



'It's a man's world?'

How to overcome gender bias in the Mongolian construction sector.

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In-depth information and quotes from various sources have been used for the purposes of this study. For brevity and ease of reading, all references, as well as paraphrased and directly quoted material are listed in the Bibliography section on Page 31.

## CONSTRUCTION IS BIG BUSINESS – WORLDWIDE

Employing 220 million people, it accounts for 6% of the global share of the gross domestic product (GDP).<sup>1</sup>

Yet, women make up only 10% of this staggering number – underscoring the common perception that the construction sector is a male-dominated field.

Asia has the most women working in this sector, while Latin America and Africa account for the least. Most of these female employees mainly hold administrative or management positions.

However, few women work on site as technicians, engineers, supervisors, or builders.

Why?

Studies show that women are held back by diverse yet crucial issues such as poverty, illiteracy, the lack of incentives (in education or recruitment efforts), gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and unfavourable working conditions or restricted promotion opportunities.

The fact is more women would be working in the construction sector if only they had the right construction sector-related training and education under their belts.

As such this paper specifically focuses on Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) as well as recruitment practices, since education could play a significant role in identifying and combating gender inequalities early on.

This paper identifies the reasons why so few women work in the construction sector both globally as well as specifically in Mongolia.

It is divided into two main segments: a general overview of global trends regarding gender bias in TVET teaching and learning materials, and recruitment practices in the construction sector. This is followed up by first-hand insights of the situation in Mongolia gleaned from interviews with trainers, trainees, and employers or industry representatives.

<sup>1</sup> International Labor Organization (ILO).

## WOMEN IN CONSTRUCTION: GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

» Not a lack of ability but  
the lack of opportunity«

UNICEF

### Technical and vocational education and training in the construction sector

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has said that the low number of women working in the global construction industry has nothing to do with their lack of ability.

They are simply not exposed to or informed of their career options in this sector, and how they could train for it.

What more, the construction sector as a major global employer, faces a constant shortage of skilled workers: a shortage that could very well be filled by trained and skilled women.

This is especially true for countries such as India or Brazil where many are illiterate and rarely participate in educational training programmes. Furthermore, the construction sectors in these countries are somewhat 'neglected' when it comes to developing skilled workers.

One of the main reasons for these problems is limited training and high turnover rates compared to other sectors or countries due to unsatisfying working conditions. Moreover, fewer women work in construction compared to other sectors.

The structure and content of TVET in construction vary across countries. Generally, it begins with textbook learning to work-based training, focusing on hands-on learning that depends on the training path and industry sector.<sup>2</sup> According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Institute for Statistics, the general global (upper secondary) TVET enrolment between 1999 and 2009 decreased from 28% to 24%. Regional differences notwithstanding, female enrol-

ment has almost stagnated over the years, and is lower compared to men.<sup>3</sup>

Technical and vocational education and training is also generally considered less prestigious than tertiary education. The distinction between private and public TVET institutions and their unequal funding further exacerbates the inequality between the two educational pathways, as costs also influence students' decisions to pursue such programmes.

For instance, the UNESCO/UNESCO-UNEVOC International Centre for TVET 2020 stated that data from Ghana and Jamaica show fewer female students in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) related TVET. STEM or STEM-related TVET programmes are important, and core STEM subjects include engineering, manufacturing, and construction. Yet, only around 30% of female students pursue these fields.

Women and men also have different motives for attending these training programmes. Many generally do it either based on personal choice or family tradition, and with the hope of being paid well. According to a study of the Indian construction sector, most of the female construction workers 'are forced to enter this field by poverty and the non-availability of any other job'.<sup>4</sup>

The UNESCO and UNESCO-UNEVOC International Centre for TVET has provided a framework (Table 1) analysing different factors at the personal, institutional, and societal levels that influence women's participation in STEM-related TVET programmes.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung GmbH.

<sup>3</sup> The female participation rate of total TVET enrolment was 45.1% in 1999 and 45.5% in 2009 on average (UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2011).

<sup>4</sup> For more detailed explanation of which job positions women are predominantly employed in, see section 1.2.

<sup>5</sup> The personal level covers for example motives, skills, and stereotypes of individual learners as well as financial/educational circumstances in the family. The institutional level refers to the conditions within TVET institutions (teachers, material, equipment etc.) and the working environment in labour market organisations. At the societal level influencing factors are social norms and public policies within a society.

**Table 1: Framework of factors at different levels influencing female participation in STEM-related TVET programmes**

(UNESCO/UNESCO-UNEVOC International Centre for TVET)

SOCIETAL LEVEL	
<b>Social norms</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mass and social media</li> <li>▪ Societal and cultural norms</li> <li>▪ Gender equality</li> <li>▪ Inclusive social norms</li> </ul>	<b>Public policy</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Equal pay legislation</li> <li>▪ Gender equality policies</li> <li>▪ Legislation and policies</li> <li>▪ Sex-disaggregated data for policymaking</li> </ul>
PERSONAL LEVEL	
<b>Individual learner</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Biological language and spatial skills</li> <li>▪ Self-efficacy</li> <li>▪ Self-perception, stereotypes, and STEM identities</li> <li>▪ Interest, engagement, motivation, and enjoyment</li> </ul>	<b>Family and peers</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Peer relationships</li> <li>▪ Parental beliefs and expectations</li> <li>▪ Household financial assets</li> <li>▪ Family characteristics</li> <li>▪ A sense of 'belonging'</li> </ul>
INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL	
<b>TVET institute</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ STEM equipment, materials, and resources</li> <li>▪ Student-student interactions</li> <li>▪ Teachers' perceptions</li> <li>▪ Female teachers</li> <li>▪ Teaching quality and subject expertise</li> <li>▪ Teaching strategies</li> <li>▪ Physical &amp; learning infrastructure</li> <li>▪ Assessments, procedures, and tools</li> <li>▪ Career awareness and information</li> </ul>	<b>Labour market organisation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Workplace culture</li> <li>▪ Employees' profile (number of female colleagues in technical jobs)</li> <li>▪ Physical environment</li> <li>▪ Open and hidden employer bias</li> <li>▪ Perception of safety in the workplace</li> </ul>



The table lists the various factors that affect women's decisions when pursuing a STEM-related TVET programme. Divided into societal, personal, and institutional levels, they can either separately or collectively discourage women from pursuing educational tracks and professions in the construction sector.

Several studies have also pointed to how construction sector trade unions and other training associations could have provided informal platforms where knowledge and work experience could be shared, but where women are also deliberately excluded.<sup>6</sup> Conversely, UNICEF and the UNESCO-UNEVOC International Centre for TVET have reported how various programmes and initiatives such as 'Girls Day' in Germany, 'Girls in ICT 7 Day' in Jamaica or the 'Girls in ICT platform' in Rwanda positively influenced the career choices of (young) women.

However, UNICEF points out that these initiatives 'have limited reach and sustainability, mostly benefiting young women who are in well-resourced urban schools.' The hope is that initiatives like these will eventually increase the number of women in STEM-related TVET programmes.

» Young women in Sudan thought that their low math skills were due to their gender« UNEVOC International Centre for TVET

Common global trends related to TVET institutions, teachers, and training materials that need an overhaul:

- **Lack of role models:** Teaching staff are predominantly male. Thus, fewer female staff means fewer role models for female students.
- **Lack of gender awareness:** Not all teachers may have received gender awareness training and thus unconsciously (and inadvertently) reflect gender biases despite believing they are gender neutral. This could include assigning 'lighter' practical work to girls or separating girls and boys during group work. However, there are initiatives worldwide to increase the gender awareness of teaching staff in TVET institutions.<sup>8</sup>

- **Gender stereotyping:** This can include the lack of motivation and willingness to teach women as well as gender segregation in classes, which are especially common in STEM-related TVET programmes.<sup>9</sup>
- **Non-formalised TVET teaching qualifications:** Formalising/standardising qualifications will make students see STEM-related TVET teaching as a viable job prospect.
- **Non-conducive work environment:** Female staff at some TVET institutions are not even provided with basic infrastructure like gender-segregated sanitary facilities.
- **Male-centric training materials:** Most TVET training materials either do not depict women or show them as subordinates to men. Female students would identify better with certain 'male' jobs and be motivated to pursue them if they see more women doing these jobs.
- **Non-gender inclusive – or gender-neutral – language:** This refers to 'speaking and writing in a way that does not discriminate against a particular sex, social gender or gender identity, and does not perpetuate gender stereotypes. Given the key role of language in shaping cultural and social attitudes, using gender-inclusive language is a powerful way to promote gender equality and eradicate gender bias.'<sup>10</sup>

A final note: there is no 'one size fits all' teaching strategy on gender-sensitivity that can be applied in all countries.

» Open and hidden gender preferences within companies«

UNEVOC International Centre for TVET

<sup>6</sup> Examples are Self-Employed Women's Association of India or the Trade Union of Civil Engineering, Industry and Planning of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (ILO 2015: 21; 26f.).

<sup>7</sup> Information Communication Technology.

<sup>8</sup> For example, gender training of teachers in Mozambique, evidence from the Netherlands (Deltion College) and initiatives in Costa Rica and Ghana (UNESCO/UNESCO-UNEVOC International Centre for TVET 2020: 26).

<sup>9</sup> From a 2018 study by the European Institute for Gender Equality that said, 'No country has achieved gender balance in vocational education.'

<sup>10</sup> United Nations (UN) 2021.







## RECRUITMENT AND HIRING PRACTICES, AND WORKING CONDITIONS OF THE FEMALE LABOUR FORCE IN THE CONSTRUCTION SECTOR

Recruitment and hiring practices in the construction sector are oftentimes informal, with the ILO citing 'poor recruitment policies' as one reason for general labour shortages in the construction industry.

Information about training and employment opportunities is often spread by word of mouth from those (oftentimes men) already working in the sector. Therefore, women who are already excluded from male networks, tend to lose out on getting information on TVET programmes and job opportunities in the construction sector – reflecting 'open yet hidden' gender (dis)advantages depending on who gains and who loses out.

Getting information via the internet, television, and radio, or at career fairs or workshops can significantly increase women's awareness of their career and training options. Expanding their access to networks of women in the construction sector or related industries could be a decisive step for them to work in this sector.<sup>11</sup> For instance, the Global Apprenticeships Network<sup>12</sup> that includes many construction companies, is a useful avenue for young women wanting to enter this field.

Common global trends in the recruitment and hiring of women, and the working conditions of the female labour force that need an overhaul include:

- **Non-standardised recruitment procedures:** This lack of standard recruitment procedures also suggests that human resource (HR) matters such as recruitment, selection, performance appraisals, and promotions are dealt with by predominantly male decision-makers.
- **Common assumption that women can't do the job:** Women make up 7.5% of all construction workers in Asia.<sup>13</sup> Yet the ILO says that women are often believed to be unable to do skilled construction work. Hence, many end up working as

subordinates to men, and are mainly employed in administrative and organisational office positions. Or they sell food, clean, and oversee storekeeping on construction sites like in Tanzania.<sup>14</sup> Or they do 'semi-skilled work' such as carrying loads, plastering, or mixing concrete like in India.

- **Women lose out to poor infrastructure:** They are (in)directly affected by unsafe workspaces, remote work sites, and poorly developed infrastructure and transport.
- **Inadequate facilities at the workplace:** Sites often do not provide separate toilets, showers, or changing rooms for female workers.
- **Stereotyping and sexual harassment at construction sites<sup>15</sup>:** Men and women have vastly differing perceptions of the barriers and causes of gender inequality, influenced in some cases by religious and cultural backgrounds.
- **Unequal pay for equal work:** Women are often not paid the same as men, with the gender pay gap having 'worsened' or 'widened' recently in some countries.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, the ILO says that in some cases, women are not paid at all if they are involved in a family network at the workplace. Figure 1 illustrates how across different income levels, there was little change in pay conditions for women between 1995 and 2015.

<sup>11</sup> One positive example is the German network 'komm mach MINT' (translated: 'Come and participate in STEM'), Nationaler Pakt für Frauen in Mint-Berufen which is also supported by the German Government (2021).

<sup>12</sup> Initiative of the International Organisation of Employers and the Business and Industry Advisory Committee to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (ILO 2015).

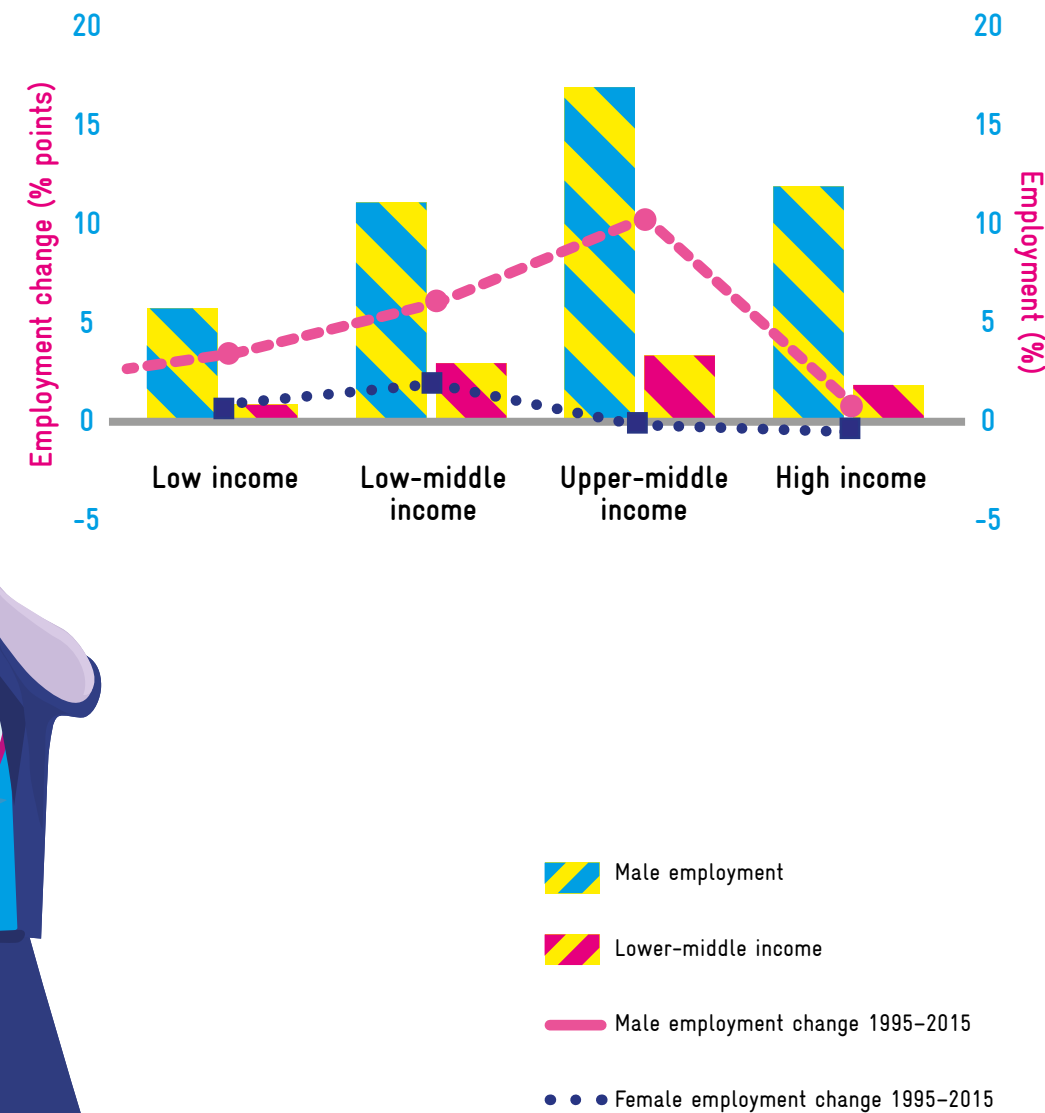
<sup>13</sup> ILO 2015.

<sup>14</sup> In contrast, 'direct construction occupations' (ILO 2015) that are often reserved for men include jobs like masonry, carpentry, or electricity.

<sup>15</sup> Kaushik et al. 2014; UNESCO/ UNESCO-UNEVOC International Centre for TVET 2020.

<sup>16</sup> Build Australia 2020; Jones 2020; in Australia.

**Figure 1: Construction sector employment by income groups and gender between 1995 and 2015**



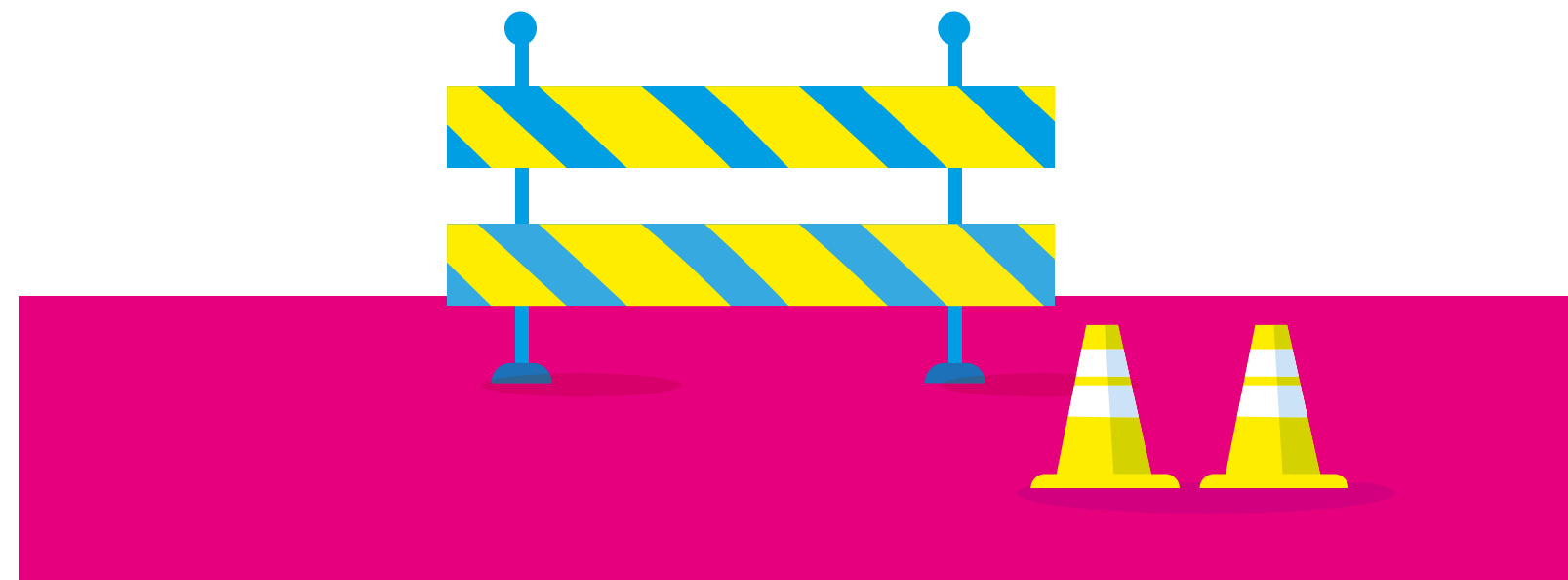
Source: ILO 2016.

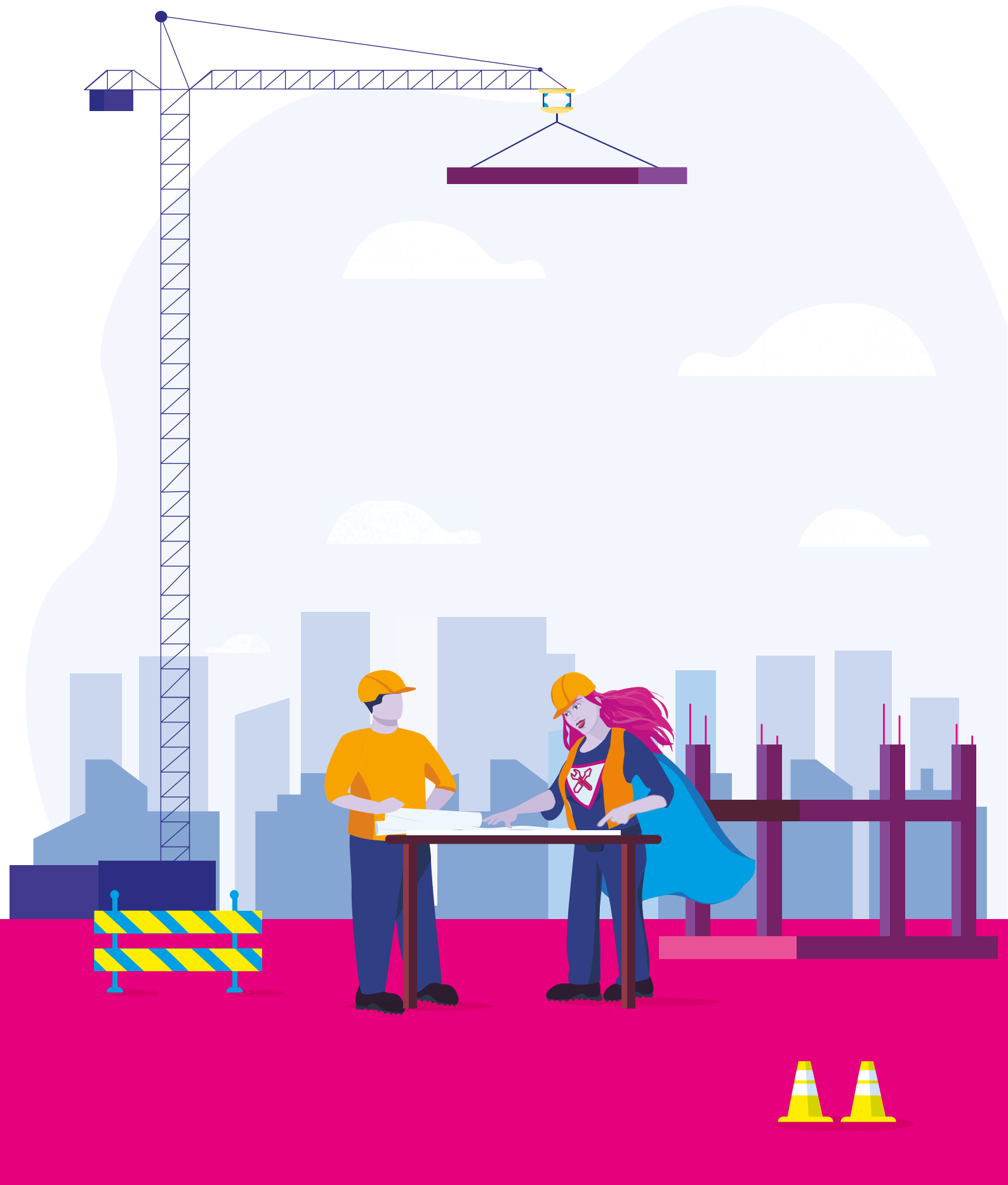
## WOMEN IN CONSTRUCTION: THE ROAD AHEAD

So, how can the lucrative global construction sector successfully fill its employment gaps with highly skilled and willing women?

The following recommendations might just prove to be a win-win solution for all:

- Encourage women to pursue STEM-related TVET programmes by tackling the personal, institutional, and societal level factors that currently hold them back.
- Educate and train women in the construction sector disciplines facing staff shortages.
- Encourage women to attend vocational fairs, or to seek career guidance, coaching and mentorships.
- Improve the design and content of learning material, train instructors in gender awareness, use gender-neutral language in training and learning/teaching materials, and in job vacancies.
- Provide women with informal training and networking opportunities by establishing support systems to help them enter the workforce and expanding women-led unions, organisations or ‘Girls’ Days.’
- Involve more women in recruitment and hiring processes, as they are important leaders and role models for young women.
- Provide women with better working conditions like gender-segregated facilities and enforce anti-discrimination and anti-harassment regulations.
- National governments should pass and enforce gender equality laws that set hiring quotas or ensure minimum numbers of women in training programmes.
- And finally: women should receive equal pay for equal work.





## WOMEN IN CONSTRUCTION: MONGOLIAN PERSPECTIVE

Mongolia's national gender policy is encapsulated in the Law on Promotion of Gender Equality (LPGE). Passed in 2011, Article 1 Chap 1 states that it aims to establish 'the legal basis for the creation of conditions to ensure gender equality in political, legal, economic, social, cultural and family relations, and to regulate relations related to their implementation.'

According to the data of the National Statistics Office of Mongolia (NSO) in 2021, the Mongolian construction sector is largely male dominated, with the average percentage of women in construction over the last three years at 16.8%. This is comparatively higher than the global average of around 10%.<sup>17</sup>

However, Mongolia's construction sector activities and its employee numbers fluctuate, as they are highly dependent on economic and climatic conditions.

Despite being one of the country's five largest employers with 76,000 workers in 2018, the sector still lacks qualified workers. Hence, about 2,000 foreign workers were working on Mongolian construction sites in 2019.

The following sections will illustrate the characteristics of Mongolia's TVET programmes and the working conditions for women in its construction sector. This is based on qualitative interviews with five trainees and five teachers from a TVET construction college, and five HR managers from leading construction companies.<sup>18</sup>

### Technical and vocational education and training in the Mongolian construction sector

In general, the formal TVET system consists of different programmes at the upper secondary level (vocational education, vocational training, and higher vocational education). Additionally, there are various non-formal training programmes such as short-term courses offered by registered private sector vocational training centres.

According to the UNESCO-UNEVOC International Centre for TVET, welding and plasterwork are among the top five highly demanded TVET trades in Mongolia. The Construction Development Centre

Survey of 2019 revealed that a total of 17,010 students were studying construction-related disciplines at the colleges and associated Vocational Training Schools (VTS).

Male students accounted for 72.5% (12,326) while female students accounted for only 27.5% (4,684). According to NSO data, generally the total number of students in vocational training institutions in Mongolia has been increasing since 2017. However, that has not been the case for construction related TVET.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> In the Global Gender Gap Index 2020 rankings, Mongolia is ranked 79th out of 153 countries, putting it somewhere in the middle regarding promoting gender equality. (World Economic Forum 2020).

<sup>18</sup> The interviews took place in Mongolia between March and April 2021.

<sup>19</sup> According to data provided by the ministry, a total of 7,135 people studied in vocational training institutions related to the construction sector during 2018-2019. Female students made up only 15.9%, which indicates a decreasing trend (Ministry of Construction and Urban Development 2019).





Meanwhile, government policies are attempting to counteract the relatively low participation rates of women pursuing construction-related disciplines. The Ministry of Construction and Urban Development's gender-responsive policy for the construction and urban development sector (2018–2025) has the following objectives<sup>20</sup>:

1) Strengthen national capacity for gender-responsive construction and urban development planning and processes.

2) Provide support to the construction and urban development sector's decent employment opportunities through gender-responsive human resource policies.

3) Encourage the engagement and participation of customers and partners in improving the construction and urban development sector's gender-responsive products and services.

## Results of interviews with teachers at the Polytechnic College of Construction

Five teachers (three women and two men) from the Polytechnic College of Construction (PCC) were interviewed, and their views shed light on how their own gender (possibly) influences their teaching styles and choice of training material. They also shared their views on general teaching practices, and teaching and learning materials. Based on these interviews and

other gender studies to date, it can be assumed that PCC and other Mongolian TVET institutes follow a coeducational system and trainees are not segregated by gender in class.

Their observations can be broken down as follows:

### Girls lack the physical makeup for some jobs

In the PCC, female students make up 11.3% and 0.8% of the concrete reinforcement and welding departments respectively. Slightly more young women are pursuing the electrical, plastering, concrete, and masonry trades.

The teachers think that the lower numbers of women in the concrete reinforcement and welding trades could be attributed to the belief among young women and parents that the construction industry is difficult and more suitable for men.

<sup>20</sup> Ministry of Construction and Urban Development (2018).

»Parents prefer to send their daughters to plaster classes. They say that at least their daughter will be able to fix her own house.« **Female teacher**

A 2015 study by Mongolkhatan/Enkhtuvshin stated that this 'occupational segregation among TVET schools mirrors the labour market segregation.' Although the LPGE has stipulated that gender aware-

ness should be integrated into teaching activities, this stereotyping could be evidence of the lack of awareness and application of the law.

»Girls are good at welding. But they prefer electricity, plaster, concrete, and masonry.«

**Male teacher**

Furthermore, the interviewed teachers themselves revealed their personal biases regarding 'gendered vocations' by expressing that these professions are less suitable for women. While the teachers treated young women and men equally for theory lessons, only the

males are asked to lift and carry things during team practical sessions. As such, teachers tend to form mixed teams by distributing the few girls in classes amongst them.

»Actually, it is possible for girls to make reinforcement knots, which is only one of the eight units of concrete reinforcement. Other jobs such as cutting, crushing, pouring concrete, levelling, moulding, and assembling are hard for girls because these jobs are too labour-intensive and involve heavy lifting. That's the level of technology and reality for now.«

**Male teacher**

### Girls are more diligent than boys

Some teachers said that young women are more diligent, responsible and study better. This became evident during remote lessons because of the pandemic. Young women were said to have performed

and communicated better with their teachers. Teachers attribute this to the early maturing of young women compared to young men, and their being responsible for household chores.



### Girls can get overwhelmed and need encouragement

»Because girls are more likely to get discouraged, teachers should talk to them, and encourage them. My only female student is quite 'feather bedded.« **Female teacher**

Some of the male and female teachers believe that girls should be given more attention so that they can successfully complete their studies and work in the construction sector in future.

»Girls are good at theory, but they tend to get overwhelmed while practicing, if not encouraged. The teacher should be ready to spend some more time with the girls. However, if these efforts are rewarded well, girls just shine in their studies.« **Male teacher**

While it is said that there is no difference in teaching approaches, some teachers felt that girls sometimes need more explanation because they have no prior experience in handling tools. This stems from girls and boys being brought up differently at home.

»Girls have never used hammers or nails. It's important to understand that girls may not have the experience in choosing a nail, holding a hammer properly, and hammering properly, which are simple for boys. If the teacher scolds a girl for such a thing, she may get depressed and discouraged from further studying.«

**Male teacher**

These statements not only indicate the situation in the classroom, but also reflect the attitudes of the teachers regarding the equality of women and men.



### Parents have a significant say in their children's education

When asked why they think girls attend vocational school, the teachers conclude that parents influence not only the girls' choice of vocational education programmes in the PCC, but also their educational goals in general. Parents tend to believe that the more educated girls are, the more secure and better their life would be.

According to the interviews, young women who enrol at college have more defined goals and aim to further their education and become technicians or engineers, which is consistent with the global analysis that tertiary education is superior to TVET education.

In addition, some poor parents choose vocational education programmes for their children because of the monthly living allowance provided by the

government of 200,000 Mongolian tögrög (MNT), which is about USD 70. It should also be noted that most students are aged 14-15 when they first enter vocational education programmes. They are still too young to make independent decisions, thus leaving their parents with a lot of influence. Consequently, these children show less interest in their studies, and the teachers have observed this especially among the boys.

Furthermore, the teachers also expressed their regret at female students from the provinces who have had to drop out due to pregnancy and birth. Living away from their parents and lacking the capacity and opportunity to sustain themselves and their babies, they are often forced to prematurely end their studies and careers.

### Teaching materials are male-centric



Reflecting the global trend, the teaching materials used at the PCC show that women are poorly represented in learning materials, thus making it difficult for female students to identify with the activities illustrated within. The training textbooks and manuals used for the two selected trades – welding and concrete reinforcement – were selected according to the teachers' recommendations and based on their belief that the books are gender-neutral. These training materials are available in the Mongolian language in PCC's library.

Since switching to remote training during the Covid-19 pandemic, the teachers have actively used

related YouTube videos for online training sessions. They noted that the English language videos they use mostly present men. However, it is also important to highlight that Mongolian is a gender-neutral language, which reduces linguistic gender discrimination in local teaching and learning materials.

Three teachers noticed that men were better portrayed in training materials, while a female teacher commented that men are portrayed more often than women. A male teacher however said that he hadn't even noticed this.

» Men are better represented in the training materials. So, I deliberately add pictures of women to the material I develop.« Female teacher



### Facilities for female staff and students are inadequate

As is often the case here and globally, PCC was found to have inadequate gender-segregated facilities. For welding practice, only one locker room was available for both women and men in PCC.

In summary, the interviews with the Mongolian teachers revealed that there is gender stereotyping both in practical teaching as well as in learning mate-

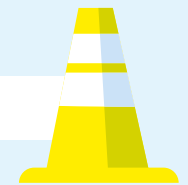
rials, reflecting the global trends in construction sector TVET. Although, the teachers perceive differences for women and men in the TVET institution and are aware of the associated problems, they themselves still distinguish between the abilities of women and men, which must be addressed. It should be noted, however, that the teachers were by no means averse to teaching women.

## Results of interviews with trainees at the Polytechnic College of Construction

Two female and three male students in their second year at PCC were interviewed on their perceptions of possible gender bias in training programme curricula, in the classroom, and in teaching and learning

materials. Their observations can be broken down as follows:

### Families influence students' education and career choices



Four of the interviewed trainees were motivated to follow this education and career track because their fathers, uncles, aunts, and sisters were already in the construction business, which these students would eventually join. Only one woman didn't have a family member in the construction sector and chose for herself to study concrete reinforcement as a major. She plans to continue her studies and become an engineer.

It is also common for family members to register young women and men at the schools. The interviews revealed that intake interviews were predominantly not conducted at the TVET institution, although they should. Thus, families and relatives

already in the construction sector not only steer the career choices of students but also help engineer their career entry into the construction sector.





### Information on training and career opportunities is not openly available

All interviewees found out about PCC and the educational programme from either friends, acquaintances or family members already working in the construction sector, reflecting the general trend in Mongolia.

All of them also said that they did not receive any information on trade unions or other training possi-

bilities in the construction sector. Therefore, not all trainees have access to information about additional opportunities at the worksite as provided by construction companies that cooperate with the PCC, which amounts to a lack of career advice.

» I wanted to apply for electricity but was told only concrete reinforcement is available. I came too late, just before the beginning of the study year. However, clear information on trades and updates on quotas for each trade would have been helpful for applicants.«

Female trainee, concrete reinforcement

This shows that information about training is very important – especially for applicants with neither any experience nor family in the construction sector. Young people should be told about these opportunities and made aware of formal channels of information during the intake interview at the latest.

However, in the last two to three years, 'Girls' Days' have been organised to promote the profession.

Teachers suggest that in future, professional presentations should highlight the achievements of young women who have graduated in welding and concrete reinforcement. For example, a female welder who became 'The best young worker' should be promoted actively.<sup>21</sup> Organising events like 'Girls' Days' can also help better promote the sector among women, as seen in other countries too.

### Gender discrimination at school and in training materials is minimal



Although the trainees criticised the overall inadequacy and lack of teaching materials, the female trainees felt only minimal discrimination in the whole education process itself. They also did not notice any difference in how women and men were represented

in the materials. While these statements may indicate a low awareness of gender inequalities, it is also clear that women do not feel discriminated against and did not experience any form of sexual harassment at the PCC specifically during training.

<sup>21</sup> For In 2018, a young female welder was placed second in the 'Mongolian Skills 2018' competition, participated in an international welding competition and received the 'Best Young Worker' award by the decree of the President of Mongolia (Sonin Mongolia 2018).

## RECRUITMENT AND HIRING PRACTICES, AND WORKING CONDITIONS OF THE FEMALE LABOUR FORCE IN THE MONGOLIAN CONSTRUCTION SECTOR

### Results of interviews with human resources managers of construction companies

HR managers of five construction companies that cooperate with PCC were interviewed for first-hand information on local hiring processes. Two of the companies are engaged in construction, electrical and technical installation, plastering and facade construction with about 100 employees. The other three

specialize in interior, exterior and engineering infrastructure with up to 25 full-time employees. Face to face interviews were conducted with a male director, a female HR officer, and a female executive director while the two remaining female HR officers were interviewed by phone.

### Seasonal fluctuations significantly influence employment and wages

Their observations can be broken down as follows: Although women make up a modest percentage of the workforce, they are often affected by the seasonal fluctuations in employment. According to the latest statistical data for the third quarter of 2020 for Mongolia, male construction workers received on

average 8.7% more pay than female workers as they hold better paid positions, on average. However, the gender pay gap in the construction sector is lower than the average pay gap in Mongolia. According to the National Statistics Office, the average salary of Mongolian women is 12.4% lower than that of men.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Workers in the surveyed construction companies earn an average of MNT 1,000,000 (USD 350) per month throughout the year. Wages in the construction sector are volatile due to seasonal fluctuations. For example, in an engineering infrastructure company, workers are paid USD 273, but welders and concrete reinforcement workers are paid extra depending on their performance. The average salary of a worker in the peak season is about USD 600. The wages of female and male employees performing the same work are equal. The salary of a seasonal assistant is slightly lower, around USD 400-450. Companies cover 50-100% of their full-time employees with social insurance services because many workers find it beneficial to choose voluntary insurance.



### Hiring is primarily done by word-of-mouth

All five companies prefer to hire people through word-of-mouth and through the intermediaries and contacts of their employees or acquaintances. Companies that undertake larger projects recruit their staff through Facebook ads and from amongst PCC graduates. The HR managers explained that compa-

nies avoid hiring workers through public ads because they hardly attract good workers – and those who do come are unreliable and quit whenever they want. This pretty much reflects the global trend of minimal effort being put into formalising recruitment practices in the sector.

### Hiring procedures are generally informal

None of the companies use evaluation sheets to select employees or has a selection committee. Instead, employers evaluate workers based on skill, performance, work quality, productivity, time use, and speed – without differentiating between the genders. Engineers (and in the surveyed companies, around 15% of the engineers were women) are responsible for this evaluation. Women make up 20-30% of these companies' full-time employees, and 5-15% of their seasonal workers. Furthermore, there are usual-

ly no introductory programmes or formal induction procedures for new employees. Employers explain that such programmes or official procedures are unnecessary since new employees tend to be family members or acquaintances of existing employees anyway. It is common for new employees to be briefly introduced informally during lunch break. Thus, there are only very few standardised hiring processes, with personal relationships instead playing a major role in them.

### Jobs are still 'gendered' despite gender not being specified in vacancies

Interns from the PCC work at all these companies every year. 90 to 100% of them are male, although the companies do not specify gender. About 40% of interns in interior design companies are young women, while all interns of exterior and engineering infrastructure companies are men. The respondents said that their key hiring criteria were experience and a passion for work. All five construction companies hire seasonal assistant workers during the warm season. A full-time job can be offered to the best seasonal worker or intern. On the other hand, if an intern or

seasonal worker makes a request for a full-time job, the decision will be made after consultation with the supervising engineer. Recruitment decisions are made jointly by the director and engineers in charge of operations in all but one company, and by the director in one company. Three of the surveyed companies are family-owned and co-managed by a couple. Consequently, women are considered in hiring decisions for the position of managers and engineers, even though they are a gender minority.



## Gender-segregated facilities are insufficient

Regarding working conditions, just like the PCC, the companies also do not have gender-segregated sanitary facilities. Only one of the five companies has separate toilets for men and women. The plastering company for instance does not have its own premises, changing rooms, restrooms, or showers. Its employees use the organisation's toilets near their

current worksite. This is common practice for companies and small crews that specialise in plastering. Only one company provides a shower for all employees at its headquarters. However, at construction sites, workers are housed in containers, and there are no showers, and there are no separate toilets for women and men.

## Work is oftentimes a family affair

What is unique in Mongolia is that generally a work crew – or 'brigade' as it is locally known – is made up of entire families. This also explains the working

climate in the companies where individual employees toe the line within the family unit.

»Concrete reinforcement workers are not a problem because they form a brigade with their families and relatives, do their work together, and coordinate their work internally.«

Female HR

While there were only a few unpleasant experiences that affected work atmosphere, none involved sexual harassment or discrimination against women.

## No disciplinary measures in place

However, companies have neither established rules nor procedures against people who behave badly at work. There are also no rules that prevent management from exerting pressure on employees regardless

of gender. These statements point to the presumption that there would be no consequences should any form of discrimination occur – either between colleagues or between employers and their staff.

»There is no such thing as correcting an individual's behaviour. We are happy when this person quits herself/himself.«

Female CEO

»There are one or two people who don't have a good relationship, but because everyone knows, they don't care, they don't get very close.«

Female HR

The HR managers stated that especially young women from PCC who joined their companies may feel uncomfortable in a male-dominated work environment, which may be a reason for them not working long hours.

»We had a good welder girl. Unfortunately, she quit soon. I thought she might feel uncomfortable working with so many men alone.«

Male director

## 'Special treatment' for women

'Positive' discrimination against women was also evident in one company: The management of a plastering company, which has younger staff, allows mothers to arrive later after sending their children to

kindergarten or school. Nevertheless, their late arrival does not affect their evaluation because these women do the most painstaking and demanding plastering work.

## Women lack the physical strength for some jobs

However, there is also the assumption that women cannot do all the work that men do, which coincides with the mindset of the interviewed PCC teachers and trainees. Despite saying that women are free to pursue whatever work they want to do, there is still the assumption that women cannot undertake all

physically demanding work. Women are considered to have less physical strength but are more skilled, patient, persistent, and diligent than men. However, there is also a tendency to believe that some working conditions that are not specified under the labour law are too dangerous for women.



»It's dangerous for women to work at heights. Therefore, women are not hired to work on the hoist.«

Female HR

Generally, gender differences do not seem to factor in daily work, in evaluations or in hiring practices. HR managers claim to treat and evaluate based only on performance and abilities. In line with the global findings however, stereotyping, inadequate segregat-

ed sanitary facilities and the relatively informal and family-networked hiring procedures illustrate that gender issues still exist in recruitment and hiring practices in Mongolia's construction sector.

## WOMEN IN CONSTRUCTION: THE ROAD AHEAD IN MONGOLIA

Based on all the findings above, the following measures could contribute towards overcoming gender bias in Mongolia's TVET teaching and learning

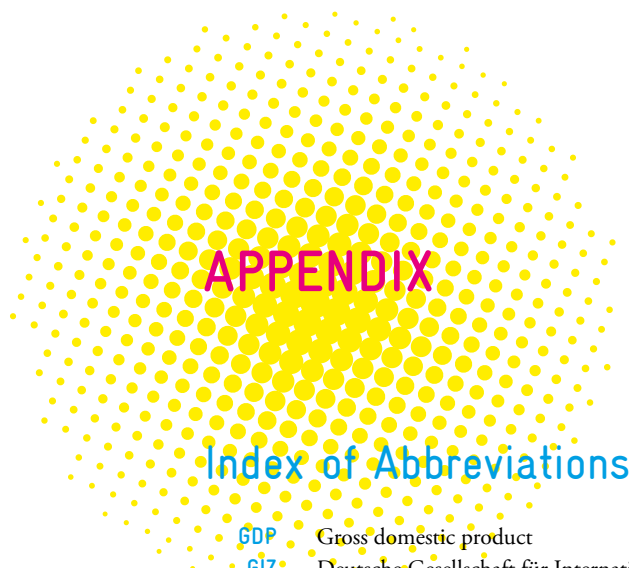
materials, improve gender parity of applicants, and help trainees successfully graduate and work in the construction sector regardless of gender:

### List of recommendations:

- Integrate gender equality into education and at the workplace.
- Use advertisements to encourage the enrolment of young women in school and to spotlight successful women in the construction sector.
- Women and men should be equally represented among teaching staff and in learning materials.
- Design gender-sensitive career counselling.
- Encourage students to visit companies, support and promote professional, social, and humanitarian clubs among students, and strengthen liaisons with labour unions.
- Increase advertisements containing information about each trade as well as job openings for new applicants during the application and enrolment process.
- Interview applicants and give them advice on course selection.
- Include communication skills, time management, reproductive health, and family planning lessons in the PCC curriculum.
- Provide gender segregated changing rooms, mobile restrooms, and showers at vocational training centres and at work sites.

Why not become a role model myself?





## Index of Abbreviations

GDP	Gross domestic product
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH
HR	human resources
ICT	Information Communication Technology
ILO	International Labour Organization
LPGE	Law on Promotion of Gender Equality
MNT	Mongolian tugrik
NSO	National Statistics Office of Mongolia
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PCC	Polytechnic College of Construction
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNEVOC	UNESCO International Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
VTS	Vocational Training Schools

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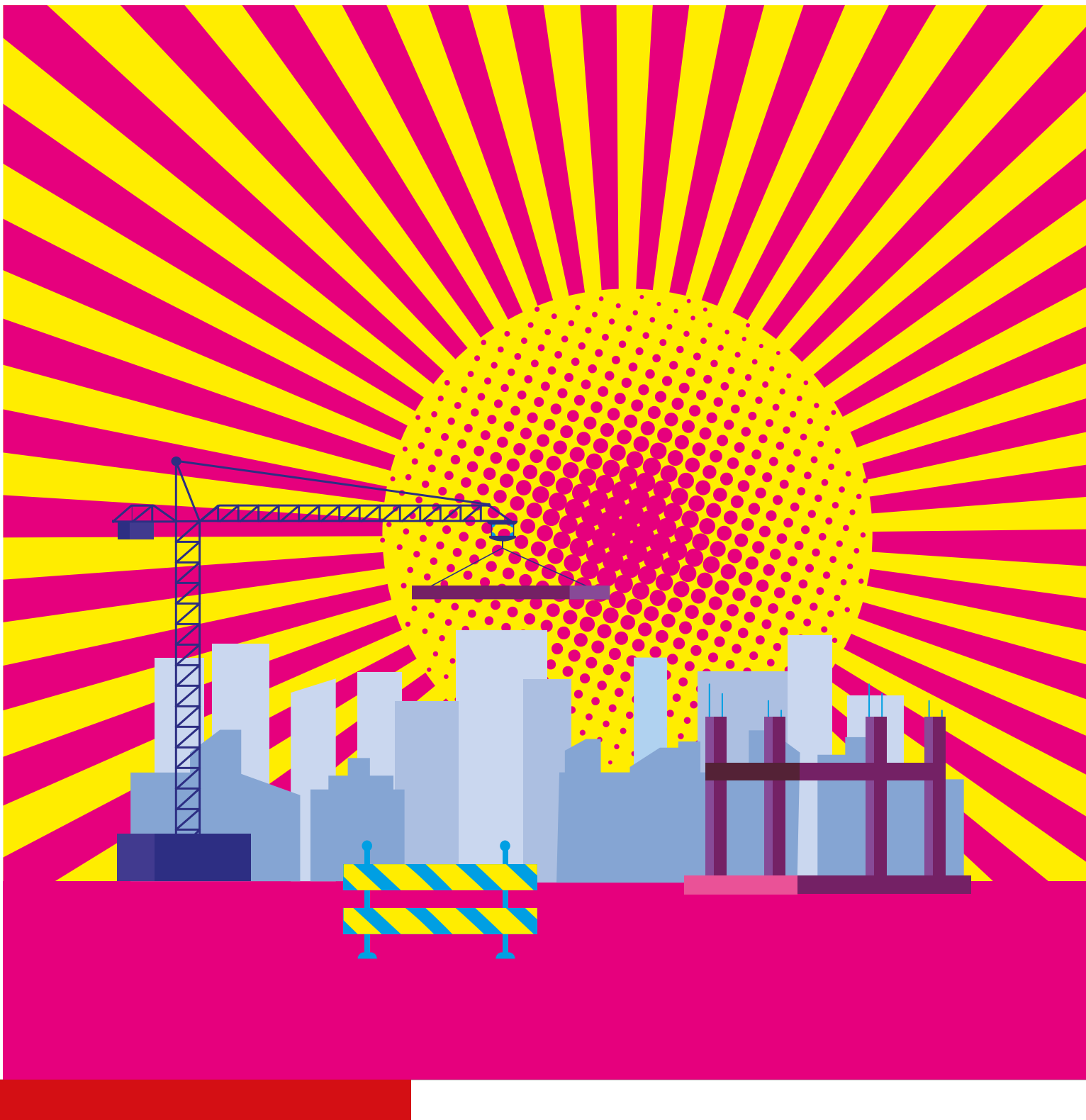
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