The Job Content of Exports by Gender: A Comparative Analysis of Developing Asia, Europe, and sub-Saharan Africa

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Globalization and export-led growth have reshaped domestic labor markets in open economies, yet export-related employment has not evolved uniformly across gender. Women remain underrepresented in high-growth sectors and continue to face wage gaps, occupational segregation, and job insecurity (WTO, 2019). While a growing literature measures the job content of exports and traces labor demand along global value chains using inputâ€“output methods (Pahl et al., 2022; Reijnders & De Vries, 2018; HorvÃ¡t et al., 2020), systematic evidence on gender differences remains largely limited to high- and middle-income economies (Pechansky et al., 2025). This paper asks: How have womenâ€™s and menâ€™s export-related employment patterns changed over 2000â€“2018, and which structural forces drive these changes across Developing Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, and Europe?

We construct a novel harmonized dataset that integrates micro-level labor force data with multi-regional inputâ€“output tables. Specifically, we compile national labor force and household survey microdata for eleven countries and harmonize them across countries by mapping occupations to five common groups using ISCO classifications and industries to 20 sectors using ISIC codes, jointly disaggregated by gender. This newly constructed occupationâ€“industryâ€“gender employment dataset is then linked to the OECD Inter-Country Inputâ€“Output (ICIO) tables in both current and previous year prices to ensure cross-country comparability and to enable Structural Decomposition Analysis in volume terms. The analysis covers eleven countries at different development stages: Pakistan, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam (Developing Asia); Germany, the Netherlands, Czechia, and Slovakia (Europe); and Cameroon, Nigeria, and Senegal (sub-Saharan Africa).

We first compute the job content of exports by gender, occupation, and industry, tracing direct and indirect labor requirements along production networks. This captures both between-industry and within-industry variation, identifying which sectors expand with export growth and which occupations women and men hold within them. We then apply SDA to decompose changes in export-related employment into three channels: changes in labor intensity, production structure (input coefficients), and foreign demand.

Results reveal strong regional heterogeneity. Womenâ€™s participation in export-related employment relative to men is lower than their economy-wide share in Europe but equals or exceeds it in Developing Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. The job content of exports grew faster for women than for men in Developing Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, mainly driven by rising foreign demand. Across all regions, foreign demand is the principal positive driver of export-related job growth, while changes in labor intensity and production structure play smaller or offsetting roles. In Europe and sub-Saharan Africa, gains are concentrated in services; in Developing Asia, growth reflects contributions from manufacturing, services, and agriculture.

This paper makes three contributions. First, it provides a comparative multi-regional analysis of gendered export-related employment across economies at different development stages. Second, it introduces a harmonized occupationâ€“industryâ€“gender dataset integrated with OECD ICIO tables, enabling granular cross-country analysis. Third, it extends SDA to jointly account for gender, occupation, and industry in a multi-regional framework, identifying the mechanismsâ€”labor intensity, production structure, and foreign demandâ€”shaping gendered export-related employment dynamics. By disentangling these channels, the study informs debates on inclusive trade, structural transformation, and the resilience of gender outcomes under export-led growth.

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