

## WEPS IN ACTION



PRINCIPLE 4

**Promote education,  
training and professional  
development for women**

### Contents

1. Context
2. Actions
3. Challenges
4. Results
5. Recommendations

## CASE STUDY: IBERDROLA HARNESSING WOMEN'S TALENT IN THE ELECTRICITY SECTOR

### LESSONS LEARNED

- Recognizing women's interest in becoming electricians, and creating an opportunity for training shows a firm commitment towards gender equality and women's empowerment from the highest level of the company. It also helps women enter into new job roles.
- Cross-sector partnerships between civil society, governmental organizations and the private sector are vital to ensuring an inclusive and supportive enrolment process and training curriculum.
- Engaging existing employees to serve as mentors for women learners creates an inclusive culture within the company.
- Transitioning from a male-dominated workplace to a mixed gender workplace requires a clear strategy of adjustment, including updating benefit policies to adapt to both women and men's needs. Providing maternity leave plans for women electricians and women toilet facilities are some examples.

### CONTEXT

Iberdrola is a multinational electric utility company based in Spain. The company has been a global energy leader for 170 years, serving Brazil, Mexico, Spain, the United Kingdom and the USA. It has over 35,000 employees around the world.

Iberdrola is committed to gender equality and, in 2019, reported that women comprised 43 per cent of its board, 11 per cent of its C-suite executives, and 20 per cent of its managers (with the goal of 30 per cent by 2025). Iberdrola places strong emphasis on training and development, sponsoring masters' degrees for employees and partnering with universities around the world to collaborate on innovative energy projects.

With the knowledge that women filled 14 per cent of its technical roles in 2019, Iberdrola set out to increase its number of women working as electricians and technicians through their subsidiary company in the Iberdrola and Neoenergia Group in Brazil.

In August 2019, the Iberdrola and Neoenergia Group created a School for Electricians uniquely for women. Previously, the company had offered women the opportunity to enroll in its mixed gender School of Electricians, but there had been very few women applicants.

Mónica Oviedo, Sustainability Manager at Iberdrola Spain, said:

*“Women [clearly want to become electricians] and we must find ways to equip them with the skills and training required. This training programme provides an opportunity to grow female talent in our sector and attract this diverse pool of talent to the organization where they will continue to be supported and encouraged in their development.”*

The school is monitored by the company’s human resources department and results are compiled after the completion of each course. Progress is reported through the corporate website.

## ACTIONS

The School of Electricians planned to hold courses for 200 women per year, with 25 in each cohort located in key regions in Brazil. Since the programme began in August 2019, more than 21,000 women applied to join and 3,000 women attended the information sessions.

The programme had state and national reach, underpinned by collaboration with celebrity influencers and non-profit partnerships in local communities. A particular focus was placed on working with a non-profit organization that supports women survivors of domestic violence – helping them to make a positive change in their lives by taking advantage of a new career opportunity. Famous musicians, Carlinhos Brown and Margareth Menezes, supported the programme and this focused even more attention on the school.

The partnership with the State Government meant that women could more easily obtain a driver’s licence, and that those without one would not feel discouraged to apply.

Iberdrola and Neoenergia also ran information session panels with women already working for the company to share stories of their career paths and what it was like to work in the energy sector. The panels included electricians, technical operation supervisors, a security manager and a commercial superintendent – all varying levels within the company – to show the opportunities for career growth for women within the company. The company held several of these sessions, attracting, in a single night, attendance by more than 2,000 women.

Christiane Tavares, Head of Corporate Training for the company explained: “The panels explained how these jobs could become a career; what they should expect when they come to work with us. We are creating a vision – a motivation for them to want to work with us.”

“All of the panel members were women. They were able to tell their stories, and of their pride in their chosen professions, and the differences the energy business makes in the lives of people and communities.”

Christiane said that all the women attending the meetings wanted to apply immediately for the programme.

The Iberdrola and Neoenergia Group set up the training programme courses in conjunction with SENAI, an industrial training school, in Bahia and Pernambuco, Brazil, with an emphasis on safety and instruction towards obtaining professional qualifications.

As a part of the selection process for the programme, candidates had to complete a written test (Portuguese, math and writing), a psychological assessment, a practical test and an interview.

The courses, which take around seven months (and comprise 596 hours of instruction), prepare women to gain employment within one of Iberdrola’s energy distributors. Course topics include learning the basics of electricity, specific regulatory norms that apply to the sector, energy consumption measurement, equipment operation, working high above the ground, and defensive driving.

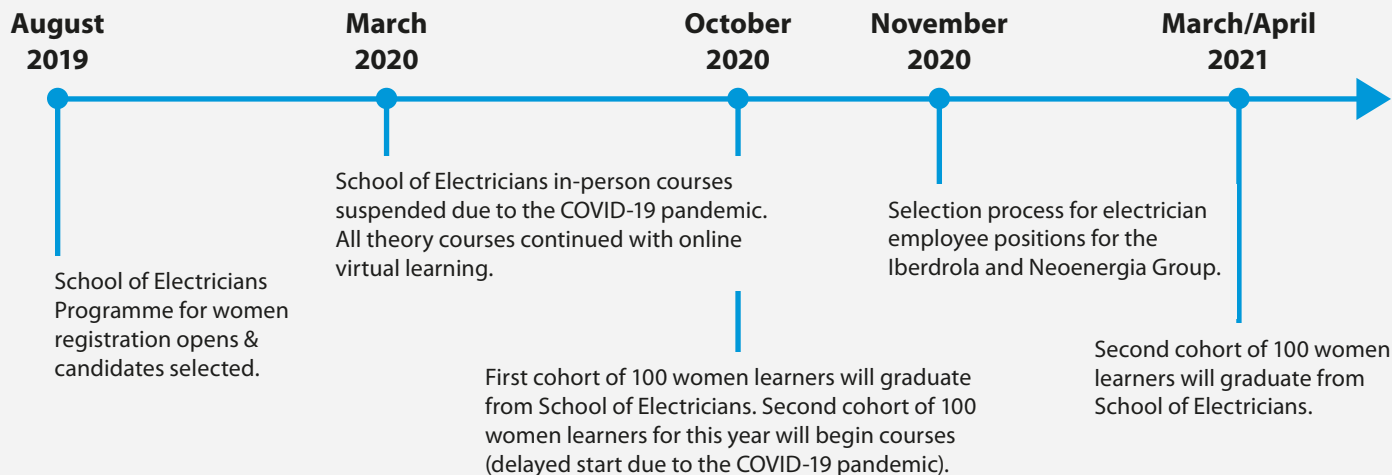
Although the courses were taught by SENAI, the Iberdrola and Neoenergia Group maintained engagement for students with the company by setting up a mentoring programme with volunteer employees.

“The volunteer programme was created not only to train women; but to broaden their outlook on strategic issues for the labour-market... to ensure the women are better prepared to compete for job vacancies, as well as the integration of vulnerable social groups,” Christiane said.

Many Iberdrola employees answered the call for mentors, and 50 were chosen to monitor the women’s development, and to discuss with them issues relevant to the company and the energy sector. The volunteers work in pairs and give four hours of mentorship per month. Themes covered include safety, ethics and transparency, acceptable company behaviour, responsibility and commitment, equality and climate change.

“The mentoring programme has made a great difference, enabling women to become increasingly aware of the Iberdrola and Neoenergia Group culture, which values diversity,” Christiane said.

## TIMELINE



## CHALLENGES

The Iberdrola and Neoenergia Group anticipated that the major challenge would be recruiting women who were interested in training for a career as electricians, historically a male-dominated sector. Given the low response by women to enrolling in the mixed gender School for Electricians, the company opted for a women-only school. As soon as the company found the right channels to help advertise the programme, it worked with community organizations to find the best method to attract and retain interested candidates.

Finding support from community-based non-profit organizations and celebrity influencers, who already understood and knew the needs of women in areas with economic inequality, ensured women would receive the best support in making the decision to apply. The information sessions with women currently employed in the energy sector, and partnering with the Government to issue driving licences were two key ways the company could work to close the gender gap for access to these opportunities.

The company also faced challenges in finding the appropriate partner for education in both technical and specific energy industry operation areas. Developing the course material and lesson plans to ensure that women felt engaged and included was an important way for Iberdrola and Neoenergia to retain the women learners. Working together with SENAI to provide the instruction and curriculum helped solve this challenge.

By increasing the number of women in the electricity sector through the School of Electricians, it became apparent that there were gaps in the benefits and facilities for women employees.

The company not only needed to consider building women's toilets, not previously needed in such a male-dominated sector, but also the reaction of its male employees to the fact that social barriers were being broken by the introduction of women electricians. It needed to reassure male employees that the women were not competing with them.

Régia Barbosa, superintendent of Organizational Development at the Iberdrola and Neoenergia Group, said:

*“When we introduce more women into this environment, we have to have a clear approach – not a competitive one. We have to propose a shared culture and we need help from our colleagues. But it's not easy when we have a culture and a job that is historically male-dominated.”*

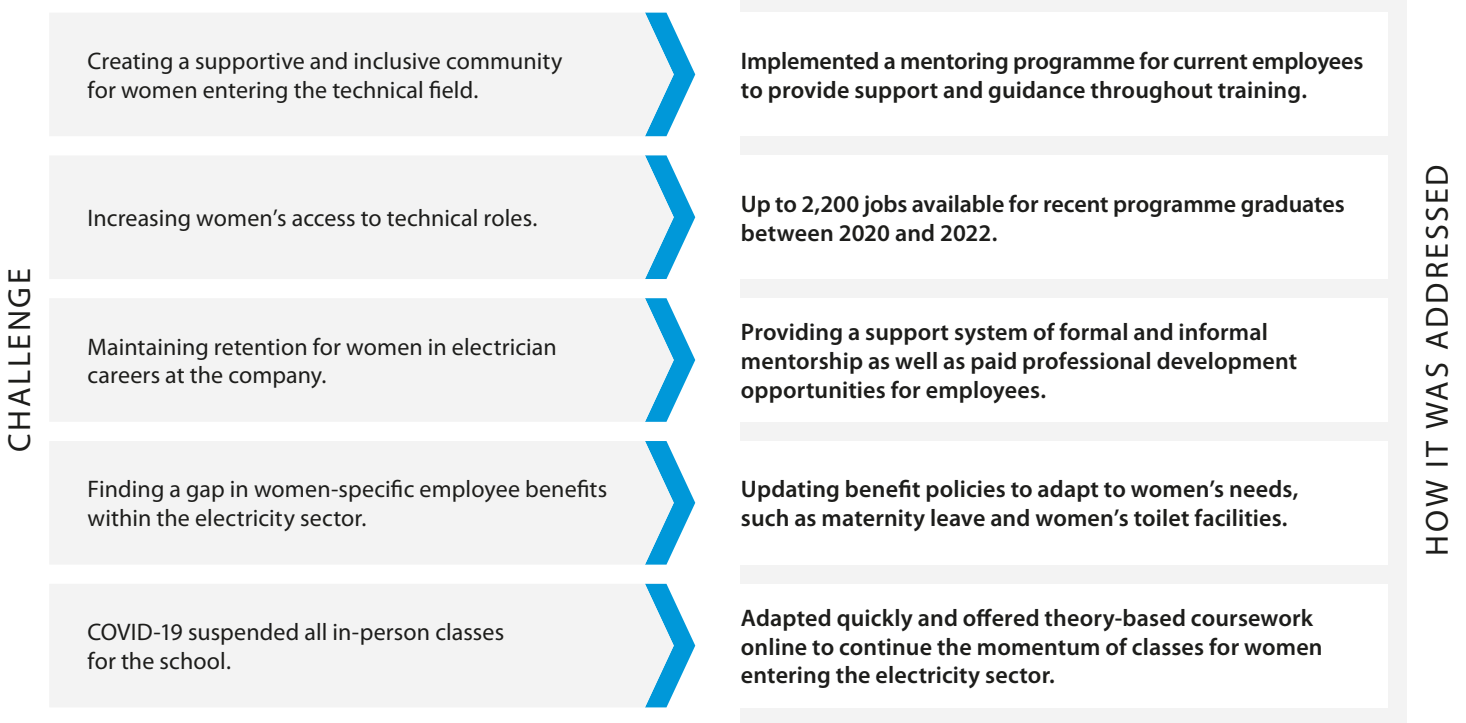
The company led on this from the top; both at the Iberdrola headquarters in Spain and with the CEO of the Iberdrola and Neoenergia Group in Brazil. The CEO supported the programme from the beginning and saw the culture shift as of value to the company. He went out of his way to talk about this innovation within the company and admitted that there might be internal conflicts due to the shift in its social structure. He emphasized his belief that the programme would lead to an overall positive cultural shift for the company.

The company saw these challenges as opportunities to find ways to support women in this sector. With the addition of women joining the company as electricians, it needed to ensure that any new mothers among them had support through a maternity leave plan. The company currently offers six months' leave to women (the legal requirement in Brazil) and, combined with paid time-off vacation, the women typically take seven months' leave. However, none of the female technicians has yet become pregnant.

The company sees challenges ahead for any women technicians that do become pregnant, as those in the field operate at heights and lift heavy objects. It hopes to be able to offer suitable work to any pregnant women, or those returning after maternity leave.

Régia said: "I think the women fear losing their jobs – they love being electricians. But we have to explain the risks involved in doing this job while being pregnant, so we're investigating what they can do safely."

The company plans to have mixed classes in the next cohort at the School of Electricians, now that it has created the support systems to recruit and retain women. The Iberdrola and Neoenergia Group believes this is a positive step to ensure the classroom environment replicates what the actual working environment will look like for women and men employees.



## RESULTS

The School for Electricians significantly helped to boost the number of women applying for technical roles at Iberdrola and Neoenergia in Brazil. The company has so far enrolled women as young as 20 up to the age of 53. All women, once they graduate from the school, will participate in the company selection process, between 2020 and 2022, for more than 2,200 electricians.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the first cohort of women's classes completed the final module with online theory classes, and is expected to graduate at the end of October 2020. The women graduates will also be able to compete within the job market generally for work in construction and commerce – or become self-employed contractors.

*Régia said: "When they are hired, they receive the same wages and benefits as the male workforce."*

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Creating commitment from the highest level of the company to increase the number of women in technical roles creates a culture of inclusion. Having both the Iberdrola headquarters and the CEO of the Iberdrola and Neoenergia Group publicly express support for the School of Electricians for women shows a firm commitment from the highest level of the company.








Christiane said: “Our Vice-President is a woman and she and our CEO were very supportive. Our VP attended all the launches of the training programmes, and because of her participation the employees realized how important this school was.”


Christiane explained that the company’s partnerships with non-profit and governmental organizations was crucial to the programme’s success. As soon as the local communities and non-profit organizations understood the possibility of new jobs for women, they wanted to show their support and provide assistance to raising awareness of the programme and recruiting women applicants. The celebrity influencers also extended the programme and job opportunities to audiences Iberdrola and Neoenergia had been unable to reach.

The company continues its commitment to the programme amid COVID-19 and, after increasing the number of women on boards and in upper management, the company is determined to continue opening opportunities for them in underrepresented departments within the company.


## THE ROLE OF WEPs


For the Iberdrola and Neoenergia Group, the Women’s Empowerment Principles (WEPs) provide an opportunity to share good practices with other companies on progress towards gender equality and women’s empowerment. The Group hopes that with the WEPs as a guiding tool, there can be more avenues for training and development, promoting gender equality in historically male-dominated sectors, and revealing the strength and capacity of women.

- Principle 1  Establish high-level corporate leadership for gender equality.
- Principle 2  Treat all women and men fairly at work– respect and support human rights and nondiscrimination.
- Principle 3  Ensure the health, safety and well-being of all women and men workers.
- Principle 4  Promote education, training and professional development for women.
- Principle 5  Implement enterprise development, supply chain and marketing practices that empower women.
- Principle 6  Promote equality through community initiatives and advocacy.
- Principle 7  Measure and publicly report on progress to achieve gender equality.

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