**Questionnaire on ‘Women’s Human Rights**

**in the Changing World of Work’**

The Working Group on discrimination against women and girls will present a thematic report on ‘women’s human rights in the changing world of work’ to the 44th session of the Human Rights Council in June 2020. This report will be produced in the context of the Working Group focus on key areas affecting the human rights of women and girls and will aim at reasserting women’s right to equality and countering rollbacks in this area. An overview of the scope of this can be found in the Appendix.

In this regard, the Working Group would like to seek inputs from States and other stakeholders to inform the preparation of this report in line with its mandate to maintain a constructive approach and dialogue with States and other stakeholders to address discrimination against women in law and practice. Submissions should be sent by 1 September 2019 to wgdiscriminationwomen@ohchr.org and will be made public on the Working Group's web page, unless otherwise requested.

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Submission from the **International Transport Workers’ Federation (ITF)**. The ITF is a democratic, affiliate-led federation recognised as the world’s leading transport authority. We fight passionately to improve working lives, connecting trade unions from 147 countries that may otherwise be isolated and helping their members to secure rights, equality and justice. We are the voice for 18.5 million working men and women in all transport sectors across the world.

The ITF women’s department works with the ITF women transport workers’ committee to support ITF affiliates to organise and mobilise more women transport workers and maximise our global influence and transport workplace power. Our aim is to strengthen their collective voice to win better conditions for women transport workers around the world. Key issues include gender-based occupational segregation, access to decent pay and jobs, and the right to work free from violence, sexual harassment and sexual coercion.

[www.itfglobal.org](http://www.itfglobal.org)

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**Core questions**

* What are the main trends influencing women’s human rights in the world of work in your national context and their impact:
* on the types of and quantity work available to women, and the quality and conditions of work (including access to social protection and equal pay)?
* for women’s safety (including violence and sexual harassment) at work?
* on women’s rights to organize and claim rights?

Whilst there has been progress in some areas, the transport industry continues to sustain a dominant global culture where women are not welcome on an equal footing. Gender stereotypes persist, which can be expressed as negative attitudes about women’s abilities and suitability to work in transport, and in practice through differences in status and conditions of the jobs done by women and men, with women more likely to be lower-paid and in jobs that are more precarious. Women are hugely over-represented in precarious work. With continuing privatisation and outsourcing, women continue to disproportionately experience a negative impact on their working conditions and career opportunities.

There are a number of issues for women working in transport – for example, lack of maternity rights, long working hours, vehicle design and uniforms, wage inequality and poor facilities. We know that these issues can impact on women’s employment in the sector.

Lack of safe access to bathroom facilities and/or appropriate PPE (personal protective equipment) can have a substantial impact on the health, safety and dignity of transport workers, with significant additional impacts for women. The issue of safe and prompt access to clean toilets for transport workers during their working hours has been an issue that has received mainstream media attention due to various civil society movements like the ‘Right to Pee’ movements. A lack of clean and safe toilets for women workers is a barrier to their employment in the transport industry. The ITF campaign ‘Right to Flush’ is raising awareness of the issue and the impacts for all transport workers, and it is connecting the issue of toilets to safe and equal working spaces for women. As a result, trade unions are now including the issue on their agendas and the ITF will be taking this further by launching a campaign document (the ITF Transport Workers’ Sanitation Charter) on World Toilet Day on 19 November 2019.

Violence at work continues to be an endemic issue in the global transport industry and remains a powerful barrier to women’s equality in society. Women are targeted on an overwhelming scale, through a range of tactics that include all forms of verbal, physical, psychological, sexual and economic abuse of power and control. Sexual harassment and violence are a very real barrier to mobility for women.

And there is a strong link between gender-based violence and gender-based occupational segregation in the transport sector, something that was acknowledged by the ILO in its 2013 transport policy brief, which states: ‘Jobs in the transport sector are highly gendered and unequal. As a result, women’s voices are all too often neglected when it comes to transport planning and the pursuit of decent work. Transport is still regarded as ‘no place for women’ in many countries/sectors around the world. Women in the transport sector often find themselves stuck in low(er) paid/low(er) status jobs with few, if any, opportunities for career development. Violence against transport workers is one of the most important factors limiting the attraction of transport jobs for women and breaking the retention of those who are employed in the transport sector.’[[1]](#footnote-1)

The impact of domestic violence in the world of work also affects women transport workers. Appropriate workplace measures should be implemented to address this impact, for example, the provision of paid leave for workers affected by domestic violence.

If we do not address the reality of gender-based violence and other aspects relating to decent work, any interventions to increase women in transport will be undermined. Furthermore, if we address issues for women working in transport, we will automatically make transport more attractive and safe for users too.

In public transport, the expansion of public transport is vital to provide women with safe, affordable, equal access to public services including education, childcare and healthcare, and to their place of work. This allows women’s empowerment via progressive participation in economic and public life, and facilitating engagement with a wide range of rights – including the right to work and rights at work, the right to education, the right to healthcare, and the right to political participation. However, public transport policy is mainly planned and decided by men. Women public transport workers must therefore be involved in public transport policy decision-making and planning – including consultation on all new public transport infrastructure and expansion of public transport – in order to ensure that gender impact assessments are undertaken and that specific issues for women are addressed. Women workers must have access to adequate information on social and labour rights and protections, including rights as trade union representatives.

* What are the promising practices emerging from your country to ensure the realization of women’s rights to work and women’s rights at work, in the context of technological and demographic change, as well as continuing globalization and the shift towards sustainability? (laws; economic, labour market and social policies; programmes).

Women’s unequal position in the economy requires gendered public policies that target the root causes of sex discrimination and ensure women’s right to paid work, safety dignity, and respect. For example, laws and collective bargaining to ensure that women transport workers earn equal pay for equal work, are protected from pregnancy discrimination, have access to paid leave for childcare and caring, to appropriate uniforms and decent toilets and sanitary facilities. Public policy is also needed to enable a more equal distribution of caring responsibilities within families and working time. Recognition and pay for the economic contribution caring makes to society, alongside shorter working time without pay cuts, agreed through negotiation and tripartite working, are part of a constructive response to the changes we face in transport and the future of work.

Transport unions are at the forefront of the global struggle to break the silence and expose the impact that gender based violence has on individual survivors, on the industry, women’s access to decent work, and to engage women and men in the solutions.

In the transport sector, the International Transport Workers’ Federation (ITF) has developed a union and workplace response to gender-based violence at work. The ITF is supporting a number of unions to develop and implement women’s advocacy on the ground to support women transport workers experiencing violence. Women’s advocates are trained to understand the issues of violence against women and how to respond to disclosures with empathy and non-judgement. Women’s advocates listen to the needs of survivors and navigate each case to find solutions which empower women and offer them choice. This may involve liaising with employers to find workplace solutions as well as finding appropriate community referrals such as health, housing, counselling and legal needs. Women’s advocates can work preventatively also, both in the workplace and in the community. Negotiating with employers, collective bargaining and campaigning to create social, cultural and political change are all important aspects of an advocate’s role.

On 21 June 2019, Convention 190 and Recommendation 206 concerning the elimination of violence and harassment in the world of work were approved by the ILO, following years of campaigning by the global trade union movement. The Convention is historic as it is the first ever legally binding international standard for workers that deals solely with the issue of violence at work. The new ILO standard does three important things. First it defines what violence and harassment means. It also includes gender-based violence and harassment. Then, it deals with who is protected by the Convention – this truly inclusive convention identifies the right of everyone to a world of work free from violence and harassment. It covers interns, volunteers and job seekers along with employees. And it applies to all sectors, whether private or public, both in the formal and informal economy, and whether in urban or rural areas. Transport is particularly recognized. And it expands the scope of the workplace – by making it clear that the world of work includes places where the worker uses sanitary facilities, and when commuting to and from work. This is really important for all transport workers. It also addresses third party violence, and recognizes the effects of domestic violence and the need to mitigate the impact of domestic violence in the world of work. This is a major breakthrough. The challenge now is to secure wide ratification and implementation of Convention 190.

Strengthening women’s employment in transport needs to be broader than just a focus on recruitment. Instead it should address all elements of the ILO framework – ‘Women’s career cycle in the transport sector’ (2013) – including attraction, recruitment and selection, retention, career interruption, re-entry, work-life balance, caring responsibilities, and realization of decent work.

In March 2019, the ITF and UITP (International Association of Public Transport) signed a joint agreement to strengthen women’s employment in public transport[[2]](#footnote-2). The practical recommendations for policies to strengthen women’s employment, equal opportunities and promote decent work cover nine areas: working culture and gender stereotypes, recruitment, work environment and design, facilities (including sanitation), health and safety at work, work-life balance, training, pay equality and corporate policy.

**Specific questions**

*Technology*

* How is technological change impacting on women’s experiences of work in your national context? (e.g. increasing access to ICTs, robotics, machine learning, automation)
	+ What are some of the good practices for supporting women to benefit equally from technological advances? *(laws, economic and social policies, institutional measures, regulation, actions by employers)*

One of the most important challenges facing workers everywhere is the development of new technologies that have the potential to transform the world of work – eliminating some tasks, massively increasing surveillance/control of workers, and allowing radical new ways of organising the transport of goods and people. There are potential benefits and risks for women’s employment in transport from the introduction of new technologies and further innovation. For example, women are often at the sharp end of automation and process reorganisation as their jobs in ticket sales and customer service functions are often undervalued and it is easy to use technology to shift labour onto passengers. As a result women in these areas have lost jobs. On the other hand some technological changes in vehicle operation could potentially reduce physical demands on operators and therefore open them up to more female participation.

For womentransport workers technological development is happening in the context of unequal pay, sex discrimination, gender-based occupational segregation and exposure to violence, on top of economic stagnation and an economic model that incentivises precarity and the lack of formal work opportunities.

The basis of technological change is digitalisation. This process will increasingly change the skills and abilities required in work.

Automation can have health and safety implications for workers. For example, women working as fare collectors who empty ticketing machines and are exposed to crime and can experience issues like back pain. Or they are customer facing workers exposed to public anger when machines break down or malfunction.

All working women will be increasingly affected by the development of monitoring, surveillance, benchmarking and rating technology based on data. This can make them more vulnerable to pressures from management or customers. It can also make them more vulnerable to gender-based discrimination, and to algorithmic management and benchmarking that takes no account of human diversity and which do no measure the full range of elements that make up a job. This is evident in warehousing, a sector with a high number of women by comparison to other areas of transport logistics.

Some forms of monitoring technology could help support women in the workplace. For example, it could, if linked to emergency response teams or help buttons, make women transport workers safer. Data from these technologies could also be used to counter negative stereotypes about women’s abilities to fulfil certain roles, and potentially show how they act to improve work processes.

However, women are also exposed because of the way that digital data can allow employers to outsource parts of the work process without loss of effective control over the process. Therefore technology can lead to increased use of outsourcing and temporary contracts, employment relationships that women are particularly vulnerable to.

Women’s exposure to technology also varies significantly by race as well. Black and ethnic minority women in parts of the developed world will also be more exposed to technology because they work in the lowest paid jobs, such as ticketing, that are already quite easily automatable. Black and ethnic minority women are also more vulnerable to racial biases in algorithms, which often do not recognise black faces. This will have serious implications for workers across the world, unless algorithms are regulated to ensure their universal applicability. In this way technology can embed existing prejudices and often exacerbates existing inequalities. Therefore without policy intervention, technology threatens to worsen gender inequality in transport.

Women transport workers need new technology to be applied to confront the impacts of sex discrimination in the workplace and the economy. They need a new economic model that incentivises employers and governments to create decent work, decent pay and lifelong educational opportunities free from sex discrimination and which distributes the wealth created more fairly.

Relocation, promotion and training opportunities should support women of all ages into higher paid work, and into roles created by new technology, while tackling gender-based occupational segregation. Training is essential but without special attention to sex discrimination, gender-based violence and other barriers faced by women transport workers, it will not be equal and it will not resolve their problems.

Transport unions play a significant role in ensuring that technology produces benefits for workers and society, and does not further enhance existing inequality.

*‘Gig’ and ‘On Demand’ Economy*

* How is the rise of more flexible forms of labour, including the ‘gig’ and ‘on demand’ economy impacting on women’s experiences of work in your national context?
* What are the implications for job security for increased flexibility and women’s caring responsibilities, and for harassment and violence?
* Which groups of women are most likely to be impacted by this type of work?
* What are some of the good practices for ensuring access to social protection for women in informal and ‘on demand’ work? *(laws, economic and social policies, institutional measures, regulation, actions by employers)*
* What are the good practices for women’s collective organising in the context of more flexible forms of labour?

Digital platforms are emerging that capitalise on the lack of regulation of the informal sector, and profit from the fact that workers are forced to take up multiple jobs in order to make ends meet. Digital platforms are changing work in transport, and women can be attracted by the flexibility that this work can offer because it can enable them to work around the caring responsibilities overwhelmingly borne by them. However, often only those women who do not rely on platform work as their sole income or who have access to their own vehicle can potentially benefit from the flexibility currently offered by platform work. In the gig economy, working class women are often discriminated against because they lack the capital to buy or lease a vehicle.

There are also issues with how to ensure decent work, including employment status. The essence of the gig economy is that it misclassifies workers as self-employed when in fact the platform still exercises almost complete control over the worker. The misclassification allows the companies to avoid paying taxes, sick pay and other benefits. In areas where the legal status of platforms is unclear women workers have no legal recourse against the employer or abusive passengers. Women also lose out on the most profitable working times (usually at night) because of the increased danger of passenger violence and the lack of safeguards to protect workers.

As a result of youth bulge and growing internet penetration, the spread of smartphones and online financial services (such as mobile money transfer), online platforms can represent alternative sources of income for young people. Despite the potential represented by gig economy to create job opportunities for young people, it more often characterized by the lack of regulations to guarantee labour standards, social protection and equal employment opportunities.

Algorithmic management is a product of digitalisation. Algorithms are applied without accounting for human diversity. They use a one-size-fits-all approach that negatively impacts those who are not being considered by the ‘model’ that the algorithm is based upon. Algorithmic bias against women results from a lack of recognition for how gender-based occupational segregation, unequal pay and sex discrimination function in the workplace. Algorithms therefore perpetuate existing discrimination.

The gig economy must be regulated and taxed effectively. Policies need to be put in place to protect gig economy workers and to regulate this type of labour market and labour force to enshrine platforms as direct employers of workers and ensure decent wages, regulate working hours, to guarantee the enrolment into national insurance and pension schemes. Algorithms should also be tested for gender biases. Governments should ensure that gig economy employers, such as Uber or Deliveroo, use monitoring technology to improve safety for women workers by connecting them to emergency response teams and in such a way that women have access to and can control their data. This should be done in consultation and negotiation with trade unions. This technology must not be used in disciplinary proceedings.

In April 2019, the ITF launched a major report into ‘The impact of the future of work for women in public transport’[[3]](#footnote-3) The research is ground-breaking as this is the first study that looks at the particular impacts of automation and digitalisation on women transport workers. It includes 12 recommendations to ensure that specific issues faced by women are reflected in policy, strategy and action at a global and sectoral level.

Trade unions and informal workers associations must fight together to secure a just transition for all workers involved and therefore establish decent work as one of the pillars of sustainable public transport. The ITF informal workers’ charter includes a section on the rights of women workers in the informal transport industry, including:

* an end to violence and sexual harassment against women
* an end to employment discrimination, and equal opportunities for training, skills development and access to higher-paid transport occupations
* adequate rest, sanitation and personal security facilities for women in transport workplaces
* affordable quality childcare and other care services
* equal pay for women and men
* access to free of affordable sexual reproductive services

*Demographic change*

* How is demographic change in your national context impacting on women’s experience of work?
* What are the implications of an ageing population and of the ‘youth bulge’?
* What economic and social policies are needed to ensure that the growth in the care sector creates decent work opportunities for women? What are some emerging promising practices? *(laws, economic and social policies, institutional measures, regulation, actions by employers).*

In a county with a youth bulge, especially emerging and least-developed countries, youth are concentrated in the informal sector (including black-market, informal small businesses, self-employed and family business), where poor job security, low wages, and limited chances for on-the-job learning restrict the ability of young people to leverage such jobs to secure better and more formal work. The informal sector is the sector through which youth gain access to the labour market, as it represents for them an important source of work and income. This is particularly true for the most marginalised. However, their initial experience in the informal economy can become a kind of trap, relegating youth to a lifetime of informal work where, without any standard contract, social protection and minimum labour standard guaranteed, they will remain economically and socially vulnerable.

It is necessary to intervene both to improve the employability of young people and at the same time to facilitate job creation. The conventional approach to provide young people education and training in order to increase their employability mitigates the issue of youth unemployment only from the supply side. Promoting education fosters innovation and increases productivity but it will not generate jobs itself. The current youth generation is much more educated than the past one and much more connected to the world thanks to technology, but they now have less job opportunities. In addition to the right mix of employment-generating macroeconomic and labour policies, young people need programmes that are tailored to facilitate them to access the labour market.

It is critical to facilitate the creation of jobs opportunities and access to services specifically dedicated for young people, supporting them with their economic and social life. The creation of labour demand is essential to absorb the new young workers into the workforce, but it needs also to address the specific needs of young workers, especially young women adults, among the growing labour force. Otherwise the risk is to increase rural-urban migration, young workers in intensive manufacturing and informal sectors with no effective impact of the overall youth unemployment. As a matter of fact, generating jobs does not only mean creating employment opportunities for young people, but ensuring decent employment (therefore wage polices, equal pay, working conditions, job security and social protection)

Social dialogue has a key role in articulating labour market policies, and it is the legitimate forum to combine employment generation while ensuring decent employment. It is critical to create space for young people in the social dialogue, especially for young women in order to enable their effective and informed participation in governance and policy formulation. Youth need to be gendered, the dialogue needs to focus on job creation but also on the formal recognition of unpaid care work done by young women and their contribution to the overall economy. Especially in low-income countries, care work falls disproportionately on women rather than men and young women tend to work fewer hours in paid employment, while assuming most of the responsibility for unpaid household and care work.

If economic and social policies do not specifically address youth employment both from the supply and the demand side, one of the main consequences is a further increase of young people NEET (not in education, employment or training). Among 18-24 years old, there is a larger number of young female adults NEET then men and this has been a steady trend for the last 10 years. There are many factors keeping young people being NEET related to the labour market, economic opportunities, social norms and restrictions and type of education. All these factors need to be considered also from a gendered perspective due to gendered career path, childcare, gender pay gap (despite the level of education). As a result, young women are more likely to become NEET and remain NEET for longer.

Also reflected in the unemployment differential between young women and men is the fact that the burden of household and unpaid care work falls disproportionately on women. Early parenthood typically leads to divergent gendered outcomes, pushing young men into the labour force and young women out; ILO data from 25 countries show a mean labour market participation gap of 38 percentage points between young fathers and young mothers (Elder and Kring, 2016, p. 4).

Not only young female adults face discrimination and exclusion from the economic and social shares. Similar barriers exist for youth from ethnic and religious minorities, persons with disabilities, youth from indigenous backgrounds, and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth. Migrant youth are vulnerable to job insecurity, poor working conditions and exploitation. It is necessary that jobs generation and policies address the specific barriers for each of these groups to access to the labour market. This is not only to guarantee the social and economic inclusion of these groups but also a responsibility to respect and comply with human rights standard.

The longer young workers stay unemployed the more their vulnerability increases. For instance, they are more vulnerable to shocks based on the common notion that youth are ‘first out’ and ‘last in’ during economic downturns. Moreover, youth are more likely among the working poor, more inclined to develop risky coping mechanisms to poor quality/ temporary jobs (i.e. borrowing money and selling assets). Unemployed youth experience serious physical and mental health problems due to their exclusion from the labour market, long period of inactivity, noxious coping mechanisms. Also, youth are more inclined to wage scars.

In the last year, policies and institution interventions had a strong focus on apprenticeships as a solution to mitigate youth employment. However, there are controversies in terms of the quality of apprenticeship opportunities, the qualification and the skills they can provide and the low or absence of payment. Also, apprenticeships are often a way for employers to avoid all the costs of a formal employment (insurance, pension, healthcare) These conditions, in particular the lack of payment or economic support, automatically exclude young people who cannot afford to work without being paid – reinforcing inequalities among the different social groups of young people. Also, young women are more likely to enrol in apprenticeships in ‘traditionally female’ sectors reinforcing gender inequality and consolidating traditional gender roles.

Besides apprenticeship programmes, also self-employment – entrepreneurship models have been proposed for young people in order to encourage them to start their own business. However, it can be a risky solution as young people pushed to start their economic activities might not have the right preparation and skills as well as the financial capacity to cope with the precarious and unpredictable nature of being self-employed. Also, self-employment models have become prominent in the last years due to the proliferation of gig and platform economies which are promoting a new contractual

relationship between employers and employees, that differ from the standard employment relationship.

*Transition to sustainability*

* What measures are necessary to ensure that women benefit equally from the transition to sustainability in your national context? What are some of the promising practices to ensure that green jobs do not replicate existing gender inequalities in other sectors (e.g. occupational segregation, gender pay gap)?

There should be conscious efforts by employers to break the cultural biases against women, transparency in wage distribution systems, and increased accountability for safety of women in the world of work.

A gender-responsive approach to occupational health and safety (OHS) management, which recognises that gender and sex may affect women and men in different ways at work. One example is access to safe and secure toilets and welfare facilities – women need access more frequently and for longer because of biological needs such as menstruation, pregnancy and menopause, and having generally to deal with more clothes than men.

The need for more OHS research on women workers. At present, despite efforts from some quarters, for example Karen Messing in Canada, the European Agency for Safety and Health and the ILO, women’s OHS remains largely ignored with the result that opportunities for prevention are missed, job segregation between women and men continues and the transport industry does not benefit from a fully representative workforce. A gender-responsive approach includes improving OHS research particularly on women’s occupational health and safety and not assuming that the results of research conducted on men workers can also be applied safely to women workers.

Recognition on the part of governments and employers that full engagement from workers and their trade unions on OHS matters including encouraging more women workers will result in improvements to working conditions.

Building the public transport systems of the future can create millions of quality jobs throughout the value chain of infrastructure and transport. It can also bring previously marginalized groups into the world of work and provide more secure and skilled employment. C40’s Green & Healthy Streets Declaration may have positive wider impacts as gender equity can be promoted by attracting and retaining women, and challenging occupational segregation in the sector. Procurement for public transport has the potential to incorporate decent work standards as well as training and apprenticeships for women, youth, and marginalized communities.

Building partnerships with mayors and city authorities to develop and integrate just transition plans that drive decent work and social action, including labour impact assessments, safeguards and job targets for men and women workers, is important.

Decent work must be integrated as a central objective of sustainable transport. Public transport is strategically important in the economic and social life of cities. This means that trade unions can contest power not only in workplaces but also in the public sphere where decision-making takes place. Decent work recognises that the contribution public transport makes to the economy includes the creation of thousands of jobs for local people. It links citizens to their place of work, education and family responsibilities. In cities in the global south, informal provision of public transport services supports a whole micro-economy that provides work to thousands of men and women who are unable to access the limited opportunities for formal employment. Working poverty drives informal public transport services. Informal work is often disguised, exploitative and fails to meet minimum human rights. Decent work challenges this by creating formal jobs that offer a fair, secure income and safeguards the safety and health of workers and passengers and provides access to social protection[[4]](#footnote-4). Effective labour inspections are key to guaranteeing this. Decent work also includes equality of opportunity and treatment, prospects of personal development, recognition of work and having your voice heard. Decent work as an objective of sustainable public transport is based on full freedom of association rights as the most effective mechanism to defend the interests of the workforce.

**APPENDIX**

**Report overview**

The specific objectives of the thematic report and the context driving the Working Group to develop this thematic analysis are, as follows:

* Deepen the understanding of the implications for women’s human rights at work in the context of megatrends that are changing the world of work, including technological change, demographic change, globalization and a shift towards sustainability;
* Identify the risks and opportunities for women’s rights to work and women’s rights at work (e.g. inter alia, access to decent work and workplace entitlements, equal pay, support to balance paid work with caring responsibilities, freedom from discrimination harassment and violence and support for women’s collective action and organising)
* Identify promising approaches and make recommendations for promoting and protecting women’s human rights in the changing world of work.

Closing gender gaps and realizing women’s human rights in the world of work remains one of the most pressing economic and social challenges facing the global community today. At 48.5 per cent in 2018, women’s global labour force participation rate is 26.5 percentage points below that of men.[[5]](#footnote-5) While the gender gap in labour force participation has narrowed in most regions, the gap remains especially wide in the Arab States, Northern Africa and Southern Asia where it is expected this gap will remain wide in the near future.[[6]](#footnote-6)

There remain significant deficits in the quality and conditions of women’s work. Globally, women remain concentrated in the lowest paid jobs, in vulnerable forms of employment including in the informal sector, with limited or no access to decent work conditions and social protection. In low-income countries, 92 per cent of women are employed informally (compared to 87.5 per cent of men), with little access to the raft of employment and social protection rights conferred on workers who have a formal employment contract.[[7]](#footnote-7) Particularly stark gender gaps can be seen in the proportion of informally employed who work without any direct pay or remuneration, as unpaid family workers in family farms and enterprises (28.1 of women versus 8.7 per cent of men).[[8]](#footnote-8)

Systemic discrimination continues to pose a barrier to women’s enjoyment of their rights to work and rights at work around the globe.[[9]](#footnote-9) A significant constraint to women’s participation in paid work and advancement in the public sphere at large remains their disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care and domestic work. This has significant impacts on women including the vertical and horizontal segregation of women workers (resulting from for example the higher concentration of women in informal and lower paying sectors as well as the lack of gender parity in positions with higher pay and influence), pervasive gender-based discrimination at work, and the high incidence of sexual harassment and violence. Realizing women’s *rights to work* includes removing barriers to women’s workforce participation, such as legal barriers, socio-cultural barriers for example the lack of public policy support for care, and the availability of ‘decent work’[[10]](#footnote-10), amongst others. Realizing women’s *rights at work* includes ensuring decent conditions at work, including equal access to workplace entitlements and equal pay, dismantling the barriers to women equal progression and access to leadership positions, freedom from violence, discrimination and harassment and enabling conditions for women’s collective action and voice in decision-making.

The context for women’s rights in the world of work is shifting dramatically – especially through technological change – but also through significant demographic change and continued globalization.[[11]](#footnote-11) The sheer scale and velocity of these changes are unprecedented, and they are occurring against a backdrop of an increasing focus on creating a sustainable future. History indicates that no industrial or technological change has been gender-neutral.

At the same time as technological and demographic changes, the increasing level of backlash and resistance to women’s rights across different parts of the world is also influencing women’s rights at work. Growing conservatism and extremism often seek to misuse interpretations of ‘religion’, ‘tradition’ and ‘culture’ to challenge gender equality and women’s rights and reinforce traditional gender roles, particularly in relation to the gender roles in the family and women’s sexual and reproductive health and rights. In some contexts, the concept of gender is being challenged by women’s rights and misleadingly characterized as an “ideology” that is opposed to family values. Such forces can serve to deny women’s access to education and economic opportunities, including their right to work.

Dominant economic models, based on financial liberalization and weak regulation, combined with boom and bust cycles geared to short-term profits, have created a global economy marked by uncertainty, increased vulnerability and deepening inequalities. The changing structure of work over recent decades has also created new vulnerabilities due to fissuring of the workplace through increased global supply chains, sub-contracting and the use of flexible forms of labour. Such trends present challenges for women’s collective action and organising which is crucial for the protection of women’s rights in relation to work.

If existing gender inequalities are not addressed and new threats not fully assessed, there is significant danger that gender inequalities will not only be replicated but amplified in the future world of work. Creating a world of work where women benefit and contribute on an equal basis to men requires recasting the structure of work and the economy with women’s human rights at the centre.

Against this background, the report will examine several mega-trends that will impact women’s human rights in relation to work in the future, building on the key themed identified by the ILO Commission on the Future of Work.[[12]](#footnote-12)

**Technological change** is driving significant change in the world of work with increasing access to information and communication technologies, artificial intelligence, robotics, machine learning and automation. There are significant implications for women’s access to work, the kinds of jobs available to women, and their rights at work. Increasing women’s access to ICT has been found to enable access to markets and information for women entrepreneurs. Yet, the digital divide continues to negatively impact on the most marginalized women and new technologies have also opened up new spaces for violence and harassment against women.

There are divergent views on how automation will impact on women’s jobs, with variation across regions and countries. Based on US data, a 2018 World Economic Forum report found that 1.4 million US jobs will be at risk by 2026, and 57% of these jobs are currently performed by women.[[13]](#footnote-13) In ASEAN countries, women represent the majority in occupations that are likely to be automated and are thus more likely to become unemployed than men.[[14]](#footnote-14) However, in Argentina, women’s jobs face an automation probability of 61.3 per cent, while for men it stands at 66.1 per cent.[[15]](#footnote-15) A key challenge in a future of tech-driven job creation is women’s underrepresentation in STEM education which limits their access to jobs in high-growth and high-paid areas.[[16]](#footnote-16)

Technological change is also shifting the type of work available, with a growth of jobs in the ‘gig’ or ‘on-demand’ economy.[[17]](#footnote-17) While these jobs may offer flexibility, they are insecure and most often do not offer the workplace entitlements and access social protection as decent work.[[18]](#footnote-18) More broadly, informal work is expected to grow in the future, which presents significant challenges for access to social protection and women’s economic security.

**Demographic change** is also continuing to transform the world of work in different ways. Developed country populations are ageing with low fertility rates, while developing country populations have growing youth populations, often referred to as the ‘youth bulge’.[[19]](#footnote-19) Ageing populations have significant implications for gender equality. Women’s poverty in old age is a major concern, stemming from their lack of access to social protection, low participation in paid work over the lifecycle, gender pay gap and lower likelihood of asset ownership. An ageing population will also increase the demand for care, both unpaid care work as well as paid care workers, with significant gender implications. Currently, nearly 1 in 5 women in paid jobs are employed by the care sector.[[20]](#footnote-20) The growth of jobs in the care sector will create increasing opportunities for women’s employment, however the key concern is the quality and conditions of these jobs as well as the risk of another layer of women care workers being exploited to sustain the participation of those for women paid opportunities open us (the ‘global care chain’).

**Globalization** is characterized by increasing trends of human, financial, economic, technological transactions and communications across countries and regions. In developing countries, the growing prominence of export-led growth, for example through the creation of export processing zones and industrial zones, have not necessarily created decent work, with new employment generally being more insecure and precarious. For example, recent years have seen large numbers of women in developing countries employed in assembly manufacturing in export processing zones, areas in which labour and environmental standards may not apply in full or remain unenforced, leaving women vulnerable to poor working conditions.[[21]](#footnote-21)

Relaxed labour and environmental regulations in some countries have created a context where some multinational corporations have engaged in a ‘race to the bottom’ in search for countries where the requirements to ensure safe, fair and decent conditions of work are less stringent. Governments have also sought to provide cheap labour with little attention to safety and environmental standards to multi-national corporations in an effort to attract investments. A devastating example is the Rana Plaza factory collapse in 2013 which killed over 1000 people due to unsafe work conditions. While globalization will inevitably continue, with emerging shifts such the increasing outsourcing of the services sector to developing countries, a focus on decent work conditions with respect for labour and environmental standards will be critical for women’s enjoyment of human rights at work.

**Sustainability** and just transitions are critical for the changing world of work. Unsustainable patterns of development and environmental degradation disproportionately affect low-income countries and vulnerable populations, while intensifying gender inequalities because women and girls are often disproportionately affected by economic, social and environmental shocks and stresses. The future of work and livelihoods must be premised on inclusive patterns of development that reduce inequalities, deliver economic justice and are also environmentally sustainable.[[22]](#footnote-22)

Women often play an important role, particularly in developing countries, in the conservation of the natural environment.[[23]](#footnote-23) The growth of movements around gender equality and environmental issues is an important development in recent decades. One example includes movements advancing the rights of women peasant farmers which are simultaneously focussed on promoting a vision of small-scale peasant farming based on ecological conservation and food sovereignty while also calling for women’s equal access to and control over land, agricultural inputs and natural resources.[[24]](#footnote-24)

However, given the focus on the creation of new jobs in the green economy, there is limited evidence on the extent to which women will benefit from new jobs created, and the extent to which women are benefitting from skills development and education in these areas. In developing countries, women are highly concentrated in low-paid and insecure green jobs, for instance as informal workers in waste collection and recycling. Such jobs are often under risk due to technological advances. Furthermore, with continued investment in extractive industries, the consequences of exploitative extractive industries on local communities and their livelihoods including the increased risk of poverty and violence for women, as well as violence against women human rights defenders requires focus.

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1. <http://www.ilo.org/sector/Resources/publications/WCMS_234882/lang--en/index.htm> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.itfglobal.org/en/reports-publications/itfuitp-positive-employer-gender-policy> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://www.itfglobal.org/en/reports-publications/impact-future-work-women-in-public-transport> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. ILO Convention 187: Occupational Safety and Health [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. ILO (2018) World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends for Women 2018 – Global snapshot

International Labour Office – Geneva: ILO, 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. ILO. 2018. Women and Men in the Informal Economy: A Statistical Picture. ILO, Geneva. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. ILO conventions recognize the central importance of both the right to work—to have full and productive employment—and rights at work—to non-discrimination and to fair, safe and just working conditions. For further details see UN Women (2016) Progress of the World’s Women, Chapter 2, pp. 70-71. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. According to the ILO, decent work involves opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. ILO (2017) Inception Report for the Global Commission on the Future of Work. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. WEF (2018) *Towards a Reskilling Revolution.* World Economic Forum. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. ILO (2018) Issue Brief: No.6 The impact of technology on the quality and quantity of jobs. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. OECD (2017) Going Digital: The Future of Work for Women. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. De Stefano, Valerio. (2016) The rise of the "just-in-time workforce": on-demand work, crowd work and labour protection in the "gig-economy" International Labour Office, Inclusive Labour Markets, Labour Relations and Working Conditions Branch. - Geneva: ILO, 2016 Conditions of work and employment series; No. 71. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. ILO (2018) Digital labour platforms and the future of work: Towards decent work in the online world

International Labour Office. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs/Population Division (2017) World Population Prospects: The 2017 Revision, Key Findings and Advance Tables: <http://blogs.worldbank.org/developmenttalk/youth-bulge-a-demographic-dividend-or-a-demographic-bomb-in-developing-countries> [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. ILO (2017) Care Work and Care Jobs for the Future of Decent Work. Geneva: ILO. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Matthew Amengual and William Milberg, *Economic development and working conditions in export processing zones: A survey of trends* (Geneva, ILO, 2008). [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. ILO. 2019. Global Commission on the Future of Work. Work for a Brighter Future. ILO, Geneva. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. United Nations (2014) © The World Survey on the Role of Women in Development, on the theme of “gender equality and sustainable development”, Report of the Secretary-General, (A/69/156). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. See for example: <https://viacampesina.org/en/information-note-un-declaration-on-rights-of-peasants-and-other-people-working-in-rural-areas/> [↑](#footnote-ref-24)