



## **Women Working Worldwide statement re COVID-19**

**April 2020**

**During this global crisis, the rights of workers, especially women in global value chains, remains top of our agenda. There will be significant disruptions to business patterns which will impact workers throughout the world. Whilst businesses will obviously focus on protecting their employees and ensuring their own continuity, we will be working to ensure that they also recognise the impact their decisions will have down the value chain on those who in more precarious jobs and less able to cope with the consequences and aftershocks of this pandemic and resulting economic crisis.**

We are already hearing of workers being laid off in many of the value chains we work with, such as garment factories and flower farms. With the world in crisis mode, the demand for clothing imports in the UK and Europe, for example, has dropped massively, which is having devastating impacts for women workers. At the same time, other workers are having to work many hours overtime to keep up with the increasing demand for essential goods.

In this context, WWW will:

- Continue to work with companies to ensure they pay extra attention to their planning with suppliers so that health and safety at work are not compromised (for example by ensuring social distancing rules are adhered to) and working hours are not excessive.
- Where unions are present, encourage managers to work with them and/or workers' representative groups to agree on extraordinary working practices.
- Where orders have been cancelled or businesses have had to temporarily shut, promote partnership work to ensure wages are paid and that support for workers is put in place during shut-down periods.
- While some countries may have national programmes that will support workers, others may not, and so we will encourage companies to work together to create alternative programmes for the support of all workers.
- Raise funds to work in partnership with locally based organisations, particularly in East Africa and South-East Asia, offering them support, training and advocacy.

It is highly likely that the need to support women in supply chains will persist well beyond this public health crisis, as the profound economic effects (e.g. unprecedented levels of unemployment) will disproportionately affect women. Rethinking and rebuilding our value chains, albeit more sustainably, will be a key requirement of the coming years.

**We stand in solidarity with all women workers in value chains around the world and hope all our colleagues and partners stay safe and well as we all go through this challenging period together. We will eventually emerge from these difficult times and we will continue to work to ensure that**

**one of the positives from this is that the relationships within our value chains and with workers will be fairer and more equitable.**

If you are a brand or supplier company that wants to ensure that the women in your value chains are supported and able to rise to these forthcoming challenges, please contact us at [contact@women-ww.org](mailto:contact@women-ww.org) . If you would like to support our work during these challenging times, you can [donate](#) to us too. Your support is very much appreciated.

For information, whilst all WWW staff, students and trustees are working remotely during this time, we can still be contacted via our usual communication channels ([e-mail](#), [website](#) and [Facebook](#)).

*Caroline Downey, Executive Director & the Board of Trustees, Women Working Worldwide*