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The impact of digital technologies and social networks in young women and young mother's entrepreneurship and employability

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Abstract. Young mothers face various obstacles in the labour market due to lack of skills in job search techniques, unpaid domestic labour responsibilities and, in developing countries, social isolation and restrictions. Business training programs targeting young mothers must be demand-driven and linked with private sector labour demands. In addition, life skills training programs aiming at work and life balance combined with the provision of childcare, are measures that if taken, can enhance young mothers' entrepreneurship. Except for entrepreneurial program curricula, special attention should be given to the dissemination and implementation methods of lifelong learning programs in order to be able to reach young mothers where they are.

Keywords. Digital transformation, digital entrepreneurship, economic empowerment, inclusive entrepreneurship policy

1. Introduction

Social policies and early childhood education and care can enhance young mothers' paid employment. Women after maternity leave need to have current labour market skills in order to be able to return to employment or self-employment, thus making further progress towards gender equity. In addition, young mothers' entrepreneurial skills will be increasingly needed in the labour market as the working age population in most OECD countries has begun to shrink. Indeed, there is an increase in mothers' employment rate over recent years, compared to fathers, although the increase has been recorded in case of better-educated women. Also, mothers and especially single mothers show their preference over part-time employment, due to their engagement in household and family duties.

Companies' flexible working arrangements, tax-benefit government policies as well as work and family reconciliation policies, such as maternity and parental leave with full earnings and formal child care are measures that create equal opportunities for young mothers employability. Moreover, work and family balance could help combat demographic problems in entire Europe by increasing both employment and fertility rates. Interestingly, employment rates of mothers with a child under six are close to, or even higher than those with a child over six years old [1-15].

Moreover, by offering a wide range of entrepreneurial training programs, while providing additional support in the form of child care and making the most of the benefits of digital technologies and particularly, social media, young mothers' work opportunities shall rise. Investing in upskilling and reskilling of unemployed and displaced workers, such as young mothers, has been recognised as a fundamental action to support the transition to automation, digitalisation and structural changes. Lifelong learning is a key to success in labour markets and challenging circumstances originating from the extension of life expectancy, rapid technological changes, globalisation, migration, environmental changes and massive scale digitalisation as well as hygiene hazards like the COVID-19 pandemic. In a fast-changing and uncertain world, lifelong learning can help individuals adapt and become resilient to manage external risks [16,17].

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In a socio-cultural environment in which women's mobility and access to education is secured, interventions combining job skills, life skills and entrepreneurship training will ensure young women's and mothers' increased employment rate. Free business skills training, such as job readiness skills as well as job search skills accompanied by small grants for business start-ups for those who are trained can address young mothers' need for labour market experience and provision of market information [18]. Gender is reciprocally related to technology as genders use technology in different ways, while technology in turn shapes gender roles. More specifically, women and mothers need to use technology both as means to improve their everyday living as well as to create opportunities for continuous education and fieldwork leading to professional development [19].

2. Young women's employability & entrepreneurship through digital technologies

Developing countries currently lack in ICT-related human capital and basic ICT skills, mainly due to the low quality and quantity of human capital in the higher education sector (38.33%) and particularly, in STEM-related programs, such as science, technology, engineering and mathematics [20]. In most developed countries, women represent about 50% of university students, but they are under-represented in science, technology, engineering and mathematics [21]. In addition, vulnerable population groups, such as young mothers need support in building their entrepreneurial and business skills in order to increase their employability rate and strengthen their livelihood capacity. More specifically, digital technologies can assist in creating added value in the productive and business sector, while providing user-friendly platforms for easily accessible financial services and effective logistics [22].

The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) has brought the need to adopt ICTs, especially through the implementation of robotics and Artificial Intelligence in labour markets and workplaces, such as in the industrial sector. For example, the internet, sensors and embedded systems are technological innovations that combine mental, physical and mechanical workspaces. By following the progress made in digital technologies, Computational Thinking (CT) and mechanisms of Artificial Intelligence (AI), labour market needs will be satisfied accompanied by improvements occurring in the lives of vulnerable social groups, such as young mothers. In general, the use of ICTs for upleveling information and knowledge management skills can contribute to tackling unemployment, inducing community prosperity accompanied by the growth of the economies. However, there is a need for joint action by policymakers, organisations and the ICT sector to facilitate universal and affordable use of the internet in combination with digital literacy training programs in order to deliver a range of life-enhancing and life-changing services for young women and young mothers in line with the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

ICTs can lead young mothers to personal development by empowering them to expand their technical knowledge through crowdsourcing and performing microworks as well as through enhancing their self-leadership and lifelong learning skills. Broadly speaking, many young people are in need of capacity building due to their inability to identify the opportunities they can derive from the use of ICTs due to a knowledge gap and lack of confidence in using ICTs. Interestingly, female-managed firms were less likely to use technology to drive changes in their business model compared to male-managed firms in the financial crisis of 2008 and in the crisis brought by the COVID-19 pandemic [23-25].

Under-represented groups in digital entrepreneurship, such as young women and mothers, could benefit from certain features of digital technologies, including the lower start-up costs required for many digital businesses and the expansion to world trade markets offered by the internet. For example, it is estimated that women accounted for only 15.6% of digital

start-ups in 2018, which was essentially unchanged from 2016 (14.8%) [26]. However, it is of utmost importance to build stronger networks so that vulnerable groups can improve their access to funds, opportunities, clients, partners and suppliers. These targeted actions should be complemented by a policy framework aimed at improving connectivity and stimulating innovation [27]. More specifically, efforts to embed entrepreneurship education in formal educational curricula have increased significantly in the past two decades [28-29].

Entrepreneurship development is perceived as a way to promote self-employment, especially among educated women and mothers, thus supporting their family budgets, attaining work–life balance and personal fulfilment. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategies align with the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development as well as international certifications, such as ISO 26000. Companies' actions have an impact and must be guided by a responsibility that goes beyond strictly economic activity [30]. CSR agendas have incorporated proactive programs aiming at supporting women-owned businesses and women entrepreneurs. Such initiatives are a public statement of commitment on account of companies to the purpose of gender equality and women's business advancement. Moreover, collaborative, public-private actions, which range from mentoring, networking and support for women entrepreneurs to increase women's access to finance and technology have a great impact on the development of community and societal interoperability and collaboration [31].

3. Young women's employability and entrepreneurship through social media

Digital media tools, such as social media platforms and female entrepreneurship are strongly related as they relieve women of the financial burdens of establishing and growing their businesses. In addition, social media platforms can create female-friendly learning environments and knowledge communities aiming to support women's and mother's capability in entrepreneurship. Therefore, women's and young mother's entrepreneurial and STEM skills can work as an enabler of female entrepreneurship and micro-small business activities to promote gender equality in line with the 21st Century Skills Agenda as well as the 17 Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 [32].

Social media editor is a flexible, although low-paid profession usually performed by women [33]. Also, self-employed entrepreneurs operating through social media have the opportunity to start their business at a low cost, benefiting from the cost advantage in the means of contact with their customers, the promotion of their products and services as well as in regard to the relationship with their clientele. The aforementioned advantage stems from the fact that most users of social media platforms visit their favourite platform at least once a day and almost half of them visit it multiple times a day [34-35].

Entrepreneurs using social media can also create a marketing network and expand their economic potential through their loyal customers, who disseminate their products and services by their personal social media. Another business opportunity offered via social media is influencer marketing [36]. In that case entrepreneurs convince an influencer, who may have million followers on a social media platform to promote their brand to his or her loyal followers [37].

Social media can also provide a network for peer advice and communication for professional development [38-39]. Notwithstanding, flexibility and adaptability are essential skills for young mothers in contemporary labour markets as a result of the immersion of emerging technologies in almost all professional sectors. Moreover, outsourcing, quick and easy communication as well as intensive collaboration are current business characteristics. Therefore, social media tools can be used as online collaboration tools [40-42].

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Evenmore, structural difficulties that poor and working-class mothers are facing can be dealt with through a set of community-based strategies, such as support from friends, family, social networks and social agencies [43-44].

4. Research Highlights

Digital technologies offer cost-effective services in the demand and supply of the labour market, worldwide. Young women and especially, mothers can benefit from digitised work through its disaggregated and geographically distributed nature. Moreover, digital work is often inclusive as even basic digital skills have significant results in completing several work tasks. Above all, digital technologies have a positive impact on young women's labour force participation rate, thus enhancing their economic opportunities as well as their role and capabilities. Therefore, the potential gains of digital technologies go beyond economic inclusion as digital work can assist young women in overcoming social, economic, political and physical constraints and attain a work-family balance.

Across all sectors of work, ICTs have the potential to improve young women's employability, employment and economic sustainability. Technology can also help young mothers to claim their labour rights. More specifically, digital and entrepreneurial skills training programs for young women and mothers should be established as early as possible accompanied by on-the-job learning work schemes and free access to ICT infrastructure and devices. Furthermore, local communities as well as employers should be supportive of young women and mothers both as far as recruitment and working conditions are concerned. As far as their economic empowerment is concerned, young women and mothers should be able to use digital financial services as well as alternative funding sources to support innovative business models [45].

Engendering ICTs entails women's and mother's engagement with technological occupations accompanied by high ranking professional positions, such as policy makers, producers and researchers in higher education. Women are still underrepresented and digitally excluded, thus reinforcing the three gender gaps; women lacking in ICTs, STEM and Information Society as well as in their payment and in their taking on leadership roles compared to men.

Several initiatives promote women's career opportunities in entrepreneurship, such as the Women's Entrepreneurship Ambassadors Program as well as entrepreneurship training programs. Furthermore, several programs address the issue of providing professional support through growing women networks, providing business advice as well as loan programs. Furthermore, EU Member States also provide access to finance for women entrepreneurs, for example through grants, loans, microcredit and venture capital investment [31].

Despite mothers' significant role in the economy and the society as a whole, the broader economy fails to support mothers in a variety of ways. The financial burden of raising children falls largely on families – and disproportionately on mothers, thus widening the gender gap in employment, employability and wage. Due to the lack of support for combining careers with caregiving, entrepreneurship, an economic activity that can potentially offer more autonomy and flexibility, remains more difficult for mothers. More specifically, women's lack in digital skills brings barriers to entrepreneurship. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance to address the digital skills gap in women so as to be capable of keeping pace with technological innovation and reach the employability skills standards. Furthermore, by closing the skills gap the growth of social inequalities is prevented as digital and social inequalities are intercorrelated [46-47].

5. Conclusions

Finally we have to underline the role of digital technologies in education and employability domains that is very productive and successful, facilitates and improves the assessment, the intervention and the educational procedures via Mobiles [53-66], various ICTs applications [67-103], AI & STEM [104-115], and games [116-125]. Additionally the combination of ICTs with theories and models of metacognition, mindfulness, meditation and emotional intelligence cultivation [126-168] as well as with environmental factors and nutrition [49-52], accelerates and improves more over the educational practices and results, especially for entrepreneurship and employability development and acceleration.

Moreover, entrepreneurship gives the opportunity of achieving work-family balance for mothers, especially in the post COVID-19 era. Sustainable development goals encompass equitable access and support for mothers in entrepreneurial ventures and digital skills training programs to raise the rate of employability and employment accompanied by equitable rewards [47-48].

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