

**Enhancing Women's Economic Empowerment
in APEC
through Greater Participation in High-skill
Digitized Service Sectors**

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This project focuses on identifying ways to better utilize the opportunities presented by the dynamic growth of digitally intensive high skill services to expand women's participation in these in order to accelerate progress towards gender equality and boost economic resilience.

- It works to help implement [La Serena Roadmap for Women and Inclusive Growth 2019-2030](#)
- It builds on a prior project carried out for the GOS on Knowledge Intensive Business Services (KIBS) - Barriers Faced by Women in International Trade in Services (GOS 02 2022), concluded at SOM3 in Peru in August 2024

Time line for project

- Project approval: July 2024
- Research begun: November 2024
- First draft of paper: February 2025
- Interviews with selected ABAC firms: March 2025
- Online workshop to discuss the research findings: April 2025
- Public-Private Dialogue on the revised paper: SOM2 May 2025
- Recommendations from the research to be considered by GOS
May/June 2025

Main components of the paper, Part I



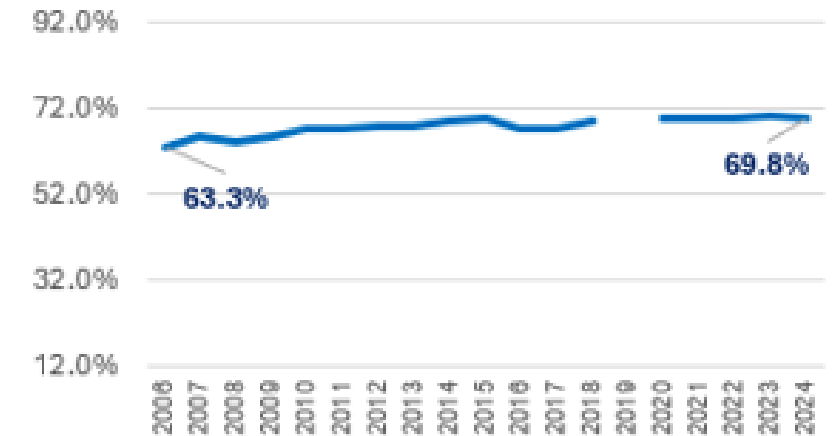
- Introduction
- Section I. Economic Gender Equality Gaps
- Section II. Growth of Trade in Digitally Delivered Services
- Section III. Women's Employment in Digitally Delivered Services
- Section IV - Skills and Education for Enhancing Women's Participation in Digitally Delivered Services
- SECTION V: Issues of Concern Around Women's Participation in Digitally Delivered Services
 - 1) Distinction between Formality and Informality
 - 2) Artificial Intelligence, Women and Digitally Delivered Services
- Recommendations

Main Messages

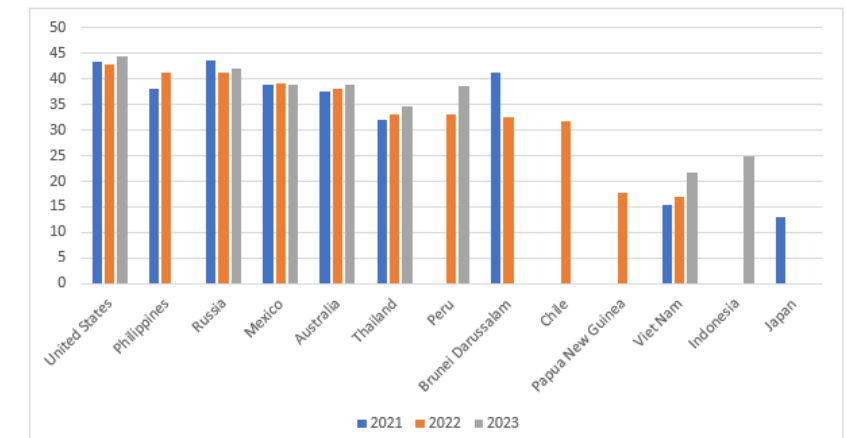
Section I – Economic Gender Equality Gaps in APEC

- **Persistent Overall Gender Parity Gap** – Despite progress, the APEC region still has a 26.65% gender gap, requiring another 84 years to close at the current pace.
- **Economic Impact of Gender Inequality** – The underutilization of women in the workforce costs APEC economies an estimated USD 17 trillion, limiting overall economic growth.
- **Economic participation and opportunity gap** – There has been no progress in recent years in APEC to close this gap.
- **Wage and Leadership Gaps** – Women continue to face wage disparities, earning less than men in similar roles, and are significantly underrepresented in leadership and decision-making positions.

APEC Global Gender Gap Economic Participation and Opportunity Subindex, 2006 - 2024



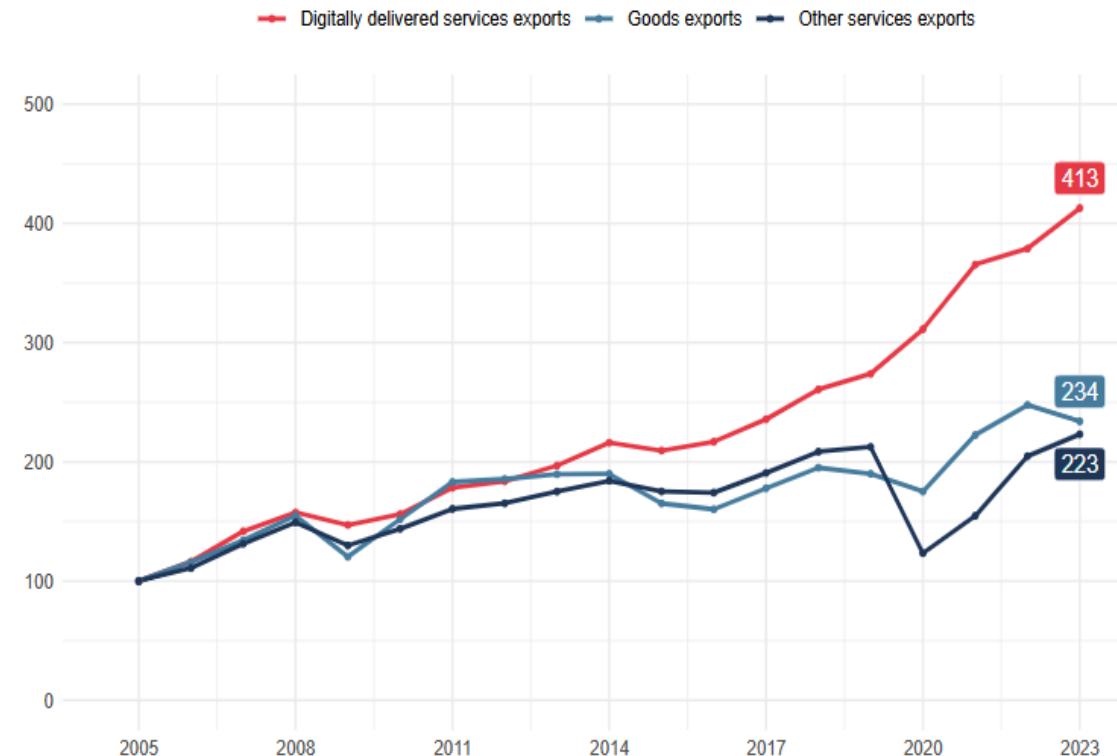
▲ Figure 4. Women's Share of Employment in Senior and Middle Management in APEC (2021-2023, in percent)



Section II – Growth of Trade in Digitally Delivered Services

- **All Digital Trade is a Service**
- **DDS as the Fastest-Growing Trade Component** – The value of digitally delivered services exports quadrupled since 2005, outpacing goods and other services trade.
- **Key DDS Sectors are Driving Growth** – *Financial services, professional services, and ITC/computer services* dominate DDS trade, presenting high-skill job opportunities.
- **Digitalization and Trade in APEC** – DDS now accounts for over 54% of global services exports, with APEC economies playing a major role in this expansion.

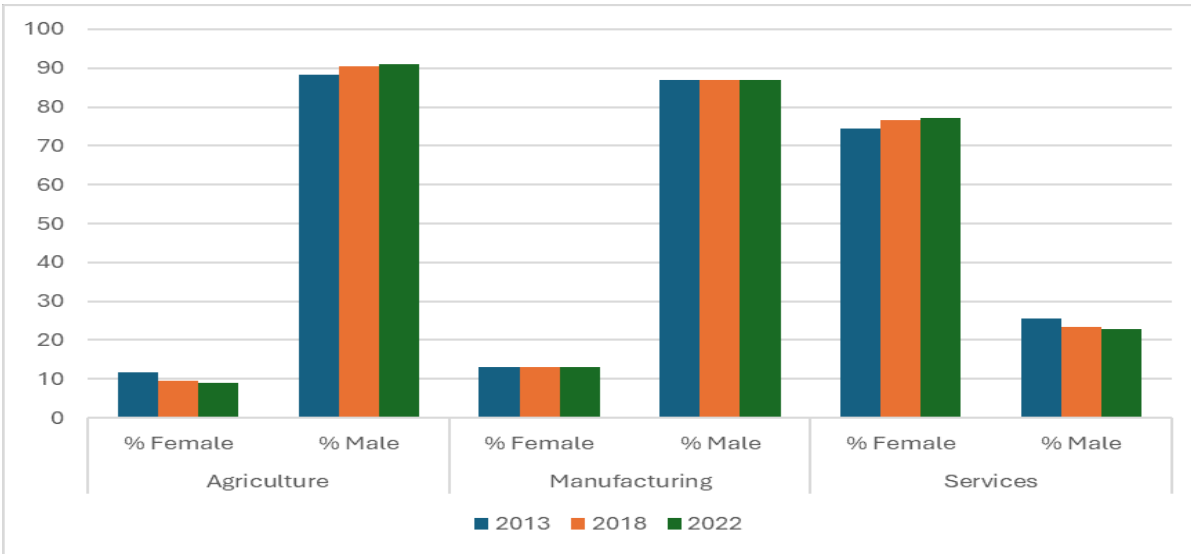
Index 2005=100



Source: WTO estimates.

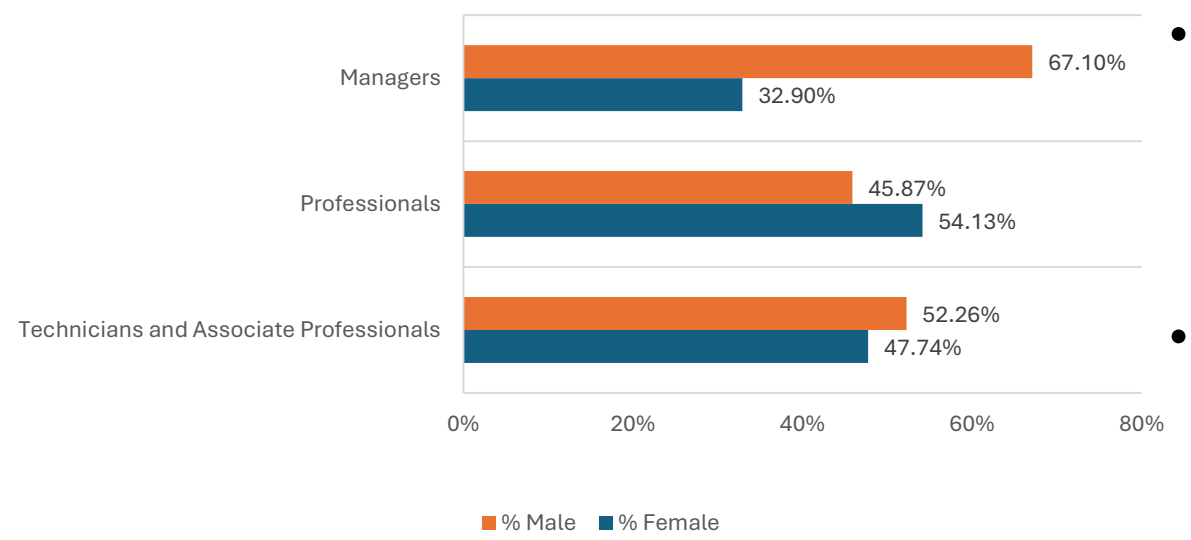
Note: Digitally deliverable services include financial services, business activities, such as information, administrative and professional services, and other services, such as audio-visual and entertainment services.

Section II – Women’s Employment in Digitally Delivered Services



Women’s Employment in Services is Rising – Women are increasingly working in services, with the share of female professionals in APEC growing, but managerial representation remains low.

Sectoral Concentration & STEM Gaps – Women are overrepresented in lower-paying service roles and underrepresented in high-skill, high-paying DDS jobs like IT and finance.

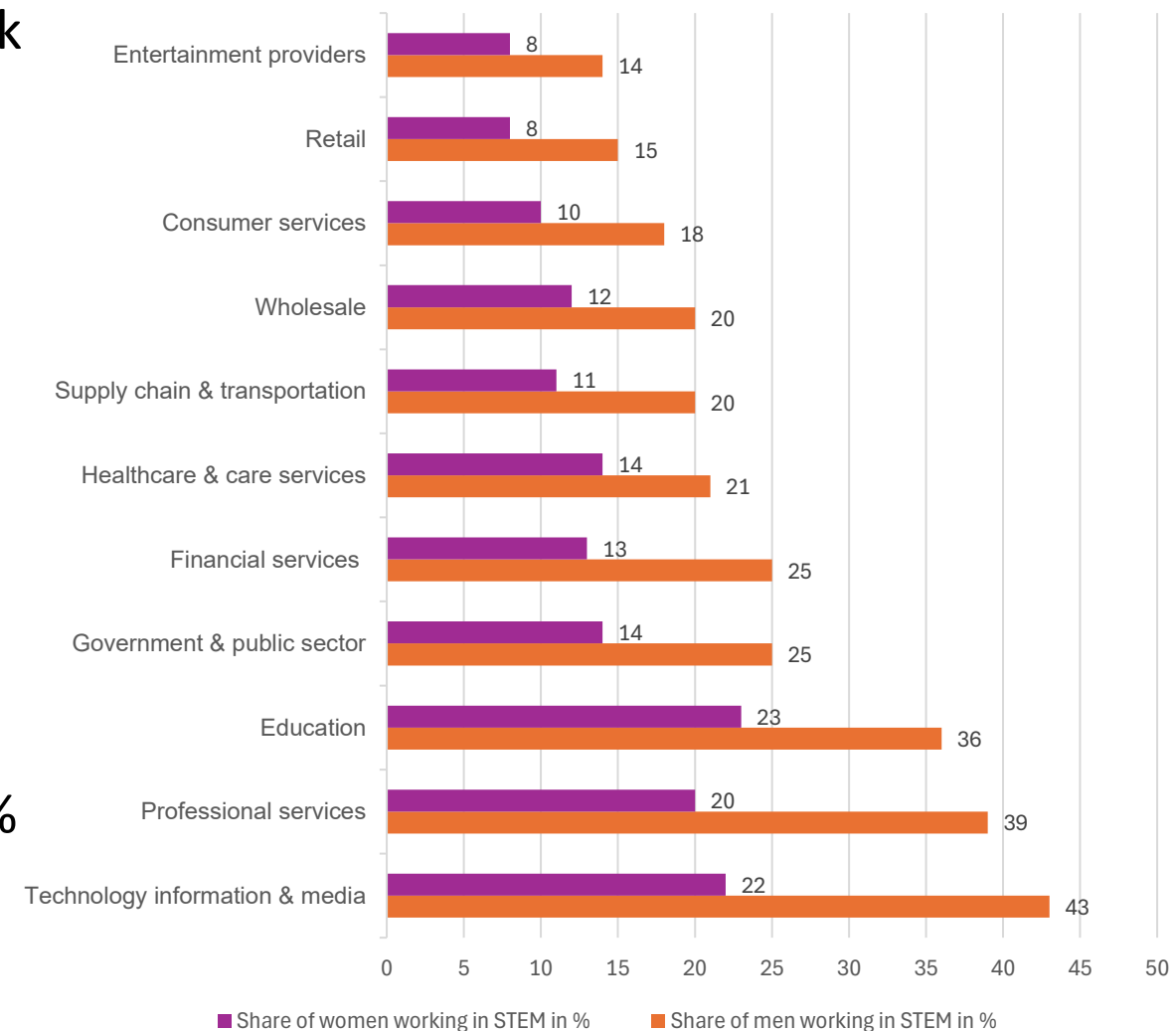


- **Barriers to Advancement** – Structural factors such as workplace biases, lack of digital training, and social norms continue to hinder women’s entry into high-paying, dynamic DDS sectors.

- **Regulatory & Financial Hurdles** – Access to finance and lack of skills training also play a role.

Section IV – Skills, Education and Women in Digitally Delivered Services

- **Skills Mismatch & Gender Gaps** – Women often lack the digital, financial, and managerial skills required for high-paying DDS jobs due to unequal access to training.
- **STEM Education and Employment Deficit** – Less than one-third of STEM graduates in APEC are women, impacting their access to tech-driven and innovation-led careers.
- **Digital Divide** – Women’s lower access to digital tools and infrastructure limits their participation in education and skill acquisition.
- **Growing Importance of Digital Skills** – By 2030, 39% of core job skills will shift towards AI, big data, and digital literacy, areas where women are currently underrepresented.



Section V – Issues of Concern Around Women in Digitally Delivered Services



1) Distinction between Informality and Formality in DDS

- The rise of digital platforms has blurred the line between formal and informal work.
- A significant portion of women in the services workforce operate informally (esp. in person-2-person services). There is also informality in DDS too.
- **Gendered impact of informality in services:** wage disparities, job insecurity, and limited career advancement, as well as access to formal education and training, especially digital skills
- Digitalization has created new opportunities in financial services, ITC, and professional services, but women often lack the digital and professional skills required to access these roles
- **Barriers that prolong informality:** skills gaps, social norms, and structural inequalities.
- Informal work typically provides limited opportunities to build formal credentials or industry networks.

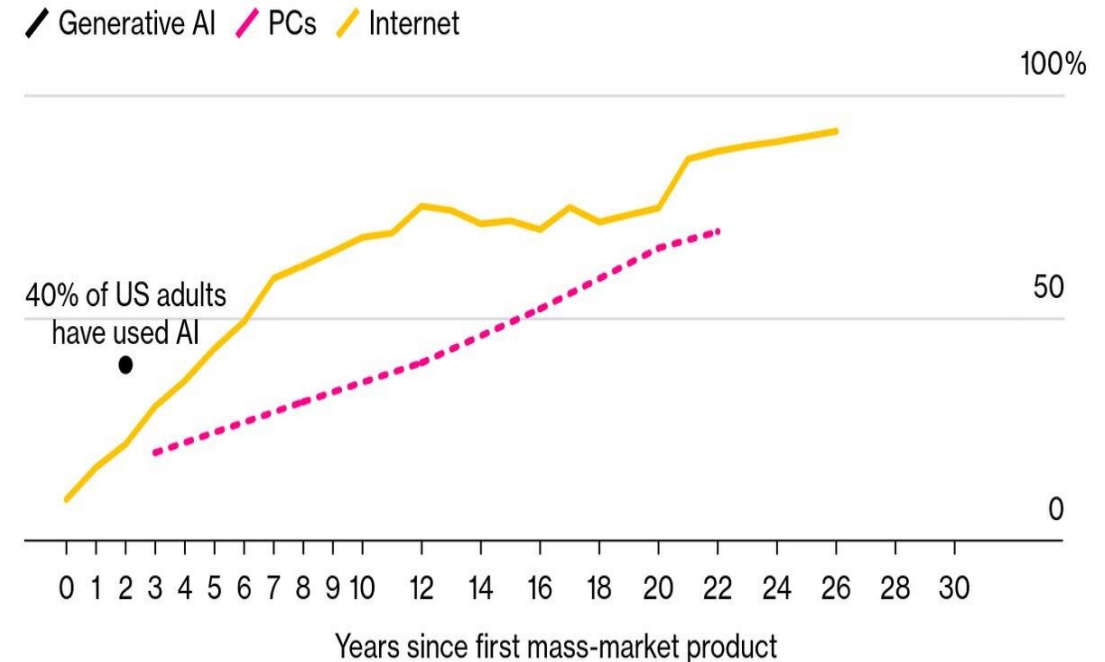
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2) Artificial Intelligence, Women and DDS

- It is unclear at present what type of AI can be viewed as a service “.....that outsources AI to enable individuals and companies to explore and scale AI techniques at minimal cost”.
- AI could increase global GDP by up to 14% as of 2030, contributing \$15.7 trillion to the global economy
- **AI is being adopted faster than PCs or the Internet were in the previous technological revolutions**
- **Effect** of impact that GenAI and new AI technologies will have on women.
- Occupations involving creative and professional skills should be enhanced rather than displaced by AI.
- **Digital Skills are of the essence for women to be able to participate in development and in DDS that require AI applications; large gaps between men and women in STEM occupations at present are not promising**
- Also exist ingrained attitudes and biases in AI development and application that work against women.

AI Is Being Adopted Faster Than PCs Or the Internet

Adoption rates following first mass-market product.



Source: “The Rapid Adoption of Generative AI,” by Alexander Bick, Adam Blandin and David J. Deming, NBER

- Private sector perspectives to be added through interviews of selected ABAC firms in financial services, professional services and IT/telecommunication and computer services
- Interviews to be based on short questionnaire
- Part II will summarize findings from these interviews
- Full paper (PARTS I and II) circulated prior to SOM2 and the PPD

- To be developed following discussions at the workshop to be organized virtually in March or April
- Recommendations presented to the GOS after the Public Private Dialogue concluded at SOM2

Thank you for your attention.

Q&A