Preparing future generations of women for new jobs demands: skilling, re-skilling, digitalization and automation

The International Labour Organization (ILO)

Summary of text:

Globally, young women are twice as likely as young men not to be in employment, education or training. These gender gaps are even more pronounced when discrimination is compounded by intersecting factors such as disability, race and ethnicity, HIV status, SOGIESC and socio-economic status. Ensuring that current and future generations of women benefit from new or different job demands triggered by digitalization and automation requires closing digital gender divides as well as gender gaps in education, including technical and vocational education and training, and removing invisible barriers such as gender stereotypes, sticky floors and glass ceilings.

New technologies and digitalization can provide opportunities to increase women's access to decent employment, including through the facilitation of more flexible working arrangements and the potential reduction of certain occupational hazards. However, digital jobs, digital platforms and remote or teleworking working arrangements may come with risks of reinforcing gender roles and making online work a highly feminized alternative to office-based work. They may also limit women's opportunities to interact with others and remain visible in relation to career opportunities. Online work also carries an increased risk of exhaustion and burnout, a high degree of job instability and uncertainty, and the risk of gender-based violence and harassment enabled by information and communication technologies. Tackling these risks and preventing a deepening of structural gender-based discrimination and inequality requires a gender-transformative agenda.

Key recommendations:

- Equipping women with digital and technical skills is essential. Educational and vocational curricula should be updated to consider labor market trends. National training systems should offer upskilling targeted at young women, particularly those at risk of being displaced by machines or automated processes. The combination of training and on-the-job learning, including through quality apprenticeships, has proven to be successful in both developed and developing countries.
- Active labor market policies should be prioritized, including gender responsive employment policies, skills anticipation and development, to facilitate the transition to new occupations and jobs, or to changing demands withing existing jobs. Such policies should pay particular attention to specific groups of women at risk of being left behind, such as women with disabilities, young women, racialized and indigenous women.
- Adequate social protection, including care policies and services which allow the redistribution of unpaid care work between women and men and between the family and the State, can reduce the current gender gap. Respecting rights at work, including women's rights to collective action, are also crucial to tackle discrimination in pay, safety and women's access to managerial and leadership positions.
- Social dialogue between employers' and workers' organizations can play a crucial role in minimizing the adverse impacts of digitalization and automation and maximizing the potential benefits of technological progress, including for advancing gender equality, equity and non-discrimination.