

# Higher Education Expansion & Labour Income Inequality in High-income Countries: A Gender-specific Perspective

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28 September 2021

Tertiary education has been continuously expanding in the second half of the 20th century worldwide, and particularly in high-income countries. While extensive evidence has shown that higher educational achievement leads to higher earnings for individuals what it implies for the overall distribution of labour income is, however, no simple story. It is not at all clear whether educational expansion has been fuelling the growth in income inequality that has been observed in many countries over the last decades or whether, on the contrary, it played a mitigating role. Existing empirical evidence has shown that expansion at the tertiary level tends to exacerbate income inequality. To a large extent these studies have, so far, ignored the potential gender-specific nature of the education inequality relationship. However, over the last decades higher education expansion was more pronounced among females than among males, so that to date more women complete a tertiary level than men. With this paper, we aim to enhance the understanding of how the expansion of tertiary education shapes labour income inequality in high-income countries. We therefore use Recentered Influence Function (RIF) regressions to project the impact that (marginally) increasing the share of tertiary educated workers, on average and separately for men and women, would have on the Gini coefficient in 27 countries and for two time points, 1995 and 2015, which represent different stages in the process of educational expansion. Our results suggest that no such thing as an average distributive effect exists, but that the impact on labour income inequality may be dependent on whether educational expansion mostly comes from men or women.

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