



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

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**UNEVOC**

International Centre  
for Technical and Vocational  
Education and Training

## Women and TVET

# Report of the UNESCO-UNEVOC online conference



5–15 December 2011

Moderated by Helga Foster

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# Foreword

In spite of gaining a considerable amount of attention from the international community, and although there has been a strong desire to improve enrolment rates for girls and women in TVET, especially at the policy level, efforts on the implementation level to improve women's access and participation in TVET have been lagging behind. A major reason for this may be the low knowledge base with few good practices, case studies and tools available to enable positive change on the grassroots level. Whilst UNESCO-UNEVOC put great emphasis on expanding access to high-quality technical and vocational education and training worldwide, especially relating to improving access for female learners, various factors prevent girls and women from accessing and completing TVET courses and successfully becoming part of their countries' workforce.

Guided by the Priority Gender Equality Action Plan for 2008–2013, UNESCO is strongly committed to promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. There is a powerful human rights argument and a strong developmental case for achieving gender equality in education, and attracting girls and women to TVET. When girls are educated, it is more likely that their livelihoods are improved, that education is valued, and civic responsibility is enhanced. In some countries, women constitute the majority of the population, and their potential human capital is often underutilized. Entrenched inequalities result in unequal access to and performance in education. In TVET particularly, girls and women remain underrepresented because traditional perceptions of appropriate roles for men and women in the workplace can remain largely unchallenged.

UNESCO-UNEVOC's moderator-driven online discussion touched upon the various political, economic and social barriers that prevent girls and women from successfully entering the world of work. The discussion covered the challenges faced on the implementation level, and illustrated the threats and opportunities faced by TVET bodies, institutions, and individuals in successfully providing girls and women with the skills necessary to become part of the world of work. This report on the moderator driven discussion on women and TVET contributes to greater awareness of the issues relating to women's participation in TVET. Many lessons can be learnt from this debate and particularly illustrates the need for building a strong knowledge base on good practices and success stories, which can serve to guide TVET experts on the policy-making level, as well as and perhaps even more so, support the successful implementation of such policies in improving women's active participation in TVET globally.

In the past ten years, UNESCO-UNEVOC has introduced several online services to convey its key messages, achieve its objectives and facilitate global knowledge exchange. Throughout the years, UNEVOC has continuously worked towards improving its online communication tools to enable technical and vocational education and training (TVET) policy makers, researchers and practitioners from around the globe to access valuable information and communicate with each other. In a world where social media enable instant communication, the way we use online services constantly changes. In this context, UNESCO-UNEVOC is dedicated to continuously upgrading its online services to meet the challenges faced in TVET development worldwide. To facilitate knowledge exchange, UNESCO-UNEVOC established the *e-Forum*, an online discussion board that, since its inception in 2003, has become a global online community with over 2000 TVET experts taking part in crucial discussions on TVET-related issues.

To further promote focused debates on crucial themes in TVET, the Centre introduced the first moderator driven *e-forum* discussion on the topic of women and TVET. Through these discussions, UNESCO-UNEVOC aims to enhance awareness and encourage wider debate and understanding, including the sharing of ongoing practices and the formulation of new ideas in the field of strategy and policy development. The discussions, guided by an expert in the field, seek experiences, expertise and feedback and wishes to inspire people to take further action.

Shyamal Majumdar  
*Head of UNESCO-UNEVOC*

# 1. Introduction: Procedure and topics of the online conference

In many countries, TVET and employment programmes have been gaining increased attention from policy makers and other stakeholders. At the same time, women are becoming an increasingly important constituency in the economy, and their right to participate in education and training on an equal basis with men has become part of the internationally-endorsed Millennium Declaration and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)<sup>1</sup>.

Today, most national laws formally strengthen gender equality and prohibit discrimination. However, it has been difficult to focus attention on equal opportunity efforts specifically within TVET. Whilst a considerable amount of knowledge has accumulated during recent decades through research and the practical understanding of the general strengths and weaknesses of TVET, information concerning the role of women in TVET is somewhat limited; likewise are discussions about the role that TVET must play in a more comprehensive equality policy.

The UNESCO-UNEVOC online conference on Women and TVET was initiated to gauge the existing conditions for equal access and participation of women in TVET, and furthermore to identify existing gaps between political intentions and the actual situation for the equal access of women to TVET.

The objective of the online conference was to explore the prevalent impression that policies, actions, initiatives and outcomes of TVET are inclusive for everyone and relate to the actual situation of women as well. A key aim was to learn more about how different countries, institutions, sectors and programmes are affected by these issues, and how they administer gender-specific needs and demands (including cultural and labour-market traditions) in effecting access to TVET.

The online discussion on women and TVET was conducted through the e-forum<sup>2</sup>, an online community for TVET themes run by UNESCO-UNEVOC. This large community of TVET experts and practitioners was asked to join the online discussion on Women and TVET. The online discussion was announced on the UNEVOC website, Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, as well as on the website of the UNESCO's Division for Gender Equality and through its Gender Focal Point Network. Finally, notice was also given to the community of the Institut Destree<sup>3</sup>.

With the focus on TVET and due to the short period of 10 days available for discussions, topics of a more general nature were not included. Yet several contributions by the participants made clear the limitations of TVET for women if there are no fundamental changes in the overall chances of women's education, labour-market situation and their position in society.

The moderator initiated thematic introductions to prompt particular topics of discussion, but participants also broached additional topics and questions based upon their experiences in TVET.

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<sup>1</sup> The MDGs were decided in 2000 at the 23rd special session of the United Nations General Assembly. Of particular relevance is goal 3 on gender equality and women's empowerment. More information about the MDGs can be found here: <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>

<sup>2</sup> The UNESCO-UNEVOC e-Forum is an e-mail list, a virtual community of TVET experts from around the world who share information and knowledge about different aspects of TVET. For more information:, visit the website: <http://www.unevoc.unesco.org/forum>

<sup>3</sup> The Destree Institute (Institut Destrée) is a private foundation established in Wallonia as a non-profit association. Acknowledged as a general service for lifelong learning and a interuniversity research centre, the Destree Institute works as a permanent think-tank while publishing studies and implementing activities related to regional development issues. For more information: <http://www.institut-destree.eu/>

The discussion was guided by the following themes:

- > The equal access of women to TVET, and the relevance of different actors, institutions, sectors, policies and evaluation.
- > The impact of traditions and cultural orientations on the participation of women and on other stakeholders in TVET.
- > The significance of the division of labour markets on women and TVET.

## 2. Summary of discussions

### a) Kickoff: Reflections and country presentations

The discussion began with participants' basic reflections about the state of TVET, in terms of being open for men and women alike. Several participants highlighted national or regional development plans for the provision of gender-neutral training, but assumed that most of these activities were insufficient to achieve substantial change.

Although TVET for women is widely considered as indispensable towards the creation of jobs and the diversification of economies, certain barriers appear difficult to overcome. In several countries, males have traditionally had better access to education, and whilst this situation has improved for girls and women during the last few decades (particularly in primary education, and in several countries even at college and university level), TVET persists with a traditional preference towards male participants.

Where TVET courses are specifically offered for women, this is typically limited to traditional female tasks in the garment, food, health and service sectors.

In some developing countries, the lack of a social acceptance for women to work alongside men determines that technical, mechanical or engineering roles are more or less off limits. Moreover, even in countries where gender equality is more advanced, women can also encounter resistance against their inclusion in technical fields within TVET.

During this first round of country presentations, it became evident that gender equality in TVET is not implemented in many countries, and typically lacks the necessary measures from different stakeholders, including training institutions and particular employment sectors.

An evident mismatch between the political intentions for equal access and the realities facing women in TVET provoked questions regarding the activities and practical experiences of the online conference's participants.

### b) What is known about the success and failures of TVET in actually reaching women?

According to the kickoff discussion, efforts to engage more women in TVET often focus on a very narrow range of activities. For the second round of discussions, participants were asked to offer their in-depth knowledge and experience about programmes that enhance the situation of women, especially with examples of good practice, with recommendations or with research results.

In several countries, women are encouraged to seek training in non-traditional occupations. Conversely, men are discouraged from entering TVET to prepare for jobs traditionally occupied by women, aware that such jobs are typically low paying and offering little social or economic acceptance and mobility.

In general, market relevance plays a major role in determining the success or failure of skills programmes, and employment prospects are crucial for encouraging successful participation in TVET. As long as such hopes are compromised by regional economic decline or gender-divided restrictions imposed on women within the employment structure, the participation rates of women will remain low.

In areas suffering from high unemployment, participants of skill programmes have often experienced the breakdown of the local or regional labour market during or after their training. With their restricted

means of mobility, women are generally less able to relocate to places offering greater employment prospects.

In developed countries, the expansion of one's skills is considered significant not only for that individual but also for economic development, whether there are immediate and relevant employment opportunities in that region or not. Government-sponsored programmes in particular follow this philosophy of human resource development, believing that a competent workforce will attract businesses and companies to regions where they can find skilled and qualified workers.

### **c) Which aspects of skill programmes determine whether they successfully generate employment and higher income opportunities for women?**

Besides the labour market, TVET itself plays a major role in the success or failure in securing employment opportunities for women. TVET institutions which supply basic facilities accommodating women (like separate washrooms, a safe and tolerable environment, additional transportation and female trainers and teachers) are considered to be better prepared to recruit female participants than training providers which ignore these basic conditions.

There are skill programmes in developing countries reaching more women in different trades, predominantly sponsored by government agencies working towards achieving equality. These TVET providers for women are successful in generating opportunities for their employment, but their capacity is far less than the actual requirement. Other programmes are closely connected with regional companies but training is strictly focused on their production lines. Whilst such programmes offer immediate employment prospects, they may limit their participants' ambitions for further career development.

Skills training for women from rural or disadvantaged communities are typically offered by NGOs. According to several participants, the NGOs offer a range of courses including general motivation for learning activities, literacy programmes, and preparation for self-employment. The success of such training activities in terms of generating employment and steady incomes is rather limited. However, a number of women who have undertaken this type of training go on to start up their own micro-businesses or engage in more demanding training activities.

The absence of counseling and support for job placements is notably absent in most TVET institutes, and as many women are not familiar with the requirements of the labour market, the lack of such support and guidance presents them with difficulties in finding employment after completing their training.

### **d) What are the central reform tendencies and governance challenges for TVET to open up a wider range of opportunities for women?**

Most contributions emphasized that the relationship between women and TVET is not confined to directly enforceable measures by TVET alone. Additional political, economic and social measures are necessary to reduce or eliminate the barriers which still exist in enabling equal access for women in TVET.

There were examples from developing countries where women are encouraged by different politically or educationally driven measures to engage in TVET. Some of these actions correspond closely to a limited range of traditional labour markets for women, others to affirmative action policies or financial support such as scholarships for female participants. In countries where a wide variety of TVET opportunities are open for women and men alike, women generally concentrate on subjects linked to trades in traditional fields.

TVET could and should offer its own share of opportunities for women by, for instance, investing more in the professional development of teachers and trainers. Particularly in technical fields, there is a need for different and new preparation for the training of female participants. However, as long as they continue to teach as usual, problems in reaching more women will persist.

Most countries have a legislation against discrimination and for supporting equal opportunities for women and men which are applicable across all parts of society. The TVET system is generally integrated in the education system of a country, and is typically faced with a complexity of instruments assessing, accrediting and controlling its different activities.

To ensure its credibility for teaching and training women, the time is ripe for TVET institutes to define their own missions and goals relating to gender equality, and to involve them in the continuous processes of monitoring and evaluation. For a holistic approach to gender equality, everyone within TVET institutes has to identify with the subject of equality, with an immediate need for appropriate indicators, tools, and processes for internal monitoring and the frequent evaluation of progress in gender-related activities.

### **e) The influence of living conditions on the access and participation of women in TVET**

On several occasions during the discussions, topics emerged which related to the living conditions of women, such as their time pressures imposed by domestic duties and responsibilities. The influence of women's living conditions (namely child-rearing and family duties) on the access and successful participation in education and training is considered accountable for many of the restrictions which they face in the labour market.

Regardless of their background, women continue to bear most child-rearing and domestic duties. This is true for developing countries as well as in Europe and North America, where sometimes a large proportion of working women's income needs to be spent on childcare and domestic help.

Home and childcare duties strongly restrict the time-management opportunities, mobility and flexibility necessary for women's full participation in education and training. After periods of child bearing (or caring for siblings), women often lose their previous connection to the labour market, and are therefore dependent on an array of re-training opportunities.

To reduce the related problems of family duties and time allocation for women, the discussion highlighted that there is an urgent need for supportive actions through different policies and stakeholders.

#### **Support by policy**

Participants in the online conference pointed to international commitments towards achieving gender equality and asked for uniform standards and policies in this issue for all UN member states.

Parental leave for both fathers and mothers does exist in several countries within selected industries for public-sector employees, yet men as fathers are largely reluctant to make use of it. Concerning daycare for children, governments are due to utilize public childcare centers, also in rural areas where currently other female members of families watch over the children when mothers are going to train or to work.

Another stipulation to ease women's access and participation in TVET could be governments' awarding of scholarships for deserving women, who would be otherwise unable to undertake such programmes.

The main policy support expected are strategies and instruments that pay attention to the developments of gender equality, and observe the process of change for the benefit of both women and TVET as a whole.

### Support by society

Many discriminatory conditions suffered by women are inflicted by society, based upon the prevalent notion that women are considered (or even treated) as subordinate to men. For the ongoing perpetuation of gender stereotypes, it does not really matter whether arguments are used concerning biological, cultural, or religious traditions, as long as women's independence and human rights are impaired. However, participants also pointed to a growing awareness of inappropriate justifications for gender separation and discrimination in many countries; they also noted that this process is much too slow to bring about the changes necessary for true and visible equality. It was stated that the main agents for change are found at the micro-level of society, in the communities, workplaces, and last but not least, families.

Some participants assigned a great influence to mass media and advertising industries, highlighting their roles in reiterating traditional gender stereotypes rather than emphasizing alternative and positive role models to the public.

It should be noted that the engaging inputs of online conference's male participants are of course not representative of the male-dominated TVET community as a whole. However, their inputs showed that they had become very supportive of balanced gender politics and issues once they were aware of the importance and advantages for the whole of society. One colleague greeted the online conference on the International Human Rights day with the statement, "Women's Rights are Human Rights".

### Support by TVET institutions

Participants' responses during the online conference were largely based on their personal experiences within the field of TVET, and/or an in-depth insight as experts for the situation of women in their respective country.

They illustrated their own experiences within TVET, characterizing an atmosphere of masculinity that is strange and often offensive to women. There were mentions of violence, scathing language from fellow students and even trainers, the lack of separate toilet and leisure facilities, absent or costly transportation, inflexible timetables, and above all the lack of female teachers, trainers and management. Such conditions are considered to be hidden causes for the low involvement of women in TVET.

Another concern is the quality of education provided. In order to attract and retain women in TVET, it is important to ensure good quality education by improving the course curricula and effectively addressing the learning needs of diversified groups of students.

In many countries, TVET has become a policy-driven component of the educational system. Much effort has been spent to upgrade and internationalize TVET through a variety of measures including internationally-acknowledged quality standards. Participants of the online conference stated the necessity and urgency of additional means of measurement and accreditation which consider the demands of women.

Rather than intentionally discriminatory notions, the lack of gender equality in TVET derives more from a lack of knowledge and insight from stakeholders about the changes caused by the growing and diverse demands of female participants.

Discussions concerning women and TVET would be incomplete without mentioning the situation of the corresponding labour market. With some exceptions, the situation strongly differs between developed

and developing countries. In countries where society traditionally segregates women from men in public life, companies will not hire women where males dominate the specific workforce. For such cases, participants in the online discussion invited solutions which pay greater attention to the conditions and quality of TVET courses in those sectors where women can find work. Often, these courses last only a few weeks or months, and are therefore limited in terms of conveying knowledge and skills. In order to increase employment chances for women, TVET may need to improve its range of job opportunities by providing comprehensive studies for women, to reach higher levels of qualifications and a wider range of possibilities within the labour market.

In general, many teachers in TVET are not familiar with the current situation and demands of the labour market. Participants of the online conference suggested that closer links between TVET and the employment sector are necessary, achieved by providing internships for the students, and offering counseling and guidance for job placements. Closer links between stakeholders, including employers as well as concerted actions to promote TVET for women, are in demand.

## **f) Experiences, innovations, and good practice: Legislation, financial and practical support for women**

The online conference's participants offered a number of missing actions, negative aspects and existing barriers, implicitly offering solutions towards the changing situation for women in TVET.

### **Legislation**

In several countries, TVET institutes are included in affirmative action plans by the government, whereby women are encouraged to seek training in non-traditional fields. To ensure gender equality on both sides, participants of the online conference also suggested encouraging men to seek training for jobs traditionally occupied by women.

Mentioned during the online discussion were positive activities for occupational training for women by a Women's Directorate. While the capacity of the training institutes is insufficient to meet the full requirements, there are other activities supporting women's enrolment in TVET, for instance to reach goals established by national TVET reforms. Institutes have to recruit female participants to meet targets set up by governments.

### **Financial support**

The lack of sufficient financial support for women in TVET accounts for several of the pressing needs for change, such as the training of teachers/trainers, systematic curriculum reform, the revision of learning and teaching materials and pedagogical skills, and for additional research. Most official activities, though sponsored by government budgets, are relatively small in scope and lack a broad, long-term impact. Investing in women's TVET, however, remains crucial as long as these resources do not last for short periods only and are connected with regulatory requirements.

In one case presented by a participant, the respective country's government offered scholarships to disadvantaged girls and women; in other cases institutes invested when they set up new courses especially for female participants.

### **Practical support**

At present there is some practical support, mainly for rural women and those who have no other choice than to become self-employed. This support consists of additional pre- or post-training courses, promoting participation in further training or initiating self-help groups and cooperatives when becoming self-employed.

## Female teachers and trainers

Several of the contributions were offered by participants who have worked as TVET teachers, trainers or managers themselves. They suggested that positive changes evolve with personal engagement and creativity from teachers and trainers, emphasizing positive female role models, cooperating closely with other members of staff, and by promoting awareness of the specific needs of women. Some of these participants looked back at 20 and more years of teaching in TVET and for some of their success they had to make several fresh starts. It is all the more admirable that they continued to work hard to reach the subsequent targets.

## Positive actions by complementary activities of stakeholders

In principle, stakeholders are directly or indirectly involved with TVET for women. All UN member states have signed equal opportunity or other policies for gender mainstreaming and are obliged by the MDGs to eliminate gender disparities at all levels of education by 2015 (Goal 3). Regarding TVET, most countries will have to make considerable efforts to reach that goal. Nevertheless, most countries are at least open to change. Due to financial problems inflicted by the present economic crisis, several countries somehow lost track of TVET for women but seem to be poised for further actions. Given that the number of girls attending primary and of secondary education is growing, the prerequisites for participation in TVET are in an increasingly strong position.

National Affirmative Action Plans, national and regional ministries, departments or directorates for Gender Equality and certain ad hoc initiatives and funding by governments show that the issue is still acute and needs to be revitalized with greater effort and more financial support. Countries with a public TVET system do invest in TVET for women, but as mentioned above, not nearly as continuously and systematically as needed.

Employers are (or rather, should be) very important stakeholders when it comes to women and TVET. When companies and businesses get involved with TVET, either by offering in-firm training places to women or by cooperating with the institutes for job placement, the situation for women and TVET looks much better concerning access to TVET. Unfortunately, there are no policies to enforce closer links between employers and TVET.

The TVET system has not yet incorporated gender equality measures to prompt the necessary level of change. Where training directly targets female participants, however, some actions have been taken to consider the special needs of women. Members of the UNESCO-UNEVOC e-forum have continued to present ideas on the topic of "Women and TVET".

## TVET and entrepreneurship for women

During the online discussion on this topic, participants commonly spoke about self-employment and micro-businesses. In respect to experiences within developing countries, TVET activities primarily addressed unemployed women from disadvantaged backgrounds with few opportunities to secure work.

Some of the follow-up studies presented about successful micro-businesses during the online conference did not come from the immediate experience of participants; nevertheless, they indicated the same factors determining success or failure as raised during the discussion.

In terms of preparing women for self-employment through TVET, critical voices pointed to problems of trainers/teachers with little market experience, deficiencies in the integration of skills-related and economic training, insufficient recurrent training, a lack of encouragement for self-help groups or cooperatives, and an absence of on-the-job training and further support until the micro-businesses are fully established.

Of these deficiencies, participants particularly underlined the low percentage of women who become successful in terms of generating sufficient income, and who are able to sustain their micro-business in the market.

To avoid this type of limited outcome, instructors need to have market experience, or at least work in close contact with respective practitioners. Besides the skills necessary to run a business, additional competencies are essential in commercial dealings with customers.

Research outcomes also showed that most women who seek to start their own business already have an idea about the product or service they want to offer. However, these are often not marketable or find themselves in over-saturated markets. To avoid encountering such failings, the TVET system should assist women with market research to become able to make an attractive sales pitch.

In the quest to secure a sustainable market position, cooperatives often prove to be more efficient than individual women toiling on their own. There are examples where TVET helped to provide courses to initiate and work successfully together in such collaboration.

To address the needs of women from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds, who want to or have to become self-employed, TVET needs to develop new combinations of integrated courses, including comprehensive education, work skills, market orientation, and competency development for life skills.

### 3. Lessons learnt

Whilst contributions for this online conference always strictly focused on TVET, they could not avoid revealing several conditions enforced by societies' male-dominated power structures and a gender-biased labour market, negatively affecting the ability of women to access and control the different resources necessary for independence and equality.

The state of TVET itself, with current trainers, curricula, methods, classroom and workplace atmosphere, etc., repeatedly received critical concerns through many participants' inputs. It became quite clear during the discussions that TVET is often fraught with biases, stereotypes and discriminatory practices, and that a majority of TVET institutions do not challenge but rather perpetuate gender-biased stereotypes. This prevailing situation necessitates strong demands for quality standards, instruments and tools for evaluating gender-specific aspects, and measurements for progress at regular intervals.

Strategies against gender stereotyping in society through national policies lately became visible in certain areas of education for girls and women. The worldwide illiteracy rate of women sunk respectably and, at the other end of the educational spectrum, more women than ever before enroll in universities and higher learning institutions. However, policies vary according to particular contexts and participants of the online conference are aware that policies and structural change, such as legislation for equal rights, do not induce immediate changes in society. Nevertheless, governments are asked to pass gender-related legislation with full vigour and with greater application towards TVET, also in respect of long-overdue changes in the apparent biased behaviour of employers.

The media and advertising businesses, with their strong influence on personal and social gender positions, are extensively perpetuating traditional gender stereotypes. Participants in the online conference urged media presentations of alternative and new role models concerning both men and women, and more control over sexualized advertising.

## 4. Outlook and recommendations

Priority objectives of the discussions (as summarized in previous sections) already included several recommendations. This section will refer again to the most urgent needs to make TVET more accessible and rewarding for women.

The topic of women and TVET seems to have lost some of its lustre and momentum in developed countries, and is experiencing stagnation in developing countries. There is a need for revitalization and continuous attention on all levels of discussions, research, developments, and policy decisions.

While the potential of TVET for the educational, social and occupational empowerment of women is unquestionable, it deserves a greater share of target-orientated intellectual and financial resources for the creation of new curricula, different teaching and training methods, and for other instruments, tools, and measurements for the reappraisal of the accountability of TVET and for positive change.

There is an urgent need for binding and unified strategies of all stakeholders of TVET, as well as the enforcement of existing policies and legislature for gender equality.

Participants in the online conference also alluded to women from disadvantaged backgrounds and rural regions. Here, the overall requirement for education and training differs considerably to those women from economically advanced backgrounds and/or urban areas, where a variety of TVET programmes are located. In the future, the issue of TVET for disadvantaged women warrants greater attention and more financial support. In addition, the low mobility of women, especially in rural areas, urges the need for direct financial support, for instance free transportation and/or scholarships.

The labour market plays a critical role in influencing TVET, and therefore governments need to demonstrate more political will to convince the economic sector about the necessity of gender equality. TVET institutes should direct their programmes to the realities of regional labour markets, especially to those which are more open to women.

There are hidden causes for the low motivation and participation of women, resulting from a lack of additional facilities and the behaviour of teachers and trainers. Established and new TVET institutions alike must dedicate effort and resources towards supplying female students with the necessary facilities for daily hygiene and leisure. To ensure that the behaviour of teachers and trainers does not discourage women from accessing TVET, they should be trained in gender-sensitive behaviour, language and methodologies. One of the most crucial points recognized during the online discussion was the overall lack of female TVET teachers or trainers. To fill this gap, more women should be encouraged and supported within all levels in the education system to engage in technical fields and to become TVET teachers and trainers.

It must be noted that changes should not be one-sided in favour of women entering traditional male sectors of TVET. To bring genuine changes in gender stereotypes, boys and men should be encouraged and guided to enter TVET sectors traditionally occupied by female students.

In summary, the discussions reflected that TVET is generally gender-biased, underachieving, and lacking in innovation. Available models of good practice are typically not integrated within the overall TVET system; rather, they are more commonly temporarily financed and confined to certain vocational areas or geographical regions. The participating TVET experts addressed the issue of eliminating gender barriers with recommendations for basic structural changes in the training for trainers (advocating more female teachers and trainers), curriculum development, changing teaching methods, improved classroom and workplace atmospheres, and the greater involvement of males in traditional female fields of TVET. Furthermore, there was an emphasis on the urgently-needed instruments for gender-related quality standards and directives for monitoring and evaluating progress.

# Note from the moderator

Participants received notification about the UNESCO-UNEVOC online conference 10 days prior to its commencement on 5 December 2011. Almost 50 TVET experts from across the world registered, with over 30 contributions received from 13 different countries in Africa, Asia, the Arab States, Europe and North America, and Latin America. Two thirds of the active participants were female TVET experts, and the professional status of participants included positions in management, research and university teaching, plus TVET teachers, trainers and consultants. The time window for active participation was from 5 to 15 December 2011, resulting in an intensive, compact and focused discussion. Participants considered this an important opportunity provided by UNEVOC and asked to continue using different forms for sustainable communication in this community.

After the online conference had formally closed, discussions on this topic continued on the UNEVOC e-forum, bringing additional inputs to the issue.

All participants were very supportive, engaged and their contributions were of a high standard, based on their knowledge and vast experience in this subject matter.

## Addendum

Number of participants of TVET conference and countries of origin						
Argentina	Canada	Egypt	Germany	India	Kenya	Lebanon
1	1	2	1	1	1	1
Nepal	Netherlands	Pakistan	Palestine	Peru	South Africa	USA
2	1	1	1	1	1	1

Participating countries	14
Contributions	30
Participants	19 (incl. UNESCO staff members)
Women	11
Men	08

## About the moderator

Dr. Helga Foster, an expert in the field of 'Women and TVET', moderated the discussion. With over 30 years of experience in the TVET sector, Dr. Foster carried out research for BIBB (Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training, Germany) and the Institute for Social Research (Austria), in which she focused on the equal access of women in TVET, and unemployment among unskilled women. She is currently engaged in the field of TVET and skills development, labour markets and gender-mainstreaming in the European Union. Dr. Foster has been a frequent contributor to the e-forum.



Published by  
UNESCO-UNEVOC International Centre for  
Technical and Vocational Education and Training  
UN Campus  
Hermann-Ehlers-Str. 10  
53113 Bonn  
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Cover photos ©ILO / M. Crozet, R. Lord

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ISBN 978-92-95071-22-3  
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