similar levels of participation to East Asia and the Pacific in the 1990s, managed to grow its GERs by only a modest 6 percentage points for both women and men over the same period. In 2007 GERs for women stood at 10 per cent while the ratio for men was slightly higher at 13 per cent. Except for Iran (Islamic Republic of), where women's GER was 34 per cent, all the other countries in the region including India had GERs of 10 per cent or less, and women's enrolment lagged behind that of men's. The average GERs for women and men in sub-Saharan Africa remain among the lowest in the world, and women in this region face significant barriers to participation in higher education.

Tertiary enrolment by field of study

Women's choices of specific fields of study have a significant impact on their future lives, careers and roles in society. Analysis of tertiary enrolment by different fields can determine whether there is a gender pattern in their selection – that is, "masculine" and "feminine" fields of study. It can shed light on whether differences in the selection of study areas reflect individual preferences or cultural and social stereotypes. Such an analysis can also elicit information on the capacity of tertiary education systems to provide programmes in different academic disciplines and to meet the needs of labour markets and society at large.

Figure 3.18 presents data on women's enrolment among eight broad fields of study: education; health and welfare; humanities and arts; social science, business and law; science; engineering, manufacturing and construction; agriculture; and services. The chart illustrates gender differences in participation among these eight fields in relation to the proportion of women in total tertiary enrolment. It is apparent from the panels in the chart that gender patterns vary distinctly by field of study.

Women still dominate traditionally "feminine" fields of study and are underrepresented in science and engineering fields

The fields in which women have traditionally been dominant – education, health and welfare, humanities and arts, and social science, business and law – are still dominated by them. In more than two out of three countries for which