



**PACT FOR
SKILLS**

ENSURING GENDER BALANCE IN UPSKILLING AND RESKILLING

Peer Learning Activity | 24th of October 2023

The European Commission organised its fourth Peer Learning Activity (PLA) as part of a series of events for Pact for Skills members to discuss key topics, share their experiences, and showcase good practices with the Pact for Skills community. The PLA provided a space for Pact members to see practices in place from Pact for Skills members and discuss their own experiences and ideas on gender balance.

Key messages

The most recent Nobel Prize for economics was won by Claudia Goldin, economic historian and labour economist, "for having advanced our understanding of women's labor market outcomes"¹, proving how relevant the topic of gender is in today's economy and society. There is great potential for the Pact for Skills in promoting a more equal gender balance and thus ensuring that upskilling and reskilling is accessible to all.

Goldin has been doing research on the topic of gender balance her whole career. One of her first major papers studied the causes of the increase of female musicians in American orchestras in the last third of the 20th century. The percentage of women rose from about 5 percent in 1970 to around 20 percent in 1995. The increased participation of women in the workforce has to be factored in, but Goldin demonstrated that 30 percent of the increase in the proportion of women among new hires was explained by a change in the way auditions were held. In the 1970s a lot of orchestras switched to blind auditions, meaning a physical screen barred the jury from seeing the person who auditioned. The resulting impartiality resulted in a 50 percent higher chance of a woman being advanced to the next round of auditions.² This gender bias is still prevalent in our economy and society. This is why the Pact is focusing on gender balance in the promotion of upskilling and reskilling.

The experiences shared by Pact Members about ensuring gender balance in upskilling and reskilling on the ground present valuable learning opportunities for the wider Pact for Skills community. Through the work of these projects the importance of a diverse gender ratio in trainings and courses is emphasised and being integrated in upskilling and reskilling measures. Companies, different sectors and governmental institutions need to work together to ensure everyone is encouraged to include gender balance measures in upskilling and reskilling.

Is your organisation interested in establishing a skills partnership? The Pact for Skills can support you:

The **PfS Support Services** can offer tailored support to develop skills partnerships including agreements, networking, actions, and showcasing impact. Expressions of interest can be sent to PactforSkillsPartnerships@ecorys.com

The [Guidance Handbook: introducing and setting up skills partnerships](#) offers support to develop impactful and sustainable skills partnerships.

¹ [The Prize in Economic Sciences 2023 - Press release \(nobelprize.org\)](#)

² [Goldin, C. and Rouse, C. \(2000\). Orchestrating Impartiality: The Impact of "Blind" Auditions on Female Musicians.](#)

Good practice presentations on the experiences, challenges and lessons learned from ensuring gender balance in upskilling and reskilling

Ensuring gender balance in upskilling and reskilling on LSP level

GCP Europe shared commitments and projects towards more gender equality from the Renewable Energy Partnership. Women only accounted for 32 percent of the workforce in the renewables sector in 2019 and in the hands-on technical part of the sector there were even less women present. Therefore, the Renewable Energy Partnership has **included gender equality issues in their declaration** and is planning to elaborate recommendations for the whole sector. They strive to encourage more women to take up clean energy related jobs to combat the shortage of skilled labour and at the same time **improve equity prospects**. The Partnership aims to not only attract younger women into the renewable energy sector, but also **women who have more work experience** with the additional advantage that they can act as role models to younger women. A **change in work culture** is also needed to work towards a more equal gender balance.

The topic is a priority for a lot of the Partnership's members of which two good practices were presented at the PLA. The first project was **Boss Ladies**, developed by **Tekniq**, Danish technical contractors' association, which aims to attract more girls and women to the installation and construction industry, especially electricity and plumbing. The measures included female apprentices visiting primary and vocational schools, free teaching courses for teachers and short internships for girls in 8th-9th grade. Another project was **W4RES**, which encouraged women from eight EU-countries to work in the RHC-sector (renewable heating and cooling). It provided innovation, technical or business support to more than fifty women-led projects and created policy recommendations for the RHC sector.

Data Corner from the Digital Partnership shared their project **Elites Galaxy**, a digital platform for peer-to-peer-learning. It uses AI-tools to discover skill gaps and talents and allows for upskilling and reskilling processes to be completed directly in the online marketplace and through peers.

The role of Pact Members in ensuring gender balance in upskilling and reskilling: Experiences from the ground

The PLA was an opportunity for the participants to learn about existing projects and practices from the ground, focused on ensuring gender balance in upskilling and reskilling.

First, the **European Centre for Women and Technology (ECWT)** presented the **WOMEN4IT** project, that addresses three main challenges: youth unemployment, low involvement of women in ICT and the lack of ICT-specialists. This is a large-scale flagship project working with 79 partners to provide training to young women in the NEET-category in seven different countries. Free digital skills training was provided to help 900 women start their career in IT. Additionally 38,600 women were reached by digital-career-awareness-activities. Over the course of the project, a set of innovative employability and

profiling tools was created for identifying the needs of employers and the women being trained. The **educational resources** created for the trainings are now available to the public in seven languages. Another important feature was the **network built for women in ICT-employment** to provide mentoring, role models and opportunities such as job shadowing and training camps. The takeaways show that projects such as this can provide new partnerships with employers for testing new innovative solutions and **identify new attractive digital jobs of the future** jointly by the employers and the employees.

Next, the **Italian Chamber of Commerce for Spain** presented **SCALE-UP: foStering women's finanCing in sociAL EntrepreneUrshiP**, an ERASMUS+ project. It aims to foster and facilitate the **acquisition of entrepreneurial skills by women** entrepreneurs who are interested in the social sectors. The project, including partners from seven EU-countries, is creating a free platform accessible for women all over the world with training and courses to help them create their own companies in the social sector. The training will be structured as an online course, divided into modules. The content will not just focus on business and finance factors but also on how to benefit society on a **social, environmental and inclusion level**. Modules will focus on characteristics of social economy, financing start-ups, storytelling, negotiation skills and how to pitch ideas for investors. Moreover, they have created **supporting tools to gain the skills needed** to set up start-up: a self-evaluation tool and an interactive library, including an investors mapping atlas, that can be used to finance enterprises.

Transilvania IT presented the European Digital Innovation Hub's project **GILL (Gender Innovation Living Labs)**, focused on doing research on gender topics in living labs, meaning theoretical concepts are applied in real-life settings. GILL consists of tools, a hub with a learning space, the theoretical framework, working groups and policy recommendations. Every participating country has focused their research on **diverse topics under the gender umbrella** such as citizen's perception of gender equality measures, guiding urban planning by considering gender factors or putting a gender-lens on social mobility. In Romania Transilvania IT deployed the methodology of GILL by raising awareness for gender sensitivity in a local municipality and the business sector as a cluster. Policies and regulations are already in place but there isn't enough **awareness and appreciation in the population** and the workplace. There need to be organisational and cultural changes, for example inserting **gender sensitivity as a mark of professional development**. The follow-up plan is to measure the impact of the implementation of gender sensitivity measures. Examples of their work include linking with initiatives for international and migrant women entrepreneurs, creating a gender equality strategy for municipalities and impact assessment and monitoring of the strategy.

Lastly, **EGInA** presented **EDIFY EDU: Equality, Diversity, Inclusion For improving the quality of management EDUcation**, a project addressing the skills gap in the sector of Management education with regard to competences in **equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI)**. The project facilitates the acquisition of EDI competences and transversal skills for management students and managers in business in order to respond to societal transformations. EDI competences are crucial for creating a **workplace that is inclusive and welcoming to all employees**. Based on research and a subsequent report EGInA devised a curriculum outline that encompassed the EDI training needs and competency gaps. The report **identified gaps** between undergraduate business management studies and **the realities of management practice**, particularly in SMEs. The curriculum is being piloted as a Massive Online Open Course (MOOC), an 8-week-Specialisation Course, a Winter School on Gender Equality and Career Opportunities for women and work-based Learning and learning mobilities abroad. It includes modules

like Unconscious Bias Awareness and Digital Equity and Digital Inclusion. From the specialisation course an implementation project will be developed by students and managers to be applied in organisations.

Looking for a project partner? Check the Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe (EPALE)

The [EPALE platform](#) provides a space for stakeholders across Europe to access resources, and exchange and discuss ideas on adult learning. For example, the [EPALE Communities of Practice](#) offer a space to share project ideas with other adult learning professionals. Furthermore, the [Partner Search](#) tool can help you find organisations who are interested in collaborating with you on projects. You can also register your own organisation to post partner finding announcements, and allow other users to reach out to you to share opportunities for cooperation.

Key messages from the plenary

The PLA was an opportunity for the participants to discuss how gender balance can be assured in male-dominated vs. female-dominated sectors, as well as ways to ensure that upskilling and reskilling measures are designed to attract people of all genders and how to implement this.

The discussions held at the PLA highlighted the differences in approaches to gender balance measures and what can be learned from each other. Participants exchanged their experiences, ideas and success-factors. Key points that were brought up were **inclusive language and communication**, change of work culture and access to free training and childcare.

The retail sector was mentioned by participants as an example with a high percentage of female workers who have low incentive to pursue upskilling and reskilling due to working conditions since jobs are often part-time, precarious and have a high turn-over. This can be counter-acted by providing **government-funded training opportunities**. The availability of free training and especially training during working hours can ensure that reskilling and upskilling is accessible to all.

In general, there was the consensus in the breakout groups that **better childcare services** will lessen the twofold burden often placed on women in the workforce. Belgium and France for example provide childcare even for children as young as three months old.

Participants pointed out that the gender pay gap can also discourage a lot of women from pursuing upskilling and reskilling. It needs to be ensured that the return on investment in upskilling is the same as for male counterparts. Especially in higher-ranked positions there are graver gender imbalances that need to be addressed, for example in management or academia. According to participants, the topic of **gender sensitivity in the workplace** needs to be tackled at these higher positions, since policymaking and awareness raising is created at the senior level. For each individual sector, instruments need to be

developed that resonate with the sector. In practice this can look like **focus groups with public servants and managers** to make gender sensitivity more prevalent.

Another important way brought up by participants to make the work of women in male-dominated sectors visible and encourage more women to join, are positive role models and images of women in fields such as mechanics, automotive, electrical and IT. Working conditions and safety at work in some of these sectors was also seen as an issue needing attention to encourage more women. **Seeing themselves represented** can have a significant impact on children and teenagers choosing their schooling but also on adults. These success stories can be told through students and ambassadors in classrooms or trainings. In one good practice example special attention was paid to using inclusive language and creating a different collective image of the sector, as well as **making classrooms and workspaces more welcoming to female students**.

The issue of gender imbalance needs to be looked at from a sector level, as each sector has its own challenges and difficulties, for example STEM professions, Digital, Healthcare and the CCI industries have high gender imbalances and women have less access to higher positions. It was proposed to **study each sector and examine how women can engage in it specifically** and give women the tools and opportunities to make professional networks. One good practice example was developing training courses for women re-entering the workforce after extended maternity leave.

The European Year of Skills can help you showcase your work on upskilling and reskilling

The dedicated [European Year of Skills website](#) includes an interactive 'Events Map', where you can register skills-related activities you are organising or find other activities and events near you. You can also download a [Communications Toolkit](#) to help you prepare your communication activities, events and media relations.