

# Policy Brief 5



International  
Labour  
Organization

## Women in Technical and Vocational Education and Training in Yemen

### Context<sup>1</sup>

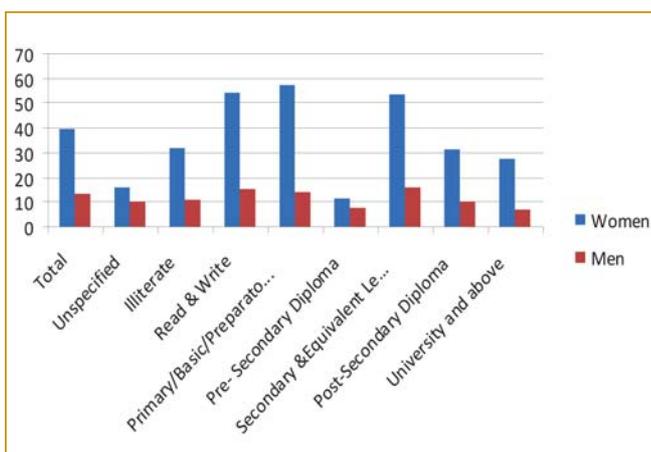
#### Skills shortages in the Yemeni labour market

Yemen has a predominantly young population that is increasingly becoming more vulnerable to unemployment. The limited ability of the formal education system to prepare young people for the labour market is leading to a chronic “skills shortage”. Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) can play a role in delivering skilled persons to the labour market. However, TVET institutions only absorb 0.2 per cent of each annual cohort in upper secondary education, and young women’s enrolment in these institutions was estimated at a low 13 per cent in 2007 (MoTEVT, 2007).

Overall, female participation in Yemen’s labour market has been bound by a number of factors that include low educational levels, early marriage, high fertility rates and cultural negative perceptions associated with “women workers”. The traditional gender roles that are observed in Yemen means that women are often concentrated in sectors that are traditionally associated with their gender roles, especially in community, social, and personal services. Women are mostly occupying jobs such as clerks, secretaries, customer service, teachers and nurses, jobs that are considered “feminine”.

The vast majority of employed young women in Yemen are self-employed, whereas the majority of employed young men are in wage employment.

#### Unemployment rates by level of education and sex, 2004 (%)



Source: MPIC & CSO, 2007.

#### Facts and figures on Yemen:

- Yemen's population has doubled in size since 1990
- Estimated number of persons entering the labour market each year (2009-2011): 227 thousands
- Unemployment rates (2004): Men: 13.1 percent; Women: 39.5 per cent
- Share of the unemployed who have never worked before (2004): Men: 68.2 per cent; Women: 94.5 per cent

Source: ILO, 2008; MPIC & CSO, 2007.

<sup>1</sup> This brief is based on an ILO situation analysis conducted by Lara Uhlenhaut in collaboration with Salwa Al Moawad, assessing the participation of women in Technical and Vocational Education and Training in Yemen.



## Status-in-employment by sex and age group, 2004 (%)

	15-19	20-24	25-59	60+	15-19	20-24	25-59	60+
<b>Employer</b>	2.1	3.1	5.0	9.0	1.0	1.2	1.6	2.3
<b>Employee</b>	49.6	61.0	63.3	37.1	17.5	46.4	56.8	20.2
<b>Own-account worker</b>	16.1	18.7	26.0	47.4	7.8	8.4	14.4	29.0
<b>Contributing family worker</b>	25.2	13.8	4.0	4.1	39.8	24.0	19.8	19.9
<b>Unspecified</b>	7.0	3.3	1.6	2.4	33.9	20.0	7.4	28.7
<b>Total</b>	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

**Source:** Computed from MPIC & CSO, 2007.

The increase of recent poverty levels in Yemen is forcing more and more women to seek work and support their families. Sole incomes from male “breadwinners” are not proving enough to make ends meet, a situation that is found across various social classes in Yemen. Financial necessity is therefore increasingly dictating the entry of women into the labour market.

Within this context, this policy brief sheds light on young women’s participation in TVET system in Yemen. It makes the case that better access and integration of women to the TVET system can significantly enhance the absorption of more young women in the Yemeni labour market.

## Women and TVET

### Persistence of traditional gender roles

Young women’s low enrolment rates in TVET institutions mainly stem from the perception that these institutions provide skills associated with manual labour dominated by men. Particularly in the context of Yemen where strong traditional gender roles prevail, women continue to be under-represented in the TVET system.

*“In Yemen, society’s perception of vocational training is not that good. They think it is only for people who want to become manual labourers. On top of that, they think it is mostly for boys. Some think that girls in vocational training institutes*

*will be exposed to boys and be bothered by them, but this is not true.”*

**Soad, 24 years old, 2 year diploma in secretarial work.**

The majority of women in TVET institutions are found in traditionally “feminine specializations” such as sewing, embroidery, handicrafts and hairdressing, which are already oversaturated and with limited returns in terms of income.

### Increased and diversified participation

Despite this overall, somewhat discouraging picture there is evidence of young women entering non-traditional specializations, though few in numbers. According to the Department of Women Workers in the Ministry of Technical Education and Vocational Training (MoTEVT), enrolments of women in TVET institutions in 2008-2009, ranked according to level of participation, were: computer programming; office management; accounting; child nursery; marketing; management; photography; desktop publishing; interior design; PC maintenance; plants production; networks; telecom engineering; engineering construction and building construction.<sup>2</sup> Graphic design and digital multimedia are the most popular courses for women in Sana’a Community College in 2008-2009. Women’s increased participation is also evident in the newly established National Hotel and Tourism Institute (NAHOTI) in Sana’a.

<sup>2</sup> Participation is limited ranging from 256 enrolments for computer programming down to just three enrolments in construction.

*“Photography has a lot of job opportunities in Yemen. Yemen is in desperate need of women to photograph the women in their parties and weddings. My family wasn’t encouraging at the beginning. They thought video and photography were just hobbies, not sources of income. My parents only know about regular jobs like teachers, doctors and engineers. Personally I like the course; it is new and makes me feel unique; it suits my interests.”*

**Sahar, 20 years old, Video photography operator.**

Participation of women in the TVET institutions is more widespread in the larger governorates of Aden, Hadramout, Hodeidah, Taizz, Ibb, Dhamar, and Sana’a. The highest and most diverse participation is found in the governorate of Taizz. Sana’a, despite being the capital, has little diversity in distribution of women across different specializations in these institutions.

Largest numbers of women participate in TVET institutions in commercial institutes (secretarial, administrative, and accounting) or traditional skills (such as sewing, ceramics, hairdressing among others) in Sana’a. There is a recent trend of increase and diversity of participation in Community Colleges in courses such as information and internet technology and graphic design. Aden is also witnessing trends similar to Sana’a when it comes to women’s participation in TVET institutions although Aden had a tradition of women in non-traditional fields such as carpentry, electrics, and mechanics in its history, prior to unification.

## General Challenges faced by TVET

### Cultural bias against technical education

Cultural bias against technical education and vocational training is evident in Yemen as in many other developing countries. This bias is shared by parents, young graduates, employers and society at large. To many, TVET system is associated with “drop-outs” and “second-class” education. Moreover, the TVET system is mostly targeting urban young men from relatively well-off backgrounds. The limited capacity of the TVET system to absorb the graduates means that entrants are selected according to grades, thus marginalizing the economically vulnerable and socially excluded with lower educational performance.



### Lack of linkages with the labour market

A common assessment of the TVET system in Yemen is that it is mostly supply-driven without sufficient links to the private sector and almost no links with employment institutions or the secondary school system. This is consistent with the view in Yemen, especially amidst the private sector and the business community, that the formal TVET system needs to improve graduates’ qualifications and provide skills with more relevance to labour market needs.

### Lack of human and financial resources for technical education institutes

TVET institutions often struggle with lack of resources and equipment. The theoretical and often outdated nature of the curriculum and the poor qualifications of teachers and trainers are often connected to the low salaries driving away qualified trainers. Investments to date have concentrated more on construction of new institutes and less on improving teachers’ skills and development of existing curriculum. Institutions are also not using their full potential by functioning only on a one shift per day.

### Lack of coordination with employment offices

Coordination between TVET system and employment offices is currently quite weak. There are limited services for young people to access job counselling and career guidance, which creates in itself an obstacle. The Ministry of Social Affairs & Labour (MOSAL) has a network of employment offices with recruitment offices in major cities, designed to link job seekers with the private



sector. However, these offices do not provide employment counselling or skills development referrals, and are mostly ignored by both employers and job seekers. In fact, about 80 per cent of hiring in Yemen is done through personal networking. Only an estimated 2.4 per cent of employees found their job through employment offices (CSO, 2007).

### Specific challenges facing women in TVET institutions

Despite the increase in the participation of women in TVET institutions and the evidence pointing to women entering non-traditional fields, their participation in these institutions remains limited. There are a number of important factors that lead to this limitation, of which are described in the following sections.

### Double discrimination facing women in TVET system

Compared with young men, young women in Yemen are disadvantaged in entering the TVET system due to the traditional perception that TVET provides second class education. Cultural hindrances, while important, do not pose the main obstacle to the entrance of more women in the TVET institutions. Lack of awareness of what TVET institutions offer is more likely to be the key factor inhibiting more women from entering the TVET system. Due to the limited capacity of the TVET institutions to absorb the increasing number of applicants, awareness raising campaigns to reach out to potential women applicants are limited. Hence, in comparison to men, women are generally less likely to hear about vocational training opportunities.

### Lack of initiatives targeting women

Non-mixed classes in mixed vocational and technical institutes, where the majority of students are young men (i.e. industrial institutes), pose an impediment to the entry of young women in TVET. Priority must be given to women, particularly those entering male dominated domains, even if this would mean initial provision of non-mixed classes.

### Saturation of traditional fields of specialization and efforts for breaking into the labour market

Women are concentrated in traditionally feminine skills specializations in the TVET system. With increasing levels of poverty, more women are enrolling in these institutions in order to provide additional income to their households. Yet many of these institutions offer very basic skills training that are often not enough to master a trade. The products produced with training from these centers are often of low quality with no connections to the markets. Women graduates, therefore, find it hard to find real income generating opportunities.

### Lack of efficient training courses

Entrepreneurship training in basic business skills is neglected in TVET institutions despite the fact that the economy of Yemen is largely based on micro and small family businesses. The need to include entrepreneurial skills courses in the TVET system is recognized in the governments National TVET Strategy.

There is little evidence of integration of entrepreneurship training in these institutions to date. There is also a lack of awareness regarding the link between self-employment and technical and vocational education and training.

### Lack of coordination with employment offices

For both young men and women job search and counselling services are limited. Employment offices in Yemen are structurally weak with little links to either the TVET system or the private sector. The fact that the majority of hiring in Yemen is done through personal networking,

makes it more difficult for women who are habitually restricted to the private sphere.

### Limited capacity of the MoTEVT to mainstream gender equality

At the institutional level, the Ministry of TEVT has made some important efforts in attracting more women to TVET institutions. These efforts include: a) added flexibility when it comes to women with regards to their qualifications; and, b) reduced fees for women entrants. The Ministry also established the Department of Women and Qualitative Training that is in charge of addressing women, people with disabilities and the socially marginalized. This approach tends to further marginalize and exclude women by treating them as part of separate “vulnerable” target groups as opposed to beneficiaries as equals to young men. Access of young women to the TVET system can be promoted in close partnership with national women organizations in Yemen that can help promote the advancement of women in select sectors.

### Lack of statistics and research

The dearth of disaggregated data and studies identifying needs of the labour market and performance of graduates in the sectors they have chosen, as well as the lack of a systematic TVET monitoring and evaluation undermine the development of objective policy and planning in order to ensure better chances for TVET graduates entering the labour market.

## Recommendations

### Raising awareness and encouraging participation of young women

Need to change the negative perceptions associated with TVET in order to encourage more participation of young women. This can be done through:

- Media campaigns featuring both young men and women;

- Large scale secondary school awareness campaigns that attract women students to TVET institutions;
- Revising the ministry’s and TVET institutions promotional materials eliminating images and messages that stereotype men with industry and women with traditional handicrafts.

*“Society is still not aware that these new fields of study have demand in the labour market. Fathers and mothers are still holding onto the idea that their daughters should ensure their future by going to universities, even though realistically there are a lot of university graduates who don’t find jobs.”*

**Rina, Video Photography teacher.**

### Creating an appropriate TVET infrastructure in Yemen for women

Need to create appropriate infrastructure for young women to enter TVET institutions; such as non-mixed classes in industrial institutes where a majority of students are men.

*“Personally, I feel comfortable with the fact that it is only girls, we feel more at ease without boys in terms of asking questions and open discussions with teachers. I find this point is encouraging for some families to let their daughters join the course.”*

**Montaha, 21 years old, Desktop Publishing diploma.**

### Adapting the TVET curricula

Need to strengthen the current TVET curricula with training in life skills and



livelihoods, as well as job search, CV writing job interviews skills among others. Training in Basic Business Skills and Self Employment (through development of basic start up packages that can teach young TVET students how to initiate their own business) could also be incorporated in the current TVET curricula. These packages can also be adapted and target vocational training institutions where women from poorer backgrounds often participate.

### Improving the capacities of MoTEVT

Need to strengthen MoTEVT capacities, considering the lack of specific targeting for women in the TVET system, to better mainstream gender equality issues in the ministry's policies and programmes. This can be done through:

- Strengthening the institutional capacities of the MoTEVT and its Woman Department to mainstream gender issues in their work and policies (i.e. through conducting a Gender Audit of the MoTEVT)<sup>3</sup>;
- Strengthening the coordination mechanisms between the MoTEVT and national organizations promoting women's employment (such as Business Women Committee, National Woman Committee, Directorate General of Women Workers and the Productive Family Centre in the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.

- Establishing a gender responsive Monitoring and Evaluation system in the MoTEVT; and
- Improving qualitative and quantitative data on young women participants and graduates in the TVET system.

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**ILO RO-Beirut, October 2009.**

Photo credits: Lara Uhlenhaut.

<sup>3</sup> The ILO Participatory Gender Audit is a well tested diagnostic tool that is used to assess gaps and strengths of a particular institution towards mainstreaming gender equality in its policies and programmes.

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