technical and vocational training with information on reproductive health rights proved useful in empowering women socially.

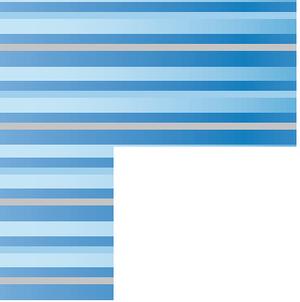
Creating gender-sensitive training environments

Teachers and trainers should receive gender awareness training to raise and address gender issues and avoid, or where necessary challenge, stereotypes. They can help to sensitize employers to these issues and encourage them to offer on-the-job training, including apprenticeships, or internships, to both women and men.

Training materials should display images of both women and men performing jobs. Safe school facilities, separate sanitation facilities, and childcare services have all been proved effective in supporting female participation in training and acceptance of facilities by trainees' parents. Rules against sexual harassment also help foster an environment based on mutual respect and gender equality. Also, interactive learning methods and role-plays foster communication, teamwork and respect, and can offer opportunities for both women and men to play different roles, as "leaders" as well as "followers".

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 deemed appropriate to young women and men that arise through their different socialization processes and their own perceptions of their abilities. Teachers', parents' and counsellors' support are crucial in encouraging young people to examine these perceptions and to raise girls' interest in non-traditional occupations, in particular those 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 can act as role models, showing that it is possible to break through gender barriers, and as mentors, providing invaluable insights into how prejudices can be overcome. Professional networks of female engineers or architects, for example, can help by offering mentoring to younger colleagues and raising awareness among employers and other professionals, exchanging experience and offering targeted training.

Employers, training providers, schools and the wider community all have parts 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.



Box 6. Encouraging Albanian women into self-employment through National Employment Services

The Albanian National Employment Services benefited from an ILO capacity-building project, launched in 2011 and supported by Italian Development Cooperation, designed to strengthen their employment and training system. One component of the project targeted vulnerable groups such as women and people with disabilities, and included assistance in designing an active labour market measure to encourage self-employment. Under this measure, women were offered grants and business training to develop entrepreneurial skills. Employment service staff were trained to administer the scheme.

The self-employment programme was advertised, and interested candidates underwent screening and an aptitude test. The women selected received training on business development and support in the preparation of a business plan. The programme also provided start-up capital.

The approach was considered successful, since businesses newly created by participants were still active at the end of the project. The combination of a culturally sensitive approach to training with financial support measures was considered the key to its success.

Key ILO resources

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Contact:

Skills and Employability Branch
Employment Policy Department
International Labour Office
4, route des Morillons
CH-1211 Geneva 22, Switzerland

www.ilo.org/skills

For more information on links between education and training and productive and decent work, visit the **Global Public-Private Knowledge Sharing Platform on Skills for Employment**, initiated by the ILO and benefiting from the support and collaboration of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the World Bank.
<http://www.skillsforemployment.org/KSP/en/index.htm>