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RESEARCH NEWSLETTER

WHAT WORKS FOR JOBS?

FOUNDATIONS, POLICIES, AND FINANCE FOR A DYNAMIC PRIVATE SECTOR

MARCH 2026

Welcome to the March edition of the Research Newsletter, featuring new evidence from the [Development Research Group](#) on how the right mix of foundations, policies, and finance can rise to the jobs challenge of the next decade. Over the next ten years, an [estimated](#) 1.2 billion young people will reach working age in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). Policymakers must ensure that labor markets can absorb these new job seekers while also delivering wage and productivity growth. New research on three pillars of jobs and growth—human and physical infrastructure, business environment and labor market policies, and mobilization of finance—provides fresh insights into how evidence-based policies and strategic investments can meet the aspirations of the next generation.

Across human and physical infrastructure, the evidence suggests that job creation depends on the quality, coordination, and institutional context of investments, with the largest gains materializing through complementarity and connecting workers and firms to markets. For example, research on short-cycle higher education programs in Latin America and the Caribbean shows that employer linkages, teaching practices, and the teaching of numerical competencies explain a large share of variation in graduates' employment and earnings outcomes ([Dinarte-Diaz et al., 2023](#)). In the field of health and nutrition, delivering integrated support that combines adequate nutrition, early childhood development services, and assistance to parents ensures a strong start to life, as demonstrated by research on the damaging intergenerational effects of famine ([Tafere, 2024](#)), the substantial benefits of lipid-based nutrient supplements ([Aguayo et al., 2023](#)), and the value of child health programs ([Hemlock et al., 2024](#)), among others. In physical infrastructure, complementarity is especially important. Long-run evidence from Brazil shows that infrastructure investments deliver large local growth effects only when electricity and transport are deployed together, highlighting the critical role of coordinated investments in supporting industrial expansion and job creation ([Selod et al. 2024](#)).

These foundational investments are essential, but they cannot deliver on their own—the policy environment must support dynamic private sectors, inclusive labor markets, and a stable macroeconomy. While the benefits of an efficient business regulatory environment are well documented, global data is shedding new light on the institutional conditions required for successful reform processes ([Georgieva et al. 2025](#)). Government-led job training and search assistance programs have been popular approaches but have historically had limited impact on overall employment levels. However, new research finds that programs that are closely aligned with market demand and paired with demand-side strategies can potentially overcome past failures ([Carranza and McKenzie, 2024](#)). New evidence is also pointing to the role of the legal environment in achieving inclusive job growth, with research on childcare laws showing their passage can meaningfully raise women’s labor force participation ([Anukriti et al., 2025](#)). Finally, research points to the role that flexible market structures can play in absorbing macroeconomic shocks. For example, the influx of Chinese imports into Ethiopia drove gains rather than losses in manufacturing employment due to competition and innovation ([Mavungu, 2025](#)), while countries in Europe and Central Asia with stronger competition environments saw greater reallocation to more productive firms in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic ([Bruhn et al., 2023](#)).

New work on finance underscores the central role of capital markets in driving firm growth and employment. A joint IFC–World Bank analysis shows that expanding access to bond and equity markets over the last three decades has enabled smaller, younger, and more productive firms in low- and middle-income countries to invest, expand, and generate jobs, while also contributing to productivity gains ([Meh and Schmukler, 2025](#)). Research is also identifying the conditions under which multilateral development banks can effectively mobilize private finance to support development goals, highlighting in particular the need to increase the pipeline of investable projects, further experiment with financial structures, and design complementary sector reforms ([Cull et al., 2024](#)).

Finally, the Development Research Group has also launched a range of Research Initiatives that support the generation of new knowledge on critical policy questions linked to the jobs agenda. The Center for Research on Women and Jobs (CRWJ) is working to develop high-quality evidence on what works to increase women’s inclusion in labor markets and coordinating closely with policymakers and researchers in the field via recent workshops in Africa,



Latin America, and the Middle East and North Africa. The AI and Digital Development (AI/DD) initiative is pushing the frontier on how to use new technologies to transform education, health, and other sectors that are critical to jobs. And the Business Dynamism in Middle-Income Countries initiative is developing diagnostic tools to identify the policies and distortions undermining creative destruction and the business dynamism underlying any fast-growing economy.

RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

FOUNDATIONS: HUMAN AND PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

[What Makes a Program Good? Evidence from Short-Cycle Higher Education Programs in Latin America and the Caribbean](#)

LELYS DINARTE-DIAZ, MARIA MARTA FERREYRA, SERGIO URZUA, AND MARINA BASSI, WORLD DEVELOPMENT, SEPTEMBER 2023

Drawing on new administrative data from more than 3,000 short-cycle higher education programs across five countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, this paper shows that program quality plays an important role in shaping graduates' labor market outcomes. Programs that explicitly teach numerical competencies achieve both higher rates of formal employment and higher wages after graduation. In Brazil and Ecuador, where additional student-level data was gathered, providing job market information was also associated with better labor market outcomes. Overall, the authors find that quality determinants—particularly curriculum design, links with employers, and faculty practices—explain up to 40 percent of the variation in student-level outcomes within countries. The results highlight that well-designed short-cycle programs can deliver meaningful gains in jobs and earnings, but only when they combine strong foundational skills with clear pathways into the labor market, underscoring the importance of quality in work-force-oriented higher education.

[Infrastructure Complementarities and Local Economic Growth: Evidence from Electrification and Highway Construction in Brazil](#)

HARRIS SELOD, JEVGENIJS STEINBUKS, IAN TROTTER, AND BRIAN BLANKESPOOR, WORLD BANK POLICY RESEARCH WORKING PAPER 10785, MAY 2024

Infrastructure investments are often hailed as powerful engines of economic growth, but new evidence suggests their impact hinges critically on being provided in combination rather than isolation. This paper explores how highway and electricity infrastructure, separately and jointly, influenced local economic growth across Brazilian municipalities over four decades. The authors find that neither highways nor electricity alone consistently stimulated local economic output. However, small and medium-sized municipalities receiving electricity that already had highway access saw local output per capita rise by at least 29 percent. Importantly, these combined investments also promoted industrial expansion. These findings highlight the essential role of infrastructure complementarities in achieving long-term economic development. Policymakers should therefore strategically plan infrastructure projects as a package of investments to maximize growth potential.

ADDITIONAL RESEARCH OF INTEREST ON FOUNDATIONS

Education

The following is a selection of recent key publications related to education, which is essential for a skilled and capable workforce. For additional resources, visit our [Education topic page](#).

- [Preprimary education improves current skills and future wellbeing around the world](#) (World Bank Research Observer, forthcoming)
- [Investing in Human Capital During Wartime: Experimental Evidence from Ukraine](#) (World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 11196, September 2025)
- [Brain drain or brain gain? Effects of high-skilled international emigration on origin countries](#) (Science, May 2025)
- [How to improve education outcomes most efficiently? A review of the evidence using a unified metric](#) (Journal of Development Economics, January 2025)
- [Building Women's Skills for Economic Inclusion and Resilience](#) (World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 10980, November 2024)
- [The value added of short-cycle higher education programs to student outcomes: Evidence from Colombia](#) (Economics of Education Review, August 2024)
- [From Access to Achievement: The Primary School-Age Impacts of an At-Scale Preschool Construction Program in Highly Deprived Communities](#) (World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 10814, June 2024)



- [High Temperature and Learning Outcomes: Evidence from Ethiopia](#) (*World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 10714*, March 2024)
- [Long-Term Impacts of Primary School Scholarships: Evidence from Cambodia](#) (*Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, January 2024)
- [Long-lived consequences of rapid scale-up? The case of free primary education in six Sub-Saharan African countries](#) (*International Journal of Educational Development*, October 2023)
- [Incentivizing School Attendance in the Presence of Parent-Child Information Frictions](#) (*American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*, August 2023)
- [Teacher pay in Africa: Evidence from 15 countries](#) (*World Development*, July 2022)

Health and Nutrition

The following is a selection of recent key publications related to health and nutrition, which are indispensable both for allowing students to perform their best and for a productive workforce. For additional resources, visit our [newsletter on Food and Nutrition Security](#).

- [Assessing the value-added contributions of community health workers and communities to early child development: a longitudinal study in a low-income setting](#) (*BMJ Public Health*, February 2025)
- [Integrating early child development into an existing health and nutrition program: evidence from a cluster-randomized controlled trial](#) (*BMC Public Health*, September 2024)
- [The Influence of COVID-19 on Young Women's Labor Market Aspirations and Expectations in India](#) (*WAEA Papers and Proceedings*, May 2024)
- [Intergenerational Effects of Early Childhood Shocks on Human Capital: Evidence from Ethiopia](#) (April 2024)
- [Benefits of small-quantity lipid-based nutrient supplements for child nutrition and survival warrant moving to scale](#) (*Nature Food*, February 2023)
- [Conditional cash transfers to improve health-focused outcomes: a global scoping review](#) (*Global Public Health*, December 2022)
- [Improving Effective Coverage in Health: Do Financial Incentives Work?](#) (*World Bank Policy Research Report*, May 2022)

Physical Infrastructure

The following is a selection of recent key publications related to physical infrastructure. Investments in efficient transportation systems, reliable electricity, and accessible telecommunications are essential to the jobs agenda. They connect workers to jobs, enable businesses to grow and hire employees, and connect companies with consumers. For additional resources, visit our [newsletter on Infrastructure](#).

- [Unreliable Electricity in Developing Countries: The Role of Weak Institutions](#) (World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 11290, January 2026)
- [Decentralized Markets for Electricity in Low-Income Countries](#) (World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 11053, January 2025)
- [Firm Linkages and Domestic Value Added in Exports: Moving up the Global Value Chains with High-Speed Railways](#) (World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 10985, November 2024)
- [Infrastructure Complementarities and Local Economic Growth: Evidence from Electrification and Highway Construction in Brazil](#) (World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 10785, May 2024)
- [Cities Spatial Model: A Quantitative Spatial Equilibrium Model to guide urban planning, policy, and infrastructure investment decisions](#) (July 2024)
- [Conflict and Cell Tower Destructions in the Central Sahel Region](#) (Working Paper, April 2024)
- [Regional Electricity Trade in Latin America Without Expanding Generation Capacities](#) (Economics of Energy and Environmental Policy, April 2024)
- [Urban and infrastructure determinants of freight cost in India](#) (Working Paper, March 2024)
- [Gender-Specific Transportation Costs and Female Time Use: Evidence from India's Pink Slip Program](#) (World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 10701, February 2024)
- [The cost of unreliable commuter rail: evidence from rolling stock vandalism in Cape Town](#) (Working Paper, February 2024)
- [Tracking Jobs in Projects Focused on Clean Energy and Productive Uses of Electricity](#) (ESMAP Discussion Paper, November 2023)
- [Land Transport Infrastructure](#) (VoxDevLit Review, May 2023)
- [Spatial misallocation, informality, and transit improvements: Evidence from Mexico City](#) (World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 9990, March 2023)



- [Physical infrastructure and economic growth](#) (*Applied Economics*, March 2023)
- [Road capacity, domestic trade and regional outcomes](#) (*Journal of Economic Geography*, September 2022)
- [Why Do Indian States Differ in Their Infrastructure Development?](#) (*World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 10086*, June 2022)

POLICIES: REGULATION, TRAINING, THE MACROECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT, AND LABOR MARKET POLICIES

Job Training and Job Search Assistance Policies in Developing Countries

ELIANA CARRANZA AND DAVID MCKENZIE, *JOURNAL OF ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVES*, VOL. 38, WINTER 2024

Government-led job training and job search assistance programs often have limited impact on overall employment levels, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. This study highlights innovative strategies where government interventions can play a meaningful role. Linking job training to market demand—by focusing on high-demand skills or using results-based funding models—has shown promise in improving employment outcomes. For job search, interventions that encourage jobseekers to explore new locations, provide targeted information to update labor market beliefs, and help them credibly signal skills through certifications have demonstrated potential. Job training and search policies are most effective when paired with broader demand-side strategies that foster job creation by increasing firm productivity and promoting economic growth.

Filling the Gaps: Childcare Laws for Women's Economic Empowerment

S ANUKRITI, LELYS DINARTE-DIAZ, MARIA MONTOYA-AGUIRRE, AND ALENA SAKHONCHIK, *AEA PAPERS AND PROCEEDINGS*, VOL. 115, MAY 2025

Using recently compiled global data on childcare legislation across 190 countries, this paper shows that laws governing the availability, affordability, and quality of childcare services play a measurable role in shaping women's labor market outcomes. The authors find that enacting such legislation increases female labor force participation by about 1.4 percentage points, equivalent to a 2.2 percent gain relative to countries without childcare laws. These gains translate into higher employment rates among women, suggesting that new labor force entrants are successfully absorbed into jobs. Among the three measured attributes, affordability had the largest positive

impact on female labor force participation, followed by availability and quality. The results highlight childcare regulation as a key policy lever for addressing gendered caregiving burdens and expanding women's access to paid work.

Examining business reform committees: findings from a new global dataset

DORINA PETEVA GEORGIEVA, VARUN EKNATH, AND MICHAEL WOOLCOCK, JOURNAL OF ECONOMIC POLICY REFORM, VOL. 28, 2025

A growing body of evidence ties business environment reforms to job creation and firm productivity, but much less is known about the institutional mechanisms that enable these reforms to succeed. To fill this gap, this paper presents a new global dataset describing the functioning of business reform committees in 160 economies. The analysis shows that reform committees are highly prevalent in lower-middle-income (85%) and upper-middle-income (68%) economies and typically focus on inter-agency coordination, public-private dialogue, and reducing regulatory burdens on firms (with a particular focus on improving global competitiveness). Considerable variation exists in committees' mandates, leadership, stakeholder engagement, and accountability mechanisms; however, the data and a series of case studies suggest high-level political backing and structured private sector participation can contribute to success. The data collected in the paper offers a foundation for future research to answer causal questions about the institutional determinants of successful business regulatory reform.

ADDITIONAL RESEARCH OF INTEREST ON POLICIES

Regulation and the Business Environment

The following is a selection of recent key publications related to regulation and the business environment, which are critical to enabling businesses to operate efficiently, grow, and hire. For additional resources, visit our [Publications Database](#).

- [Algorithms and Bureaucrats: Evidence from Tax Audit Selection in Senegal](#) (World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 11205, September 2025)
- [Capitalizing on Digital Transformation to Enhance the Effectiveness of Property Institutions: Conceptual Background and Evidence from 85 Countries](#) (World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 11100, April 2025)



- [How Can Lower-Income Countries Collect More Taxes? The Role of Technology, Tax Agents, and Politics](#) (*Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Winter 2024)
- [How Should the Government Bring Small Firms into the Formal system? Experimental Evidence from Malawi](#) (*Journal of Development Economics*, March 2023)
- [Effective Tax Rates and Firm Size](#) (*World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 10312*, February 2023)
- [Ownership, Enforcement, and the Effects of Business Environment](#) (*Journal of Government and Economics*, Summer 2021)

Training and Entrepreneurship

Programs to improve businesses' management capacity can pay big dividends, but results depend on effective program design. Many of our recent publications test how best to design and deliver these types of interventions. For additional resources, visit the Training section of our [newsletter on 4 Keys to Unlocking Firm Productivity](#).

- [Group Consulting Continues to Benefit Firms after a Decade: Experimental Evidence from Colombian Auto Parts Firms](#) (*World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 11278*, January 2026)
- [Long-term and Lasting Impacts of Personal Initiative Training on Entrepreneurial Success](#) (*American Economic Review: Insights*, December 2025)
- [Bayesian Impact Evaluation with Informative Priors: An Application to a Colombian Management and Export Improvement Program](#) (*Econometrica*, September 2025)
- [How Organized Is the Informal Sector? The Role of Business Associations in Microenterprises in West Africa](#) (*World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 11101*, April 2025)
- [Private Provisioning of Employment Services: Experimental Evidence from Bosnia and Herzegovina](#) (*World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 10826*, June 2024)
- [Training Microentrepreneurs over Zoom: Experimental Evidence from Mexico](#) (*Journal of Development Economics*, March 2024)
- [Estimating the demand for business training: Evidence from Jamaica](#) (*Economic Development and Cultural Change*, October 2023)
- [Training Entrepreneurs](#) (*VoxDevLit*, September 2023)
- [Improving business practices and the boundary of the entrepreneur: A randomized experiment comparing training, consulting, insourcing and outsourcing](#) (*Journal of Political Economy*, January 2022)

- [Improving Management with Individual and Group-Based Consulting: Results from a Randomized Experiment in Colombia](#) (*The Review of Economic Studies*, January 2022)
- [Small business training to improve management practices in developing countries: Reassessing the evidence for “training doesn’t work”](#) (*Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, June 2021)
- [Growing markets through business training for female entrepreneurs: A market-level randomized experiment in Kenya](#) (*American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, April 2021)

The Macroeconomic Environment

A robust private sector requires a stable and supportive macroeconomic environment to invest and grow. Our recent publications examine a diverse set of macroeconomic issues and how best to manage them, ranging from trade shocks to market integration, the macroeconomic impacts of cash transfers, and the benefits of closing gender employment gaps.

- [Chinese Imports and Industrialization in Africa: Evidence from Ethiopia](#) (*World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 11118*, May 2025)
- [Cash Is Queen: Local Economy Effects of Cash Transfers to Women in West Africa](#) (*World Bank Policy Research Working Paper*, May 2025)
- [The Division of Revenues from Unexpected Demand Shocks](#) (*World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 10925*, September 2024)
- [How Large Are the Economic Dividends from Closing Gender Employment Gaps in the Middle East and North Africa?](#) (*World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 10706*, February 2024)
- [The Macroeconomic Effects of Cash Transfers: Evidence from Brazil](#) (*World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 10652*, December 2023)
- [The Economic Effects of Market Integration in the Western Balkans](#) (*World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 10491*, July 2023)
- [Competition and firm recovery post-COVID-19](#) (*Small Business Economics*, May 2023)
- [Deconstructing the Missing Middle: Informality and Growth of Firms in Sub-Saharan Africa](#) (*World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 10233*, September 2022)
- [Trade, Jobs, and Worker Welfare](#) (*World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 9628*, April 2021)



Labor Market Policy

Poorly functioning labor markets prevent workers from matching with employers, which can make it harder for marginalized groups to join the labor force. Much of our recent work examines ways to overcome these market frictions to enable women and youth to access labor markets.

- [Does Gender Tagging Public Works Increase Women's Participation? Experimental Evidence from Haiti, Kenya, and Rwanda](#) (AEA Papers and Proceedings, May 2025)
- [Matching Frictions and Distorted Beliefs: Evidence from a Job Fair Experiment](#) (The Economic Journal, April 2025)
- [Gender Barriers, Structural Transformation, and Economic Development](#) (World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 11083, March 2025)
- [Women at Work: Evidence from a Randomized Experiment in Urban Djibouti](#) (World Bank Policy Research Working Paper, September 2024)
- [Closing the Gaps: The Role of Screening Questions and Self-Reporting in Measuring Women's and Youths' Employment and Work](#) (World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 10773, May 2024)
- [Evaluating the Impacts of Access to a Digital Jobs Platform and Skills Training on Female Domestic Workers](#) (Working Paper, March 2024)
- [Minimum Wage, Informality, and Gender Gaps: Evidence from Morocco](#) (Working Paper, March 2024)
- [The Early Career Dynamics of Informality and Underemployment: Evidence from the Arab Republic of Egypt](#) (World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 10499, June 2023)

MOBILIZING FINANCE FOR A VIBRANT PRIVATE SECTOR

Financing Firm Growth, The Role of Capital Markets in Low- and Middle-Income Countries

CESAIRE A. MEH AND SERGIO L. SCHMUKLER (EDITORS), JOINT IFC-WORLD BANK REPORT, MARCH 2025 | [REPORT LANDING PAGE](#) | [LAUNCH EVENT](#) | [CAPITAL MARKETS PORTAL](#) | [POLICY RESEARCH TALK](#)

Over the past three decades, capital market financing has surged for firms in low- and middle-income countries. This IFC-World Bank book analyzes data from nearly 80,000 firms worldwide, focusing on how the 20,000 firms located in 106 low- and middle-income countries access and

use capital market financing. Leveraging a novel database of global bond and equity issuances between 1990 and 2022, the findings reveal that the expansion of capital market financing has facilitated access for smaller, younger, and more productive firms than those already participating. These firms are using the capital raised to invest in physical assets, expand operations, and hire workers, generating 5 percent more jobs over three decades.

Mobilizing Private Capital for the Sustainable Development Goals

ROBERT CULL, INDERMIT GILL, ALVARO PEDRAZA, CLAUDIA RUIZ-ORTEGA, AND FEDERICA ZENI,
WORLD BANK POLICY RESEARCH WORKING PAPER 10838, JULY 2024

Mobilizing private investment is essential for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including the goal of decent work for all, yet public finance alone cannot meet the scale of investment required. This paper reviews the theory and evidence behind efforts to crowd in private capital by raising the marginal product of capital through multilateral interventions. The authors assess five tools—guarantees, public-private partnerships, syndicated loans, sustainable finance contracts, and climate and banking regulations—and find that while these instruments have increased private investment, mobilization volumes remain well below global needs. That paper cautions against unrealistic targets and highlights weak project pipelines, limited multilateral development bank (MDB) influence, and difficulties demonstrating additivity as key constraints. The paper concludes with recommendations on how MDBs can increase their effectiveness, including ramping up the pipeline of investable projects in promising sectors like infrastructure and digital development, experimenting with financial structures, and designing complementary sector reforms.

ADDITIONAL RESEARCH OF INTEREST ON FINANCE

- [Access to Finance for MSMEs in Ecuador: A Firm-Level Impact Evaluation](#) (*World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 11121, May 2025*)
- [Promoting Innovative Startups: Quasi-Experimental Evidence from Tunisia](#) (*World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 11117, May 2025*)
- [The Impact of COVID-19 on Formal Firms: Lessons from Administrative Tax Data](#) (*Journal of Development Economics, January 2025*)
- [Did Program Support for the Poorest Areas Work? Evidence from Rural Viet Nam](#) (*World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 11029, January 2025*)



- [Is there still a role for direct government support to firms in developing countries?](#) (*New Zealand Economic Papers*, 2025)
- [The Financial Premium and Real Cost of Bureaucrats in Businesses](#) (*World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 10929*, September 2024)
- [The Role of Financial \(Mis\)Allocation on Real \(Mis\)Allocation](#) (*World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 10811*, June 2024)
- [The Internationalization of China's Equity Markets](#) (*IMF Economic Review*, January 2024)
- [Capital Market Financing and Firm Growth](#) (*Journal of International Money and Finance*, July 2021)
- [Can Government Intervention Make Firms More Investment Ready? A Randomized Experiment in the Western Balkans](#) (*Review of Economics and Statistics*, July 2021)

RESEARCH INITIATIVE SPOTLIGHT: CENTER FOR RESEARCH ON WOMEN AND JOBS

Launched in 2025, the [Center for Research on Women and Jobs](#) (CRWJ) is a research initiative led by the [Development Research Group](#) in collaboration with the World Bank's regional [Gender Innovation Labs](#) and other researchers in the World Bank Group. The CRWJ's mission is to enhance the policy relevance and impact of research on women and jobs by coordinating research efforts, amplifying their reach, and promoting the use of robust, high-quality evidence. In its first year of operation, the Center has co-organized multiple workshops, including [Mend the Gap in Economic Opportunities in Europe and Central Asia](#) (May 2025), [Women and Jobs in Latin America and the Caribbean](#) (October 2025), [Women and Jobs in Africa](#) (November 2025). Visit the [CRWJ website](#) to find curated collections of research, future events, and a range of additional policy-relevant resources.

SOCIAL MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS ON JOBS

Explore blog posts and expert commentary by Development Research Group staff highlighting policy findings that can drive growth in jobs and the private sector.

[New evidence on women and jobs in Africa: A research workshop round-up](#)

KATHLEEN BEEGLE, CLARA DELAVALLADE, SOPHIA FRIEDSON-RIDENOUR, MICHAEL O'SULLIVAN, AND LUCÍA RIOS BELLAGAMBA | DEVELOPMENT IMPACT | FEBRUARY 2, 2026

“While levels of female labor force participation in Sub-Saharan Africa are high, women face many challenges in their income generating activities. The vast majority of working women in the region remain in vulnerable employment, concentrated in agricultural-related family employment and low-productivity micro-enterprises. Occupational segregation drives gender pay gaps, and despite being one of the regions with the most female entrepreneurs, women-led businesses have fewer employees, fewer sales, and lower productivity than their male-led peers.

Policy research is critical to filling knowledge gaps about the barriers women face in the labor market and the types of interventions that can help address these constraints. Here we highlight key takeaways from 18 research studies presented at the November 2025 [Women and Jobs in Africa Workshop](#), organized by the World Bank's [Center for Research on Women and Jobs](#) (CRWJ) and the [Africa Gender Innovation Lab](#) (GIL), the [African Center for Economic Transformation](#) (ACET), and the [University of Ghana](#)...”

[Unlocking Women's Economic Potential: Cutting Edge Evidence from Latin America and the Caribbean](#)

KATHLEEN BEEGLE, JACOBUS DE HOOP, JAVIER ROMERO HAAKER, AND RAQUEL MELGAR CALDERON | DEVELOPMENT IMPACT | JANUARY 20, 2026

“In Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), women's economic potential remains untapped. While [75% of males](#) participate in the labor force, only [51% of women](#) do. Women's economic opportunities are [held back by systematic barriers to jobs](#), an [unequal distribution of caregiving responsibilities](#), and biased social norms that can result in serious social consequences, such as [violence against women](#).



Rigorous evidence can drive smarter policies. Here we summarize the lessons of 17 cutting-edge studies from LAC on the drivers of gender inequality and the policies that can make a difference. The papers were presented at a recent [Policy Research Workshop on Women and Jobs](#), in Bogotá, Colombia, in October 2025..”

[The fading dividend of past human capital reforms](#)

ARTHUR MENDES AND STEVEN PENNINGS | LET’S TALK DEVELOPMENT | DECEMBER 17, 2025

“For many developing countries, quiet gains in human capital accumulation have boosted GDP growth in recent years: each new cohort entering the workforce is typically healthier and better educated than their parents, lifting productivity and contributing substantially to long-term per capita growth. But much of this boost reflects reforms from the past – a “human capital dividend” that naturally fades over time. Because human capital reforms take years to affect the economy, choices made today in education and health shape worker productivity a decade or more from now. If students aren’t learning enough or health isn’t improving, average productivity can stagnate, lowering potential growth.

Our new [paper](#) shows that without continued reforms, the human capital contribution to growth declines over time. Our companion spreadsheet-based tool, the [Long-Term Growth Model–Human Capital Extension \(LTGM-HC\)](#) helps policymakers assess future human capital growth paths and build reform scenarios to offset the expected decline. Because reforms take time to translate into higher productivity, action today is essential to avoid tomorrow’s slowdown...”

[Updating my priors on the effectiveness of wage subsidies in developing countries](#)

DAVID MCKENZIE | DEVELOPMENT IMPACT | NOVEMBER 3, 2025

“In 2017 I [published \(ungated\)](#) a review of active labor market programs in developing countries, in which I concluded that the “accumulated evidence suggests that wage subsidies are unlikely to be very effective in generating additional employment under standard labor market conditions, and may also even not be very effective in playing a distributional role in determining which individuals get to access jobs”. This was based on experiments in Argentina and South Africa in which very few firms hired workers with wage subsidy vouchers, an [experiment I had done in Jordan](#) in which firms hired workers, but then had the large impacts disappear as workers quit or firms fired workers after the subsidy period ended, and an [experiment I had done with small firms in Sri Lanka](#), which likewise found temporary impacts that fell off after the subsidy.

This set of experiences had made me pretty pessimistic about the effectiveness of wage subsidies. However, several more recent papers have led me to update my priors a little bit. I thought I'd summarize some of these results, and some of my reflections on these..."

[Creating a market to turbocharge jobs for the poor: Childcare entrepreneurship in the Republic of Congo](#)

ALESSANDRA HEINEMANN, JOACHIM BOKO, ANDREA HAUSHOFER, KATHLEEN BEEGLE, AND BERNARD YUNGU LOLEKA | AFRICA CAN END POVERTY | OCTOBER 1, 2025

[““Had I asked people what they wanted, they would have said faster horses!” This quote, often attributed to Henry Ford, conveys a powerful insight about the nature of innovation:](#) People don't always know what they need—or what's possible—until they see it. Transformational products and services require vision and a leap beyond the conventional. We believe this is the case for childcare services in the Republic of Congo, and indeed, in much of Sub-Saharan Africa.

The average family in Congo has more than four children. Yet, according to UNICEF, **[only a third of children aged 3–5 have access to early childhood education programs.](#)** For children under the age of three, access is even lower. For the fortunate few, private daycare centers exist, but fees can exceed \$100 per month—an expense out of reach for most families, as the minimum wage in Congo hovers around \$150 per month. Public or subsidized childcare facilities are few and far between..."

[Grants to women-owned businesses: when what's for her does not stay with her](#)

[KATHLEEN BEEGLE](#) | ALL ABOUT DEVELOPMENT | SEPTEMBER 16, 2025

“What explains why grants to women-owned microenterprises often fail to yield improvements in business outcomes, especially as compared to grants to men's microenterprises? This is the topic tackled in the new working paper **[“Mitigating the Impact of Household Expropriation on Female Entrepreneurship: Experimental Evidence from Ghana,”](#)** by Francisco Campos, Adriana Conconi, Elwyn Davies, Marine Gassier, and Markus Goldstein. They look within households to understand the role of “expropriation” of resources (also referred to in the paper as intra-household sharing pressure) which diverts these grants away from their intended use..."



Digital technology is driving the future of jobs

CHRISTINE ZHENWEI QIANG, STÉPHANE STRAUB, AND LEORA KLAPPER | VOICES | SEPTEMBER 15, 2025

“A farmer in Kenya uses mobile apps to get real-time harvesting tips, check market prices, and connect directly with buyers and lenders. A woman in Indonesia takes meal orders and arranges deliveries through social media. A small innkeeper in Jamaica lists rooms on booking platforms and manages reservations online. A street vendor in Dakar sells handmade jewelry across Africa using just her smartphone. And in Manila, a university student teaches math to high schoolers in remote areas via an online e-learning platform.

These types of stories are becoming the new norm as the traditional model of salaried employment rapidly evolves. [Millions of people are redefining what it means to work as they earn income through self-employment and gig work. Digital platforms like Jumia, Shopee, Uber, and Upwork are at the heart of this transformation](#), allowing people to reach customers, manage their businesses, and receive payments—all from the palm of their hand. Most workers can have payments sent [directly to their financial accounts](#), opening doors to other financial products like savings and insurance and enabling the innovative delivery of social transfers.

New data from the [Global Findex 2025](#) report reveals many of these trends on technology and financial inclusion and tracks how prepared countries are to seize the opportunities of a digital job economy...”

Unlocking SME growth: Key lessons from Ecuador’s loan program

CLAUDIA RUIZ, MIRIAM BRUHN, FEDERICO DIAZ KALAN, AND NICOLÒ FRACCAROLI | LET’S TALK DEVELOPMENT | SEPTEMBER 3, 2025

“Governments and development institutions spend billions to help small businesses access financing, hoping this will create jobs and support inclusive economic growth. But we don’t really know if these programs reach the firms that need help most and help them grow.

In a recent [paper](#), we evaluate a loan program in Ecuador implemented by the state development bank Corporación Financiera Nacional (CFN) with support from the World Bank. Between 2021 and early 2025, more than USD 500 million was lent to more than 24,000 small businesses through commercial banks...”

Informal yet organized: Can business associations be harnessed for development?

CLEMENT JOUBERT AND KATHLEEN BEEGLE | LET'S TALK DEVELOPMENT | JULY 03, 2025

“Informal firms, typically microenterprises, are central to the economic life of many African countries. They employ large shares of the workforce, fill gaps in service delivery, and form a key part of local markets. Yet, despite their prevalence, they remain difficult to reach through traditional policy channels.

In our recent [study](#) across seven Sub-Saharan African countries, we looked at one potential—but understudied—mechanism to support informal firms: business associations (BAs). These organizations are visible actors of the informal economy, yet little is known about their membership patterns, functions, and potential as partners for development programming...”

Unlocking Economic Potential across Europe and Central Asia: Insights from the Mend the Gap conference

KATHLEEN BEEGLE, CHIARA BROCCOLINI, ANNA FRUTTERO, AND JENNIFER SOLOTAROFF | DEVELOPMENT IMPACT | JUNE 23, 2025

“Across Europe and Central Asia, women’s economic potential remains underused due to barriers to jobs—stemming from limited access to finance, caregiving burdens, and entrenched norms—and resulting in slower and less resilient growth. Tackling these challenges demands data-driven, evidence-based policy solutions for jobs in the region.

The Mend the Gap policy research workshop, held in Rome in May 2025, rose to this task. Co-hosted by The World Bank’s [ECA Gender Innovation Lab](#) and [Institute for Economic Development](#); the [Axa Research Lab on Gender Equality at Bocconi University](#); the [Einaudi Institute for Economics and Finance \(EIEF\)](#); and [LABOUR: Review of Labor Economics and Industrial Relations](#), it brought together leading researchers and policymakers to share insights and strategies for impacting the jobs landscape...”

Women’s employment in Egypt

KATHLEEN BEEGLE | DEVELOPMENT IMPACT | APRIL 23, 2025

“In their new working paper, “[The barriers to female employment: Experimental evidence from Egypt](#),” Caria, Crepon, Krafft, and Nagy present results of their experiment in Egypt. They



offered job matching services (to make jobs easier to find) and childcare subsidies (to make jobs easier to keep) to a sample of mothers with young children. These are women who have very low levels of employment. It is an intriguing study, carefully done and addressing some key facets of low female labor force participation in the region.

The interventions consisted of vouchers for local nurseries and employment services. The latter was done in collaboration with two job matching platforms which connected mothers to a minimum of three open vacancies that were suitable for their skills and their preferences in terms of location, occupation, salary, and working hours. The two interventions were cross-randomized to explore potential complementarities since these mothers might need both to start working. Few of these mothers were working at baseline (11%), while a lot of women reported wanting to work (40% of those with no job) and searching (57% of those unemployed who want to work).

A key finding is that neither intervention, nor the combination, resulted in changes in women's employment. But take-up is very "limited". Only one in five women in the job services intervention applied for at least one job; most of the women offered an interview declined it. The 100% subsidy of childcare had low take-up: only 11 percent of households used the free childcare.

In the era of AI, I am limiting my space (and my time) summarizing the paper. If interested for that type of blog, read the [ChatGPT-created blog](#) that I generated. Rather, I will highlight three observations..."

[Personal initiative training continues to yield positive benefits after 7 years, but impacts vary with gender](#)

DAVID MCKENZIE | DEVELOPMENT IMPACT | MARCH 3, 2025

"Back in 2014 I worked with several World Bank colleagues and two psychologists (Michael Frese and Mona Mensmann) to test a new form of business training for microentrepreneurs. In contrast to traditional business training programs that focus on teaching business practices like accounting, budgeting, and marketing, personal initiative training instead focuses on developing behaviors associated with a pro-active entrepreneurial mindset. This involves exercises such as going through the days activities and thinking about what could have been done at each step to avoid tomorrow looking exactly the same, as well as looking for opportunities to foster innovation, learn from setbacks, and financially bootstrap. This psychology-based approach was very

successful, resulting in a 30% increase in profits over 2 years for entrepreneurs in Togo, three times that of the IFC's Business Edge traditional business training program, and impacts on profits were similar for both men and women. I summarized these 2-year impacts in a [previous blogpost](#), and these findings have spurred projects to implement personal initiative training in over a dozen countries..."

Creating jobs: yes!

KATHLEEN BEEGLE | DEVELOPMENT IMPACT | JULY 30, 2024

"In [our post](#) earlier this month, Louise Fox and I explored the question of the treatment effects of supply-side interventions on employment outcomes when the setting is one of seemingly weak labor demand. Do programs create new jobs or rather crowd-out others in the labor market? One approach to get at this question is to run a double-sided experiment involving both workers and firms with random assignment of both to treatment and control groups.

In their forthcoming ReStud [paper](#) ([earlier working paper version](#)), Crépon and Premand indeed do this in their randomized experiment in Côte d'Ivoire and aim to tackle our question. They study the impact of subsidized dual-apprenticeships (formal center-based training with on-the-job training), to examine whether & which market failures are at play in this labor market. Is it that youth under-invest in apprenticeship due to financial constraints (and limiting supply), or firms under-invest in training for arguably standard economic reasons, or firms under-hire apprentices due to information asymmetries or imperfect intermediation? As they describe in their paper "Our double-sided randomized design is tailored to estimate the direct impacts of subsidized dual apprenticeships on youth participation and the indirect crowding-out effect in firms, which allows us to estimate the net effect on the number of filled apprenticeship positions." Yay!"

Creating jobs.... or shifting existing jobs?

KATHLEEN BEEGLE AND LOUISE FOX | DEVELOPMENT IMPACT | JULY 01, 2024

"Many countries in Africa are challenged with very large populations of young people without work or in vulnerable employment; creating more and better jobs is a critical policy challenge. Back in October, David and Eliana Carranza posted two blogs ([here](#) and [here](#)) featuring the findings of [their Journal of Economic Perspectives paper](#) on evidence related to job training and job search assistance programs in developing countries. In their paper, the first of three



main reasons they outline as to why jobseekers might struggle to find employment is “the lack of overall labor demand in the economy”. They go on to state that “Our sense is that in many cases the largest issue is a lack of labor demand for jobs, especially ‘good’ jobs, and that policies to help firms to grow and demand more labor need to be a primary part of any jobs policy solution.” David and Eliana’s paper came to mind in the course of reading the employment effects from an impact evaluation of two training programs in Nigeria. Specifically, it begs the question how should we think about the treatment effects of supply-side interventions on employment outcomes when there is a strong suspicion of very weak labor demand?”

To read more of our blogs, see: [Let’s Talk Development](#) | [Development Impact](#) | [All About Finance](#)

RECENT AND UPCOMING EVENTS

- February 16–18, 2026: Watch the replay of the [Industrial Policy for Africa Conference](#)
- March 30–31, 2026: [10th Urbanization and Development Conference](#)
- March 31, 2026: [Policy Research Talk | World Development Report 2025: Standards for Development](#)
- April 29–May 1, 2026: [Land and Property Research Conference 2026](#)
- May 14–15, 2026: [Mend the Gap in Economic Opportunities in Europe and Central Asia: Second Edition](#)
- May 21–22, 2026: [International Seminar on Trade \(ISoT\) 2nd Edition](#)

See more [events](#) | Sign up for event [email notifications](#)

UPDATES FROM ACROSS THE DEPARTMENT

Preregistration Is Now Open: 10th Urbanization and Development Conference

The [10th Urbanization and Development Conference](#) will bring together academics and development practitioners to present and discuss questions relating to jobs, firms, and growth in cities. The two-day event will take place in Washington, DC and will center on three interlinked themes:

structural transformation; urban labor markets and the changing nature of work; and firms, productivity and urban economic growth.

Preregistration is for general attendees (non-speakers) who would like to participate in the conference (online or in-person), and attendance is not confirmed until you receive an email from the Conference Organizing Committee. Preregistration closes on March 16.

Event [Website](#) | [Preregistration](#)

Beyond Coverage: Turning Health Access into Better Outcomes

RESEARCH INSIGHTS | FEBRUARY 25, 2026

Health systems play a central role in building human capital and supporting a productive society, yet translating health investments into better outcomes remains a challenge. This edition of Research Insights examines why expanding access (through insurance, subsidies, or digital tools) does not automatically improve health and how to address this gap.

[Read the Research Insights here](#)

International Day of Education: Evidence on What Works and What Must Come Next

RESEARCH INSIGHTS | JANUARY 24, 2026

In light of the International Day of Education, this edition of [Research Insights](#) highlights how expanding schooling has helped drive down global extreme poverty and what it will take to sustain these gains in the future. It also features country evidence from Ukraine and Jordan showing how well-designed programs can support students at scale, even in fragile settings. To dive deeper into ongoing work in this area, explore the updated [Education Research Roundup](#), a curated compilation of recent studies on education systems, learning, and human capital.

[Read the Research Insights here](#)



International Migration

VOXDEVLIT | JANUARY 14, 2026

International migration is one of the most powerful tools available for poverty reduction and economic development. This review synthesises rigorous quantitative evidence on the impact of migration on origin countries, as well as the impact of development policies related to international migration.

[Publication](#)

Trade Remains Resilient to Trade-Policy Uncertainty

TRADE WATCH | DECEMBER 8, 2025

The latest edition of Trade Watch, jointly developed by the Development Research Group and the Trade, Investment, and Competition Department, shows that global goods trade continued to expand in Q3 2025, despite higher trade-policy uncertainty. Trade in services also continued to grow in the July-to-September period, albeit at a slower pace, led by digitally enabled services. Shipping costs remained low, as container fleet expansion continued to restrain shipping costs amid global supply chain pressures.

[Access the publication](#) | [Access the series](#) | [Explore the interactive dashboard](#)

Rethinking Resilience: Adapting to a Changing Climate

POLICY RESEARCH REPORT, DECEMBER 2025

For the world's poorest people, climate change does not announce itself in parts per million. It arrives as a ruined harvest, a flooded shopfront, and lost learning as children are kept out of school. The most consequential climate-policy question for developing economies is not only how much carbon the world emits, but how quickly people, firms, and governments can prepare for shocks, recover from them, and learn to do better next time. To ensure that a bad day, week, or season does not become a bad decade, the principal response to climate change for developing economies should be to quickly become more resilient to it.

[Report Website](#) | [Launch Event](#)

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This newsletter is produced by the Development Research Group, part of the Development Economics Vice Presidency of the World Bank Group. The Development Research Group is the World Bank's principal research department, covering a broad range of topics and countries. Research plays a crucial role in learning from past policies and shaping the future. The department undertakes catalytic research with the aim of generating new knowledge on what works in development. With its cross-cutting expertise, the Development Research Group supports effective policy making within and beyond the World Bank.

