

## Briefing 4.1 – Making the case: human rights, economic development and business arguments for eliminating gender-based violence in global supply chains

### 1. Introduction

This section sets out the human rights, economic development and business cases for workplaces to be free from sexual harassment. Eliminating gender-based violence positively impacts on women's participation in work and public life, their freedom of movement in public places, and ultimately on the economic development of a country. Many employers recognize the business case for preventing sexual harassment and the negative impact that it can have on profits and competitiveness.

### 2. Gender-based violence is a violation of human rights

Gender-based violence violates fundamental human rights and is a major barrier to achieving gender equality. The UN regards violence against women as one of the most significant violations of women's rights across the world.

Human rights were enshrined in the 1948 UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and since then a range of international conventions cover gender-based violence. This includes the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), CEDAW General Recommendations 12 and 19, and the 1993 UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women. In 1995 the UN World Conference on Women in Beijing declared that 'violence against women is an obstacle to the achievement of the objectives of equality, development and peace. Violence against women both violates and impairs or nullifies the enjoyment by women of their human rights and fundamental freedoms'.

Women are entitled to the full and equal enjoyment of their human rights free from discrimination, and all workers, regardless of immigration status, have the right

to protection and redress from sexual harassment and other workplace abuses. Crucial to addressing these issues in the workplace are a range of international labour standards that are relevant to preventing and eliminating gender-based violence at work.

Watch the video from UN Women on International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women and Girls (2015). <http://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/videos?videoid=bCh0ITnLU4c>

See also the infographic from UN Women on women's human rights: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/multimedia/2015/12/infographic-human-rights-women>

➔ Refer to Information Sheet 1 for information and definitions about gender-based violence, as well as the main international instruments from the UN and the ILO.

### 3. Gender-based violence is an obstacle to development

Gender-based violence in the world of work is an **obstacle to development** and implies significant costs for developing country economies. In 2015 the United Nations agreed an ambitious set of new **sustainable development goals (SDGs)** as a follow on from the Millennium Development Goals. The seventeen SDG goals aim to eradicate poverty and promote sustainable development and prosperity.

Importantly, SDG 5 '*Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls*' has a specific goal to "Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation" For further information about the UN Sustainable Development Goals and gender equality see: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/topics>.

### The economic and social development impacts of gender-based violence: World Bank Group Violence against Women and Girls Resource Guide

The Violence Against Women and Girls Resource Guide (published by the World Bank Group, the Global Women's Institute at George Washington University, and the Inter-American Development Bank) provides guidance about how to address violence against women and girls through policies and legislation, sector programmes and projects and partnerships between governments and multi-stakeholder initiatives. Violence is widely recognized as hindering social and economic development as well as the achievement of internationally agreed targets such as the reduction of poverty. The resource guide argues that violence against women: "prevents women and girls from participating equally in social, economic, and political life and perpetuates the cycle of poverty." See: World Bank (2014) Violence against Women and Girls Resource Guide: <http://www.vawresourceguide.org>

## 4. The business benefits of addressing gender-based violence

Human rights risks can adversely affect profitability of the businesses involved, for example through operational disruptions, reduced productivity and challenges in securing new business.

*[...] "sexual harassment undermines equality at work by calling into question integrity, dignity and the well-being of workers. It damages an enterprise by weakening the bases upon which work relationships are built and impairing productivity." (ILO, 2003, p. 463)*

Sexual harassment and violence can have negative business outcomes, affecting brand image, restricting business productivity and profitability, and therefore impacts on economic growth. From a **business case perspective**, gender-based violence in the workplace causes pain and suffering which can result in victims' absence from work or leaving their job, ill-health, disability or even death. It can impact on work performance, motivation, staff loyalty, the quality of work and timely production, as well as on the working

environment. (Cruz & Klinger, 2011) It can lead to workplace conflict, a failure to retain workers and high turnover of employees, especially where there is nearby competition. The employer faces costs including the cost of sick days, lower productivity and poor concentration and the costs of recruitment and re-training if a person leaves their job. (DFID, 2015a)

Evidence shows that profitability of garment factories improves when working conditions improve. Research from the Better Work impact assessment in Viet Nam demonstrates profitability of garment factories increases as working conditions improve. (Brown et al., 2014; Better Work, 2015) Profitability is boosted by increased productivity among workers in better working environments; the financial benefit accrued by the factory from this productivity improvement is shared with workers in the form of higher wages. Better Work found that in factories which were more compliant with labour standards and had better working conditions, workers were more productive than their counterparts in otherwise similar factories. Better management practices and human resources policies have been shown to creating better business outcomes and higher profitability. For example, Better Work (2015) research found a 17 percent increase in productivity among a subset of Indian textile firms whose managers received information on international best-practice management techniques. Responsible supply chain management has the potential to achieve direct economic benefits as a result of productivity gains by suppliers.

*"...we have seen first-hand that investing in women's employment is good for business. Many of our private sector clients and partners know that supporting women's employment is not only the right thing to do, but benefits the bottom line." Jin-Yong Cai, Executive Vice President and CEO of International Finance Corporation (IFC), quoted in International Finance Corporation (2013) report on investing in women's employment.*

For further information and guidance see: ITCILO (2015) A Guide on CSR and Human Rights – what does it mean for companies in supply chains? Available at: [http://www.itcilo.org/en/the-centre/programmes/employers-activities/project-tcas/A\\_Guide\\_on\\_CSR\\_and\\_Human\\_Rights\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.itcilo.org/en/the-centre/programmes/employers-activities/project-tcas/A_Guide_on_CSR_and_Human_Rights_FINAL.pdf)