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The COVID-19 pandemic has severely affected employment and schooling for young people around the world, exacerbating existing gender inequalities and the particular risks faced by girls and women. Before the pandemic, young women were already less likely than their male peers to be employed or in school and more likely to be working in informal or precarious forms of employment.¹ Estimates show that an additional 11 million girls may not return to school in 2021 due to the COVID-19 crisis. Evidence from previous crises suggests that many will never return to school.²

Gender gaps also appear in skilling activities, especially vocational education training programs and information, communications, and technology (ICT) education.³ Girls have less access to mobile internet than their male peers.⁴ These gaps have widened during the pandemic, as women and girls are more likely to be pulled out of school or leave the workforce to compensate for increased care and domestic work.⁵ Girls not returning to school may also lead to an increase in child marriages as a way to relieve families from economic stress. Lockdowns may also increase rates of pregnancy among girls due to disrupted access to reproductive health centers and social services.⁶ Further, evidence suggests that young people graduating in times of crisis find it more difficult to find jobs and income, delaying their path to financial independence and potentially causing them to fall into poverty as they have less savings.⁷

In this brief, Innovations for Poverty Action has compiled evidence-based insights from multiple meta-analyses and three-dozen randomized evaluations (both IPA and non-IPA studies) on how to support young women's skill-building and their transition into the labor force in low- and middle-income countries, with a focus on the COVID-19 crisis.⁸

From School to Employment: Effective Strategies to Support Women and Girls through the COVID-19 Crisis and Beyond

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