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Abstract

From Jobs to Careers: Apparel Exports and Career Paths for Women in Developing Countries

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An oft-cited strategy to advance economic development is to further integrate developing countries into global trade, bolstered by the expansion of female-intensive industries that bring more women into the formal labor force. As a result, a frequent debate centers on whether the apparel industry—the most female-intensive—can be a key player in this regard. A new Report—From Jobs to Careers: Apparel Exports and Careers Paths for Women in Developing Countries—answers this question by stressing the importance of a transition from jobs into careers—the so-called “quiet revolution”—on seven countries where apparel plays a vital role in their export baskets—Bangladesh, Cambodia, Egypt, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Turkey, and Vietnam. It finds that apparel can serve as a launching pad to bring more women into the labor market, albeit indirectly. But for this approach to work, there needs to be complementary policies that tackle the barriers that hinder women in their pursuit of long-term workforce participation and better-paid occupations. Key policy recommendations include: increasing participation of female production workers in export-oriented apparel manufacturing and related industries; upgrading within apparel to manufacturing-related industries; boosting access to education; and breaking glass ceilings.

Link to the report: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/36529>