



May 2024

# GENDER-INCLUSIVE SKILLING FOR AN EQUITABLE WORKFORCE

## Policy Brief



# BACKGROUND

Skilling significantly impacts women's professional trajectory by expanding their work opportunities and amplifying occupational choices. According to the **Periodic Labour Force Survey 2022-2023**, 78.5% of men participate in the labour force in comparison to only 37% of women. Additionally, on one hand, there has been a decline in the educational attainment gaps in the country and on the other hand, the gender gap in skilling and vocational training has been widening.

While unpaid care work, social norms, mobility restrictions and unavailability of 'good quality' jobs extensively contribute to women's unemployment, lack of proper skills in the changing economy also lowers the demand for women's labour. Gender gaps in skilling are further compounded by limitations in the choice and quality of training courses. Inadequate emphasis on revising curriculums to develop digital skills, communication, design thinking and leadership qualities which are in high demand also weakens the purpose of skilling centres.



To convene a dialogue on the existing gender balance in India's skilling landscape, a (virtual) panel discussion- **Gender Inclusive Skilling for an Equitable Workforce** was organized on May 15, 2024. The conversation brought together the research community, practitioners and policymakers to converse on the existing gender gaps in skills and policy measures to address them.





## POLICY SUGGESTIONS

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- **Women centric awareness programs on skilling initiatives:** Several initiatives are being run by the Government to ensure skill development of youth, especially women in the country. The knowledge gap about these programs is even more fundamental to women due to their skewed access to technology that majorly embeds such information. The panel stressed on the importance of creating awareness on skilling initiatives using mediums accessible to women.
- **Holistic approach towards skilling:** The significance of ensuring end-to-end service provisions for women taking up skilling courses is immense. The service must focus on helping them enroll in the courses, ensuring its successful completion and finally helping them find a job post completion of the program. The comprehensiveness of this modus operandi has the potential to inspire youth, especially women to enroll into these skilling programs.
- **Vocational training within school education system:** Strengthening the skilling ecosystem demands a new education policy that embeds vocational training within the school education system. Incorporating learnings from best practices in other countries where starting early has helped improve educational gender gaps, Indian school education system must include vocational trainings to efficiently build on learning outcomes and employability.

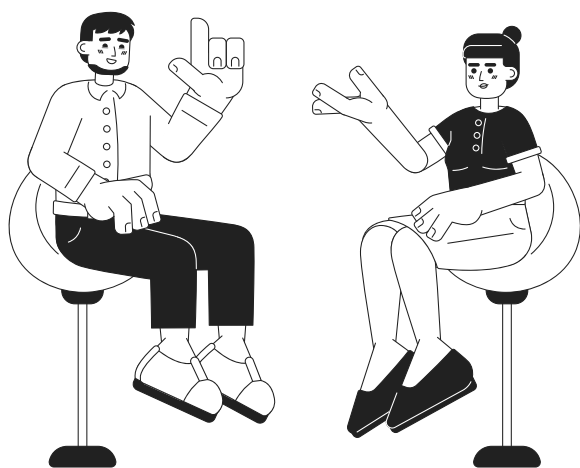


- **Choice and quality of skills imparted:** Very few Industrial Training Institutes cater exclusively to women, which involves courses like computing, soft skills etc. hinting at the occupational segregation that women fall prey to. Instead of only focusing on conventional domain specific skilling, women need trainings to improve their employability and possibility of career progression. In case of entrepreneurs for instance, in addition to teaching how to make products, incorporating courses like business plan development, costing, financial management, open-source software, and relevant soft skills like leadership, communication and problem solving can diversify the skilling framework.
- **Improving physical and financial access to skilling centres:** It is pertinent to direct policy initiatives that can improve women's access to the skilling centres. Mobility restrictions at home due to household responsibilities, safety issues and poor infrastructure disable women to enroll in skilling programs. Access can be improved if skilling centres are established at local levels to cater to women- it is essential to bring skilling to women instead of expecting women to relocate. In addition, provision of soft loans or subsidized fees for high quality skilling courses for women, will help address their financial constraints.
- **Improving matching with employers:** Evidence suggests that women have worse employment outcomes post skill training, relative to men. Several studies have highlighted social networks as key to women's development, this holds true even in the skilling ecosystem. Embedding role models with steady career progression within skill development networks have the potential to inspire women to enroll into programs in addition to it, alumni networks can enable a strong referral system for last-mile connection to the employer.



# FURTHER RESEARCH AND SCOPE

The discussion broadened our understanding of the potential that quality skilling programs have in increasing women's labour force participation. Quoting several studies and field experiences, the panel highlighted that distance to skilling centres, credit constraints and the heavy burden of care work at home disables women to access skilling programs. While designing holistic skill courses has been a key policy suggestion by the panel, converging the various existing skilling initiatives of Ministries and Departments to enable efficient outcomes was also emphasised by them. While evidence on the effectiveness of some of these policy measures is more robust than the others, all of them require regular evaluation at various stages to understand the effectiveness and the need for scaling up. Additionally, with the increasing need for analyzing employment outcomes after skilling, the **Digital Platforms and Women's Economic Empowerment** initiative's study on gaining deeper insights into matching frictions in the labour market has been a remarkable move. In collaboration with online job platforms, the study is developing targeted interventions to identify key patterns of demand and supply on these platforms and thereby reduce job-matching frictions to foster better economic outcomes, especially for women.



*The speakers who joined the discussion, brought with them a myriad of academic, industrial and field level experiences in the domain of women's skilling and economic empowerment. Moderated by **Dr. Sona Mitra**- Director of Research and Policy at the **IWWAGE**, the panel included **Prof. Farzana Afridi**- Professor of Economics at the Indian Statistical Institute, **Ms. Susan Thomas**- National Health Coordinator at **SEWA** and **Ms. Poulami Bhattacharyya**- Head of Women Entrepreneurship vertical, **NASSCOM Foundation**.*

Digital Platforms for Women's Economic Empowerment (DP-WEE) is a project led by Prof. Farzana Afridi, Indian Statistical Institute (ISI), supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF), and housed at LEAD at Krea University, IFMR (Institute for Financial Management and Research) & the Center for Research on the Economics of Climate, Food, Energy and Environment (CECFEE), ISI Delhi.

To learn more, please visit the website: [www.digitalplatformsandwomen.ifmrlead.org](http://www.digitalplatformsandwomen.ifmrlead.org)

