ALIVE
Acumen LatAm Impact Ventures

VALUE FOR WOMEN

THE POTENTIAL OF HRTECHS & EDTECHS FOR

PROMOTING WOMEN'S RETENTION AND PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

ALIVE
Acumen LatAm Impact Ventures

ACUMEN LATAM IMPACT VENTURES (ALIVE) designed and commissioned this research project as part of its ongoing efforts to better understand gender dynamics in the value chains of its portfolio companies and to disseminate to the broader ecosystem original insights and recommendations for improving sector gender practices and outcomes across those value chains.

Dutch Good Growth Fund

This study was made possible primarily with funding from the **Dutch Good Growth Fund.**

VALUE FOR WOMEN

ALIVE selected global gender inclusion consultancy, **Value for Women**, to execute the research and production of this report, with guidance and support from the ALIVE team. Value for Women (VfW) is a specialized advisory firm helping organizations advance gender inclusion. VfW works with a range of partners and institutions, including SMEs, investors, and financial institutions across Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Pacific, to drive gender-forward solutions within their operations. Learn more at **www.v4w.org**.

Research leads: Natalia Sant' Anna Torres & Daniela Moctezuma Salas
Editor: Shoshana Grossman-Crist | **Design:** Gerardo Mejia

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Although the past decade has seen women in Latin America achieving higher levels of education and training, corresponding improvements in women's professional stability and career progression have not followed.[1] On average, **women hold senior management positions in only 20% of companies in Latin America.**[2] Furthermore, for each hour worked, women in Latin America, on average earn 17% less than their male peers.

Multiple barriers underpin these gender gaps in women's career development in Latin America, including gender biases, social expectations that women be the primary caregivers, systems that reward men more than women, a gender pay gap, more limited professional networks, few women role models particularly in both leadership and male-dominated sectors, and gender-based violence at work.

In the face of these immense challenges, B2B technology companies working in human resources (HRTech) and education (EdTech) are supporting a successful transition to the future of work. **By facilitating flexible and diverse work models, reskilling, applying data intelligence to promotion processes, and supporting anonymous whistleblowing, many of the HRTech and EdTech solutions reduce some gender inequalities.**

But to do this well, they must consider gender throughout their business models. While tech firms with B2B models have indirect or limited contact with end users, they can incorporate segmentation into their products or work collaboratively with their corporate customers to offer solutions that help their customers improve DEI in the workplace.

This report looks at how HRTech and EdTech firms can better contribute to increasing women's retention and professional growth in the workplace. The potential payoffs to businesses and investors for doing so are immense; businesses that embrace diversity tend to both outperform their peers financially and benefit from increased internal collaboration and innovation.[3]

To answer this question of "how," the report draws from conversations with over 30 tech companies, regional specialists, intermediary organizations, consultations with over 100 women, and an extensive literature review.

1 UNESCO, 2021a
2 World Bank, (n.d.)
3 Montilla, E., 2020; Castillo, P. & Callegaro, H., 2020

It finds that **some HRTechs and EdTechs are already catalyzing gender inclusion in retention and professional growth, offering solutions that address key gender-related barriers.** These powerful solutions existing today include providing the data to inform companies' gender, diversity, equity, and inclusion strategies; providing insight into the heterogeneity of women's experiences and into the experience of caregivers within a company; using virtual reality to increase company awareness of biases and discrimination; monitoring the gender pay gap; and offering solutions that reduce sexual harassment risks in companies.

With gender inclusion generally a new focus area for HRTechs and EdTechs, besides a few notable examples (i.e., solutions at the vanguard), **there is much opportunity for these companies to do more to support gender equality.** But where to start? We share the following seven recommendations for HRTechs and EdTechs:

1 **Collect and analyze sex-disaggregated data.** Tech companies can use the large amounts of data they are already generating on their customers and users to streamline business decision-making on DEI.

2 **Use inclusive algorithms.** Ensure artificial intelligence does not replicate gender stereotypes, and that teams can both prevent bias and act when they identify bias.

3 **Include a women-centric approach.** "Gender-neutral" designs often exclude women. Instead, specifically consider women, among others, when developing training solutions.

4 **Create diverse product development teams.** Formalizing practices and policies that promote diversity in the company and delivering anti-bias training to product development teams will help de-bias technologies.

5 **Develop a DEI value proposition.** Develop a value proposition around how solutions can catalyze change on DEI within companies and communicate both the social and business impacts a company will experience as a result of this change.

6 **Walk the talk.** Practice DEI internally to give the business ecosystem a model of DEI in the workplace.

By implementing these recommendations, and with the support of investors, accelerators, and business hubs and networks, the HRTech and EdTech sectors could increase the odds that women benefit from the technology transformation occurring in Latin America's economy and that businesses flourish.

2 PROJECT BACKGROUND, METHODOLOGY, & TARGET AUDIENCE

This report was funded primarily by the Dutch Good Growth Fund and is the result of a research project commissioned by Acumen Latam Impact Ventures (ALIVE) and executed by Value for Women (VfW) to implement a two-part study on how technology companies working in education (EdTech) and human resources (HRTech), can best contribute to:

1. women's ability to access professional training and formal employment in Latin America; and

2. women's ability to retain formal employment and/or grow professionally in Latin America.

This volume (ii) looks at how EdTech and HRTech firms can better contribute to increasing women's retention and professional growth in formal employment. Our sectoral analysis led us to understand that, save for exceptional cases, **EdTech and HRTech companies operating B2B models are best positioned to address retention and employability issues** since they can influence processes and practices within employers. Therefore, this report focuses mainly on the B2B segment.

This is the first study of this kind focused on Latin America. The previous analyses in the region focused, above all, on the gender composition of EdTech and HRTech leaders and teams. This study, therefore, adds a new layer of analysis by concentrating on the products and services these companies offer.

Methodology

Between September 2022 and January 2023, we conducted 31 interviews with tech companies, corporate users, intermediary organizations, and regional specialists. We asked companies about:

- **their business models** to identify opportunities to contribute to reducing gender gaps;
- any **inclusive business policies, practices, and strategies** they have; and
- their **opinion on how tech platforms could contribute** to women's ability to retain formal employment and/or grow professionally in Latin America, accounting for the sector's strengths, gaps, and sophistication.

This last question was also the focus of our conversations with intermediary organizations in the field and regional specialists.

In parallel, we consulted over 100 women across Latin America[4], through a survey and focus group discussions.

We asked women about:

- the **barriers** they face;
- their **experience using HRTechs and EdTechs**;
- **whether this tech influenced their job retention and career development opportunities**; and
- **what they would improve** on these platforms.

This data, together with an extensive literature review, provided a picture of the factors that shape women's access to professional training, formal employment, and career growth in Latin America. From there, we developed concrete recommendations for how EdTech and HRTech can contribute to reducing gender inequalities in the region through their products and services.

The findings from the primary and secondary research inform all sections of the report.

Target audience

EdTech and HRTech firms operating in Latin America that offer B2B products to improve people management and talent development processes and seek to have greater impact on women's professional development in the workplace.

This study is also helpful for:

Ecosystem players — such as investors, business incubators, and accelerators — interested in gender inclusion.

4 The women consulted came from the following countries: Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico, Peru, and Venezuela.

What's in this report

THE BARRIERS

There are gendered barriers that affect the way women remain and grow in their careers. In this section, you will find an overview of the multiple barriers to women remaining and growing in their careers. Knowing these barriers is the first step for developing products and strategies aligned with women's experiences.

THE LANDSCAPE

B2B HRTechs and EdTechs have great potential to contribute to women's professional retention and growth. This section analyzes how B2B HRTechs and EdTechs are uniquely suited to reduce some of the aforementioned barriers, identifies the HRTech and EdTech solutions at the vanguard supporting gender inclusion, and describes the main challenges HRTech and EdTech companies are facing to taking greater action for gender inclusion. We look specifically at the HRTech and EdTech solutions that have the greatest capacity to directly impact the professional lives of their women users: those focused on building more women-inclusive environments and work models and those providing tools to help women advance in their careers.

THE RECOMMENDATIONS

HRTech and EdTech firms with B2B models can consider gender in their business models in a variety of ways. This section provides concrete recommendations on how HRTech and EdTech companies can take action to support women remaining and growing in their careers.

ICONS TO GUIDE YOU THROUGH THIS REPORT

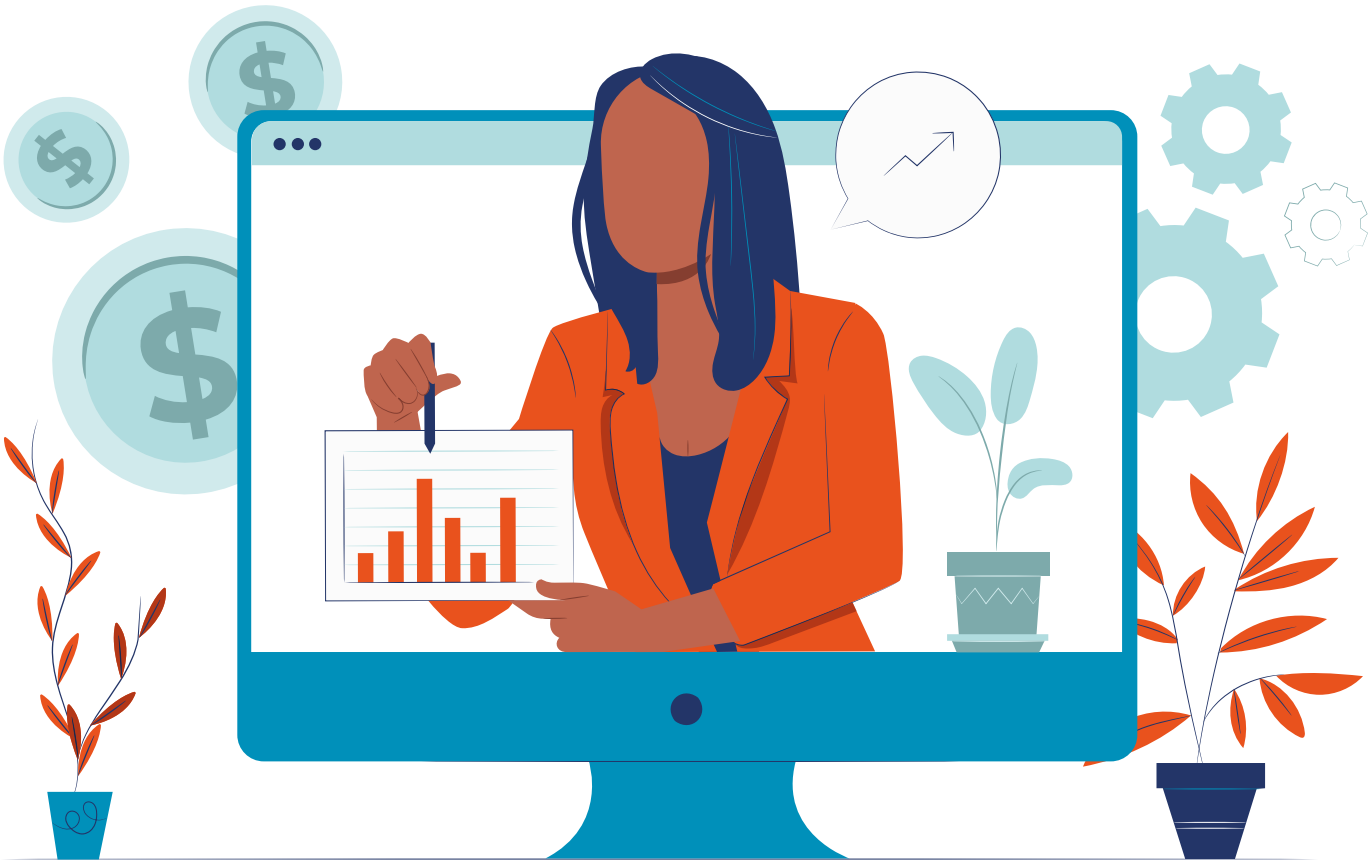
In an effort to support readers in identifying the report content most relevant to them, we have included a series of labels that identify when content is relevant for each type of reader:

EdTechs

HRTechs

Internal-facing teams[5]

External-facing teams[6]



5 E.g., teams that focus on people management and internal systems and processes
6 E.g., teams that focus on product development, customer service, and marketing

3 INTRODUCTION

3.1 Gender gaps and challenges to women's career development in Latin America

Although the past decade has seen women in Latin America achieving higher levels of education and training, corresponding improvements in women's professional stability and career progression have not followed[7]. On average, **women hold senior management positions in only 18% of companies globally and, similarly, in only 20% of companies in Latin America**[8]. This is often attributed to the "glass ceiling," which women often cannot rise above due to the invisible sociocultural biases and barriers that prevent women from reaching the highest positions in companies, regardless of their qualifications or competence.

Furthermore, **for each hour worked, women on average earn less than their male peers, 23% less globally and 17% less in Latin America**[9]. And research in Brazil found that 24 months after taking maternity leave, almost 50% of the women were out of the workforce[10].

The economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these inequalities. While nearly all the jobs men lost during the pandemic were recovered by the end of 2021, 4.2 million jobs women lost had yet to be recovered by that same time, in large part due to women's increased caregiving and household responsibilities which preclude their participation in work onsite outside the home[11].

3.2 The business case for EdTechs and HRTechs to address these gendered challenges women face

Addressing the key barriers women face offers an opportunity for tech company growth. Closing the gender gap in access to online learning platforms in emerging economies would mean **8 million women joining the paid online learning market each year**[12]. The rapidly growing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) agenda among the private sector worldwide has created **heightened demand for HRTech solutions that support firms in their DEI strategies.**

Further, there is a clear business case for promoting diversity within the workforce, and EdTechs and HRTechs can contribute toward scores of companies achieving diversity. As has become widely known, businesses that embrace diversity tend to both outperform their peers financially and benefit from increased internal collaboration and innovation[13]. Also, evidence demonstrates that, by better serving women customers, businesses increase sales and income.

7 UNESCO, 2021a
8 World Bank, (n.d.)
9 ILO 2016; ILO, 2019
10 Machado, C. & Neto, P., 2016
11 ILO, 2022
12 IFC & Coursera, 2022
13 Montilla, E., 2020; Castillo, P. & Callegaro, H., 2020

BOX A — But what are EdTechs and HRTechs?

EdTech

The term **EdTech** comes from combining the words "education" and "technology." Although there is still no consensus around its definition, it usually refers to the combined use of computer hardware, software, and educational theory and practice to facilitate learning. In this sense, technology makes learning more efficient and effective[14].

Market segmentation

The EdTech market can be segmented in multiple ways, with the most common approach being to break up by age and educational level:

- Early childhood (Pre-K)
- K-12
- Post-secondary or higher education
- Workforce development and upskilling
- Others

Or, alternatively, by subject:

- Advanced technology
- STEM and coding
- Language learning
- Online learning
- Tutoring and testing
- Management systems
- Workforce upskilling
- Digital content
- Others

HRTech

The term **HRTech** refers to using technology in human resources to increase sector intelligence, optimize processes, and improve results. The main objective of HRTech is to reduce the bureaucracy of processes[15]. HRTechs are part of the larger "era of HR 4.0," where human resources are shifting toward playing a more strategic role in the decision-making process of companies.

Market segmentation

HRTechs are generally segmented by their business areas, as follows:

- Job marketplaces
- Recruiting tools
- Learning & development
- Performance management
- Employee experience
- Work-life balance and wellbeing
- Internal communication and engagement
- Work management
- Workforce planning
- Personnel department
- Payroll
- Benefits
- Others

14 Abstartup, 2020
15 Guimarães, B., 2021

4 BARRIERS AFFECTING WOMEN'S PROFESSIONAL RETENTION AND GROWTH

There are multiple barriers causing these gender gaps in women's ability to remain and grow in their careers. These range from gender norms that limit the pipeline of women in high-demand sectors to labor force segregation, women's digital and financial exclusion, domestic violence, women's access to justice, reproductive rights, and more.

Understanding these barriers is the first step to designing value propositions that contribute to reducing gender gaps. **Here we list those that are most critical to women's ability to retain and/or grow professionally and, as we will see later, EdTechs and HRTechs can address:**

- **Gender biases impact, albeit unconsciously, the way people perceive women in the workplace.** For example, women receive less credit for their achievements and more blame for mistakes, compared to men. Consequently, this can impact women's performance evaluations and promotion path[16]. Studies[17] show that women receive less helpful feedback for improving their performance than men receive. This interferes with women's career evolution.

- **Social expectations are that women be the primary caregivers** and that they prioritize caregiving over careers. This expectation means that employers often don't take women seriously as employees, impacting how women progress at work and in their careers[18,19].

- **When women become mothers, they face greater time poverty than men**[20]. Latin American and Caribbean women spend twice as many hours as men doing domestic labor and unpaid care work. And this is particularly aggravated when women have young children[21]. This leaves women with less time and energy available for their careers than men and necessitating greater flexibility in their work schedule[22,23]. In Brazil, 24 months after taking maternity leave, almost 50% of the women were out of the workforce.

16 Evidence shows that women tend to receive less constructive feedback than men. Also, women are 1.4 times more likely to receive subjective feedback, often based on personality traits, while men are 2 times more likely to receive feedback that is objective, often regarding their technical expertise. Additionally, as a result of double standards, the same situation often gets a positive or a negative spin depending on gender (ex. a man can be seen as confident and assertive, while a woman in the same situation would be seen as bossy and aggressive, or a man careful and thoughtful while a woman indecisive and slow) (Cecchi-Dimeglio, 2017).
17 McKinsey & Company, 2016
18 World Bank, 2021
19 World Bank, 2021
20 CEPAL, 2021
21 As well as elderly care, which also falls disproportionately on women.
22 CEPAL, 2021
23 ILO, 2019

"Since I became a mom, my life has changed a lot. I work in a national position, and I was offered the opportunity of an international role, but I found out I was pregnant so I couldn't accept the role with its constant travel requirements. This does not happen to men. My male colleagues have accepted opportunities like this even with newborn children."

– BRAZILIAN WOMAN, HRTECH USER

"We are aware of women's challenges in accessing professional networks, which is why we create networking spaces just for women, spaces for more closeness between women where a lot of magic happens. We organize community events only for women because we have found that feeling accompanied, so as to not sit alone, is very important. All this [is done] remotely.

— MARÍA FERNANDA ZAMORA, CUSTOMER SUCCESS LEAD, TALENTLY

- **Women are less likely to self-promote**[24,25], and systems reward men more than women[26,27,28]. Women tend to describe their ability and performance to potential employers less favorably than equally performing men. This hampers women's ability to claim value for their work and negotiate for career upgrades.
- **Women still earn less than men, even in equivalent roles.** For each hour worked, women in Latin America earn, on average, 17% less than their male peers[29].
- **Women have more limited professional networks and encounter more challenges in establishing and joining such networks**[30]. This is the result of both sexism inherent in many networks and women's tendency to rely more heavily on family connections and informal networks. The result is women have less access to professional information and opportunities than men.
- **Gender norms from an early age discourage girls from pursuing studies in entrepreneurship, management, and science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM)**[31]. The result is that, despite having the same innate ability as men, women have fewer professional skills in these areas that are critical for the future of work.

"The gender gap in STEM is partly due to the gender roles of society. It's like a funnel in time; everything starts from a very young age. What society tells girls, sometimes directly or subtly with toys, for example, is that science, math, and engineering are not for us. And then later, when a girl or woman wants to study STEM and looks for role models who look like her, there aren't any. Very few women are visible in these fields, and that discourages other women from joining."

– GABRIELA ROCHA, CO-FOUNDER & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, LABORATORIA

24 Exley, C. & Kessler, J., 2021
25 Nicks, L., Gesiarz, F., *et al.*, 2022
26 Mohr, T.S., 2014
27 Barsh, J., &; Yee, L., 2011
28 Mohr, T.S., 2014
29 ILO, 2019
30 Chin, K., 2017
31 Chin, K., 2017; Spearman, J., & Watt, H., 2013; Ruigrok, A., Salimi-Khorshidiet, G., *et al.*, 2014; Eliot, L., 2013; Riegle-Crumb, C., King, B., *et al.*, 2012; Hyde, 2005; Halpern, D., Benbow, C., *et al.*, 2007, UNESCO, 2017; UNESCO, 2017

- **There are few women role models, particularly in leadership and especially in male-dominated sectors.** Evidence found this to be the fifth highest barrier to women's leadership because it limits the roles and fields women aspire to enter[32].

- **Women experience more gender-based violence at work**[33]. This often occurs subtly in the form of "microaggressions," that is, those everyday cumulative small interactions or behaviors that communicate some sort of gender bias. This can be detrimental for women's productivity, workplace permanence, and well-being.

BOX B — Gender-based violence

Women are more exposed to types of violence related to gender-based power relations, which can affect women workers' mental and physical health, productivity, and learning[34]. Gender-based violence (GBV) in the work environment includes physical and verbal abuse, sexual harassment, and unwanted sexual advances, psychological abuse and intimidation, abusive working conditions, and subtle microaggressions.

Gender barriers related to women's retention & growth

32 ILO Company Survey, 2015
33 IFC & Coursera , 2022; Agbaje *et al.*, 2021
34 Agbaje *et al.*, 2021

5 CURRENT LANDSCAPE OF GENDER INCLUSION IN EDTECH & HRTECH

EdTech is potentially one of the most powerful growth engines for LAC, accelerating the economic recovery, addressing inequalities, increasing access, and multiplying the support for and impact of LAC's parents, mentors, teachers, and institutions[35]. The sector has demonstrated a clear ability to scale and internationalize, expanding dramatically in recent years to number more than 1,500 EdTech companies and over 4,500 jobs in 2021, and having attracted US $1B in investment over the past 10 years[36]. Venture capital investment in LAC EdTech more than tripled between 2020 and 2021[37].

The HRTech sector seems to follow the same trend. In line with global patterns, **the HRTech sector in Latin America has accelerated since the start of the pandemic**, reaching a market size of US $1B in 2022 and expected to reach US $1.7B by 2028[38].

HRTechs and EdTechs are uniquely positioned to support gender inclusion

In the face of the immense gender challenges described in the previous section, EdTechs and HRTechs are supporting a successful transition to the future of work. **And, by facilitating flexible and diverse work models, reskilling, applying data intelligence to promotion processes, and supporting anonymous whistleblowing, many of the HRTech and EdTech solutions reduce some gender inequalities.**

35 Lustosa, C., Yaacov, B., *et al.*, 2021
36 Lustosa, C., Yaacov, B., *et al.*, 2021
37 Lustosa, C., Yaacov, B., *et al.*, 2021
38 IMARC Group, 2022

"Multi-level performance evaluations are important because the greater diversity of voices involved, the lesser the impact of subjectivity in the evaluations. It is also now possible to capture other important aspects, such as engagement, ability to inspire others and cooperation, composing a more complete picture of workers' performance, and, eventually, refuting assessments anchored in stereotypes and biases."

– IVAN CRUZ JUNIOR, CO-FOUNDER, MEREO

"On the employee side, [our whistleblower platform] is designed to provide a frictionless experience that encourages people to speak up internally. On the employer side, it supports managers by systematizing verification flow and records of evidence, and creating dashboards mapping problematic behavior patterns so employers can act preventively. All of these, combined, strengthen the workplace culture of inclusion, retention, and productivity."

– RAFAELA FRANKENTHAL, CEO, SAFESPACE

Video conference, task-sharing, and scheduling solutions, for example, reduce the need to be in the office, reduce time spent commuting, and enable caregivers to both structure their work around domestic demands and catch up on work conversations when they next log in. In fact, the women consulted for this study used these HRTech solutions the most. Furthermore, men, also having this flexibility, opens the possibility of them taking on a more equal share of domestic responsibilities (though, notably, the reverse occurred during Covid[39]).

But to realize the entirety of HRTechs' and EdTechs' potential to address gender gaps, they must do it intentionally with specific actions, products, and solutions to consider gender in their internal and external operations.

39 Gênero e Número & SOF Sempreviva Organização Feminista, 2021

Some powerful solutions in the market today

Some HRTechs and EdTechs are already catalyzing gender inclusion in job retention and career growth, offering solutions that address key gender-related barriers. **The most powerful solutions identified in our research include:**

Providing data to inform companies' gender, diversity, equity, and inclusion strategies. Developing DEI strategies– from goal setting and KPIs to prioritizing actions and undertaking regular monitoring –requires data. Some HRTechs are offering data analytic tools to provide this, going beyond static diversity composition (demographic census) to signal trends and movements and to cross-reference data. For example, by providing trends on young women voluntarily leaving the company, analyzed along with other variables (e.g., type of contract and work regime, under which leadership, ethnic-racial identity, disability status), these solutions inform strategies to prevent turnover.

Providing insight into the heterogeneity of women's experiences within the company. With an eye to increasing retention, employers are increasingly focusing on internal policies that improve employees' experience at work. For these policies to succeed at retaining women and other underrepresented groups, employers need to understand how these groups' experiences differ. To this end, some HRTechs allow companies to customize employee survey questions to focus on DEI topics, using natural language processing and sentiment analysis to identify themes in written comments[40]. Those that include diversity-oriented questions allow for sex-disaggregated analysis.

40 Sherman, S. Jackson, C., 2019

Profile of an HRTech that intentionally addresses gender gaps

NAME:	Pin People
TYPOLOGY:	Employee experience
DESCRIPTION:	Pin People is a Brazilian survey platform that combines people analytics, artificial intelligence, and people science to help companies understand and improve the candidate and employee experience.
GEOGRAPHIC COVERAGE:	Brazil
GENDER APPROACH:	Pin People offers two sorts of solutions related to DEI: 1. Inclusion solutions: Pin People´s Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity Maturity Census Survey allows companies to assess employees' experience regarding inclusion and get concrete insights on what can improve inclusion. 2. General business solutions disaggregated by diversity: Pin People's wide range of automated employee experience surveys with built-in diversity data disaggregation enable companies to apply the survey(s) most relevant to them (e.g., organizational climate and engagement, selection process, onboarding/integration, leadership experience and effectiveness, work model, emotional well-being, change management, offboarding/termination), and capture information segmented by diversity markers such as gender, race, disability status, among others[41]. This allows employers to identify, for instance, if there is any deviation between the experience women and men employees live as well as between other groups and their intersectionalities[42] and act to make business practices, policies, and culture more inclusive.

Increasing company awareness of biases and discrimination. Some corporate learning-focused tech firms are facilitating corporate bias and discrimination education for companies that do not have their own training programs. Furthermore, technology can make this education even more effective. Some HRTechs offer virtual reality diversity training, putting teams directly in uncomfortable situations to illustrate the biases the individual has and help them improve their practices.

41 Whenever this does not pose a risk to the anonymity of the data.

42 For instance, barriers faced by non-white women may differ from those white women face. Diversity variables –such as gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, age– can combine in different ways, generating diverse experiences of exclusion or inclusion in society. The concept of "intersectionality" refers precisely to this interaction between the multiple potential social factors that define a person.

> *"In our B2B community, there is demand for more inclusive leadership and for recruitment processes free from gender bias. In response, the diversity and inclusion school in Platzi was born."*
>
> **– JULIANE BUTTI, FORMER HEAD OF PARTNERSHIPS & STARTUPS, PLATZI**

Profile of a hybrid EdTech that intentionally addresses gender gaps

NAME:	Equal Reality
TYPOLOGY:	Learning & Development
DESCRIPTION:	Equal Reality is a tech firm focused on driving empathy, awareness, and inclusion in organizations. To do so, it offers immersive learning and virtual reality diversity inclusion training in the Metaverse.
GEOGRAPHIC COVERAGE:	U.S. and Australia
GENDER APPROACH:	Equal Reality's virtual reality learning product allows team members to "walk a mile in someone else's shoes" by learning what it is like to experience discrimination or inappropriate behavior and learning to identify bias-related decisions. It also allows users to rehearse challenging conversations (e.g., management performance reviews, breaking bad news, difficult conversations) by experiencing the situation from the perspective of multiple people.

Monitoring and providing insights to address the gender pay gap. HRTechs can enable companies to conduct pay equity analyses, providing data-driven insights for closing wage gaps. To remove the risk of human bias, some software in the global market use bots to provide these insights. Some tools also offer pay gap analysis across variables beyond gender, such as ethnicity/race and disability, allowing an intersectional view of diversities.

Profile of a hybrid EdTech that intentionally addresses gender gaps

NAME:	Gapsquare (XpertHR) GAPSQUARE
TYPOLOGY:	Payroll
DESCRIPTION:	Gapsquare, from XpertHR, is a software for organizations to measure, achieve, and sustain fair pay and workplace equality in real-time.
GEOGRAPHIC COVERAGE:	Global
GENDER APPROACH:	Based on advanced SaaS pay analytics technology, Gapsquare allows companies to use their pay data to identify existing pay inequities and gaps across the organization as well as root causes of disparities to find out who and what and how to fix them. It also allows companies to monitor progress in real-time and use predictive modeling to prevent further issues and set targets.

BOX C — The rise of "Diversity & Inclusion Techs" [43,44]

There is growing use of the term "Diversity & Inclusion Techs" (D&I Techs). This refers to technology-based companies, usually operating as HRTech and/or EdTech, that offer solutions explicitly created to advance diversity and inclusion (e.g., reduce unconscious bias, support companies to attract and retain a diverse workforce, provide DEI analytics insights for guiding decision making, building diverse talent pipelines, measuring the success of DEI strategies).

With the development of new technologies (e.g., AI, machine learning, text mining, sentiment analysis), the increased attention to diversity and inclusion, and an eye toward disrupting the stagnant progress to date, a ripe market opportunity has arisen to support leaders to increase diversity. In 2019, the market size of D&I Techs was approximately $100 million[45].

43 Sherman, S. Jackson, C., 2019
44 For clarity, we are using the acronyms DEI and D&I interchangeably.
45 Sherman, S. Jackson, C., 2019

Delving into the experience of caregivers, so the parenting process can become more inclusive. Studies show that after maternity leave, the employment stability of women workers sharply drops after the period protected by law[46]. Evidence shows this is largely driven by women feeling that their need to balance family and work is neither respected nor understood in the workplace[47]. HRTechs offering employee experience solutions– such as pulse and engagement surveys –can delve into the specific experience of caregivers, and in particular women, throughout the different phases of parenting (pregnancy announcement, pre-leave, leave, post-license, and mothering). This enables employers to identify potential gaps and implement improvements. EdTechs and HRTechs can also help train managers to best support employees during parental leave.

Profile of an HRTech that intentionally addresses gender gaps

NAME:	Bloom Care
TYPOLOGY:	Caregivers support
DESCRIPTION:	Bloom Care is a B2B health and well-being management platform that assists companies in providing support to their caregiver employees throughout the pregnancy cycle and return to work, including with family health.
GEOGRAPHIC COVERAGE:	Brazil
GENDER APPROACH:	Bloom Care offers care pathways for fertility, pregnancy, postpartum, parenting, and mental health. Offering corporate clients access to a network of specialists and multidisciplinary professionals, Bloom Care enables companies to provide support to employees along these journeys.

Offering both anonymous incident reporting and solutions that reduce sexual harassment risks in companies. There are innovative solutions that offer neutral and reliable spaces to report incidents, including sexual harassment, without fear of retaliation. These platforms help people feel safe to speak up internally. Some platforms also analyze staff feedback to suggest solutions and action plans to reduce the risk of sexual harassment.

46 Machado, C., Pinho Neto, V., 2016
47 The Mom Project, 2019

Profile of an HRTech that intentionally addresses gender gaps

NAME:	ELSA
TYPOLOGY:	Wellbeing/Compliance
DESCRIPTION:	ELSA is a B2B SaaS that allows organizations to proactively measure, monitor, and take action against sexual harassment at work. It does this by collecting data from employees through an anonymous survey and then using this data to create a tailor-made strategy for the organization, providing the resources the organization needs to implement and track progress. ELSA's methodology has allowed organizations to reduce the prevalence of sexual harassment at work by 60% over the course of one year.
GEOGRAPHIC COVERAGE:	Latin America
GENDER APPROACH:	ELSA was born from the proven hypothesis that if the problem of sexual harassment becomes visible, a company's response changes. When companies implement actions to address the problem, the organizational culture improves as well as employee satisfaction and performance, particularly for women, directly impacting their retention within companies. The ELSA tool has been particularly effective in companies in sectors that are traditionally dominated by men (e.g., construction, mining, and technology), where the incidence of sexual harassment is significantly high.

Vast untapped potential

Despite HRTech and EdTech solutions being uniquely positioned to be game changers for gender inclusion, we found they are not yet realizing their full potential to do so. HRTech and EdTech firms' awareness of their potential impact on gender equality is still nascent, and only a few incorporate gender into their business strategy intentionally.

When asked about the possibility of taking such action, **tech companies shared a variety of challenges to doing so**. Tech companies we spoke with mentioned it being difficult to identify the specific preferences and requirements of women users/clients and corporate clients' still-incipient knowledge of the opportunities to use technology to address diversity, equity, and inclusion challenges.

The **low gender diversity often found in product development teams**, compounded by the **still scarce supply of senior-level women tech professionals** in the region, may further complicate these challenges.

Although the education and HR sectors have historically had greater participation of women, men lead the vast majority of tech companies operating in these areas. HolonIQ's 2020 analysis of the most promising 100 EdTech startups in Latin America showed that women founded or led only 23%48. We also found this trend in our research.

Finally, regional specialists highlighted that companies do not yet see the women segment strategically, as a business strategy for growth and to attract investment.

Some HRTech & EdTech solutions in the market today that are powerfully reducing gender barriers to retention and career growth

Gender norms, roles, & stereotypes

Solutions that use people analytics to mitigate bias in decision-making processes, help to raise awareness on biases and discrimination, and provide inputs to DEI strategies.

Time poverty

Solutions that provide caregivers with more flexible schedules, facilitate remote work, identify and/or address specific experiences of employees throughout the different phases of parenting, and train managers to best support caregiver employees.

Systems that reward men more than women

Solutions that make performance evaluations, promotions, and recognitions more transparent and based on concrete and objective data.

Pay gap

Solutions that facilitate pay equity analyses and identify data-driven insights for closing wage gaps.

Fewer professional networks

Solutions that facilitate connections outside of the traditional face-to-face model and facilitate mentor-mentee matching.

Male-dominated STEM sectors

Solution that offer companies gender-inclusive reskilling and upskilling programs and challenge gender norms from an early age (e.g. initiatives with younger workers/interns).

Few women in leadership

Solutions that use people analytics data to mitigate bias in decision-making processes and that make performance evaluation, feedback, and promotion more transparent, inclusive, and based on objective performance.

Gender-based violence

Solutions that allow anonymous whistleblowing and virtual reporting of unethical conduct, monitor harassment cases, compile data to reduce risks of harassment and build stronger protocols, and increase internal awareness on discrimination.

48 Woolley, A. *et al*., 2010; Sodexo, 2018

6 SIX RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HRTECHS AND EDTECHS TO ACCESS THESE OPPORTUNITIES

With gender inclusion generally a new focus area for HRTechs and EdTechs, besides a few notable examples (i.e., solutions at the vanguard), there is much opportunity for HRTechs and EdTechs to do more to support gender equality. But where to start? We offer five recommendations and areas of potential action, and detail them in this section:

Data

Develop sex-disaggregated data collection and analysis solutions to streamline business decision-making on DEI

Algorithms

Ensure artificial intelligence does not replicate stereotypes

Women-centric Approach

"Gender-neutral" designs often exclude women. Instead, specifically consider women, among others, when developing training solutions

Team Diversity

Increase diversity in product development roles to help de-bias technologies

Value Proposition

Develop a value proposition and sales strategy around how the solution can catalyze change on DEI. Pitch both the social and business impacts of achieving this change

Walk the talk

Practice DEI internally, to give the business ecosystem a model of DEI in the workplace

6.1 Develop sex-disaggregated data collection and analysis solutions[49]

EdTechs and HRTechs generate large amounts of data on their customers and users. However, our research suggests that the collection and use of sex-disaggregated data is not common *(for guidance on companies in general how to collect, analyze, and use sex-disaggregated data, see Appendix A).*

HRTechs can offer solutions (like pulse and engagement surveys) that help companies collect and analyze data to identify gender disparities in the workplace. **Further, HRTech can push diversity data out to decision-makers' desktops and support the operationalization of DEI strategies across all areas of the company by circulating information in real time.** Through such automated management tools as DEI dashboards (with indicators like gender diversity in leadership, departments with less diversity, and turnover and retention rates by gender), companies have greater transparency and accountability on gender equality, and optimize reporting exercises to external stakeholders.

Examples of powerful data to collect and analyze for women's retention and professional development include:

- Retention, performance, turnover, and engagement data of women vs. men;
- Salaries of women vs. men;
- The kinds of benefits and services most used by women vs. men;
- Preferred communication channels, working models, and capacity building tools of women vs. men;
- Women and men employees' feedback on their satisfaction and well-being levels.

Both HRTechs and EdTechs can **leverage big data and machine learning to close gender gaps.** Big data[50] can detect patterns of gender perceptions and develop predictive models of discrimination, which companies can use to inform their evidence-based solutions to improve women's retention and professional development[51]. Machine learning[52] can help companies identify gender trends in a specific industry or geography to then develop any needed solutions. This data can also demonstrate mothers' and fathers' success in their careers, building the case for retaining this talent.

> ***Technology allows us to work with a lot of data. At ELSA, we have already passed 100,000 data points, which is the biggest data set available in the region on the topic– this can be considered 'big data.' We can now begin to predict under which conditions sexual harassment is more likely to occur and what actually works to prevent it.***
>
> **— MARLENE MOLERO, CEO ELSA BY GENDER LAB**

49 Sex-disaggregating data can benefit not only the product design process but also internal practices within the technology firm.
50 Big data is defined as data sets whose size or type is beyond the ability of traditional relational databases to capture, manage, and process the data with low latency.
51 IFC, 2020
52 Machine learning is a branch of artificial intelligence focused on the use of data and algorithms to imitate the way that humans learn, gradually improving its accuracy.

BOX D — Sex vs. Gender[53]

- Sex (biological sex) refers to the physical and biological characteristics that distinguish men and women.
- Gender links to social norms and refers to the roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes that a given society at a given time considers appropriate for men and women. Gender identity refers to how one thinks of oneself — as a man, woman, nonbinary, etc.

Many firms collect sex and/or gender data on women and men; this disaggregation is an important start. However, companies can be more inclusive in their data collection and decision-making by asking for "gender identity" and including additional gender options (as multiple-choice options or write-ins), such as nonbinary and gender nonconforming. This allows for recognizing the unique experiences of individuals who do not self-identify with any of the gender spectrums or who self-identify with a gender other than the sex assigned at birth.

6.2 Use inclusive algorithms

As the use of artificial intelligence (AI) grows exponentially in educational and HR tools, these tech companies must ensure their tools do not replicate or reinforce stereotypes.

As with any human creation, algorithmic design can embed inadvertent human biases and unintended discriminatory features. Today, mostly small, homogenous, male-dominated teams develop AI algorithms without sex-disaggregated data as inputs. This increases the likelihood that AI has built-in biases that might penalize job seekers who are women and other disadvantaged groups[54,55].

Best practices for developing inclusive-AI for educational and HR solutions include the following:

- Recruit development teams with a greater range of gender identities, ethnic-racial identities, and worldviews.
- Bring DEI experts (external or internal) into algorithm design.
- Train development teams about gender biases and their impact on algorithm creation, so they can assess inadvertent biases in the design.

53 Gender Equality Glossary, UN Women
54 Sherman, S. Jackson, C., 2019
55 CBR Staff, 2020

- Conduct algorithmic audits and risk assessments to determine how predictive tools reach decisions and their potential impact on women and other underrepresented populations[56].
- Whenever possible, use– and advise others to use– artificial intelligence information as one piece of the larger puzzle, rather than as the sole source of information. To do this, combine it with other sources and modalities of information.

BOX E — The "small n" dilemma

When targeting the challenges underrepresented groups face at work, it is common for companies to find that the sample size does not include enough people to produce statistically significant results. Some internal and external resources can make it easier to supplement this "small n"[57]:

- Whenever possible, have data analysts provide confidence intervals (i.e., **guidance on how much managers can trust the data if the n's are too small to prove statistical significance**). Managers are more likely to make changes when there are strong confidence intervals.
- **Applying mixed-method approaches** allows leaders to look beyond the hard data and place a higher value on the experiences shared by small groups of underrepresented employees, such as what it feels like to be the only black woman team member. To fully capture nuances of exclusion of underrepresented groups– those who barely register on the analytics radar –leaders must complement aggregated data with one-on-one interactions, interviews, and focus groups.

6.3 Include a women-centric approach in the solutions offered

Unfortunately, processes and designs thought of as "gender-neutral" often end up excluding women because the default user considered is usually a man. To ensure women can access and benefit from workforce up/reskilling, mentoring programs, career development, and corporate training, EdTech and HRTech need to intentionally include women in the design. Best practices to do so include the following:

- **Ensure that program content meets the needs of women.** This might require that EdTechs conduct sex-disaggregated market research (short surveys, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups with the customer's employees) prior to the program design to better understand content needs of both men and women. *(For guidance on developing education solutions tailored for women, see Appendix 2).*

56 Sherman, S. Jackson, C., 2019
57 Williams, M., 2017

- **Identify the most effective program delivery methods for women.** With the rapid adoption of remote work spurred by the COVID-19 pandemic, it is likely that employees access up/reskilling programs on their own devices and connectivity. Make sure to consider women's different access to mobile devices and connectivity.
- **Mainstream gender into program content, instead of developing "women's empowerment modules."** While many of the challenges professional women face link to gender, the notion of "women's empowerment modules" can feel patronizing, reinforce stereotypes, and potentially marginalize women further. Instead, incorporate discussions on gender into the core of regular up/reskilling programs, for example, a discussion on how to deal with sexist attitudes in client relations and leadership[58].
- **Influence employers so they recognize up/reskilling activities as working time** and therefore paid by the employer and accessible during working hours. This could look like sharing with employers both the business case of increasing access to training and the data included in the Introduction to this report on women's disproportionate time constraints.

BOX F — Understand and address intersectionalities

Gender inequalities connect to other types of inequalities. In fact, discrimination can occur in many "layers" according to nationality, age, disability, sexual orientation, race-ethnicity, among other diversity variables. Thus, workers do not experience organizations based on their race or gender separately; they live their lives at the intersection of these characteristics. "One size fits all" diversity approaches often only benefit a subset of people[59] (often young, white, highly educated women).

EdTechs and HRTechs can incorporate intersectionalities by connecting gender/sex data with other diversity variables. For example, analyzing people analytics' sex and age data together can show employers whether women employees aged 50+ have a greater need for specific up/reskilling processes. Other examples include analyzing sex and disability data together (this may show that women with disabilities have specific needs in terms of flexible and remote work options) and looking specifically at transgender women (they may have specific needs for personal data and parental leave). It is important to always consider how these issues interconnect with conventional gender barriers.

58 Value for Women, 2018
59 Wullert, K., Gilmartin, S., & Simard, C., 2019

6.4 Create and support diverse product development teams

Increasing diversity in tech roles is critical to help de-bias the technologies that make up an ever-present component of modern life and produce more inclusive tech[60,61]. There is also a business case for this: research has found a positive correlation between diversity and inclusive leadership models, talent retention, collaboration in and across teams, motivation, and productivity, which ultimately leads to better organizational health and financial performance for the companies[62].

Platforms can promote diversity in their product development teams in the following ways:

- **Build the pipeline.** Companies can encourage applications from women by using inclusive language and images in job ads. Additionally, advertise benefits, flexibility, and workplace perks, stating that the company strongly encourages women to apply. To effectively circulate these job ads, see section 5.5 in this report.

  Some tech companies have held lightning talks, community events, and small group meetings for women in tech, as well as published blogs focused on women, to inspire women to enter tech careers.

- **Deliver gender-bias training to recruitment staff and adjust the recruitment process.** To reduce bias in the recruitment process for product development roles, ensure panelists, managers, and anyone engaged in the recruitment process are aware of gender biases and the importance of having a diverse team. Additionally, include standardized interview questions and processes, with a rubric for scoring, and form a diverse hiring committee.

  To ensure men and women candidates have equal chances to demonstrate their capabilities, some companies are scheduling an informal chat with a panel member before the interview, so the candidate feels less intimidated during the interview. Other companies are ensuring an equal number of women and men candidates on shortlists, setting quotas, or giving women additional points in early rounds of the selection process. During interviews, questions should be the same for all candidates and focus on the essential skills required to do the job (avoiding questions about personal life, and particularly family issues and plans because these tend to reinforce gender stereotypes).

- **Formalize practices and policies that promote diversity in the company.** Foremost to promote an inclusive organizational culture, formalize policies and practices to ensure that women feel safe, comfortable, and that they belong. Best practices include conducting regular salary reviews (to avoid potential gender-based disparities), offering women career development opportunities such as capacity building and mentoring (this can play a crucial role in women's decision to stay or leave a company), ensuring the working model and benefits are adequate for caregivers (see Table G), as well as putting in place non-discrimination and anti-harassment policies.

60 McKinsey & Company, 2022; Nigam, R., 2021
61 Nigam R., 2021
62 Castillo, P. & Callegaro, H., 2020

Value for Women's **Gender Smart Nexus** no-cost gender self-assessment helps companies identify gaps in their business operations, including the workplace, and provides recommendations on inclusive policies and practices that the company can implement.

> ***"I am convinced that diverse teams are more productive and innovative, and I mean diversity in all aspects. I've seen this since my first job. And so, at Kuepa, we try to carry out processes where we really know that we are hiring people for their qualities, and we try to identify that there are no biases in the process."***
>
> **- JORGE GARCÍA, KUEPA**

BOX G — Addressing the motherhood penalty inside firms

Paid and unpaid care and domestic work are vital to both the economy and society, but often they remain invisible, undervalued, and unevenly distributed[63]. Once it falls disproportionately on women and girls, and prevents, delays, or hinders women's professional development, it is known as the "motherhood penalty."

Some ways employers can mitigate this penalty are:

- **Create supportive policies** that address diverse family arrangements (ex. benefits designed for "primary and secondary caregivers" instead of "mother and father").
- **Create a culture in which men feel supported as caregivers** and comfortable taking full advantage of available caregiver policies and practices alongside women.
- **Support caregiver employees** by subsidizing some of the costs involved, such as paid parental/family leave (ideally beyond the legal requirements) and childcare costs, if possible[64].
- **Foster working models that are compatible with care responsibilities** (such as flexible hours and locations) and provide spaces for breastfeeding/pumping.
- **Reduce assumptions that mothers are less committed to their careers** or less competent, and the resulting penalization of mothers and those returning from maternity leave. This may look like gathering data and case examples to demonstrate the career success of mothers and fathers.
- **Include the voices of workers with care responsibilities** when formulating workplace policy and program design and evaluation.

63 Gender equality specialists have developed a simple framework (the "Rs framework") that summarizes key steps needed to address the motherhood penalty. For more information about it, see: D. Elson (2008) "The Three R's of Unpaid Work: Recognition, Reduction, and Redistribution."
64 Depending on local legislation, parental leave policies change in Latin America. For more information, see "IPC-IG & UNICEF (2020), at: https://ipcig.org/sites/default/files/pub/en/JP23_Review_of_national_maternity_and_paternity_policies.pdf

6.5 Develop a DEI-oriented value proposition and pitch

In addition to tech firms designing and adjusting their products and services based on corporate DEI needs, these firms have a critical role in educating their corporate clients on the opportunities brought by diversity in the business. These opportunities include improvements in employee's motivation, collaborator behaviors, innovation, retention rates, and overall performance[65]. That is, it is often important not only to sell DEI solutions, but also to educate corporate clients so they can best benefit from them.

To do so, EdTechs and HRTechs can start by proactively including gender inclusion in their pitches and sales material. While some customers will become interested in DEI for impact reasons, others will look for the business benefits of DEI within the workplace. Some practical ways for EdTechs and HRTechs to make this case in marketing and sales strategies are:

- **Start the pitch/advertisement with a hook** that draws the client's attention. For the hook to be effective, base it on the problem solved by the product or service. For example: *Are you struggling with operationalizing flexible work arrangements in your company?*
- When describing the product or service, **highlight the opportunities** to improve corporate diversity and positively impact business performance. For example, if offering a performance evaluation solution, mention the ways transparent, less biased evaluations can contribute to retaining women and supporting their professional development and the business benefits of doing so.
- **Use concrete figures and percentages** wherever possible, such as time saving, retention rates, level of satisfaction with the solution, or unique features that enhance user satisfaction (e.g., "Clients have improved women's retention by 80%" or "Women employees' satisfaction increased by 50%, improving job performance"). These statistics can be obtained from existing clients' data (if available) or a brief customer satisfaction survey.
- **Elevate women's voices.** Include advertisements that involve testimonials or success stories from clients and their users, especially women, highlighting their positive experience with the solution.

Additionally, to prepare client teams to make full use of the opportunities brought by the tech firm's software or platforms, firms can offer complementary services in addition to their software or digital platforms. Such complementary services may be consulting services, training, or technical assistance.

65 Castillo, P. & Callegaro, H., 2020

6.6 Walk the talk and set an example for business clients

EdTechs and HRTechs are uniquely positioned in their business ecosystem to give greater visibility to DEI in the workplace and its best practices, due to both their positioning as education and HR technical experts and their wide networks (ex. industry peers, customers, investors, suppliers, and partners).

Here are some actions that EdTechs and HRTechs can implement to walk the talk:

- **Include DEI in the business model.** Begin by drafting and publishing a DEI commitment statement to send a clear signal to all corporate stakeholders, including clients/ potential clients, users, and potential investors.
- **Use internal data** to understand how women and other underrepresented groups experience the work environment, policies, and organizational culture.
- **Internally test solutions** that contribute to women's retention and professional development. Use one's own company as a laboratory to test the solutions, walk the talk, and then transfer the learnings into products and services tailored to clients' different industries.
- **Formalize internal gender diversity policies and practices** based on evidence of the experiences of women and other underrepresented groups within the company.
- **Advocate for gender equality** in one's areas of influence.
- **Use the power of data** to identify best policy and practices and, whenever possible, to build benchmarking across industries.

Gender barriers, how they hinder women's retention and professional growth, powerful HRTech and EdTech solutions to these, and recommendations

GENDER BARRIER	How this gender barrier can affect women's retention and career growth	Powerful HRTech and EdTech solutions addressing this gender barrier
Gender norms, roles, and stereotypes	• Women's performance is more often underestimated without objective reasons, than that of men. • Women receive less credit for their achievements or more blamed for mistakes, compared to men. • Leaders frequently assume that women are less interested in, or capable to assume, leadership positions, than men. • Women are stigmatized and penalized for being mothers and for absence during maternity leave.	Solutions that use people analytics data to mitigate bias in decision-making, identify the heterogeneity of women's experiences within the company, raise awareness of biases and discrimination, and generate inputs to build, implement, and monitor their DEI strategies.
Time poverty	• Women have less time (and head space) to dedicate to professional growth, re/upskilling, work trips and large projects, each of which negatively impacts their retention and professional growth. • Chronic stress reduces women's ability to focus and their creativity, and increases their risk of absenteeism, burnout, and resigning[66].	Solutions that provide caregivers with more flexible schedules, facilitate remote work and team communication, identify employee experiences throughout the different phases of parenting (pregnancy announcement, pre-leave, leave, post-license, and mothering), and train managers to best support employees during parental leave.
Systems that reward men more than women	By affecting the way women apply for or negotiate promotions, new positions, or salary raises, this: • Limits women's professional growth opportunities; • Leads to women's lower job satisfaction.	Solutions that allow companies to conduct more objective performance evaluations and to assign salary raises, promotions, and recognitions based on concrete performance information.
Pay gap	Feeling their work is less, or unfairly, rewarded compared to others, women experience: • reduced motivation; • reduced aspirations; • reduced performance.	Solutions that allow companies to conduct pay equity analyses and identify data-driven insights for closing wage gaps.
Fewer professional networks	• Women have less access to professional information than men. • Women have less access to professional growth opportunities than men.	Solutions that facilitate connections outside of the traditional face-to-face model and that facilitate mentor-mentee matching.
Male-dominated STEM sectors	• Women have fewer professional skills in these areas. This reduces their professional development opportunities as operations become more digitally enabled[67], despite women having the same innate ability as men.	Solutions that offer gender-inclusive reskilling and upskilling and that challenge gender norms from an early age (e.g. initiatives with younger workers/interns).
Few women in leadership	Having few women in leadership positions: • reinforces general unconscious biases about the believed masculine nature of leadership functions; • drives a vicious circle in hiring/promotion patterns, as leaders tend to hire and promote people similar to themselves ("affinity bias").	Solutions that use people analytics data to mitigate bias in decision-making and to make performance evaluation, feedback, and promotions more transparent and based on objective data.
Gender-based violence	• Women workers' mental and physical health is compromised; • Women's productivity and learning is hindered.	Solutions that offer anonymous whistleblowing and virtual reporting of unethical conduct, monitor harassment cases and compile data, help build stronger protocols, and offer learning opportunities on GBV.

Recommendations for EdTechs and HRTechs

1. DATA
Develop sex-disaggregated data collection and analysis solutions to streamline business decision-making on DEI.

2. ALGORITHMS
Ensure artificial intelligence does not replicate stereotypes.

3. WOMEN-CENTRIC APPROACH
"Gender-neutral" designs often exclude women. Instead, specifically consider women, among others, when developing training solutions.

4. TEAM DIVERSITY
Increase diversity in product development roles to help de-bias technologies.

5. VALUE PROPOSITION
Develop a value proposition and sales strategy around how the solution can catalyze change on DEI. Pitch both the social and business impacts of achieving this change.

5. WALK THE TALK
Practice DEI internally, to give the business ecosystem a model of DEI in the workplace.

66 Deloitte, 2022
67 IFC & Coursera, 2022

7 CONCLUSION

By nature of facilitating flexible and diverse work models, reskilling, applying data intelligence to promotion processes, and facilitating monitoring and response to cases of harassment, B2B HRTechs and EdTechs are uniquely positioned to help reduce gender barriers in women's retention and professional growth in the workplace. And because gender inclusion is generally a new focus area for HRTech and EdTech firms, there is much opportunity for them to both land and expand this global trend, particularly given the notable corporate demand for solutions as diversity and inclusion increasingly become a central theme on the ESG agenda.

Considering gender throughout one's business model provides an opportunity to simultaneously promote social impact, market expansion, and brand positioning. Solutions at the vanguard of the HRTech and EdTech sectors have proven the viability of this path and are pointing the way forward. However, there is no "right" way to do this; each company will have to define its own way, in alignment with its business challenges and strategy. The important thing is to start— and to start today.

Implications for investors and ESOs

Investors and others are critical for supporting tech companies in Latin America to leverage gender-forward approaches.

Investors can both increase capital available to companies committed to reducing gender gaps and influence their portfolio companies to adopt more gender-inclusive practices and strategies.

Accelerators and business hubs and networks have a key role to play in encouraging technology firms to consider gender throughout their business model. Specifically, they can provide knowledge and technical assistance as well as disseminate best practices by bringing ecosystem players together and sharing successful cases and trends.

Future research needed to continue driving action

Since this is the first study of this kind focused on Latin America, future research can build the case and provide further ideas for HRTechs and EdTechs to contribute to women's retention and professional growth in the workplace. Additional research is particularly necessary to:

- Identify more case studies and proof points in Latin America, especially B2B solutions that are addressing gender in an intersectional way.
- Understand how digital solutions can boost DEI in less technology-intensive sectors, and therefore benefit a greater number of workers in traditional industries.
- Build the evidence linking gender diversity to social and business impacts for HRTech and EdTech companies.

In today's technological revolution and changing economic landscape, HRTechs, EdTechs, and their partners can work intentionally to increase the odds that women benefit from the technology transformation occurring in Latin America's economy, and to ensure that businesses continue to flourish.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX 1.

Guidance for companies on how to develop education solutions tailored for women

EdTechs and HRTechs can design and adjust products and services based on evidence about women's market niches, preferences, pains, and wishes from the sex-disaggregated data recommended above and complementary market research. Specific design elements and adjustments include:

Consider women's connectivity access and mobility restrictions to better target women users, such as by:

- **Identifying connectivity challenges that unserved women face and develop solutions to address them.** Benefiting from digital solutions requires a certain level of digital literacy, hardware access, and connection. Use proxies based on national statistics or socioeconomic data to target the most unserved women, including those with low literacy, low incomes, who live in a rural area, or who have a disability[68]. Understand the geographic locations where these women concentrate and their specific needs and limitations in terms of connectivity.
- **Supporting users with lower digital literacy and learners without access to devices** can also be a solution to help address gender gaps. This can look like establishing help desks and creating centers where users can use devices, access a reliable connection, and get support with digital tools[69].
- **Prioritizing services that enable mobile access, require low bandwidth, and allow downloadable content** can address some of the challenges related to mobility that women often face. In general, women are more likely to access the internet exclusively on mobile phones or shared devices than computers or tablets. They are more likely to face challenges related to the cost of connectivity. Women participating in this study reported using commute time or multiple short time windows to study.

Develop flexible solutions that contribute to addressing women's time restrictions, as a stop gap measure for as long as women continue to be responsible for an unequal share of household responsibilities. Such flexible solutions include:

- **Offering shorter, mobile-friendly sessions that allow students to complete courses on their timelines.** Courses with shorter sessions– which makes it easier to learn more often but in briefer intervals– are more feasible for time-constrained learners, especially women, to follow through with their learning. More mobile-friendly options appeal to women and can result in greater engagement.

68 GSMA, 2021
69 IFC & Coursera, 2022

- **Maintaining a daily schedule and ensuring learners keep up with assignment deadlines** are two relevant predictors of course completion and have a more substantial effect on women than men. Supporting learners to keep up to date with assignments through reminder prompts, peer support, and ascending assignment difficulty levels can make it easier for women to complete more tasks, increasing the odds of completing courses.

Consider hybrid models & networking in the programs. Some studies have found that women prioritize community building, indicating a preference for blended learning options and networking[70]. Regarding girls' education, there is strong evidence that face-to-face and group learning, which provides opportunities for girls to learn and discuss challenges together, positively impacts girls' empowerment, aspirations, and commitment to study[71]. We share some considerations for EdTechs when developing hybrid models and integrating networking:

- **Create offline and online meetups, small group connections among users**, and other forms of personal engagement to strengthen women's experiences.
- **Options for direct interaction with instructors** (e.g., synchronous sessions, Q&A sessions, mentorship opportunities, and forums and group work where women can interact with other learners) **can make online platforms less isolating while maintaining the flexibility that women value.** However, platforms need to ensure the safety of these spaces and allow mechanisms for women to report online gender-based violence and violence targeting other vulnerable groups.

Given women's time poverty and mobility constraints, women are more likely to value platforms that combine blended solutions– digital and face-to-face –as well as more interactive digital solutions.

Identify women's content preferences/needs and incorporate them into program design. Our research found that most EdTechs are not yet adapting their programs to women's different needs. Doing so can increase women's and girls' enrollment, retention, and performance. Studies indicate that group learning, high-engagement learning, real-world learning, and project-based learning, can improve girls' learning in distance education and women's learning on digital learning platforms. Some recommendations for companies to adapt content based on women's preferences include:

- **Have feedback loops disaggregated by sex** to gain a deeper understanding of customers' and users' behaviors, needs, and preferences, and insights on how the programs benefit women and men customers and users. Companies can collect this data through short surveys, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups with customers and users.
- **Include lively interactions** (ex. personalization features, dynamic exercises, cases based on real life, common myths, and peers' mistakes by topic). In fact, all the women participating in our focus groups noted how much they value the practical components of the online courses they completed.
- **Partner with prestigious educational institutions to co-develop content and provide certificates these institutions validate.** Women participating in this study

70 IFC & Coursera, 2022
71 Unterhalter, E., North, A., *et al.*, 2014

noted that the courses they valued the most are the ones prestigious universities developed and that have included certificates they can include in their resume. The women consider that having this type of certificate in their resumes contributed to obtaining jobs.

- **Include successful women.** Companies like Platzi identified that women's learning is particularly catalyzed through hearing testimonials from successful women, meeting women role models, and meeting women founders in their community, and they have included this type of content.

Ensure women representativeness and include women role models in the programs. Role models matter to everyone, but research shows they have an amplified benefit for women[72]. In a region marked by gender inequalities, role models have a demonstrative effect crucial for women. Women teachers positively influence girls' perceptions, interests, and confidence in STEM subjects[73].

Women users tend to enroll in more courses in which at least one instructor is a woman, and they rate these courses more highly. Platzi identified that videos with women speakers have more female audiences than videos with men speakers. Coursera has found that representation of women instructors is among the most important contributors to an increase in enrollments from women in its platforms[74]. In STEM courses, women's enrollment increases by 34% when at least one female instructor is present[75].

Here is how EdTechs and HRTechs can ensure women's representativeness:

- **Include more women instructors in courses;**
- **Show more women in the programs' audiovisual content;**
- **Feature women in leadership positions or in male-dominated areas, such as STEM, in their job advertisements, whether visual or verbal.**

72 Lockwood P., Sadler, P., *et al.*, 2004
73 UNESCO, 2017
74 Coursera, 2021
75 IFC & Coursera, 2022

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