

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE G20 IN 2018

### ON THE IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGY ON WOMEN IN THE WORKFORCE

The G20 process, which this year under Argentina's presidency focuses on 'Building Consensus For Fair And Sustainable Development', is an important opportunity for G20 countries – which together constitute almost two-thirds of the global population, more than 80 per cent of global GDP and three-quarters of worldwide trade - to affirm their collective commitment to ensuring that human rights - particularly gender equality - are a fundamental part of the shared global framework for sustainable development that is continuing to develop, thus setting an important example to the rest of the world.

Amnesty International welcomes the G20's focus on digitisation and the future of work, and the economic empowerment of women in the context of sustainable development. It also welcomes the G20's 2014 commitment to reduce the gender gap in labour market participation rates by 25% by 2025. It is critical that deliberation on these issues be driven by a universal respect for human rights and human dignity, recognising that in our increasingly interconnected world, economic policy and development must be developed and targeted in ways to reduce inequalities and ensure that no one is left behind whilst promoting effective accountability for all stakeholders. Given the clear disparities in women's participation in the workforce, gender must be at the heart of all human rights considerations in this context. In this respect, we urge all members of the G20 to pay particular attention to the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Goals 5 (Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls), 10 (Reduce inequality within and among countries) and 16 (Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels).

#### THE IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGY ON WOMEN'S RIGHT TO WORK AND RIGHTS AT WORK

The proliferation of new technologies has meant a fragmentation of work, in ways that have led to increased disruptions in the world of work. As more and more companies try to enforce a lower pay regime and weaker conditions of employment, women are disproportionately affected. The new gig economy, if not properly regulated, risks lacking adequate protection for workers' rights thereby facilitating exploitation. At the same time, the expansion of automation is predicted to result in massive job losses, especially in the short-term, and especially at the expense of low-skilled positions, thereby risking further entrenching the social and economic marginalization of women. According to some scholars, women are five times more likely to be affected by technological advancement, in comparison to their male counterparts.<sup>1</sup>

However, if workers' rights are safeguarded, technology can -if thoughtfully harnessed - also provide good opportunities to advance women's economic and social empowerment, including by stimulating emerging economies, and fostering transparency, productivity, and flexibility for employees - thus ultimately promoting and contributing to gender equality (which in itself can positively impact economic growth).

#### WOMEN IN THE GIG ECONOMY

Women carry out a disproportionate amount of informal, unpaid care work, and in many areas of the world they are more likely than men to work part-time. The growing spread of new forms of casual, on-demand work as part of the 'gig economy' can thus prove beneficial, by allowing women to have more flexibility with respect to their work life, whilst supplementing their income. However, when left unregulated this fragmentation and increased fluidity of the labour market can also pose serious risks for the socio-economic rights of women: their protections are reduced, while job and income insecurity, discrimination, and exploitation worsen, thereby further entrenching unequal power relations in the work-place, in the family, and in society. To enable women to access decent work in the gig economy, states should implement best practices such as parental leave, affordable and accessible care services (child, elder, disability); flexible working time arrangements (while respecting working time regulations); social security; basic infrastructure; discrimination protections; equal pay; safe working conditions and pension (particularly in the informal sector), as recommended by the G20 in 2017.

#### DISPROPORTIONATE JOB LOSSES COMBINED WITH LACK OF NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN

Automation is likely to disrupt a number of industries where the workers are predominantly women, especially in emerging economies where "female workers are typically employed in less-productive and lower-paid sectors, their jobs are more insecure and they are at higher risk of extreme low pay than men",<sup>2</sup> such as the garment sector; typically, these are the same sectors in which workers also

<sup>1</sup> Dr Helen Hester, University of West London After Work: What's Left and Who Cares? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yinnGV3RHy2c> (accessed 13 March 2017);

World Economic Forum, "The Future of Jobs. Employment, Skills and Workforce Strategy for the Fourth Industrial Revolution" (2016), 39 [accessed at: [http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_Future\\_of\\_Jobs.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Future_of_Jobs.pdf)]

<sup>2</sup> The Impact Initiative, "Automation, Women, and the Future of Work" (July 2017) [https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/bitstream/handle/123456789/13126/II\\_RRBrief1.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/bitstream/handle/123456789/13126/II_RRBrief1.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y)

endure unsafe and unsanitary conditions. At the same time, women are underrepresented in those sectors which will play an important role as automation increases, such as the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) sector<sup>3</sup> – which, due to gender biases, gender stereotypes and discrimination, remains strongly male-dominated. Therefore, as automation progressively replaces repetitive and often dangerous work, much of it undertaken by women, states will need to develop strategies and policies to provide displaced workers with decent work opportunities.

Best practices to mitigate such risks and address these challenges will vary and all should be implemented with a gender lens. For some countries this will require structural reforms, with the aim of supporting sectors which are less likely to be negatively impacted by automation. For others, it might mean taking concrete steps to confront abusive practices (such as tax evasion and profit shifting) which deprive states of fundamental resources for implementing socio-economic initiatives for inclusive national development that meet international human rights obligations.

More generally, worrying levels of gender inequality persist in the access to, and use of, technology, and more broadly the STEM sector. This makes the digital divide a key challenge to address, especially in rural areas, and in less developed countries. The intersection of a number of factors such as gender, socio-economic status, and geography can often have a cumulative discriminatory impact which further widens the inequality gap. If these trends are not reversed, women will be disproportionately affected by the impact of technology on the world of work, while also unable to take advantage of the accompanying opportunities brought by digitalization.

Measures should be taken to strive towards overcoming the digital divide between genders, including ensuring that women and girls have the opportunity to access safe, exclusive and moderated spaces to learn and build up their confidence in using digital technology, have access to STEM-related educational and opportunities, and that they are protected from all forms of violence both on and off line, including commuter, domestic, workplace and cyber-violence, as outlined by the W20 in 2017.

#### IMPORTANCE OF ACCESS TO SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS FOR BRIDGING THE GENDER DIVIDE

Violations and abuses of women's sexual and reproductive rights impact women's experiences in, and beyond, the workplace. Women and girls will never be able to fully realise gender equality in access to and use of technology, including at work, if they do not enjoy the right to experience and express their sexuality, access adequate sexual and reproductive healthcare, choose whether or when to have children and how many children to bear, and decide whether, when and whom to marry, free from the threat of prosecution, discrimination, coercion or violence. States cannot expect to bridge the digital divide and reduce gender inequalities at work without fully realizing this fundamental right.

Amnesty International urges all G20 member states to:

- **Analyse the automation and digitalisation of work from a human rights perspective, taking specific gender issues into account by giving adequate considerations to the realities of women in the workplace and in society. These include the discrimination women face in accessing certain sectors; the need for flexibility alongside job security; and the exposure to unique forms of abuse and marginalization.**
- **Re-think the welfare and social protection systems in a way that is responsive to the increased casualization and digitalisation of work, engaging in national, regional and international initiatives of standard-setting and promotion of best-practices, including those enabling women to access decent work in a changing labour market.**
- **Develop tailored and gender-sensitive national strategies and policies to respond to the shocks automation will cause in the short-term, in terms of massive job losses and the corresponding loss of income and social security.**
- **Focus on education, with a strong emphasis on facilitating access to STEM-related educational and employment opportunities for women.**
- **Ensure women and girls' sexual and reproductive health and rights.**
- **Ensure that all strategies and policies are aligned with the agreed conclusions of the 61st Session of the Commission on the Status of Women<sup>4</sup>, draw on the recommendations of the UN Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment<sup>5</sup> and include measures to hold employers accountable to standards of gender equality in line with the UN Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPS)<sup>6</sup>.**

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<sup>3</sup> As an example, see ILO, "ASEAN in Transformation: How Technology is Changing Jobs and Enterprises" (2016) [accessed at: [http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_dialogue/---act\\_emp/documents/publication/wcms\\_579553.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_dialogue/---act_emp/documents/publication/wcms_579553.pdf)]

<sup>4</sup> Accessed at <http://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/61/csw-conclusions-61-web.pdf?la=en&vs=5452>

<sup>5</sup> Accessed at: <http://hlp-wee.unwomen.org/-/media/hlp%20wee/attachments/reports-toolkits/hlp-wee-report-2017-03-taking-action-en.pdf?la=en>

<sup>6</sup> Accessed at <http://www.weprinciples.org/>