

# Unacceptable Forms of Work: A Gender Perspective

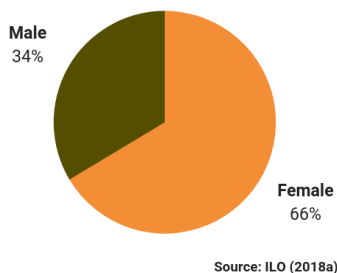
Sustaining productive and protected working lives is among the most pressing challenges of the twenty-first century. The urgency of this objective has been confirmed by the inclusion of Decent Work among the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG8).

Across the world, millions of people are subject to working conditions that deny fundamental rights, put at risk their lives, health, freedom, human dignity and security, or keep their households in poverty. These conditions have been defined by the International Labour Organization as Unacceptable Forms of Work (UFW) (ILO, 2017). A substantial number of these jobs are performed by women.

Gender equality is therefore at the heart of decent work, including in SDG5 - to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.



Workforce in the care economy worldwide



Workforce in the garment sector worldwide

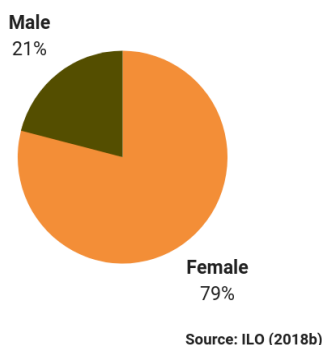


Figure 1

In many cases, UFW are present in working contexts which are highly gendered. Compelling examples are the care economy and the garment sector. In these sectors, the great majority of workers are female (Figure 1). Working conditions often involve long and unpredictable working hours, high levels of informality, job insecurity, harassment, and gender-based violence (GBV).

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Unacceptable forms of work are centred on groups that are already at risk of social and economic disadvantage [...]. Policies aimed at effectively improving these working relations are both urgently needed and a potential entry point for broader social and economic upgrading.

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Deirdre McCann and Judy Fudge (2017)



### **Towards legal regulation of decent work that promotes gender equality**

There is strong evidence of gender bias in labour regulatory frameworks. Labour regulation may therefore negatively affect female workers in more substantial ways than their male peers.

Across the globe, the care economy is characterised by informality and casualization, low pay, and exposure to violent behaviour, bullying and sexual harassment. In the garment sector, inflexibility in the formal sector, long and/or unpredictable working hours, and long commutes negatively impact

### **Longstanding concerns remain in industries which are highly gendered**

- Work-family balance and gender equality are crucial elements of decent working conditions.
- Broader responses are needed to challenges that are not conventionally treated by labour regulation such as worker protection outside of the workplace (e.g. against GBV) and secure and reliable transport.
- Long and unpredictable working hours, job insecurity, high levels of informality, sexual harassment, and bullying remain challenges.
- Labour standards cannot be left to the market and casualisation has to give way to better regulation of employment and improved job quality.

on the work-family life balance of female workers. These working conditions may discourage workers with family responsibilities from taking up formal jobs and push women into informality.

Regulatory frameworks are needed that effectively prevent discrimination, combat violence and harassment, and ensure worker-centred flexibility that allows women - and men - to combine work and family life.

### **References**

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### **This Briefing draws on:**

Lydia Hayes and Sara Charlesworth, 'Violence and Harassment in the Care Economy: A Global Research Agenda' (2018) *ESRC/GCRF Network on Legal Regulation of Unacceptable Forms of Work*.

Kelly Pike and Shane Godfrey, 'Enforcing Labour Laws: A Global Research Agenda' (2018) *ESRC/GCRF Network on Legal Regulation of Unacceptable Forms of Work*.

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