

Skills and Entrepreneurship: Bridging the technology and gender divide - Gender equality at the heart of decent work, Campaign 2008-2009

With an estimated 500 million people entering the global workforce over the next decade, coming to grips with the technological challenge is crucial. Without being "plugged in", millions of women and men risk being left behind. Since women represent a significant majority of these who do not have access, there is a clear gender dimension to the technological divide. Therefore the technology divide is multifold. It refers to a gap between countries that have or do not have easy access to technological advances. Within countries, the divide is between the socio-economic strata of societies that have access to technology and those that do not (particularly in rural areas). In addition, there is a gender gap across and within most countries: almost everywhere women lag behind men either in access to training or in the application of technology.

Why is there a wide gap in some parts of the world and not in others? It is more a question of encouragement, pervasive gender roles and attitudes rather than aptitudes, according to the OECD. Girls are far less likely than boys to study engineering or computer or physical sciences. Though women earn more than half of the university degrees in the OECD countries, they receive only 30 per cent of degrees in science and technology. The percentage of female graduates advancing to research is even smaller, representing less than 30 per cent of science and technology researchers in most OECD countries and only 12 per cent in countries such as Japan and the Republic of Korea.

Another element to look at is the degree of access women and men around the world have to information and communication technologies. Even though women hold more than 60 per cent of Information and Communication Technology (ICT)-related jobs in OECD countries, only 10 to 20 per cent are computer programmers, engineers, systems analysts or designers. The large majority of women are in secretarial, word processing or data-entry positions, requiring rather routine, low-level skills or limited technical training.

Education and skills training increase the ability of women and men to apply new techniques, thus enhancing their employability as well as the productivity and competitiveness of enterprises. Effective skills development systems –connecting education to technical training, technical training to labour market entry and labour market entry to workplace and lifelong learning - can help women and men benefit from existing and emerging opportunities.

Technological "catching up" is also supporting the transition from the informal to the formal economy. In some countries, the growth in women-owned businesses is greater than for private firms as a whole. Supporting women entrepreneurs to introduce new technologies in their enterprises enhances the potential to increase productivity, create employment, reduce poverty, and promote local development. Women go into business in a variety of forms, including self-employment, SMEs, social entrepreneurship, cooperatives and many more. For women to recognise their entrepreneurial potential, it is important to promote role models that coincide with their realities and aspirations. Women also need to overcome other barriers when deciding whether to start a business, such as limited access to credits or traditional patterns preventing women from taking part in income-generating activities or controlling financial resources.

Find out more:

- [ILO – Women's Entrepreneurship Development and Gender Equality Programme \(WEDGE\)](#)
- [ILO – Boosting Employment through Small Enterprise Development Programme \(EMP/SEED\)](#)
- [ILO – Skills and Employability Department \(EMP/SKILLS\)](#)
- [ILO – Cooperatives Branch \(EMP/COOP\) on gender and cooperatives](#)
- [ILO – Sectoral Activities Action Programme on skills and employability in telecommunications services](#)
- [ILO – Bureau for Workers' Activities \(ACTRAV\)](#)
- [ILO – Bureau for Employers' Activities \(ACT/EMP\)](#)
- International Labour Standards on Employment Promotion
- [C122 Employment Policy Convention, 1964](#)
- [C159 Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment \(Disabled Persons\) Convention, 1983](#)
- [R168 Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment \(Disabled Persons\) Recommendation, 1983](#)
- [R189 Job Creation in Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises Recommendation, 1998](#)
- [R195 Human Resources Development Recommendation, 2004](#)
- [Resource Guide - Gender equality in the world of work](#)
- [Gender Equality and Decent Work - Selected ILO Conventions and Recommendations Promoting Gender Equality](#)