



Gender and Labour in the Global South

Video Transcript

The segregated labour market

NARRATOR: Between the late 1990s and the early 2000s, the garment industry in Laos experienced an impressive growth. In 2012, the sector employed around 25'000 workers, and more than half of the factories were export-oriented. However, production had already begun to fall after 2005, due to price pressure and an increase in competition. Paid work can be a driver for economic security and can contribute to people's well-being. The global flows of capital, trade and people shape the world economy.

CHRISTINE BIGLER: Production processes of global value chains are being divided across national borders. On the one hand, globalised value chains create opportunities for lower-income countries to expand their economies and to create employment. On the other hand, they increase the competition among producers and can create downward pressure on decent working conditions. Moreover, the global labour market and value chains are not gender-neutral spaces. In this sense, a gender lens is necessary to trace the ways in which female and male workers are incorporated into the global economy. Evidence shows that economic growth has not been sufficient to overcome all forms of gender discrimination, and that little has been done to reduce gender segregation in the labour market. We can understand this by considering vertical and horizontal segregation. The background of these concepts is mostly linked to gender norms and other characteristics such as age, disability or ethnic group, which may differ according to cultural context.

'Horizontal segregation' occurs when women and men perform different types of work in the labour market or in a specific sector. Examples of horizontal segregation can be seen in a hotel, where housekeepers are more likely to be women and porters are more likely to be men.

'Vertical segregation' is related to the hierarchical structure of an organisation. When vertical segregation is present, women or men cannot occupy higher-ranking positions in the organisation because of their gender. For example, men are more likely to occupy higher positions with higher salaries, while women are more likely to occupy lower positions with lower salaries. 'Vertical segregation' is common in the garment industry, where women often work as sewers and men work as supervisors.



Society's existing gender norms, relations and stereotypes permeate the labour market. Gender stereotypes define 'men's work' and 'women's work' and influence not only individual preferences, but are also embedded in social institutions.

Gender stereotypes persist and are serious obstacles to gender equality in the global labour market. Gender norms are key underlying factors in determining whether women take up paid work, what kind of paid work they can do, and what responsibilities they have apart from their paid work. Existing gender norms and unequal power relations within households and society determine women's disproportionate involvement in unpaid work and their unequal access to education, health care and property ownership. These are the most influential barriers to women's access to decent work.

Gender inequality is a global phenomenon that manifests itself in both unequal access to the labour market and unequal working conditions. The global labour market is shaped not only by gender norms, but also by modes of employment – formal or informal. All this has an impact on workers' access to decent work.

'Informal employment' is defined as employment that exists outside the boundaries of law or common practice. It is also not subject to national labour legislation, income taxation, social protection or entitlement to certain employment benefits. Informal work goes hand in hand with poor working conditions and without social security protection.

According to the International Labour Organization, 2 billion workers, or around 60 percent of all employees worldwide, work on an informal basis. In low-income countries, informal workers account for 70% of all employees. Worldwide, more men than women are informally employed. The data shows a different picture for low-income countries. There, more women than men are informally employed.

Women in the informal sector face various safety and health risks, gender-based violence and dangerous working conditions. Decent work deficits are particularly pronounced in the informal economy. This sector has the highest rates of in-work poverty and high percentages of self-employed and contributing family workers who lack adequate protection.

Both female and male informal workers are disproportionately and adversely affected in times of crisis, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic. This scenario has made the formalisation of informal employment a desirable goal for both governments and civil society. Neglecting informal labour also often means neglecting women in the Global South.



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Understanding the impact of global economic forces on workers in the informal sector is of vital importance. In this context, the complex relationship between segregated labour market, gendered relations of power and poverty requires careful analysis. To achieve more gender equality in the world of work, transformative policies are needed at global, national and local levels.

Can you think of an example of a horizontal and vertical segregation in your environment? What would be needed to overcome the situation? We look forward to reading your comments!