



GENDER ISSUES IN THE LABOR MARKET AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

RESEARCH PAPER

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Strengthening Women's Participation in the Workforce

This research has been conducted by OxYGen Foundation jointly with Solidarity Center in Armenia within the framework of the project Strengthening Women's Participation in the Workforce. The project aims at promoting women's full participation in the labor market and Armenia's economy.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ARMSTAT	The Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia
CEDAW	The UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CoE	Council of Europe
F	Female
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
M	Male
RA	Republic of Armenia
STEM	Science, technology, engineering and mathematics
TVET	Technical and vocational education and training
TVS	Technical vocational school
UN	United Nations
VET	Vocational education and training

INTRODUCTION

Strengthening the system of vocational training to satisfy the new demands for skillful human resources is one of the most important issues nowadays.

The reforms of the technical and vocational education and training (TVET) system should also address the problem of gender inequality in economy and provide equal access for both men and women to new technologies, skills formation and available opportunities. This can be enhanced through gender mainstreaming of both the general system and documents regulating the sphere, which, in its turn, implies:

- Gender analysis of the labor market,
- Study of the national and international documents related to gender equality in the relevant area,
- Gender impact assessment, as well as
- Preparation of conclusions and recommendations.

The work carried out by a group of experts within the framework of the project on Strengthening Women's Participation in the Workforce, which is jointly implemented by OxYGen Foundation and Solidarity Center in Armenia, has been guided by these principles of gender mainstreaming allowing to come up with a number of recommendations on ensuring gender sensitivity of the TVET sector. The research paper focused not on the entire labor market, but only on its segment serviced by the TVET system.

METHODOLOGY

The goal of this research work was to reveal gender problems in the TVET sector and the labor market segment serviced by it, as well as to identify issues requiring more in-depth and comprehensive research.

The group of experts had to tackle the following issues:

- Is there gender discrimination and segregation in the TVET sector and the related segment of the labor market?
- To what extent do stereotypic gender perceptions impact the sector?
- Is a gender component incorporated in the professional orientation system and does it contribute to overcoming gender inequality?

To perform this work, the group of experts has applied different methods of data collection, including:

- Study of literature and documents relevant for the topic:
 - ▶ National and international legislation and documents,
 - ▶ National and international research works of the recent years related to the issue,
 - ▶ National gender statistics,
 - ▶ Five-year socio-economic development plans of the RA marzes (territorial-administrative units).
- Qualitative study:
 - ▶ Focus group discussions,
 - ▶ Interviews with five executives responsible for career centers of the TVETs in Yerevan and marz colleges.

Focus Group Discussions

Three focus group discussions were held at educational institutions of the Yerevan TVET sector, each discussion lasting one hour and a half. Each group included 20 participants: students, lecturers, administrative employees, and representatives of career centers operating at those educational institutions.

METHODOLOGY

The sampling of participants in the focus group discussions was carried out taking into consideration gender composition and representation of different age groups, as well as of lecturers and students of different professions and decision makers.

1. The colleges and technical vocational schools that were chosen were those where: There were approximately the same number of girls and boys studying different professions,
2. There were professions affected by gender stereotypes in a more pronounced way and the number of girls or boys predominated (see Appendix 1).

The focus group discussions were preceded by a brief presentation to touch upon the purpose of the meeting and issues, as well as facts and questions that were meant to help reveal and discuss opinions on the topic.

PART 1. Gender peculiarities of the labor market

Ensuring gender equality in the labor market is necessary for realization of women/human rights, which is an alienable requirement of any rule-of-law and democratic state and creates favorable conditions for full utilization of society's economic potential and, as a result, for economic growth.

Ruling out gender discrimination can in its turn contribute to providing equal access to resources, development of the economic potential of representatives of different genders, and full utilization of their talents and opportunities.

Nevertheless, the labor market is not devoid of gender discrimination. There exist several types of discrimination.[1] An example of direct discrimination is when the employer consciously discriminates against women or men and shows different approaches to employees having the same work references during hiring, dismissal, promotion, qualifications advancement and remuneration, depending on their sex. During the meetings, examples were brought when employers, providing on-the-job practice opportunities to students, made job offers to boys, though they were more pleased with the work of girls.

Women and men's positioning in the labor market is characterized by yet another circumstance, namely segregation.[2]

Professional gender segregation (horizontal segregation) is a stable trend of employment of women and men in certain professions, branches, and positions.

[1] Discrimination can be direct and indirect. Direct gender discrimination manifests:

- In the family (through unequal distribution of family duties, forced abortions, prohibitions, etc.).
- In the labor market (through different remuneration for the same or equivalent work, salary changes – increase or decrease, deterioration of working conditions, the impossibility of changing the position in the workplace, etc.).
- Forms of gender discrimination include gender violence, sexual harassment, and sexual stalking.

Indirect gender discrimination manifests:

- Through reproduction of gender stereotypes by mass media, education and culture.
- Through creation of such conditions, presentation of such demands, which have brought about or can bring about negative consequences by harming persons of certain sex. Source: <https://bit.ly/43Bgkwm>

[2] Gender segregation is a stable trend of employment of women and men in certain professions, branches, and positions. Professional segregation has two levels: horizontal and vertical. Horizontal segregation is manifest through disproportionate distribution of men and women in economy branches and professions. Horizontal segregation distinguishes “women's” and “men's” professions or sectors. Vertical segregation is evident in the hierarchy of positions or scale of ranks. //L.Zakaryan, A. Harutiunyan, Gender and Journalism, Training manual, Association of Women with University Education, Yerevan, 2010, page 171.

Vertical segregation is manifest in the hierarchy of positions or scale of ranks. In regard to vertical segregation, expressions “glass ceiling” and “gender pyramid of power” are often used when speaking about certain “invisible” obstacles impeding women’s advancement. Frequently, women having equal or even exceeding professional characteristics as compared to their male colleagues are not promoted remaining among the rank-and-file employees or, at best, in the position of a deputy. These obstacles are conditioned by gender stereotypes, as well as by “horror of success” or “self-discrimination.” The following regularity is observed: the lower the position and therefore the salary, the higher the number of women. Women’s representation begins to decrease parallel to increase in the position and, therefore, in income anticipated from that position, as well as parallel to expansion of the area of influence. Thus, position ranking resembles a pyramid with women at the bottom and men on top of it.

Overall, segregation reflects gender stereotypes prevalent in society about the social roles of men and women, which is, on the one hand, a consequence of peculiarities in socialization of girls and boys, as well as of the separation of professions existing in the field of education, and, on the other hand, negatively affects the structure of the economy creating gender disbalance and reinforcing covert discrimination.

In the segment of the labor market that services the TVET system, segregation is manifest through existence of “women’s” and “men’s” professions, which is reflected also in the area of education through unequal distribution of girls and boys with respect to professions. For example, the greater part of students specializing in the professions of “software development for computing and automated systems” and “maintenance of computer equipment and computer networks” are boys, whereas those specializing in the profession of “sewing production technology” are mostly girls. Cooking was traditionally regarded as a woman’s job; however, since, over the recent years, preference in the labor market has been given to men, the number of boys among the students of culinary art has increased.

PART 2. International and national documents aimed at ensuring gender equality in the TVET sector

In response to the international community's voiced demand related to ensuring equal rights and equal opportunities for sexes in the labor market, over the recent decades, a number of international documents have been developed serving as a guide for revision of national legislations. They include:

UN Documents

- UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 1979)
- Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995)
- Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1999)
- Sustainable Development Goals: Agenda 2030 (2015)
- UNESCO Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (2016)
- International Labor Organization's Conventions

Council of Europe Documents

- The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe Recommendation CM/REC (2002) 12 on Education for Democratic Citizenship
- The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe Recommendation CM/REC (2007) 13 on Gender Mainstreaming in Education
- The Council of Europe Recommendation of 24 November 2020 on Vocational Education and Training for Sustainable Competitiveness, Social Fairness and Resilience
- Osnabruck Declaration 2020 on Vocational Education and Training as an Enabler of Recovery and Just Transitions to Digital and Green Economies.

For example, according to Article 11 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, "States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of employment in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, the same rights, in particular:

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- (a)** The right to work as an inalienable right of all human beings;
 - (b)** The right to the same employment opportunities, including the application of the same criteria for selection in matters of employment;
 - (c)** The right to free choice of profession and employment, the right to promotion, job security and all benefits and conditions of service and the right to receive vocational training and retraining, including apprenticeships, advanced vocational training and recurrent training;
 - (d)** The right to equal remuneration, including benefits, and to equal treatment in respect of work of equal value, as well as equality of treatment in the evaluation of the quality of work;” etc.

In addition, the same article defines that in order to prevent discrimination against women on the grounds of marriage or maternity and to ensure effective right to work, the States Parties shall undertake all appropriate measures. Thus, point 2 of the Article stipulates that the state is obliged to undertake appropriate measures:

- “(a)** To prohibit, subject to the imposition of sanctions, dismissal on the grounds of pregnancy or of maternity leave and discrimination in dismissals on the basis of marital status;
- (b)** To introduce maternity leave with pay or with comparable social benefits without loss of former employment, seniority or social allowances;
- (c)** To encourage the provision of the necessary supporting social services to enable parents to combine family obligations with work responsibilities and participation in public life, in particular through promoting the establishment and development of a network of child-care facilities;
- (d)** To provide special protection to women during pregnancy in types of work proved to be harmful to them.”[3]

Since ratifying the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1993, the RA Government has submitted seven reports to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. One of the key provisions of the Convention is that the state ratifying the Convention assumes obligations to take steps towards eliminating all forms of discrimination against women and consents to be placed under oversight in that respect. After each report, the CEDAW Committee submits observations to the RA Government presenting its opinion about the implementation of the Convention.

[3] <https://www.arlis.am/DocumentView.aspx?DocID=60505>

In its Concluding observations on Armenia's seventh periodic report[4], the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women recommended, for the employment area, adopting legislation that will clearly prohibit sexual harassment in the workplace, ensuring equal remuneration for work of equal value, reconsidering salaries in those areas where predominantly women work and undertaking measures to eliminate gender segregation. For the area of education, the Committee advised to ease access to jobs and training opportunities for disadvantaged and marginalized groups of women, such as women belonging to national minorities, internally displaced women and refugees, migrants and women with disabilities, to apply targeted measures, including temporary special measures (quotas, special scholarships) to encourage education of women and girls in non-traditional areas: science, technology, engineering, business, mathematics and information and communication technologies (ICT), including provision of professional orientation to them, as well as subsidies to take care of indirect educational costs.

The critical area of concern "Education and training of women" in the **Beijing Declaration** envisions provision of equal affordability of education for women, expansion of affordability of technical vocational training, science and technology, and continuing education, development of non-discriminatory approaches in the area of education and training, allocation of sufficient resources for reforms in the field of education and oversight of their implementation, and lifelong support to education and training of women.

Almost all the goals of the **Sustainable Development Agenda** include provisions related to the subject-matter under consideration. In particular, in the education area, it is envisioned by 2030:

(4.3) To ensure access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and higher education;

(4.4) To substantially increase the number of youth and adults that have proper skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship;

(4.5) To eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for vulnerable groups.

National Legislation and Documents

The RA Constitution in effect includes a number of provisions, which aim to ensure gender equality: Article 29 provides for prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of sex, Article 30

[4] https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2FC%2FARM%2FCO%2F7&Lang=en

secures legal equality of women and men, and Article 86 stipulates promotion of employment of the population and improvement of working conditions, as well as promotion of de facto equality between women and men.

The RA Law on Ensuring Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Women and Men provides, for the first time, clarification of the notion “gender discrimination.” The Law includes provisions that relate to ensuring equal rights and equal opportunities for women and men in the areas of labor and employment, entrepreneurship, and education.

The RA Government’s decision N 1334-L of 2019 endorsed **the 2019-2023 Strategy and Action Plan on Implementation of the Republic of Armenia Gender Policies**[5], which includes the following activities for overcoming gender discrimination:

- Organization of training courses and discussions on gender equality topics for administrative and pedagogical personnel of general education and primary (craftsmanship) and secondary vocational education institutions;
- Inclusion of topics aimed at developing women’s leadership and entrepreneurship capacities in the action plans of the Career Centers and Career Management educational program of vocational education institutions.

[5] <https://www.irtek.am/views/act.aspx?aid=151906>

PART 3. Gender peculiarities of the RA labor market serviced by primary and secondary vocational education

In 2021, by gender equality indicators in the area of economic activity (ratio of men and women's employment level, equal remuneration for work of equal value, men and women's proportion among specialists and technical employees) Armenia worsened its position ranking 78th[6] as compared to 69th in 2019 and 24th in the pre-crisis year of 2007. In the structure of this indicator, gender gap[7] is especially great in the areas of labor force participation (ranking 84th) and estimated earned income (ranking 97th).

In Armenia, labor market problems become evident when looking at the 2021 human capital index. According to the report by World Economic Forum[8], Armenia ranked 49th among 130 countries of the world, having developed 64% of its human capital. The index is characterized by four measurements: existence of potential/education, realization of the potential, development, and know-how. Although by education enrollment rates Armenia ranks third, by the indicator of the potential realization, which includes gender gap in employment and unemployment, it ranks 114th, which points to imperfection of the educational system and non-effective use of the human capital.

The obstacles that women come to face in the labor market lead to economic losses not only for women and their families, but also for the entire society.[9]

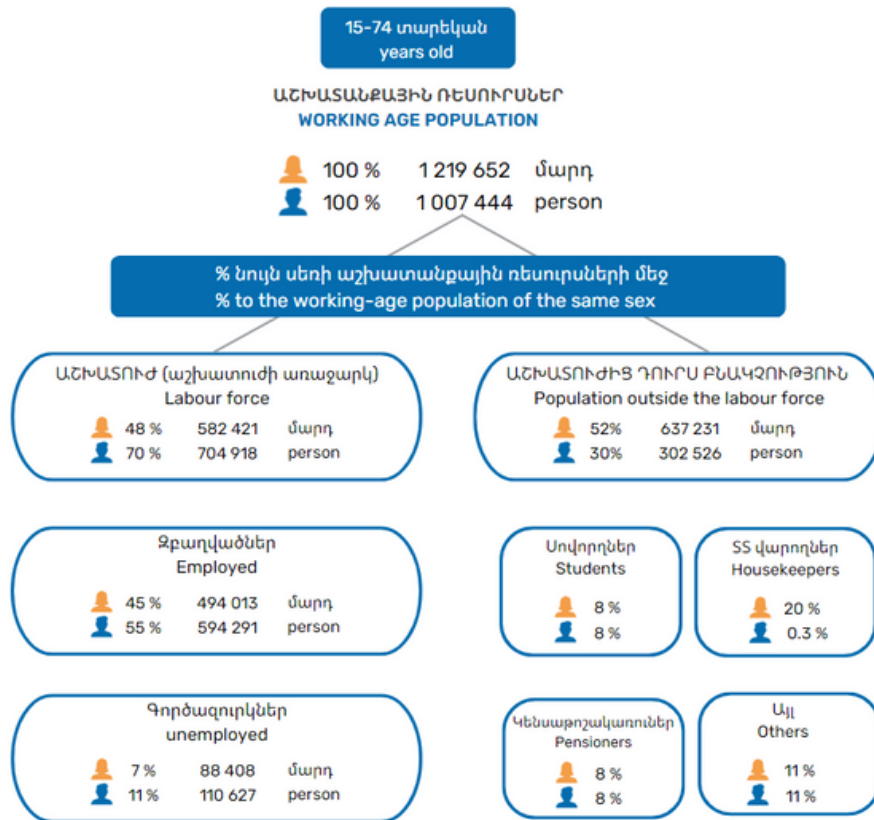
[6] The Global Gender Gap Report 2021 https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2021.pdf

[7] Gender gap indicator has been calculated by World Economic Forum since 2006 in four pivotal areas: economy, politics, education and healthcare. The indicator reflects the difference between women and men's opportunities in each of the noted areas.

[8] The Global Human Capital Index, <https://weforum.ent.box.com/s/dari4dktg4jt2g9xo2o5pksjpatvawdb>

[9] The macroeconomic benefits of gender diversity <https://cepr.org/voxeu/columns/macro-economic-benefits-gender-diversity>, Diagnostic Study of Discriminatory Manifestations against Women // <https://armenia.unfpa.org/hy/node/7000>

Table 1. The 15- 74 year old population according to the economic activity status, 2021 [10]



Source: Workforce Research, ARMSTAT

Only half of the women in Armenia (48%) participates in the labor market, which is lower by 22% as compared to men (Table 1). One of the reasons for this gap is the role of women as housekeepers imposed by gender norms, which brings about problems in reconciling family care duties with work and that, in its turn, leads to low participation of women in the labor market and employment area, their low-level incomes and other manifestations of inequality.

Table 2. Population outside the labor force according to reasons for not working, 2021 [11]

	1000 persons		% per sex	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
Family circumstances	247	3	99	1
Student status	97	78	55	45
Illness, disability	159	110	59	41
No hope to find a job (the disappointed)	131	80	62	38
Planning to depart/are abroad	2	4	27	73
Other	1	28	5	95
Total	637	303	68	32

Source: Workforce Research, ARMSTAT

[10] ARMSTAT, Women and Men in Armenia, statistical booklet, 2022 <https://www.armstat.am/en/?nid=82&id=2530>

[11] Ibidem

When looking at **Table 2**, special attention should be paid to “No hope to find a job,” which makes up 38% of male respondents and 62% of female respondents. This indicator also includes lack of professional skills demanded in the labor market, which, by the way, is higher among women.

Discrimination shown by employers is an additional factor for limiting women’s participation in the workforce. Although principles prohibiting discrimination are enshrined in the RA Constitution and Labor Code, they are not always applied. Discrimination reinforces the continuity of gender gap in Armenia.

At the same time, education and correspondence of acquired professions to modern requirements of the labor market also play a major role in both women and men’s participation in the labor market and the overall employment picture. Nevertheless, here too there are gender peculiarities.

For example, the gross enrollment index in the area of vocational education demonstrates that, as compared to 2012, in 2021 there is almost 5% increase in women /girls’ participation in secondary vocational education as distinct from 2.6 % participation increase among men/boys (See Chart 1).

Chart 1. Gross enrollment index in vocational education, 2012 and 2021 [12]

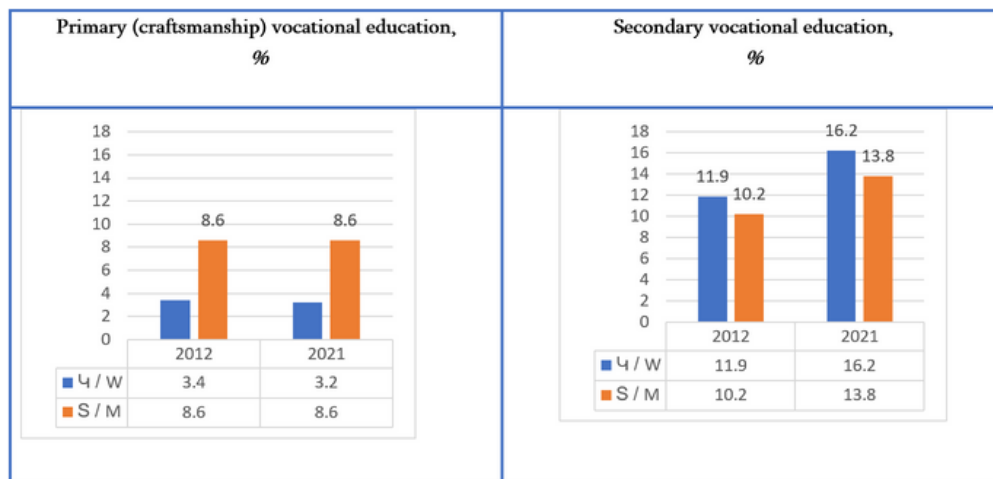
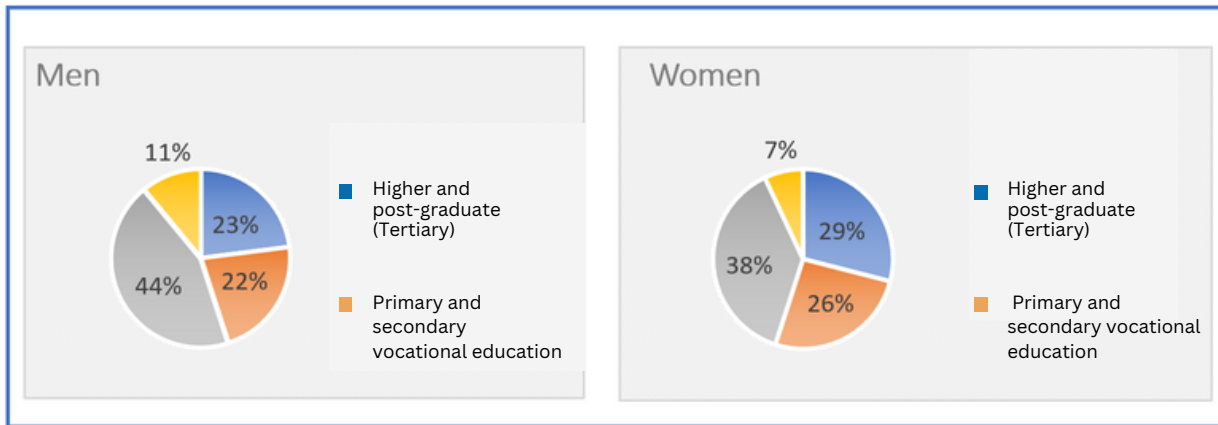


Chart 2 clearly demonstrates that among labor resources[13] 26% of women have primary or secondary vocational education, which is a little bit higher than the percentage of men (23%) with the same education. This is accounted for by higher enrollment of women in secondary vocational education.

[12] ARMSTAT, Women and Men in Armenia, statistical booklet, 2022 <https://www.armstat.am/en/?nid=82&id=2530>

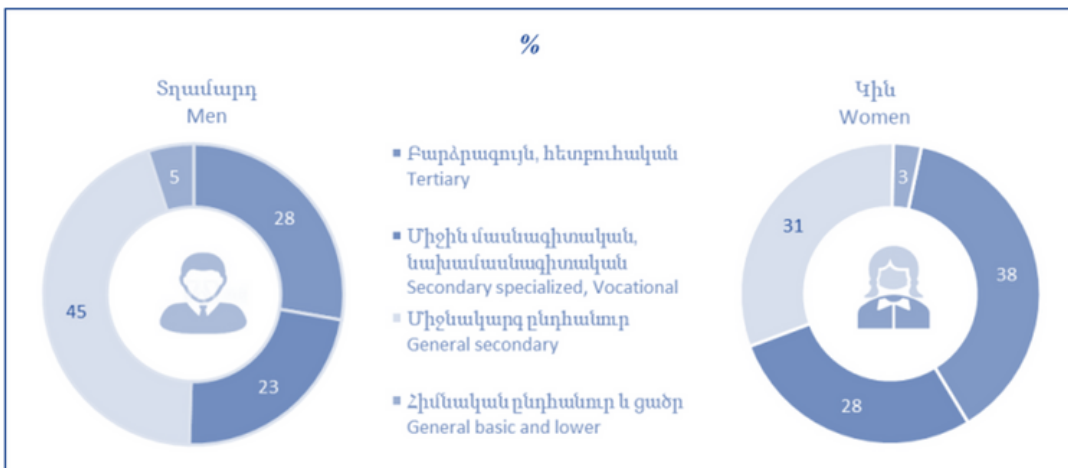
[13] Labor resources are the sum total of economically active (employed and unemployed) and non-active (those having no job and not looking for any work) population.

Chart 2. Labor resources according to the educational level, 2020 [14]



On the other hand, 28% of female workforce[15], those involved in the labor market and unemployed, but looking for a job, have primary or secondary vocational education, whereas only 23% of male workforce have such education. Comparing this to the gross enrollment index of higher education, we can see that in case of women the difference in enrollment between secondary vocational and higher education is quite big, 10%, and in case of men 5%.

Chart 3. Workforce according to the educational level, 2021 [16]



This can be explained by a higher demand of the labor market for those with higher education as compared to those with secondary vocational education. Armenia has not yet introduced the system of descriptors of occupations according to the educational level.

[14] ARMSTAT, https://armstat.am/file/article/lab_market_2021_1.pdf

[15] ARMSTAT, The term “workforce” is equivalent to the former term of “economically active population.” The workforce includes employed and unemployed, which create the labor market (in terms of workforce supply) for production of goods and provision of services. https://armstat.am/file/article/trud_2019_2.pdf

[16] ARMSTAT, Lab Market 2021_2 (armstat.am), page 62:

On June 2 of 2021, **by his decree N 353-N** the RA Minister of Economy **approved** “the national classifier of education”[17] of technical-economic and social information of the Republic of Armenia, but this is just the first step in that direction. The clarification of this issue can possibly partially be obtained from five-year plans of socio-economic development of the marzes since the majority of them express dissatisfaction with the level of vocational education. The employees of secondary vocational schools usually attribute low professional qualities to two factors: the low level of knowledge among general main and secondary school students that come to them and absence of the resources necessary for education.

It was noted above about the dissatisfaction with the educational level in the labor market. However, the opposite trend is also manifest: there are cases when learners achieve great success in their professions, but the country’s market is small, and they are unable to find jobs with salaries commensurate with their potential. According to participants in the focus group discussions, today it is possible to enter the global market thanks to information technologies.

“...My son has been drawing since childhood, but it is a little bit difficult to attain heights in Armenia because there are too many blind alleys. However, now when he is dealing with computer design as his profession and working with abroad, he has reached great successes. In fact, there are professions that open up not only the market of one country, but in general.”

It is also interesting to look at the population outside the workforce[18] according to their educational level and sex. In 2021, there were 28% of women and 23% of men without jobs. Since this number also includes students, pensioners and persons with disability, caregivers of relatives, property income earners, compulsory conscripts, etc., it is difficult to assess how it affects the labor market. At the same time, the research demonstrates that caregivers of relatives, as well as housekeepers make up the greater part of this number and 99% of them are women.[19]

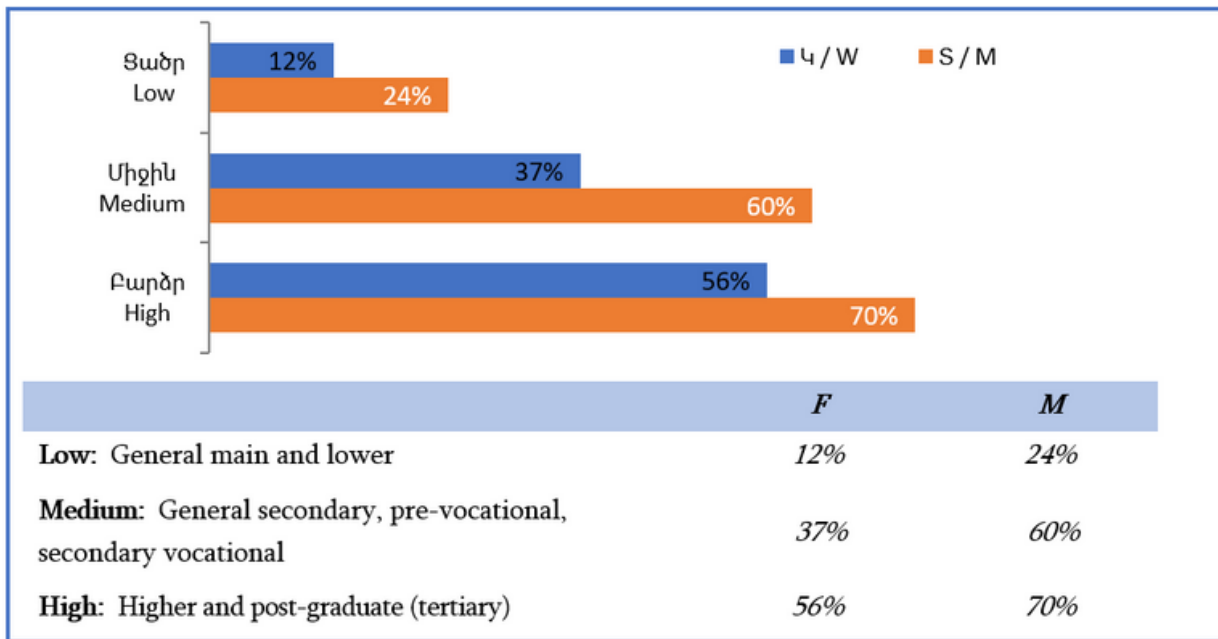
Data on the educational level of the employed, as well as on female/male ratio are already accessible at the employment level (See **Chart 4**). According to these data, from the perspective of women and men’s employment level, the main and biggest difference is recorded in the area of secondary vocational education.

[17] <https://www.arlis.am/DocumentView.aspx?DocID=153514>

[18] ARMSTAT, The population outside the workforce includes persons that do not work and do not look for jobs. [Lab Market 2021_3 \(armstat.am\)](#), page 95.

[19] ARMSTAT, [Lab Market 2021_3 \(armstat.am\)](#), page 88.

Chart 4. Employment level according to the educational level, 2021 [20]

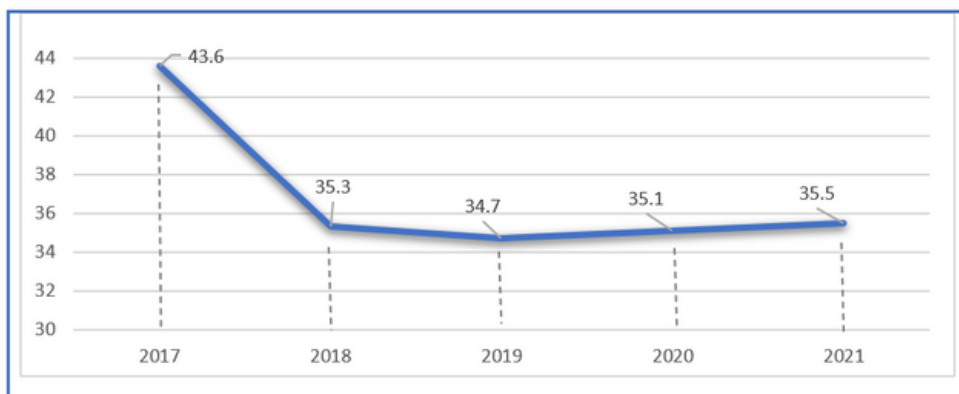


Source: ARMSTAT

Looking at the data of **Chart 4** and trying to reveal tendencies, it is not possible not to consider the phenomenon of “gender pay gap” [21] recorded in Armenia and in a number of countries in the world, which demonstrates general difference between women and men’s average salary.

According to the RA legislation, equal remuneration is envisioned for women and men’s same work. As compared to 2017, in 2021, the gender gap of average monthly salaries (pay) decreased by 8.1 percentage points. Nevertheless, in 2021, women’s average pay in Armenia made up 64.5% of that of men, or the gender pay gap was 35.5% (Chart 5).

Chart 5. Gender pay gap in average salary, 2017-2021 [22]



[20] ARMSTAT, Women and Men in Armenia, statistical booklet, 2022 <https://www.armstat.am/en/?nid=82&id=2530>

[21] Gender pay gap is the difference between men and women’s average monthly nominal salaries correlated to men’s average monthly nominal salary and expressed in percentage.

[22] ARMSTAT, Women and Men in Armenia, statistical booklet, 2022 <https://www.armstat.am/en/?nid=82&id=2530>

The statistics do not allow observing the same according to educational levels. It has been possible to reveal that the gender pay gap among those with secondary vocational education is 51.1%^[23] only through research and surveys. There are significant differences in gender pay gap according to economic activity groups (**Chart 6**).

Chart 6. Gender pay gap in average salary according to major economic activity groups, 2021

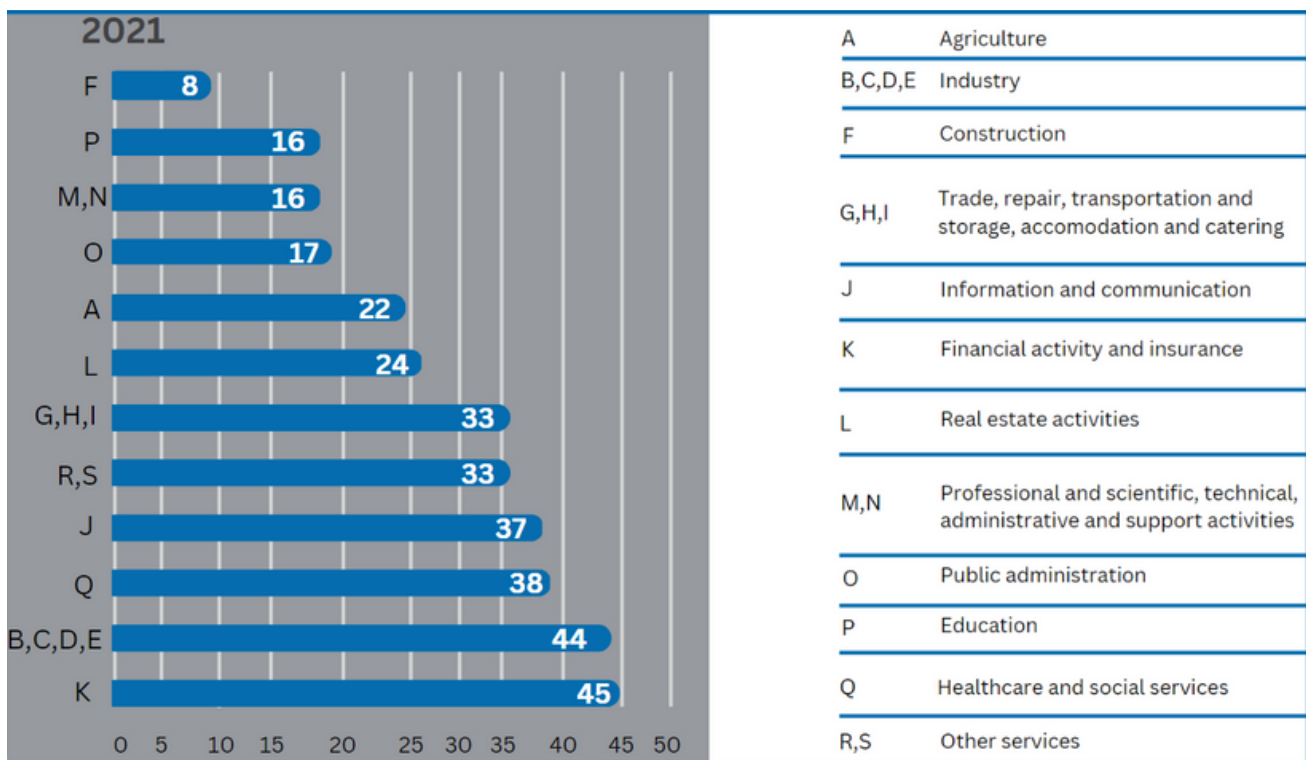


Chart 6 shows that gender pay gap (i.e. the difference between men and women’s average salary) exists in all noted areas, however, it is the highest in the areas of financial activities and insurance, industry, healthcare and social services, and information and communication.

[23] ARMSTAT, [analysis_of_the_gender_pay_gap_armenia_am.pdf \(armstat.am\)](#), page 32.

PART 4. The TVET system of the Republic of Armenia

In Armenia, the system of vocational education and training has two levels: primary and secondary vocational schools. They are rich in history since during the Soviet period these institutions—technical colleges and schools, prepared cadres for numerous industrial enterprises and non-industrial areas such as agriculture, construction, transportation, communication services, service sector, healthcare, and education.

At present, one can receive primary vocational education in schools and colleges that have primary vocational education programs, and secondary vocational education in colleges and other higher education institutions that have secondary vocational educational programs.

Craftsmanship education can also be offered through master classes[24] with an individual training schedule.

The number of educational institutions is always changing. Changing is also the list of professions depending on new market demands, professional requirements, and the number of recipients of education at that level. Table 3 presents the number of vocational education institutions and students, as well as the dynamics over the past 30 years.

Table 3. Secondary vocational education institutions in 1991-2021.

	1991	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015 ²⁵	2021 ²⁶
# of primary vocational (craftsmanship) institutions	86	83	56	0	44	44	23
# of students	21881	11040	5122	0	6393	6900	6780
# of secondary vocational institutions	69	79	105	111	101	97	25
# of students	40600	22400	28679	30818	29575	24300	28399

[24] According to the RA Law on Primary Vocational (Craftsmanship) and Secondary Vocational Education, craftsmanship education and training is offered in craftsmanship schools, colleges, other specialized educational institutions, educational centers of organizations, penitentiaries, and by masters that have relevant licenses and offer individual vocational training.

[25] ARMSTAT, The Social Situation in the Republic of Armenia in 2015 and the Dynamics (2011-2015), statistical collection, 2016, pages 130, 153.

[26] ARMSTAT, The Social Situation in the Republic of Armenia in 2020 and the Dynamics (2016-2020), statistical collection, 2021, pages 140, 153. https://armstat.am/file/article/soc_vich_2020_4.pdf

In essence, these figures also record economic development trends, situation with and interest in this level of education in the republic. For example, in 2001, the institutions offering primary vocational education were eliminated[27], and later were reopened because of necessity, although at present their number is again reduced.

At first, the number of secondary vocational education institutions drastically increased, then decreased, however, in recent years, the number of students has been growing and admission to some specializations is carried out on a competitive basis.

In reality, today vocational education is confronting serious challenges since many employers, not finding workers with needed qualifications in the labor market, open training centers to prepare cadres with special qualifications.

Back on May 6 of 2004, Armenia adopted its Strategy on Primary (Craftsmanship) and Secondary Vocational Education and Training[28], based on which, on July 8 of 2005, it adopted the RA Law on Primary Vocational (Craftsmanship) and Secondary Vocational Education[29], which declares equal opportunities for students, affordability, continuity, and succession.

Based on the RA Government's protocol decision #51 of December 18, 2008, a Concept Paper on Development of Primary Vocational (Craftsmanship) and Secondary Vocational Education was developed.[30] Taking into consideration the socio-economic conditions in the country, prioritized were those directions, which could produce greater results with limited resources in a shorter period. To develop the sector, importance was attached to internationalization. To accelerate the pace of the reforms, centers of excellence were created in the twelve state educational institutions of all the marzes. The centers were designed to become multi-functional (experimental) colleges and set an example for other colleges in the region.

The global changes in the labor market compelled to alter the vocational training paradigm. The labor market, both in terms of its structure and content, was changing so fast that vocational education institutions often could not respond to those changes in a timely manner.

[27] The 1999 RA Law on Education did not envision the existence of technical vocational schools (TVSes) as a separate type of educational institutions; within the framework of rationalization of the primary and secondary vocational education system approved by the RA Government, technical vocational schools in Armenia were reorganized into high schools with craftsmanship groups (45 TVSes), were joined to secondary vocational education institutions (9 TVSes) or were dissolved (4 TVSes). <https://www.irtek.am/views/act.aspx?aid=26724>

[28] <https://www.irtek.am/views/act.aspx?aid=26724>

[29] <https://www.arlis.am/documentview.aspx?docID=68301>

[30] <https://www.gov.am/files/meetings/2008/85.pdf>

In 2010, the Turin process[31] was launched in Armenia and the first assessment of the implemented reforms made within its framework demonstrated that there was a certain barrier between the labor market demand and the vocational education supply/offer. Training in the TVET sector continued to remain theoretical and inflexible.

At the same time, problems in the labor market, a high level of unemployment, and stereotypes reinforced in society over the decades made the TVET sector less attractive as compared to higher education. Rules of the game in the labor market also contribute to such situation. Employers frequently prefer graduates of higher education institutions, though that qualification very often does not match the requirements of this or that position.

Due to shortage of funding for the sector, the resource base (buildings, material and technical resources) of the primary and secondary vocational institutions are in a sorry plight and conditions necessary for learning are often not provided.

Responding to these challenges, in 2009, the RA Government endorsed the Concept Paper on Social Partnership in the area of Primary Vocational (Craftsmanship) and Secondary Vocational Education[32], which envisioned four levels of social partnership: national, regional, sectoral, and institutional. According to the document, the link between the vocational education institution and the employer had to be activated.

As the next step of this policy, in 2009, the RA Ministry of Education and Science, the Republican Union of Employers of Armenia and the RA Chamber of Commerce and Industry signed a memorandum of understanding on cooperation in the area of primary vocational (craftsmanship) and secondary vocational education. However, due to the absence of mechanisms regulating this process, as well as of a toolkit to draw the employer to educational institutions, this program was not realized.

Nevertheless, the need for implementing reforms in the sector was apparent and this served as a basis for the adoption of the RA Government's protocol decision #19 at its session of May 7, 2009, which concerned the formation of collegial administration bodies, councils, at the TVET educational institutions with a view to ensuring social partnership between TVETs, employers, and trade unions.

[31] Web page of the Turin process in Armenia, <http://www.etf.europa.eu/web.nsf/pages/Armenia>

[32] Concept Paper on Social Partnership in the area of Primary Vocational (Craftsmanship) and Secondary Vocational Education, https://mkuzak.am/wp-content/uploads/soc.gorts_1.pdf

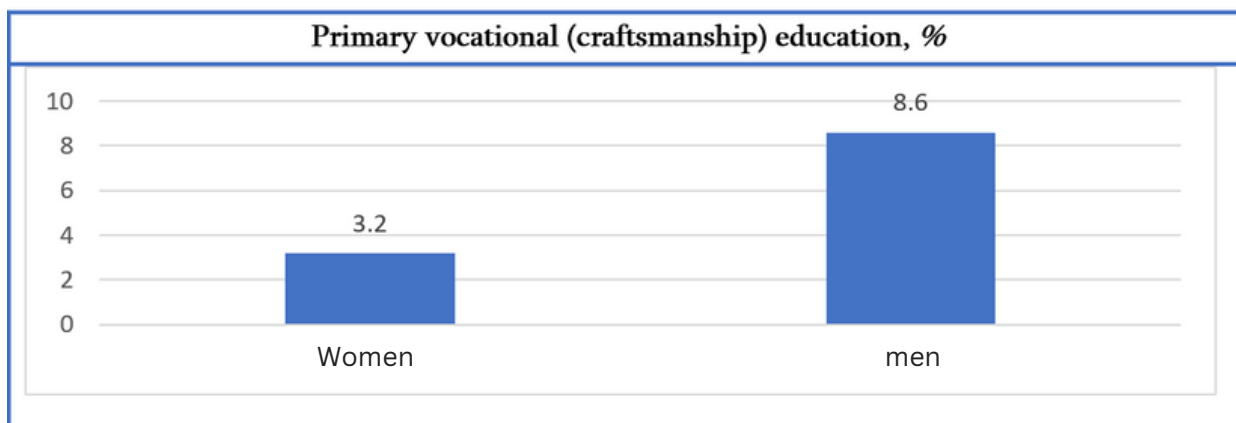
Unfortunately, throughout all these reforms no study was carried out to reveal gender risks in the development of the sector and gender peculiarities of the labor market, because of which the reforms were not gender-sensitive and the problems with gender equality existing in the sector became deeper.

PART 5. Gender peculiarities of the primary and secondary vocational education

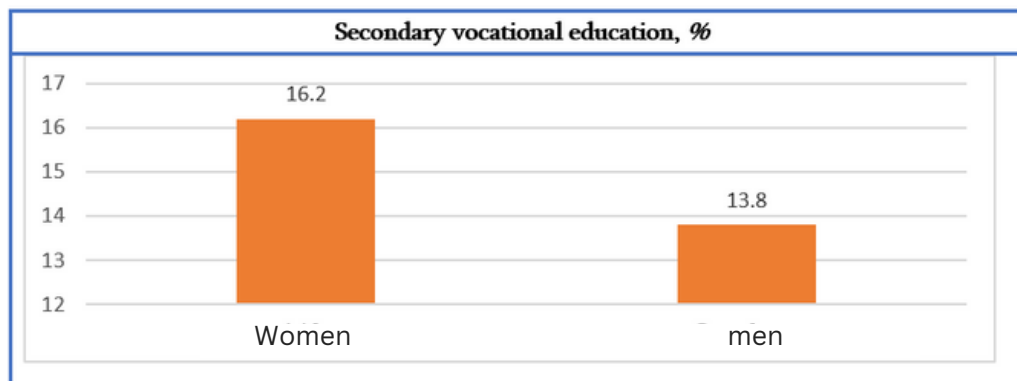
The gross enrollment index of girls and boys in vocational education provides a clear view of the sector's development trends from a gender perspective.

In the academic year 2020-2021, at the 23 primary vocational (craftsmanship) education institutions of the republic the gross enrollment index of women and men was respectively 3.2% and 8.6%, and the gender equality index is 0.38 (Chart 7).

Chart 7. The gross enrollment index in primary and secondary vocational education, 2021 [33]



In the same year, at the republic's 25 state and non-state secondary vocational education institutions the number of women exceeded that of men by 2.4 per cent, and the gender equality index makes up 1.17.

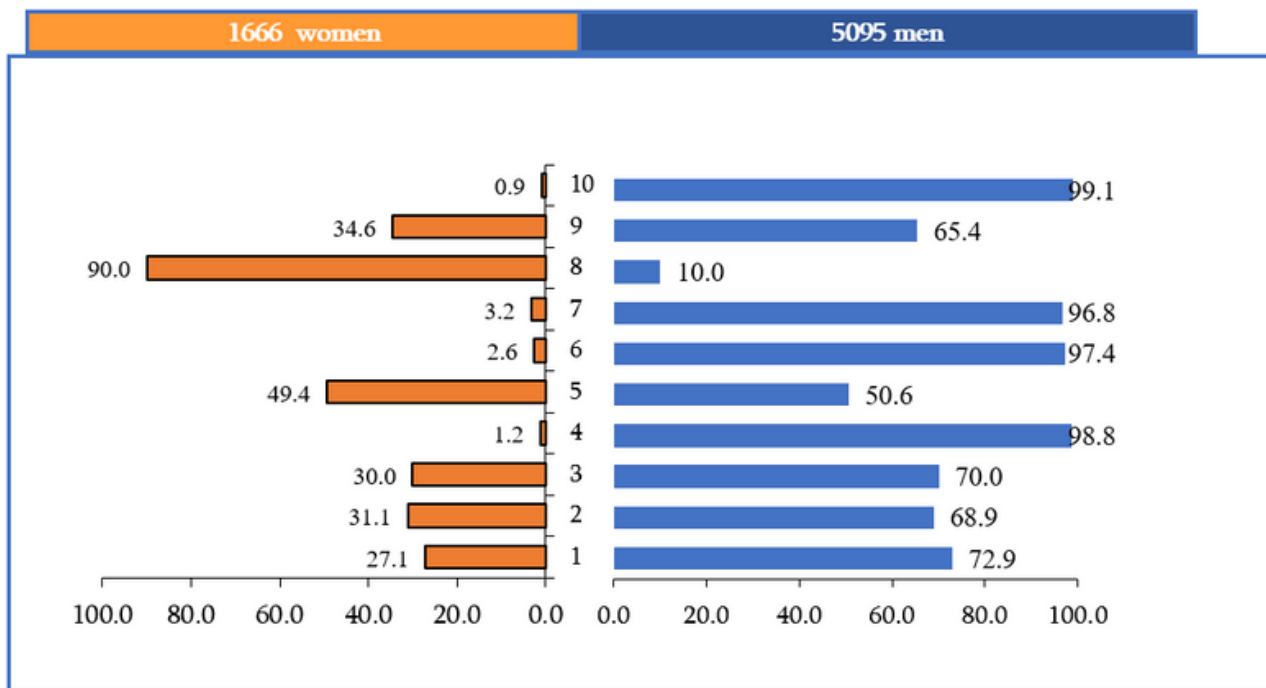


[33] ARMSTAT, Women and Men in Armenia, statistical booklet, 2022 <https://www.armstat.am/en/?nid=82&id=2530>

The data demonstrate that there is increase in the number of students, in particular girls, in the area of secondary vocational education, which is conditioned by the drop in the attractiveness of high schools and the diversity of and quality increase in professional programs of colleges.

Figures on gender segregation in the area of primary vocational education presented below (**Chart 8**) are especially telling. In fact, gender segregation is especially pronounced in the areas of transportation services, engineering, architecture and construction, and agriculture. The number of girls is especially high in forestry.

Chart 8. Students of primary vocational (craftsmanship) education institutions according to the area of professional training and sex, 2021-2022 academic year [34]

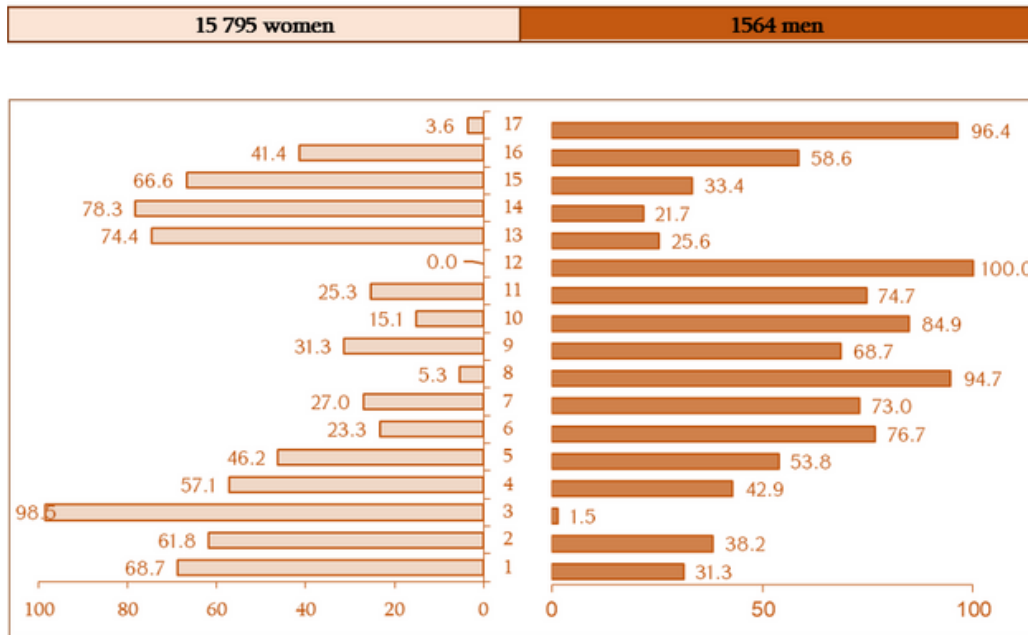


1. Art, 2. Business, management, 3. Information science and information technologies, 4. Engineering, 5. Industry and production, 6. Architecture and construction, 7. Agriculture, 8. Forestry, 9. Individual services, 10. Transportation services.

The picture of gender segregation in the area of secondary vocational education is as follows (Chart 9):

[34] ARMSTAT, Women and Men in Armenia, statistical booklet, 2022 <https://www.armstat.am/en/?nid=82&id=2530>

Chart 9. Students of secondary vocational education institutions according to the area of professional training and sex, 2021-2022 academic year.



1. Education, 2. Art, 3. Journalism and information provision, 4. Business, management, 5. Law, 6. Environment, 7. Information and communication technologies, 8. Engineering, 9. Industry and technology, 10. Architecture and construction, 11. Agriculture, 12. Fishery, 13. Healthcare, 14. Social work, 15. Individual services, 16. Security services, 17. Transportation services.

In fact, there are large numbers of girls in the following areas: journalism and information provision (98.5%), social work (77%), healthcare (74.4%). There are no girls in the area of fisheries and their percentage is low in the areas of transportation services (3.6%), engineering (5.3%), architecture and construction (15.1%). It is also necessary to note that over the recent years, there have been continuous changes in the number of students according to their choice of profession, but gender segregation has persisted.

It should be mentioned that from the perspective of profession selection, the situation is almost the same in different countries of the world; however, in other countries they are aware of the problem and exert efforts to address it, whereas we continue to be primarily guided by stereotypic perceptions. Although participants in the focus group discussions noted that they themselves had selected their profession/specialization, that too is conditioned by stereotypic situations and perceptions acquired during their socialization.

For example:

«...Persons of my age, teenagers and children of this generation select the profession they like, and not their parents' choice.»[35]

[35] Focus group participant

«...My mother has always told me that pedagogy is a very good profession for a girl, you will come home early and be with your family.»[36]

«...Programming is for boys, in any case I appreciate the intelligence and flexibility of boys more.»[37]

In this and similar situations, of great importance is professional orientation of the youth. Professional orientation is provided in the main school, high school, and primary and secondary vocational education institutions. At schools, form masters and at primary and secondary vocational education institutions, career centers offer training sessions in professional orientation. However, according to focus group participants, guidance is more often provided by parents, relatives, girl-friends and boy-friends. During the meetings, the difference between young people and the older generation was apparent, the youth were more independent and bolder.

“I have been given complete freedom to choose my profession. I have selected my profession – marketing. In my case, my mother is an economist, and she advised the same to me taking into consideration my abilities. And I selected the most highly demanded field.”[38]

The support manual of the National Institute of Education on Educational Work in School: Professional Orientation Issues incorporated advice for form masters, including tips on overcoming sex-based stereotypes and developing motivation of girls and boys for professions non-traditional for their sex. However, the effectiveness of the implementation of this process depends on trainers' perceptions, beliefs, as well as on the existence of gender stereotypes among them. For example:

“If we go back biologically and consider the structure of the human brain a little bit, we will understand that in all the centuries men formulated all the laws of physics, mathematics, and chemistry and made all the discoveries. The only female scientist was Marie Curie. Using biological evidence, we will understand that women and men's cerebral hemispheres work differently, and men's inclination for mathematics and physics is unequivocally an endowment from above.”[39]

[36] Focus group participant

[37] Focus group participant

[38] Focus group participant

[39] Focus group participant

During meetings in schools and colleges, it was also voiced that due to shortcomings with professional orientation, students do not orient themselves correctly when choosing a profession and they might have problems in the labor market in the future. In the global market, STEM[40] area has a special place and significance, and it provides great and equal opportunities and outcomes to women and men. However, in Armenia, no emphasis is placed on this during professional orientation and there is also lack of coverage of the demand for the STEM professions.

Professions are very often selected by chance, based on the advice of a parent or relative. In the opinion of a person responsible for admission of students, boys usually act that way, and girls, as a rule, orient themselves better. Girls rarely apply to primary vocational education institutions for two reasons. Firstly, because the demanded professions are more “masculine,” for example, jeweler’s art, and, secondly, the weakest students apply there and there are more boys among them than girls.[41]

According to the focus group participants, highly demanded professions include culinary art and tourism. By the way, the majority of students of culinary art (in visited colleges) are boys.

“The field is lucrative, but the work implies major workload, both physical and hourly. And women cannot do it due to double workload.”[42]

Professional gender orientation is not effective and segregation according to professions persists. This means that both education and the labor market are divided based on sex. There are professions where there are either no girls or very few of them and, as a rule, women are concentrated in lower-paid professions.

It is also interesting to look at the situation in different marzes.

[40] STEM: science, technology, engineering and mathematics

[41] Focus group participant.

[42] Focus group participant.

Table 4. Primary and secondary vocational education and training (VET) institutions and the number of students studying at them in Yerevan and the marzes [43]

Yerevan and the marzes	Number of secondary VET institutions, unit	Number of primary VET institutions, unit ⁴⁴	Number of students at secondary VET institutions		Number of students at primary VET institutions	
			F	M	F	M
City of Yerevan	35	10	8833	7703	695	1997
Aragatsotn	1	3	11	51	49	186
Ararat	4	3	709	704	44	205
Armavir	6	2	724	711	59	213
Gegharkunik	8	4	674	749	63	456
Lori	11	4	1077	1078	96	421
Kotayk	6	7	639	879	97	505
Shirak	11	6	941	968	348	726
Syunik	7	5	463	550	83	272
Vayots Dzor	1	1	67	121	16	68
Tavush	6	3	329	418	30	151
Total	96	48	14467	13932	1580	5200

In the marzes, there are both colleges and schools, as well as branches of higher education institutions that offer secondary vocational education programs (see Table 4). The study of research and statistical materials demonstrates that these colleges overall correspond to priority development directions of the marzes, however, gender segregation is more pronounced there.

Shortcomings of professional orientation, gender stereotypes existing in society, and perceptions about “masculine” and “feminine” professions have their impact on finding jobs in the labor market by women and men that have received primary vocational or secondary vocational education. However, there also exist a number of other important factors. It is not always the case that after graduating from educational institutions girls and boys become participants in the labor market, which is conditioned by different reasons. For example, right upon graduation boys are called up and fall behind for two years; after their return from the army service, they often do not

[43] ARMSTAT, The Social Situation in the Republic Armenia 2020 ., [soc_vich_2020_4.pdf \(armstat.am\)](#), p. 14

[44] Including those secondary vocational education institutions, which offer primary (craftsmanship) programs.

enter the labor market for “family reasons.” In this case, gender stereotypes play a certain role too.

“...Boys primarily join the army; about 80% of them have to face this problem. They graduate from colleges, but not from higher education institutions. After their return, they may not want to continue their education or are admitted and compelled to continue, but they lack inspiration and excitement that they should have had.”[45]

When studying this problem, it is important to realize that in the area education, gender segregation is manifest not only at the level of primary and secondary vocational education but continues to be the case also at the level of higher and post-graduate education. Therefore, we have the following result: **“...in 2021, the difference of 1.7 times between women and men outside the workforce is equivalent to the 42.5% gender gap. The gender gap is especially high in the age group of 25-49 year olds (78-79.5%).”** In the education area: **“the 7.2% indicator of the gender gap in the age group of 15-24 year olds is conditioned by mass enrollment of the youth in education, regardless of sex.”[46]**

The presence of this problem in Armenia not only negatively affects attainment of gender equality and the general human rights rating, but also impedes economic development processes, very often depriving women and men of opportunities to find preferred jobs, to achieve high results and to be closer to higher sources of income. In other words, they are deprived of economic opportunities, which are the main factor in the development of any country.

[45] Focus group participant.

[46] ARMSTAT, Women and Men in Armenia, statistical booklet, 2022 <https://www.armstat.am/en/?nid=82&id=2530>

CONCLUSIONS

Thus, having studied the relevant legislative and normative framework, the research conducted over the recent years, the statistics and educational trends describing the area under consideration, we have arrived to the following conclusions:

- Although the legislative framework rules out discrimination in the TVET sector, in practice there exists covert gender discrimination conditioned by gender stereotypes and gender socialization.
- From the perspective of professional orientation and professional growth, there is a clear-cut horizontal and vertical segregation, which is the consequence of the absence of gender mainstreaming of the professional orientation process.
- The training programs for directors and teachers of the TVET institutions incorporate a gender component, but its effectiveness requires assessment. The work of career centers in the direction of overcoming gender stereotypes is not noticeable either.
- Due to women's double "employment," gender stereotypes, "glass ceiling" phenomenon, women's opportunities for professional advancement, professional-technical training, and continuous education are more limited, and without special programs, it is not possible to solve this problem.
- There are jobs in the labor market, which require specialists in craftsmanship and secondary vocational education, but this demand is not met by the supply of the existing workforce, and women that are a major resource are not engaged in certain professions because of stereotypic perceptions prevalent in their midst and society.
- The study of employers' opinion through almost all research attests to the fact that the quality of vocational education does not correspond to the requirements of the labor market.
- The resource base for implementation of educational programs is, as a rule, very weak and does not meet the requirements of scientific-technical progress.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In general, it is proposed to support the formation of gender-sensitive policies in planning and learning settings in the field of education, to carry out the training of professors of educational institutions, industrial training masters, managers and employees of career centers, and gender mainstreaming of educational programs, as well as to support the elimination of gender discrimination in educational institutions.

It is also necessary to carry out a multidimensional and comprehensive study of the field of primary and secondary vocational education to better identify gender peculiarities and challenges of the field and based on the study, to come up with recommendations for solving the problems.

Appendix 1

TVET Institutions, where focus group discussions were held

Yerevan Regional State College # 1

Secondary vocational education

- Art of acting
- Vocational pedagogy: art of dancing (qualification: pedagogue-choreographer)
- Directing (qualification: director)
- Economics, accounting and auditing
- Primary vocational (craftsmanship) education
- Culinary art (qualification: chef)

Yerevan State College of Informatics

Secondary vocational education

- Software development for computing and automated systems (qualification: technician-programmer)
- Maintenance of computer equipment and computer networks
- Mechatronics (qualification: mechatronics technician)

Yerevan State School of Craftsmanship #1

Primary vocational (craftsmanship) education

- Culinary art (qualification: chef)
- Operation of computers (qualification: computer operator)
- Sewing production technology (qualification: tailor)
- Operation and repair of vehicles (qualification: car repairer-locksmith)