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Gender equality, employment and green transition: policies for inclusive development

Costa rica in the «Fair transition energy and green job creation» study

COUNTRY

COSTA RICA

When ratifying the Paris Agreement, Costa Rica committed itself to reducing its greenhouse gas emissions and adapting to climate change. Within this framework, the country submitted its Nationally Determined Contribution in 2015 and updated it in 2020. Costa Rica has demonstrated a strong commitment to a just and sustainable energy transition in its policies and strategies. In 2022, the country established a High-Level Working Table to coordinate actions related to just transition and decarbonization, involving key institutions such as the Ministry of Human Development and Social Inclusion (MDHIS), the Ministry of Labor and Social Security (MTSS), the Ministry of Environment and Energy (MINAE), the National Institute for Women (INAMU) and the Ministry of Health (MINSA). The National Action Plan on Gender Equality in Climate Action, launched in 2023, aims to integrate a gender perspective into policies and actions related to climate change. The development of green jobs in Costa Rica represents an opportunity to simultaneously address the labor and environmental crisis, promoting gender equality and improving the quality of life of the population.

1. Public Policy Review

1.1. National policies for a just and energy transition

- -National Climate Change Adaptation Policy 2018-2030: establishes a strategic framework to strengthen the country's resilience to the adverse effects of climate change. Commitment to gender equality as a cross-cutting approach to reducing the vulnerability of communities, considering that women and girls are most affected by the effects of climate change.

- National Circular Economy Strategy (ENEC)**:** it seeks to strengthen the economy, competitiveness and social welfare through the circularity of material flows in the productive sectors. The ENEC creates conditions for a fair and inclusive transition, decentralizing development opportunities, generating quality employment and attracting investments in technology-based businesses. It also fosters public-private and academic partnerships to foster innovation and gender equality.

- **National Policy for Effective Equality between Women and Men 2018-2030** (PIEG); responds to international commitments on human rights and effective equality, setting as a priority the reduction of structural knots that perpetuate inequalities between women and men, and on the other hand promoting a framework of respect for human rights and the inclusion of economic, age, ethnic, cultural and geographical diversities.

- National Energy Plan 2015-2030: it is based on the explicit formulation of the long-term national energy policy, based on the National Development Plan 2015-2018. Focuses on improving energy efficiency, promoting distributed generation and self-consumption of electricity, and updating the legal and institutional framework for energy efficiency. However, it does not incorporate specific considerations on gender equality or women's empowerment in the energy sector.

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* National Decarbonization Plan 2018-2050: sets the goal of achieving net zero emissions by 2050. This plan covers ten strategic axes that seek to transform key sectors of the Costa Rican economy and society to achieve effective decarbonization. The importance of a just transition that promotes green employability and gender equality is recognized. The plan includes a cross-cutting strategy on human rights and equality, with the aim of promoting gender equality in climate change governance structures.

1.2. Planning tools and instruments

* Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC): NDC 2020 is an update and improvement of the first contribution submitted in 2015. The contribution follows the logic of climate action, which integrates mitigation and adaptation measures. To support a just transition, this official document includes actions that focus on social and climate justice, emphasizing gender equality in actions to reduce emissions and increase resilience.

* National Strategic Plan Costa Rica 2050: is the main instrument of long-term planning in the country, designed to guide sustainable development until 2050. This plan sets out a vision for the future that seeks to transform the current development model into one more decentralized, digitized and decarbonized, known as the 3D model. Further considers the need to increase women's participation in the labour market and reduce gender gaps.

* National Development and Public Investment Plan 2023-2026: is the main planning instrument of the government for this period, aimed at establishing strategic priorities for the country's development. The PNDIP seeks to align government policies with the SDGs. Gender-sensitive targets of 21.2 per cent, including the provision of training processes for employability with a gender perspective in the EMPLÉATE programme, which is specifically aimed at young people in vulnerable situations.

* National Action Plan on Gender Equality in Climate Action: aims to integrate a gender perspective into policies and actions related to climate change in Costa Rica, Recognizing and empowering the role of women in mitigating and adapting to the effects of climate change.

This plan recognizes the key role of women in environmental management and promotes their participation in sustainable, green and blue economic models.

* National Strategy for Employability and Human Talent 2023-2027: also known as "Brete Strategy", seeks to improve the employability of people in situations of exclusion from employment in Costa Rica, through transversal actions that promote gender equality, Social inclusion and adaptation to new technologies.

* Citizen Advisory Council on Climate Change (5C): is a consultative and deliberative space that seeks to collaborate in the design and implementation of national climate change policies. Has developed mechanisms to ensure equitable gender representation in its processes.

* Joint Programme to accelerate the energy transition through the National Biomethane Strategy: an initiative of the United Nations (UNDP) and the Government of Costa Rica, which seeks to promote the energy transition with a focus on the inclusion of women and vulnerable populations.

1.3. Inclusion of the gender dimension in public policies

Costa Rica has demonstrated a strong commitment to integrating gender equality into its public

policies related to energy transition and climate action. In line with the country's PIEG 2018-2030 and NDC 2020, several initiatives have been implemented with the objective of strengthening gender equality in action against climate change.

The **National Women's Institute (INAMU)**, as the governing body for gender issues, develops institutional policies to integrate a gender perspective in various areas, including the environment. INAMU has adopted an environmental policy that reflects its commitment to the protection of women's human rights and environmental sustainability. This policy establishes guidelines for integrating environmental considerations into all institutional operations and decisions, recognizing the interrelationship between gender equity and environmental sustainability.

2. Analysis of opportunities and potential

2.1. Identification of policies that favor the integration of women in green jobs

NDC 2020 envisages the development of a Just Transition Strategy for the country, accompanied by a

National Green Jobs Policy. Although this policy is still in the process of definition, Costa Rica has implemented several strategies that integrate the gender perspective in the field of work and environment:

- **National Strategy for Employability and Human Talent.**
- **National Circular Economy Strategy (ENEC).**
- **National Action Plan on Gender Equality in Climate Action.**

The study "Green Employment in Costa Rica: Decent work for social-ecological transformation" analyses the state of green jobs in the country, identifying strategic areas and opportunities for their promotion, with special emphasis on young people and women. This document highlights the need for public policies that promote the creation of green jobs as a way to improve the competitiveness and living conditions of the population, in line with the commitments made in NDC 2020.

2.2. Recommendations to improve the inclusion of gender in public policies

Costa Rica leads the energy transition in Latin America, standing out for its commitment to clean energy and regional integration in the electricity sector. This leadership is reflected in its ability to generate more than 98 per cent of its electricity from renewable sources, mainly hydropower, without using coal or natural gas power plants. In addition, the country has been internationally recognised for its sustainable approach and has been selected to chair the OECD's Ministerial-level Council Meeting (MCM) in 2025, focusing on resilient, inclusive and sustainable prosperity.

To advance gender mainstreaming and a just transition, it is recommended:

Develop a national diagnosis of green and blue jobs with a gender focus: prepare a comprehensive study to analyse the current status of green and blue jobs in Costa Rica, disaggregated by gender. This diagnosis should identify the main existing and potential value chains, assessing specific opportunities for female employment in these sectors and possible obstacles to successful integration.

Practices to highlight

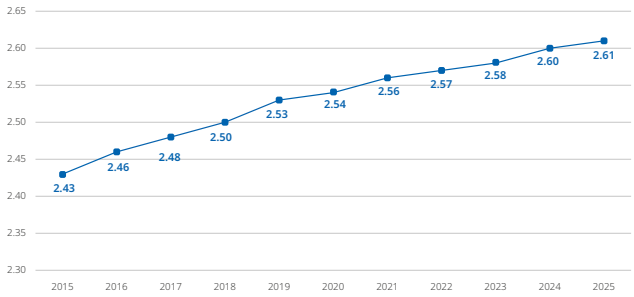
INAMU's Good Labour Practices with Gender Equality and Equity (BPLEIG) model: aimed at micro and small enterprises, this model offers guidelines for implementing actions that promote equal opportunities and treatment between women and men in the workplace.

3. Statistical data

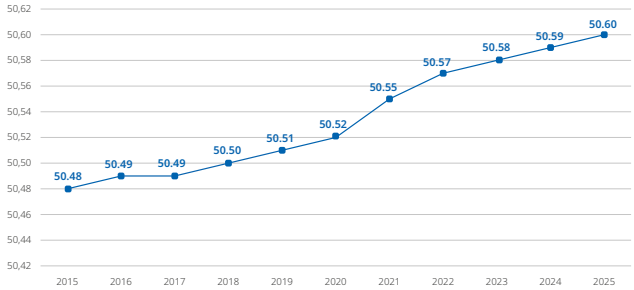
A. Demographic data

Population distribution statistics

Number of woman, millions

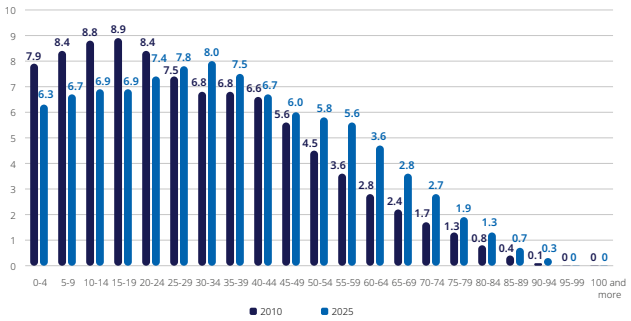


Percentage of woman



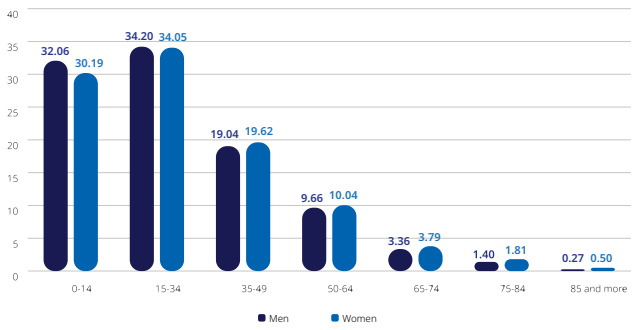
Age distribution statistics

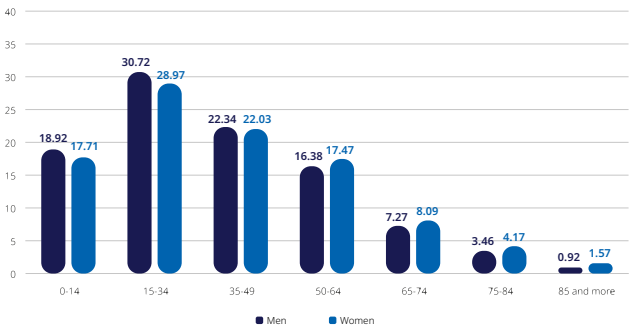
Age distribution of the female population



Population distribution statistics by age

Age distribution by sex, percentage





Ages	Women			Men		
	2000	2025	Difference in percentage points	2000	2025	Difference in percentage points
0-14	30.19	17.71	-12.48	32.06	16.92	-13.14
15-34	34.05	28.97	-5.08	34.2	30.72	-3.48
35-49	19.62	22.03	2.41	19.04	22.34	3.3
50-64	10.04	17.47	7.43	9.66	16.36	6.7
65-74	3.79	8.09	4.3	3.36	7.27	3.91
75-84	1.81	4.17	2.36	1.4	3.46	2.06
85 and more	0.5	1.57	1.07	0.27	0.92	0.65

Interpretation of demographic data

Distribution of the population by age and sex (2000 vs. 2025): Costa Rica is undergoing a clear process of population ageing. In 2000, 30.2% of women and 32.1% of men were aged 0-14 years. By 2025, these proportions will fall to 17.7% and 18.9%, respectively, representing a drop of more than 12 percentage points.

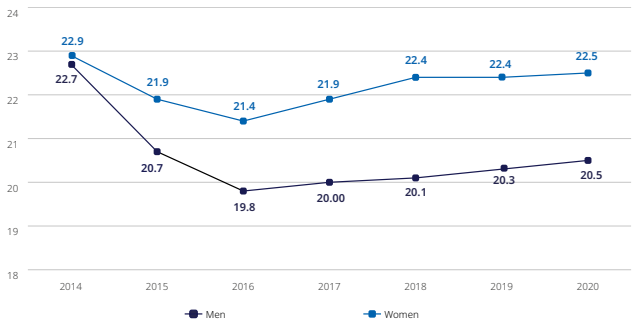
On the other hand, there is a considerable increase in older age groups. Women aged 50-64 will increase from 10.0% in 2000 to 17.5% in 2025; men from 9.7% to 16.4%. Groups aged 65-74 and 75 or over are also growing, especially among women, anticipating greater demand for health services, care and pensions.

Evolution of the percentage of women in the total population (2015-2025): the proportion of women in the national population remains stable, ranging from 50.48% in 2015 to 50.60% projected for 2025. However, their over-representation in older age groups suggests the need for specific public policies for women's old age.

B. Education level data

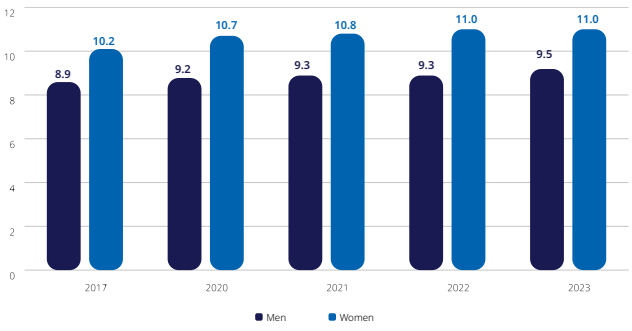
Educational attainment statistics

Percentage of bacherol, population 25+

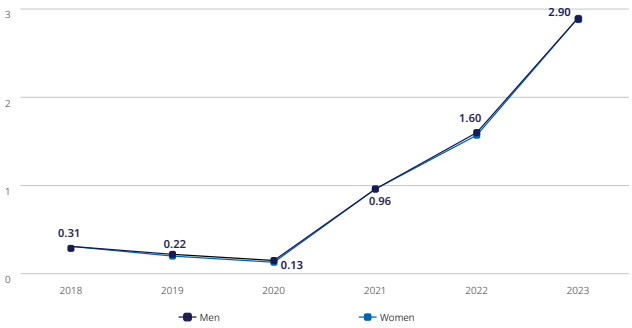


Statistics on years of study

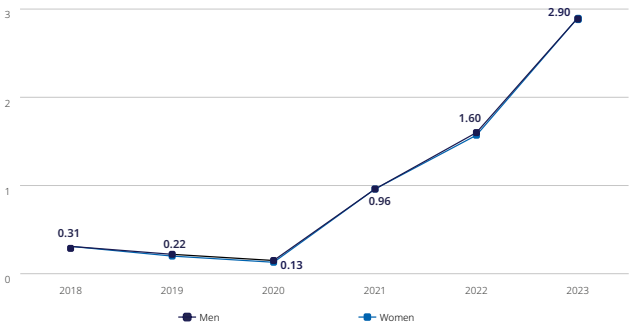
Years of education



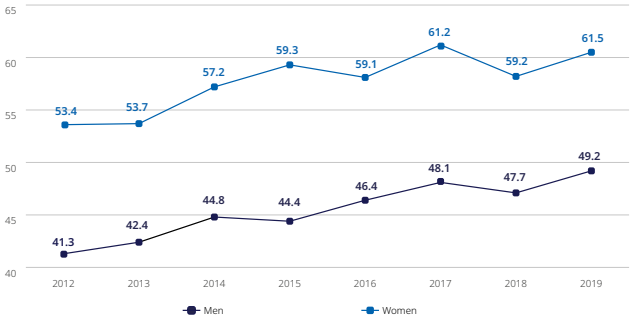
Percentage of master, population 25+



Percentage of PhD, population 25+



Gross tertiary enroment rate, percentage



Interpretation of training data

Access to tertiary education: Gross enrolment rates in tertiary education reflect higher access by women. From 2012 to 2019, women have consistently maintained rates above 57%, while men remain below 50%.

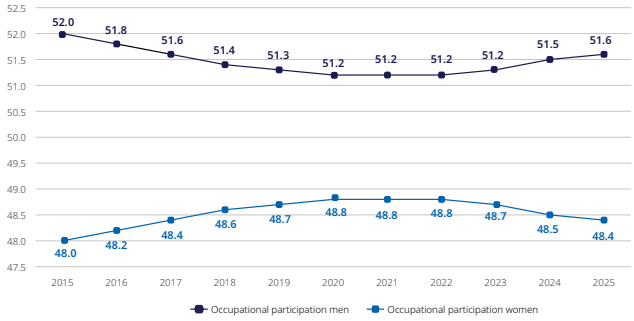
Level of education attained (bachelor's, master's, doctorate): women outnumber men in the percentage of people with a degree since 2015. In masters, although the gap is narrower, they also have a growing advantage since 2018. In doctorates (PhD), men still lead slightly, although the gap has been gradually narrowing.

Average years of formal education: since 2017, women have equaled or slightly outperformed men in average years of formal education. In 2023, women reach an average of 11 years of schooling compared to 10.2 years for men.

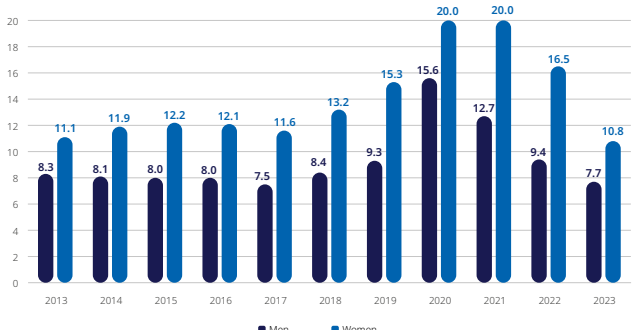
C. Employment data

Employment statistics

Economic participation rate, percentage

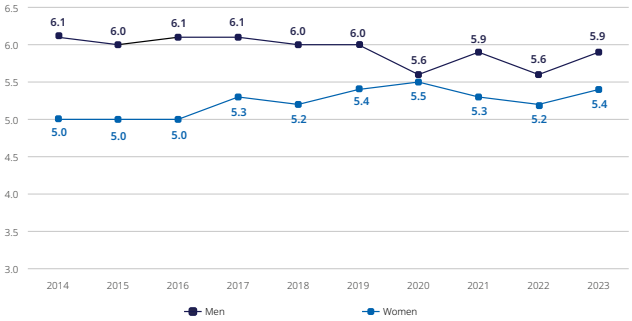


Unemployment rate, percentage

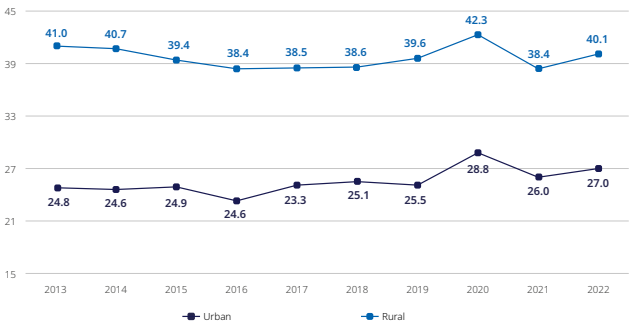


Income Statistics

Average income, in multiples of the poverty line



Percentage of adult women dedicated exclusively to unpaid work



Interpretation of employment data

Economic participation rate: women's economic participation is persistently below that of men. By 2025, the rate is projected to be 48.4 per cent for women and 51.6 per cent for men. Although the gap has narrowed in recent years, a structural gender gap still persists.

Unpaid work: A significant proportion of adult women report full-time unpaid work. In 2022, this figure reached 28.8% in rural areas and 25.1% in urban areas. This reality lacks a male equivalent and demonstrates the disproportionate burden of care borne by women.

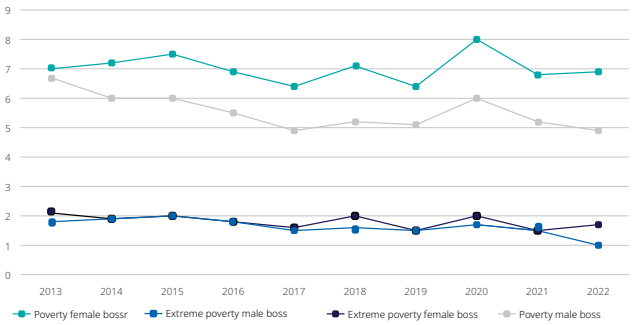
Unemployment rate: unemployment affects women more than men. In 2023, the female rate was 6.1%, compared to 5.0% male. This difference is persistent and amplified in situations of economic crisis.

Income: in 2023, the average income of men was 5.4 times the poverty line, while that of women was only 5.0. This gender pay gap persists even among people with similar educational levels.

D. Poverty data

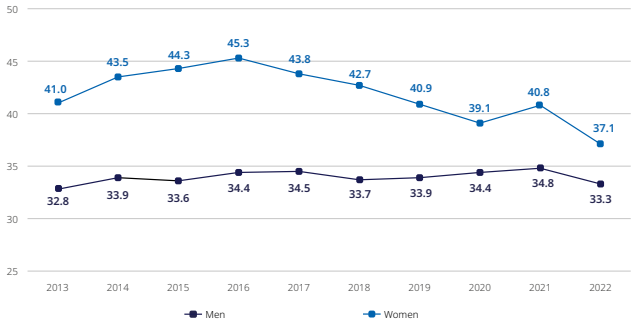
Statistics on poverty and extreme poverty

Poverty gap coefficient, percentage

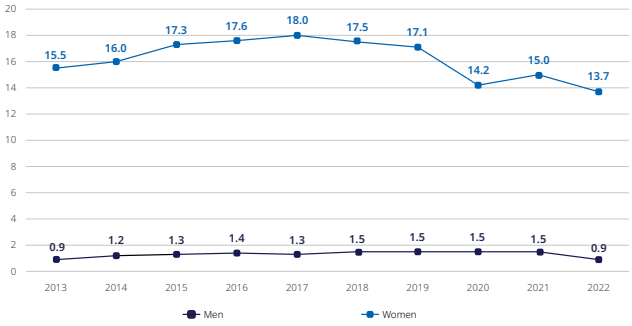


Employment and vulnerability statistics

Total employed in low-productivity jobs, percentage of urban employed population



Employment in domestic work, percentage



Interpretation of poverty and vulnerability data

Low productivity jobs: women are over-represented in low productivity jobs. In 2022, 40.8% of employed women were in this type of employment, compared to 33.3% of men. This condition affects their access to social security and job mobility opportunities.

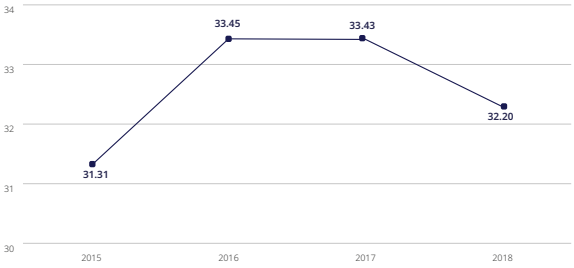
Poverty gaps by type of head of household: female-headed households have higher rates of poverty and extreme poverty. In 2022, poverty in female-headed households was 34.8%, compared to 33.3% in male-headed households. In terms of extreme poverty, the differences are even more marked.

Employment in paid domestic work: Paid domestic work is highly feminized. In 2022, 13.7% of women were employed in this sector, while for men this proportion is no more than 1.5%, reflecting a clear occupational segregation by gender.

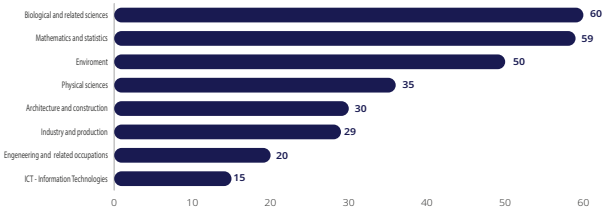
E. STEM education and employment data in the energy and transportation sectors

Graduate Statistics

Percentage of STEM graduates

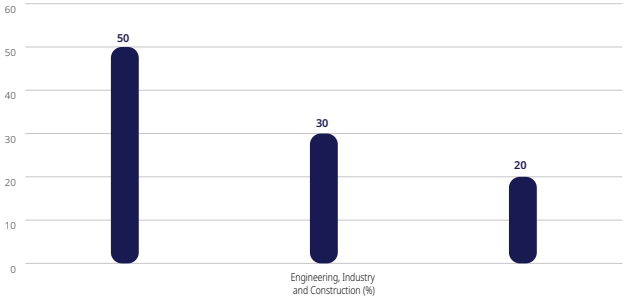


Participation of women in STEM careers



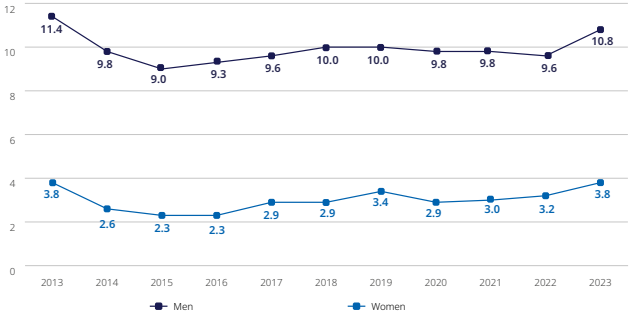
Student statistics by STEM major

Percentage of female graduates from selected STEM majors (2022)



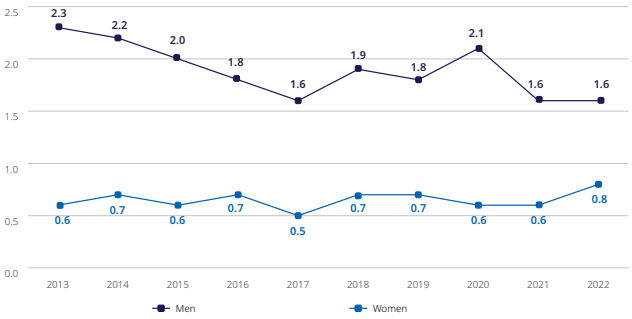
Transportation employment statistics

Population employed in transport, percentage



Energy employment statistics

Population employed in energy, gas and water, percentage



Interpretation of training and employment data in STEM and strategic sectors

Female participation in STEM careers: Female participation in STEM areas is limited. In 2022, only 15% of those studying Information Technologies were women, and in Engineering and Production this percentage

was 20%. On the other hand, women are more concentrated in natural and biological sciences, with rates close to 50%.

Graduates in STEM disciplines: between 2015 and 2018, the percentage of women graduates in STEM areas ranged from 31% to 33%, with little variation. This suggests a stabilization in the recruitment of women, although far from parity in key technical disciplines.

Employment in strategic sectors (energy and transport): female employment in strategic sectors such as energy and transport remains marginal. In 2022, women accounted for only 0.8% of employment in energy and 3.8% in transport. This under-representation reflects cultural and structural barriers that hinder women's access to high economic and technological value jobs.

General conclusions

Persistent inequality despite educational progress: women have reached and surpassed men in schooling and university degrees, but this is not fully reflected in their employment or income.

Labour market segmentation: women continue to be concentrated in low-productivity jobs, domestic work and feminized sectors, with little presence in strategic industries.

Overburden of unpaid care: A considerable proportion of adult women are engaged exclusively in care work, which hampers their participation in the labour market.

Feminization of poverty: female heads of household face higher rates of poverty and economic exclusion, aggravated by their precarious integration into the labor market.