



7TH SEAMEO CENTRES POLICY RESEARCH NETWORK (CPRN) SUMMIT 2024

EMBRACING INCLUSIVITY IN EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND CULTURE TOWARDS A FUTURE-READY SOUTHEAST ASIA

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Towards Inclusive Up-/Reskilling: Leveraging Behavioral Insights to Foster Women's Engagement in Adult Training in Southeast Asia

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HOSTED BY
SEAMEO VOCTECH
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Background and Rationale



In the face of technological progress, globalisation, demographic shifts, and climate change, Southeast Asian economies and labor markets are encountering both **new opportunities and risks**.



Amidst these rapid transformations, **up-/re-skilling has emerged as a crucial imperative** for firms and workers to adapt effectively. However, the **risk of exclusion from up-/reskilling looms** particularly large for individuals from disadvantaged groups, such as women, older workers, ethnic minorities, and those employed in smaller enterprises.

Background and Rationale



ECONOMIES AND LABOUR MARKETS IN ASEAN ARE IN TRANSITION

- **Emergence of a 4th industrial revolution**, such as digital trade, industry 4.0 (advanced manufacturing) and digitally enabled services.
- **Significant job displacements** triggered by automation and digitalization, with millions of jobs becoming redundant.
- **Both lower skilled and higher skilled jobs are at risk** (automation, AI).
- **While some jobs are lost, new jobs are also emerging** (within and across industries).



GROWING NEEDS FOR AN ADAPTABLE WORKFORCE

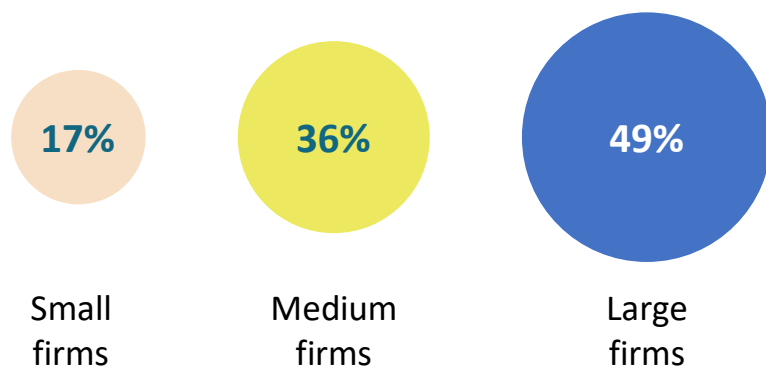
- **Firms and workers must adapt** to fast-changing labor markets and technologies.
- **Skill shortages are expected to grow** amidst technological change and other megatrends.
- **ASEAN governments are recognizing the importance** of up-/reskilling.

If ASEAN countries want to continue their growth path, effective up-/reskilling will be key to keep up with rapid technological developments and other megatrends.

Background: Inclusive Up-/reskilling

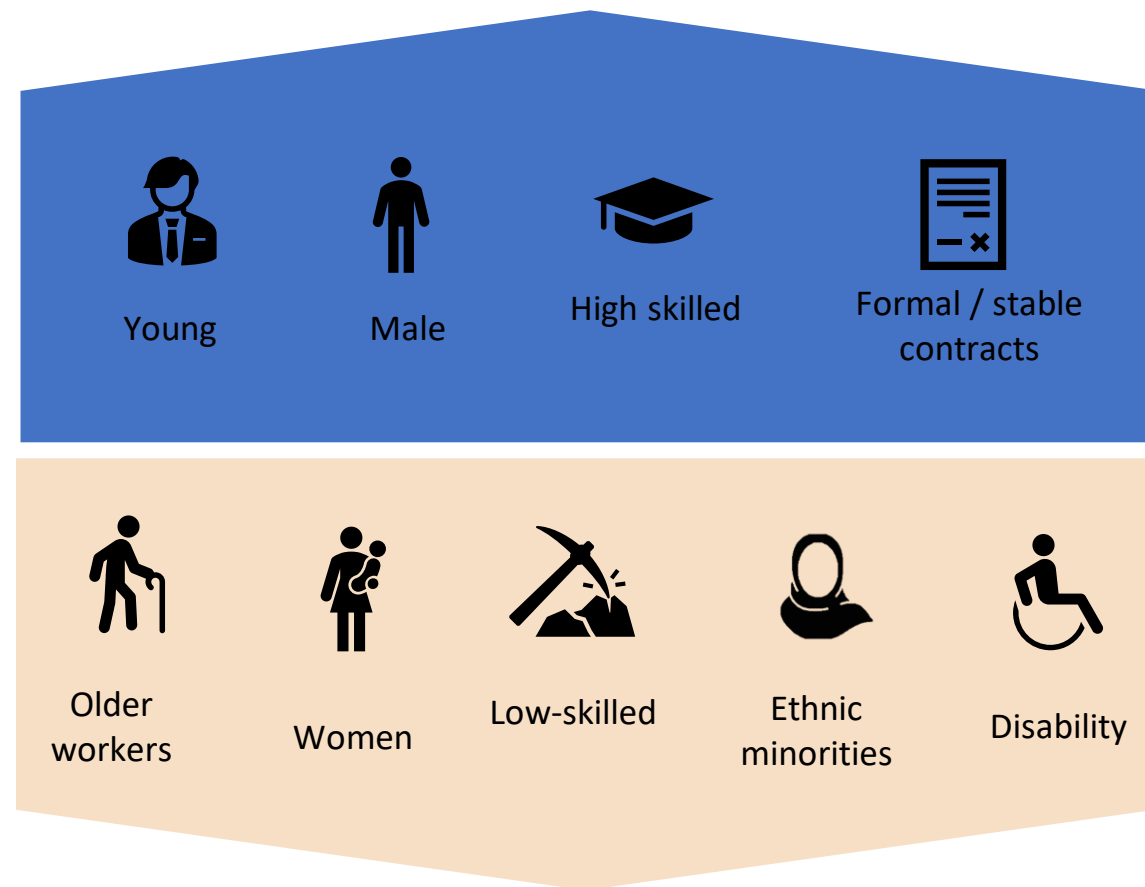
By firm size

Percentage of adult workers with access to formal training (ASEAN average)

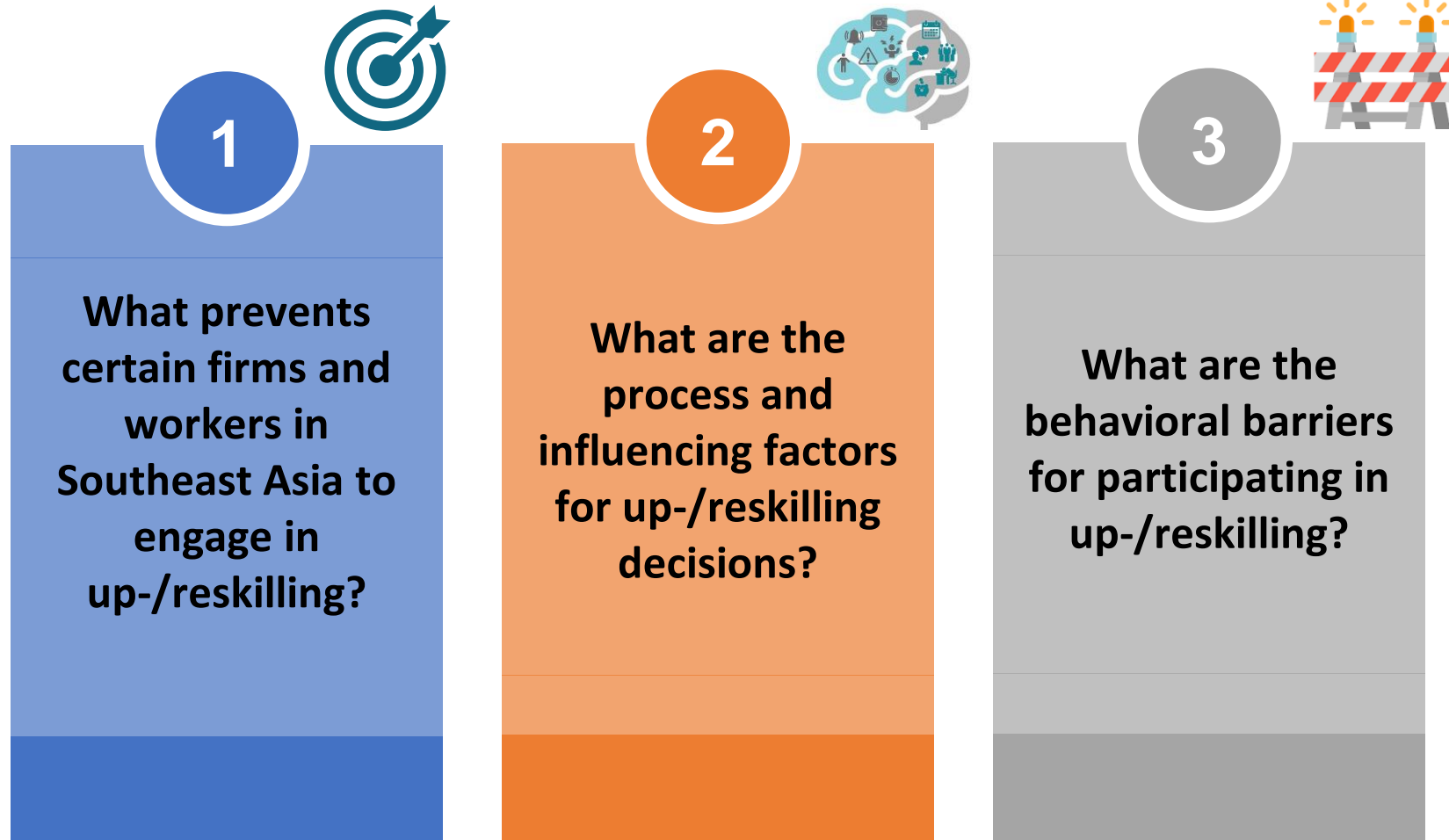


However, the risk of exclusion from up-/reskilling looms particularly large for individuals from disadvantaged groups, such as women, older workers, ethnic minorities, and those employed in smaller enterprises.

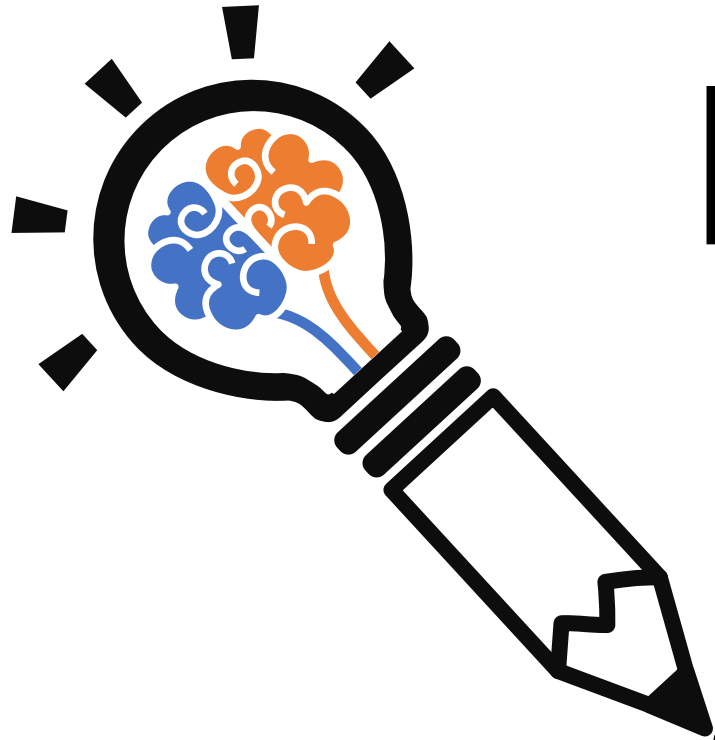
By sociodemographic group



Research questions



Methodology



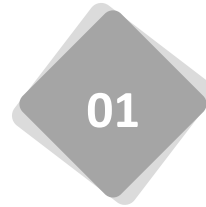
Literature review
(global, regional).



Over 100 interviews with firms, training providers, government officials and workers/trainees across Vietnam, Indonesia, Philippines, Malaysia and Brunei.

Discussion of Findings

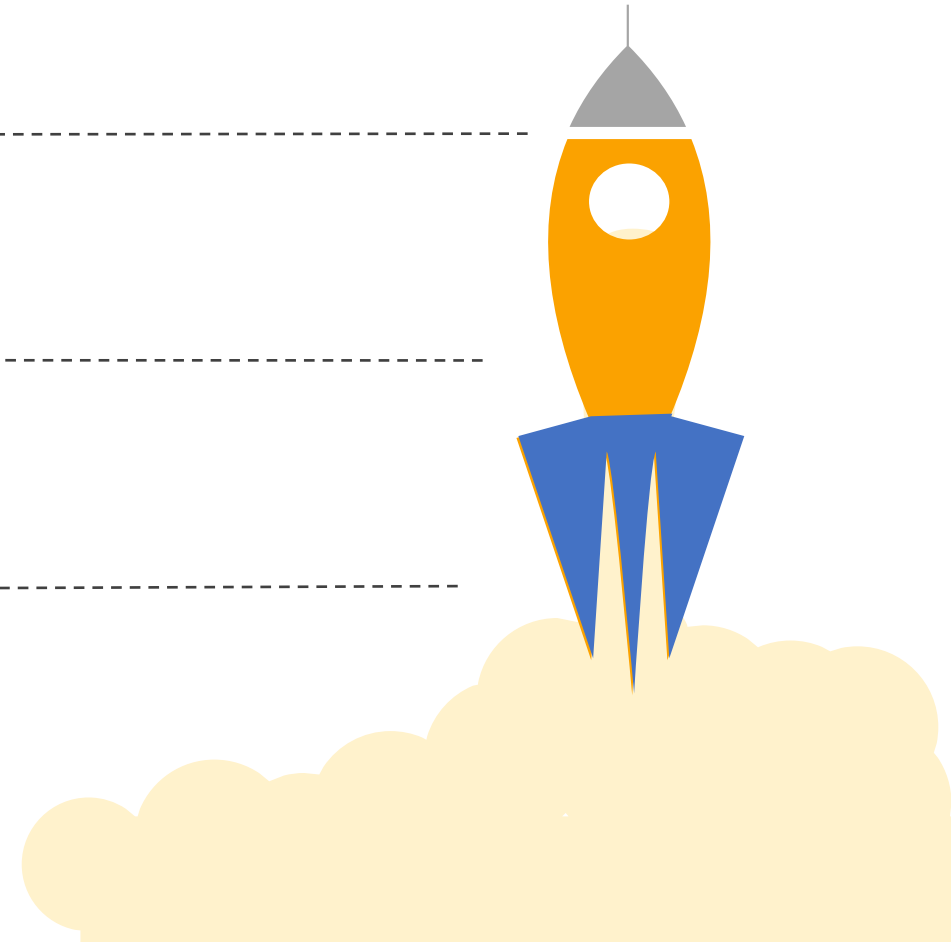
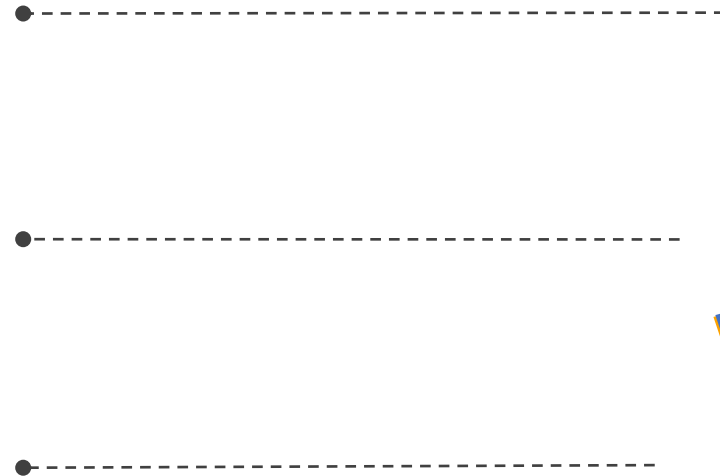
What prevents certain firms and workers in Southeast Asia to engage in up-/reskilling?



What are the process and influencing factors for up-/reskilling decisions?



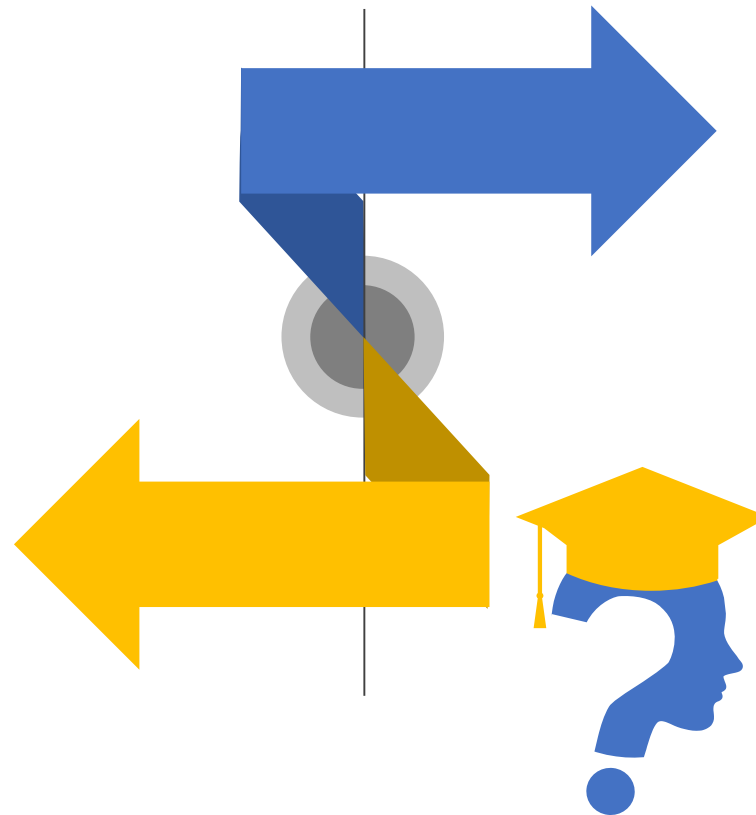
What are the behavioural barriers for participating in up-/reskilling?



1.a. What prevents certain firms in Southeast Asia to engage in up-/reskilling?

Lower perceived benefits

- Anticipation of **women's career breaks** (e.g., maternity leave) can reduce expected benefits.
- Women are more likely to **work in part-time and less secure jobs**, putting them at disadvantage compared to formal and full-time employees.
- Assumptions about women's **lower take-up of training**, anticipating gender-specific constraints.



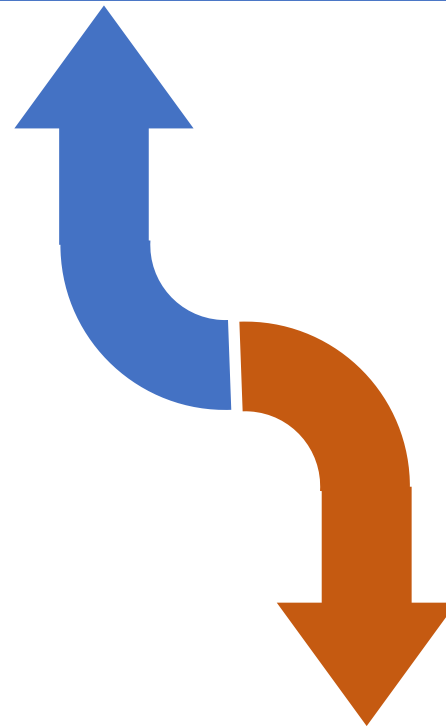
Higher perceived costs

- Women in ASEAN often have **lower levels of education & skills** and hold different occupations than men, making it more costly to move them from one occupation to another.
- **Potential burden to make gender-specific arrangements** to facilitate women's participation in training (e.g., schedule, location, childcare).

1.b. What prevents certain workers/ trainees in Southeast Asia to engage in up-/reskilling?

- **Lower command over household resources** makes it more difficult to weather the costs associated with training.
- Emotional burden due to **unwelcoming environments in male-dominated fields** and feelings of guilt when pursuing work and training at the expense of family duties.
- **Social repercussions**, such as household conflict, rejection by family/peers if entering a “male” occupation, or backlash at work for being seen as too assertive.

Higher perceived costs



Lower perceived benefits

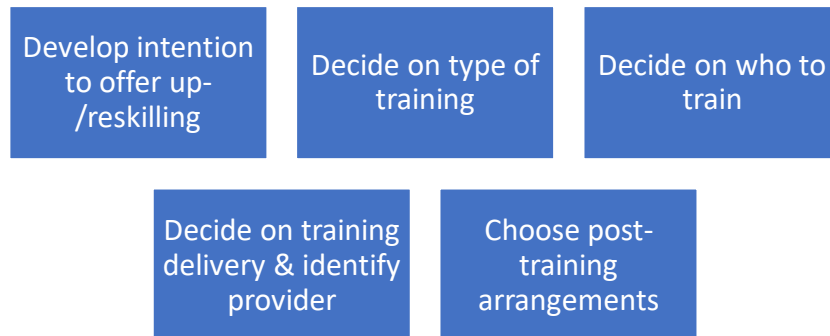
- **Higher uncertainty** due to general disadvantage in the labour market (e.g., pay gap, discrimination).
- **Career advancement may be less valued by women** since higher-level positions are often incompatible with family duties (e.g., due to longer and unpredictable hours).



2. What are the process and influencing factors for up-/reskilling decisions?

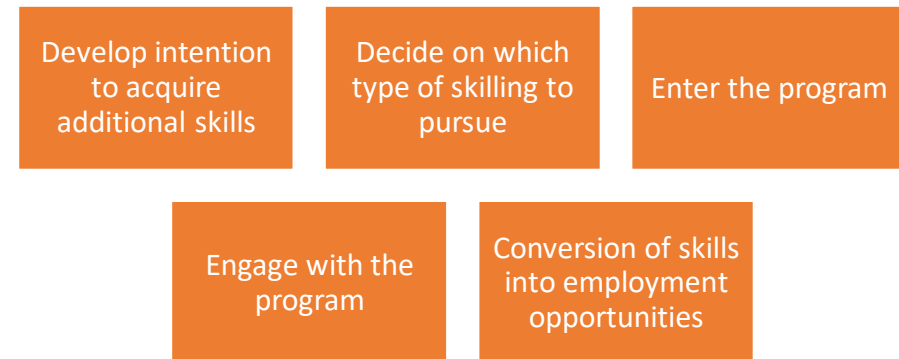
FIRMS

- Stakeholders, including firms, weigh the expected benefits and costs to make up-/reskilling decisions, though there can be a lot of uncertainty in the decision making.
- Up-/reskilling involves multiple steps and decisions with potential “breaking points” along the way. The common steps of decision-making process in a company are:



WORKERS

- Personal characteristics (e.g., gender, age) can fundamentally change the decision-making calculus
- Up-/reskilling involves multiple steps and decisions that are influenced by several people, and with potential “breaking points” along the way. The common steps of decision-making process in a company are:



3. What are the behavioural barriers for participating in up-/reskilling?



			
Mental resources	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of time and mental resources Lower confidence to seek out skilling opportunities 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of attention and time* 	
Automatic thinking	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Risk aversion lowers interest when benefits of training are uncertain 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Perceived complexity and cost of (inclusive) training* 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Salience bias (focus on physical infrastructure and equipment) (Perceived) complexity of gender-sensitive training
Social thinking	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Lower bargaining power in the household Limited access to networks and information Lack of trust about training environment and effectiveness 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of information about quality training providers* Men as gatekeepers in making training decisions 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of information about needs of women Lack of female trainers and administrators
Mental models	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Different aspirations due to own gender identity 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Beliefs about employee loyalty* Gender-based stereotypes & discrimination Beliefs about returns to training women and women's time/interest 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Gender-based stereotypes Beliefs about demand for gender-sensitive training and returns of focusing on women

Conclusions

01

We need to focus more on “inclusive” up-/reskilling

Adult training does not naturally happen in an equitable way. Exclusion happens along several dimensions (firm size, gender, age, etc.). Unless we address these exclusions, up-/reskilling will reinforce existing inequalities in the labor market.

02

Barriers to up-/reskilling go well beyond financial costs

Individuals, firms and training providers face many uncertainties, complexities, and beliefs that prevent them from engaging in (inclusive) up-/reskilling.

03

Policies and programs must go beyond financial incentives (subsidies).

They must also address the psychological and social barriers that prevent equitable engagement in up-/reskilling (e.g., by making it easier, using role models, changing perceptions, etc.).



Policy Recommendations (Immediate)

Short-term interventions (examples)



Show the extent of exclusion

- **(Regular) study** on how different groups of workers experience training in the workplace
- **Systematic collection of disaggregated data** of up-/reskilling courses among (public and private) training providers



Make up-/reskilling easier

- **Reduce complexity** and search costs to find (quality) training providers, e.g., through portals
- **Make courses easy to access** (short, flexible, modular, on site, during work hours)
- **Simplify process** of how subsidies to workers and firms are administered



Make it automatic

- **Introduce annual “up-/reskilling weeks”** (e.g., at industry level) as a channel to foster attention and provide guidance to firms
- **Promote use of annual employee learning plans**, e.g., as part of regular staff assessments



Leverage peer influence

- **Highlight role models** of firms (esp. SMEs) and inclusive training providers to trigger imitation of good practices
- **Leverage existing networks** of firms and training providers to foster exchange on up-/reskilling



Change perceived costs and benefits

- **Counter employees’ fears and provide them with clear information** on post-training outcomes
- **Make the benefits of (inclusive) up-/reskilling more tangible to firms and training providers** (business case)

Policy Recommendations (Long-term)

- Promote social norms that are conducive to women's participation in the labour market and career development.
- Promote welcoming workplace and training culture in male-dominated industries, including more women in leadership positions.

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Thank you



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