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UN Women

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MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTORS

Dear Delegates,

It is an honour for us to welcome you to UN Women at OxIMUN 2019. We are eager to meet you, enthusiastic young people that will engage in an intense debate to improve the conditions of women in different areas related to trade and development. We are fierce believers in the phrase “the first step for fixing a problem is to acknowledge it”, and by attending this committee, you will be a lot of steps ahead for contributing to gender equality in the world.

We are convinced that the delegates attending this committee will become future agents of change for the empowerment of women and girls. No matter the challenges that you will have to overcome during the committee sessions, whether it is fighting against an unfriendly amendment or trying to convince other delegates to vote on your draft resolution, this weekend will be about working together and sharing ideas in order to protect all women’s rights.

Furthermore, whether it is your first conference or not, we hope you will enjoy this experience, meet new friends from all around the world and acquire new skills that you will be able to use even outside of MUN. We truly hope that OxIMUN 2019 will inspire you to become the leaders of tomorrow.

See you in October!

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INTRODUCTION TO UN WOMEN

UN Women is the United Nations entity dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. A global champion for women and girls, UN Women was established to accelerate progress on meeting their needs worldwide (UN Women, 2019). UN Women acts by working directly with UN Member States for assisting them in approaching a society with gender equality and improving the overall condition of women throughout the world.

Although UN Women is directed towards the empowerment and respect of women in different societies, its actions benefit most of the actors in society. It has been demonstrated that “equality between men and women is inextricably linked to peace and security” (Coomaraswamy, 2013). Additionally, including women in positions of leadership, the workforce, and education results in great benefits for countries, such as an increased GDP, improvement of public systems, reduction of poverty, and an overall stability of communities. Therefore, a focus on the position of women in the world is needed in order to improve societies from different perspectives.

HISTORY OF THE COMMITTEE

In the pursuit of more efficiency in the dynamics of the United Nations and its commitment to the rights and protection of women, the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) was created in 2010. Before the creation of UN Women, there were different conventions and agreements to pursue gender equality, among them, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1979 and the UN Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security in 2000. These resolutions and conventions were useful to have a structured framework on how to protect women. Nevertheless, their implementation was not well integrated among the international community. This is one of the main reasons for the creation of UN Women. This entity has the institutional purpose of uniting various fragmented global efforts for the improvement of women’s conditions and guiding them in an increasingly unified way (Chinkin & Charlesworth, 2013).

STRUCTURE AND FUNCTIONS OF THE COMMITTEE

UN Women reinforces the work of four distinct institutions of the UN that were focused on specific aspects of gender equality: the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI), and United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) (UN Women, 2019). Therefore, the institutions take a strong vision related to the roles played by these institutions. UN Women presents an intergovernmental and interinstitutional structure for its decisions and development. Among these institutions, it is possible to find the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, and the Commission on the Status of Women. In its intergovernmental part, 41 UN member states from different regions of the world are elected every three years to be a part of UN Women. UN Women’s first executive director was Michelle Bachelet, while the current director is Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka. The institution works with mandates related with the

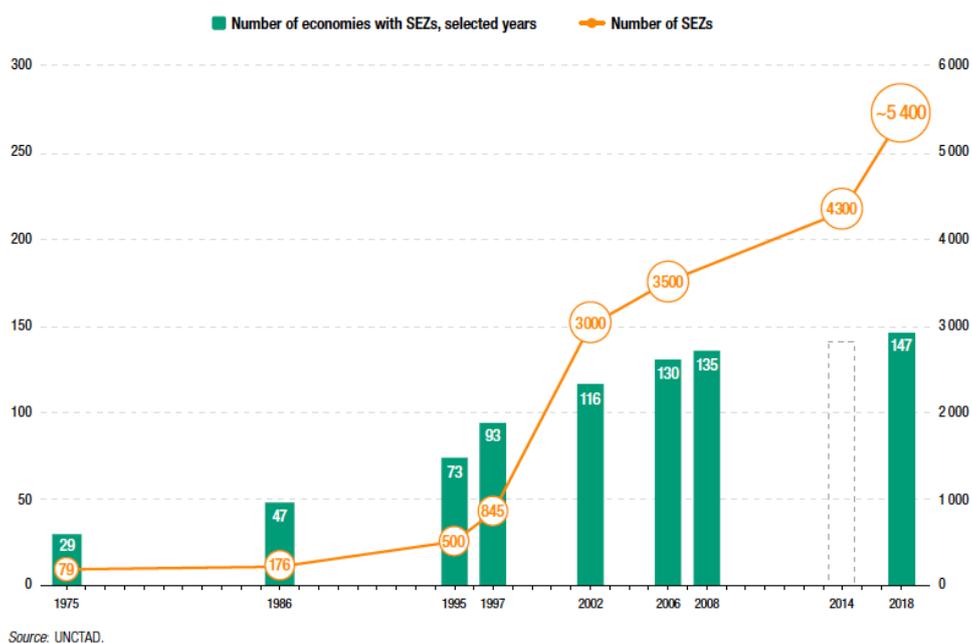
position of women in areas such as political participation, economic and social empowerment, and ending of violence against women (UN, 2010).

TOPIC A: WOMEN'S RIGHTS WITHIN EXPORTING PROCESSING ZONES

BACKGROUND

Export processing zones (EPZs), according to the International Labour Organization (ILO), are “industrial zones with special incentives set up to attract foreign investors, in which imported materials undergo some degree of processing before being exported again” (Sukthankar & Gopalakrishnan, 2012). EPZs are a branch of Special Economic Zones (SEZs), an umbrella term used for zones where states facilitate industrial activities through incentives. Common traits of EPZs are their characteristics as industrial zones with special incentives, relatively small geographically separated areas within a country usually near an international port or airport, their purpose is to attract export-oriented industries offering free trade conditions and a liberal regulatory environment. The entire production of such zones is generally exported (International Labour Organization, 2014). EPZs are therefore an important element of the modern Global Supply Chains (GSCs).

Many developing countries set EPZs with the objective of generating exporting income by competing in the so called “race-to-the-bottom”. Race-to-the-bottom theory may be regarded as a cross border externality of low labour standards in poor countries for labour in richer countries (Singh & Zammit, 2004). In other words, countries go into a downward spiral of lowering or eliminating aspects that could increase the cost of production to incentivize international companies to provide jobs and investment to the country. Countries that commit to the race-to-the-bottom are mainly developing and labour-rich countries. Due to the increase of interconnectedness in the world, there is an important increase on SEZs (and thus EPZs) in most countries (Figure 1). The inhabitants of these countries do not have many options for receiving an income and turn into EPZs as the only source of money. However, in most cases the rights of individuals, payments, and labour conditions tend to decrease substantially in EPZs, affecting the lives of the employees, who are mainly women.



Source: https://unctad.org/en/PublicationChapters/WIR2019_CH4.pdf

EPZs have been strongly female-intensive, with no developing country having increased manufacturing exports without greater recourse to women workers (Smith, 2016). As of 2012, EPZs hired 66 million people around the world (Sukthankar & Gopalakrishnan, 2012). Out of these 66 million people, women labour in EPZs constitute 50 percent up to 90 percent of their employability in some cases (Avsar & Linosi, 2017). This phenomenon could be strongly associated with neo-liberal aspects of globalization and the feminization of labour. An International Labour Organization (ILO) publication explains that “international capital tends to be invested in more labour-intensive production which tends to be female-dominated owing to the lower wages women workers earn in these sectors” (International Labour Organization, 2007). Women are seen as cheap and docile labour in comparison to men. When working in poor labour conditions, women are considered as a preferable force for working as they are less likely to complain and assemble in unions. These particular characteristics are highly desirable for the companies employing them. Costs of production are significantly reduced by employing women with considerable low wages in poor working conditions.

EPZs zones have given women opportunities for independence and work with better wages than agricultural or domestic jobs, especially in the garment industry. Moreover, many women working in EPZs are breadwinners. They strongly depend on their jobs on these zones for the stability of their relatives, especially their children. However, there are also plenty of disadvantages for women in EPZs. For instance, EPZs incentivize more segregation of women and pay them lower wages, companies allow women to work in extremely poor working conditions, they do not acknowledge the rights of women and their position in their families, and in some cases, they aggravate the spiral of poverty among young women. Balancing out the advantages and disadvantages of women in EPZs has been a difficult issue for the international community considering the key actors that play a role in the GSCs.

When it comes to the development of EPZs, there are many important players involved: the outsourced country, the outsourcing country, private outsourcing companies, local suppliers, NGOs, and the civil society. The number of players involved in EPZs creates a complex network of co-existence. Usually, the outsourced country starts a race-to-the-bottom to attract businesses from outsourcing countries. These businesses are private outsourcing companies, which seek to invest in labour or resources at the lowest possible cost to generate greater profits. The local suppliers are the companies that grow in EPZs. These are the ones directly hiring labour and work for the outsourcing private companies, which will seek to reduce all possible production costs for the suppliers. Due to the lack or decrease in human and environmental rights produced by the race-to-the-bottom pressure, NGOs and the civil society get involved to demand better working standards for the employees, as well as corporate and state responsibility for the mistreatment and poor working conditions of the workers. The diversification of actors creates many perspectives in how the flow of EPZs should work depending on the actor that evaluates the outsourcing process.

Solving the inequalities and unbalances that EPZs bring to the world is thus a difficult task. Some attempts to improving the conditions of women in EPZs have been taken by international organizations. UN agencies, such as ILO and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), have urged states to comply with eradicating gender discrimination in their industries, reviewing closely the compliance of industries in EPZs with the rights of women, and incentivizing liberties and rights for workers in these areas. However, these attempts are seen as “Soft Power”. No real repercussions for the non-compliance of states have been implemented.

A different attempt to improve the conditions of women in EPZs has been taken by the World Bank through its International Finance Corporation (IFC). The IFC has donated billions of USD for private

sector investments that seek the reform of EPZs and the garment industry in different countries. Nevertheless, this attempt does not directly address the occurrences of gender-based violence or exploitation in EPZs. It rather pursues the empowerment of women by incentivizing the assembly of unions and social management programs in EPZs (Asia Floor Wage Alliance, 2018). This attempt is seen as social and economic, it emancipates female workers in a determined society. Nevertheless, it does not provide sanctions, or other types of repercussions for instances of gender-based abuse in EPZs.

Considering the small (or even lack of) actions from governments to improving the conditions of women in EPZs, the civil society and NGOs have turned their attention to this matter. Activist groups realized that sometimes it is more efficient to pressure private companies for the practices in the GSC that are involved in the production of their activities. A special attention has been given to companies in the garment industry. Companies in the garment industry have taken advantage of the benefits of outsourcing and have created a new trend: fast fashion. Fast fashion attempts to change the regular seasons of clothing, which were aligned with the four seasons of the year, to a fast-paced change of clothing. New collections and seasons are arriving now to stores with more frequency, every two weeks or every month (Peterson, 2014). The companies engaged in fast fashion, such as H&M, Zara, Uniqlo, Primark, among others, offer clothes at remarkably low prices in order to compete in the western market. However, to provide these cheap clothes with such a fast pace, a noticeable negligence is made towards the employees which are mainly women, and towards the environment.

CURRENT SITUATION

China

The Asian continent has more than 85% of all EPZ workers worldwide. It is estimated that some 40 million people work in EPZs in China alone, and 15 million in other Asian countries (International Labour Organization, 2014). Most Chinese manufacturing workers are migrants who come from all over the country to work in coastal factories. Of this population, 26.2 percent are women working in production jobs, according to survey results of 10 provinces including Guangdong and Shanghai (BSR, 2014). Female factory workers typically face many challenges throughout their working lives, some of them linked to limited formal education. Chinese women generally have less education than men, and migrant women have less education than urban women (BSR, 2014). The results from these conditions of both rural and urban women in China usually results on extremely low wages (BSR, 2014).

Local NGOs in China have surveyed 500 women regarding their biggest concerns in the workplace, with a focus on EPZs. Of the surveyed women: 52 percent listed sexual discrimination as being what they are most concerned about; 20 percent said they were dissatisfied with the inequality of family roles; and 15 percent stated concern about their working conditions and labour protection processes (BSR, 2014).

A key finding in a study carried out in China from four different NGOs, The Sunflower Women Worker Centre, Hand-in-Hand Women Worker Centre, Times Women Worker Centre, and Nongjianv Migrant Worker Centre, is the different interests that women workers in low wage activities have. There is a strong variation of the interests of women depending on their age group. As shown in Figure 2, younger women look forward for learning new skills in the workplace while older women are interested in stability. This information could be useful when tackling the needs of women in different stages of life and ensuring their rights in the workplace in EPZs.



Source: https://www.bsr.org/reports/bsr_female_factory_workers_china_en.pdf

Additional research studies also demonstrated that women in different EPZ's factories are favourable of receiving trainings for finding different vocations, escalating the work ladder, and becoming the managers at their current jobs (BSR, 2014). However, a great lack of training and information about job opportunities occurs in factories in China. This lack of information is translated into career stagnation and discontent. It has additionally produced an advantage for men over women to escalate positions in the workplace and reach managerial positions that often consist on managing tasks that correspond to a majority of female workers. Therefore, although men and women in EPZs in China are paid about the same, they have strong differences when it comes to career opportunities.

The Chinese government has committed suspicious acts regarding labour unions of women in EPZs, although it claims to protect women workers, provide mechanisms against gender discrimination, and look forward to gender equality. A Chinese online forum dedicated to empowering women to speak out about gender-based discrimination was shut down. The forum, called "Pepper Tribe" had over 20,000 followers on Weibo before it was taken down in 2018 (Huang & Tang, 2018). Months before being shut down, the forum called for women working in Foxconn, the world's largest assembler of iPhones, to write about their #MeToo experiences in fighting against sexual harassment (Huang & Tang, 2018). This is not an isolated instance of the Chinese government to shut down female-lead activism in the country. The government has jailed female activists, banned their appearance in social media, and actively avoid any form of protest for the rights of women in China (Fincher, 2019).

El Salvador

An International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) study on core labour standards in El Salvador reports that many of the 67,000 mostly women workers employed in the country's 15 export processing zones suffer from appalling treatment ranging from verbal abuse and threats to physical abuse and sexual harassment. (International Trade Union Confederation, 2010). Although El Salvador, as of 2010 counted with an overwhelming majority of women over men in EPZs, virtually all managers and positions of power are occupied by men. Among the most distinctive gender-based discrimination practices in El Salvador, mandatory pregnancy testing for hiring women and dismissing them and sexual harassment are part of the most conflicting situations for women in the Central American country (International Trade Union Confederation, 2010).

Although the government has ratified the core ILO conventions on gender-based discrimination, women are still largely underpaid and struggle with obstacles based on their gender. Furthermore, the

government of El Salvador also ratified the main ILO conventions for forced labour, which contradicts its behaviour due to the instances of forced labour of women in EPZs throughout its territory.

Activist Montserrat Arévalo from El Salvador denounced at the press that “At the factories, you have women aged 18 through 35. The extenuating workdays of over 16 hours and the high production targets mean that after the age of 35, these workers are no longer profitable for the industry.” (Makazaga, 2017). In her testimony, she points out that the problem is not only a matter of local laws and regulations, nor the involvement of the government, it goes beyond to the private outsourcing companies. She mentioned some of the major brands for which the women in El Salvador overwork for: “Puma, Adidas, Old Navy, GAP, Reebok, etc”. (Makazaga, 2017). She concluded her testimony by expressing that there is a strong complicity between the state and the businesses involved. This complicity is profitable and consequently, hard to break for women in El Salvador.

Bangladesh

On April 2013, the collapse of the Rana Plaza building in Dhaka, Bangladesh, which housed five garment factories, killed at least 1,132 people and injured more than 2,500. Only five months earlier, at least 112 workers had lost their lives in another tragic accident, trapped inside the burning Tazreen Fashions factory on the outskirts of Dhaka (ILO Global Employment Injury Insurance Programme, 2018). Most of these workers were women. After Rana Plaza’s tragedy, the government of Bangladesh, alongside the ILO and local NGOs, created the Rana Plaza Coordination Committee (RPCC). The RPCC had the main goal of providing the families and victims of this disaster with compensations that are consistent with working standards (ILO Global Employment Injury Insurance Programme, 2018). In addition, within three months of the tragic accident, the Bangladesh Labour Act 2006 was amended to focus on the obligations of rights to freedom of association as well as collective bargaining and, most importantly, occupational health and safety (Rahman, 2017).

After the Rana Plaza disaster, international garment corporations faced immense pressure from the public sphere. International efforts from foreign countries were also pushed, resulting in three monitoring regimes: the business-dominated Alliance (US-led), the multi-stakeholder-oriented Accord (EU-led) and the Bangladeshi government’s National Tripartite Plan of Action (NTPA) in collaboration with the ILO (Rahman, 2017). However, human rights activists and the workers in the EPZs agree that not enough efforts have been deployed to help with infrastructure, violations of human rights, and exploitation within EPZs. Gender-based violence is still prevalent within EPZs in Bangladesh and there is an objective critique to why it is still persistent: there is a strong need for buyers and suppliers of the GSC to make a radical change in their labour practices. Governments alone are unable to solve the issue.



Source: <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/05/02/world/asia/bangladesh-us-tshirt/index.html>

DISCUSSION OF THE PROBLEM

Sources of employability for women in developing countries have the potential to create a great shift in gender roles and the overall economic position of women in society. Nevertheless, employability with poor wages and working conditions will not provide considerable changes in the status of women around the world. This is mainly due to the aforementioned poverty spiral and a lack of women empowerment. Yet it is of imminent need to provide these women with a job to give them a level of independence, a secure income, and the potential to improve their skills for future jobs. Therefore, there is a clear distinction between advantages and disadvantages of EPZs for the position of women in society.

CAUSES OF LOW WAGES AND POOR WORKING CONDITIONS FOR WOMEN IN EPZs.

Arguably, the neo-liberal market linked with the tendencies of globalization have become the ideal platform for outsourcing to developing countries and take advantage of their labour norms. Although globalization per se can be used for outstanding innovations, interconnectedness, and development of marginalized communities, many of its forms open a window for exploitation (or super exploitation), specially to women. This is partially the case of EPZs.

As Clark & Auerbach, (2018) explain it “the expansion of capitalist relationships continues to disrupt traditional economies, contributing to the swelling of the unemployed and underemployed. Women in these nations often face super-exploitation, where the wages received for work are not enough to reproduce themselves and their families”. The super exploitation of these women under unregulated capitalist regimes only enriches the distant companies in the west. It is important to acknowledge that capitalism and the neo-liberal market do have a lot of advantages and could be adapted to be used in favour of the now super-exploited women. Nevertheless, there must begin a reform to deeply change the current outsourcing labour standards that many industries committing to the GSC currently have.

Besides the nature of the modern market, there are many risk factors present in developing an under-developed countries that contribute to the gender-based violence in EPZs. ILO recognized the following risk factors as causes of increased exploitation in EPZs: high rates of unemployment, unrealistic production targets, poor labour relations, unsocial working hours, discriminatory practices, culture of impunity, and imbalanced power relationships, including due to gender, race and ethnicity, social origin, education, poverty, disability, HIV status, sexual orientation and gender identity, migrant status and age (Asia Floor Wage Alliance, 2018). Each of these factors alone contribute to the high discriminatory practices in EPZs, nevertheless, they are often present as a cluster of gender-based practices in EPZs.

Workers who cannot exercise their rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining, due to the inappropriate use of contractual arrangements leading to decent work deficits, including the misuse of self-employment, are also likely to be more at risk of violence and harassment (Asia Floor Wage Alliance, 2018). In many EPZs, managers threaten, prohibit, or damage women who try to create labour-unions within the EPZs. This prohibition has resulted in extreme violence for women revolting to their managers and attempting to unite for their rights, as it has been displayed in the documentary “The True Cost” (Morgan et al., 2015)

The role of the government and its involvement while protecting female workers is also an important factor for decreasing discrimination, exploitation, and gender-based violence in EPZs. The Asian Floor Wage Alliance (2018) displays some of ILO’s indicators for higher risks for women that are directly related to the role of the state: “weak enforcement mechanisms, including understaffed and poorly equipped and insufficiently trained labour inspectorates, and occupational safety and health (OSH) systems at different levels not mandated to address discriminatory practices or violence and harassment, and the absence of effective and accessible dispute resolution mechanisms is an additional risk factor.” Therefore, it is clear that a lack of involvement or negligence of the state is directly related to the prevalence of gender-based violence and discrimination in EPZs.

The involvement of the state opens a window for accountability, prevention, and eradication of gender-based violence in EPZs. Yet some governments neglect these aspects of protection. For the state, it is profitable and essential to count on local suppliers for exports to the west. It provides a stable source of income that is needed for the economy to develop. The more protection the state provides to its workers, the higher the costs for the state will be, as the investors will not be so drawn on purchasing more expensive labour from the country. For instance, In Bangladesh, the garment industry which is mainly located in EPZs and with high women employability, is the nation's number one export earner, accounting for \$21.5 billion in 2013 – 80% of Bangladesh's total exports of \$27 billion (Paul, 2013). Interventions from the government could jeopardize this important sector of exports. Nevertheless, it is necessary to find strategies to deal with this situation and find affordable and still profitable ways of protecting women in EPZs.

Finally, a core cause of the exploitation of women and their lack of rights in EPZs is related to the perception of their gender in society. As discussed above, there is a strong preference in EPZs to hire women over men. Women are hired for their acceptance to undesirable working conditions, as little or none other alternatives for work are available. Female workers accept contracts that have little benefits for them and make it easier for suppliers to fire them (Ghosh, 2002). To avoid this issue, higher levels of literacy, equality, and protection needs to aid women in their daily life. A societal shift in the role of women and the improvement of working conditions for female workers are consequently strongly desirable.

CHALLENGES FOR ADDRESSING THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN IN EPZs

The feminization of labour has had enormous benefits throughout the world. It has allowed women to gain independence and consequently, have more chances of uniting, requesting, and obtaining their rights. We have seen great improvement in the conditions of women in the last century, with more women in positions of power, less rates of illiteracy, and an overall decrease of extreme poverty. Nevertheless, the increase of women employability is not necessarily a positive indicator when considering the environment of female workers. To achieve gender equality and ensure women’s rights, there must be a shift in the

employability of women, especially in developing and under-developed countries. To escape the downward spiral of poverty, women need more opportunities in their jobs, accountability in cases of injustice, and the possibility to find better working options.

A great challenge for improving the conditions of women in EPZs is the dependency that women have on what is usually their single source of employment. Strengthening the control over EPZs by any of the actors involved in the GSC could result in drastic measures of termination of employment for the women involved. Unemployment would, consequently, maintain or deteriorate their current economic and social situation. Furthermore, creating alternative sources of employment may not be easy, profitable, or provide enough vacancies for the women that are currently going through discrimination at their workplace.

Another challenge is the income of the state due to investments made from foreign enterprises to hire women in poor working conditions. As explained before, the states that create EPZs in their territory do so in order to attract investors, increase their GDPs, and provide employability for a population that has little or none working skills. In several countries, the income produced in EPZs constitutes a great percentage of the country's GDP. In addition, more than 60 million people around the world work in EPZs. States therefore deeply rely on the emergence and maintenance of EPZs to improve the overall status of their societies.

PREVIOUS INTERNATIONAL ACTIONS

The WTO, parting from an idea to decrease tariffs by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), endorsed the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) to help developing countries in their exports. The EU took the GSP idea further, and created the GSP+, which looks to improve labour rights and conditions for the countries they benefitted with special trade tariffs. At the moment, the GSP+ works with 9 countries: Armenia, Bolivia, Cabo Verde, the Kyrgyz Republic, Mongolia, Pakistan, Paraguay, the Philippines and Sri Lanka (Richardson & Harrison, 2017). In each of the countries, the EU establishes a long-term communication with local labour offices to ensure safe labour practices and decent payments. Although this initiative has a special focus on the role of women in EPZs, it has failed to fully guarantee their rights due to lack of appropriate monitoring within the benefitted countries. Women are unaware of the benefits of these offices, lack the legal assistance to inquire about them, and therefore, continue in similar situations of exploitation.

The civil society has had a very important role in the EPZs practices. Pressure from activist environmental and human rights groups in Western nations has provoked an effect in the practices of the Fast Fashion industry. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has gained importance in international businesses due to civil activists. CSR is a way of private self-regulation that aims for improving the overall footprint of companies, including human rights and the environment. Activist groups have sought the international recognition of CSR as a way to regulate the main exporting industries and adapt offices for human rights advocacy (Bijlmakers, 2018). However, there is a lot of scepticism regarding the true intentions of CSR departments in the private industry, as companies would usually act on their self-interest instead of a human-ethical manner.

Additionally, International Finance Corporation (IFC) alongside the World Bank have published extensive reports on how to increase benefits and reduce instances of abuse of women in EPZs. The

report has been available and encouraged to be adopted by most countries (Brooks, 2016). Although extensive verbal commitment has been expressed, and local departments advocating for the rights of workers in EPZs, instances of corruption and abuse are still predominant. It is important to consider that virtually no major international commitment has changed the situation of women in EPZs, and therefore, it is necessary to study feasible options for a long-term and persistent pursue of women's rights in EPZs.

POINTS A RESOLUTION SHOULD ADDRESS

It is necessary to evaluate all the causes that lead to super-exploitation and hazardous working conditions for women in EPZs in order to effectively address the issue. Furthermore, these causes need to be analysed through a multi-actor perspective. Considering the many actors involved in the GSC and the employability of women in EPZs, the solutions in the committee should consider a maximization of benefits for the players involved. Nevertheless, improving the role of women in society and in labour should be the first priority of the clauses that are presented during the conference.

It is expected from delegates to deliver solutions tackling different regulatory areas. The problem of rights of women in EPZs involves various areas of society, politics, culture, and economics. In order to boost a shift in the role of women in society and stop the super-exploitation happening in several EPZs throughout the world, it is needed to address the issue from different fronts. For instance, economic measurements for buyers and suppliers hiring women in discriminatory conditions will not solve the overall problem efficiently. Other cultural and political regulations would have to be included in order to producing a comprehensive an inclusive shift for the women suffering from gender-based violence in EPZs.

Delegates also need to provide resolutions that acknowledge that this issue has many similarities across EPZs around the world, but specific nation-states or region go through different local situations that should be addressed. Furthermore, it would be beneficial for delegates to expand their knowledge by reading about EPZs in various countries and looking for successful regulations that have consistently improved the rights of women in labour. International successful cases of regulations in EPZs could be used in committee to create an overall framework for new and broader solutions in the world while still considering local or regional conditions.

Finally, it is essential for delegates to back-up their proposals in a long-term scheme while ensuring the international feasibility of their resolutions. In world affairs, many resolutions take place that have no real path towards a goal due to the short-term fixation on a solution. Delegates are required to come up with ideas that could be sustainable in the long term, as a radical shift in the position of women in labour and EPZs would require time and persistence. Therefore, it is recommended to look for local partners, NGOs, and groups of the civil society that are willing to work in the issue continuously and that could provide (or be provided with) enough resources to boost the position of women persistently.

FURTHER READING

This study guide is a medium-length summary of the overall situation of women in EPZs around the globe. Yet specific cases of mistreatment and abuse vary in different regions under the power of mixed actors. Delegates are highly encouraged to read different cases of EPZs in Latin America, Asia, and Africa to get a more in-depth grasp of the variety of obstacles faced by women in EPZs. World Bank Group

and ILO reports regarding different countries with EPZs would therefore be beneficial for good quality clauses in committee.

Additionally, getting a more realistic picture beyond numbers and indicators is important for creating sensitive resolutions in committee. A series of documentaries at the bottom of the bibliography are strongly advised for delegates to watch. Among them, delegates will find *The True Cost*, a documentary about the garment industry in the world containing personal experiences from women workers. In addition, a small report of Vice News on “rescued workers” in Cambodia, called “From Sex Work to Seamstress” provides an insight to the movements of women within EPZs in the garment and sex industries. A final video called *Fashion displays*, in a comedian way by John Oliver, the behaviour of major garment retailers towards their outsourcing in EPZs abroad.

Topic B: IMPROVING THE CONDITION OF SEX WORKERS IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES



Source: Thegryphon.co.uk

I) Background

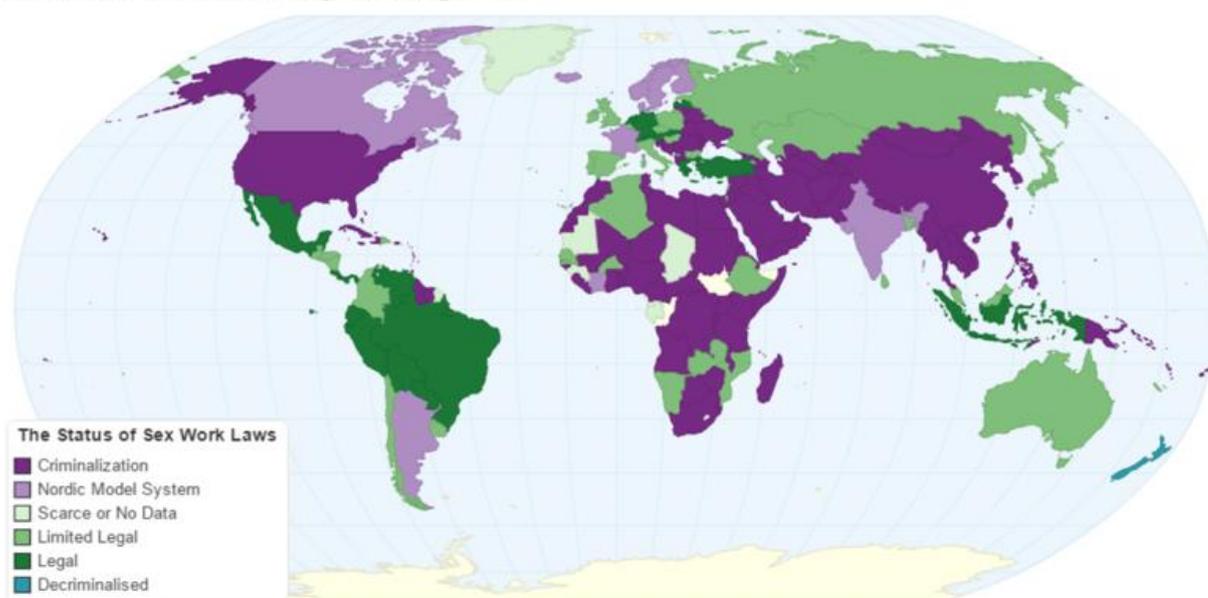
Sex work can be defined as the ‘provision of sexual services for money or goods’ (Overs, 2002). In daily life, prostitution is often used as a synonym for sex work. However, many international organizations and NGOs choose not to use this word as it has a negative connotation linked to criminality and immorality and does not explicitly recognize that sex work is work (Open Society Foundations, 2019). Furthermore, sex workers are defined by UNAIDS as ‘female, male and transgender adults who have consensual sex in exchange for money or goods, either regularly or occasionally’ and who ‘consciously define those activities as income generating even if they do not consider sex work as their occupation’ (UNAIDS, 2017; Overs, 2002). In this definition, the word ‘consensual’ is crucial to make a clear distinction between sex work, trafficking and sexual exploitation. Indeed, in a note on the issue of terminology written in 2013, UN Women argues that one ‘cannot consider sex work the same way we consider trafficking or sexual exploitation which are human rights abuses and crimes’ (UN Women, 2013). While some NGOs like Amnesty International agree with such a statement, other NGOs such as CAP International (Coalition for Abolition of Prostitution) argue that ‘international human rights law recognizes prostitution as a violation

of human rights’ and that ‘states and UN agencies have a direct, binding obligation to oppose any trivialisation of prostitution’ (Amnesty International, 2016; CAP, 2016). Furthermore, it is true that making ‘consent’ the criterion to distinguish between sex work and sex exploitation can be an issue given the multiple definitions of consent and the difficulty to prove to what extent a sexual service is consensually delivered (Schulze, 2014). Nevertheless, it seems important to specify that UN Women and most NGOs in favour of legalization or decriminalization of sex work do not promote sex work or believe that paying for sexual services is a human right, they only support that sex workers have rights too (Amnesty International, 2016). Indeed, as stated in their note, UN Women aims to protect sex workers because ‘they are right holders like all other women and men and should be recognized as such’ while simultaneously addressing ‘structural and root causes for women to engage in sex work, including poverty and discrimination’ (UN Women, 2016).

The Current Situation

Sex work legislation remains a topic of hot and virulent debates whether it is between or within nations around the globe. Laws concerning sex work and thus sex workers’ rights vary greatly across the world, from it being considered as an immoral lifestyle punishable by death to a fully legal and regulated job. The legal status of sex work in different countries in 2016 can be observed in the map below. However, for an updated and more detailed version of this map, delegates are encouraged to check the ‘Map of Sex Work Law’ which will be referenced in the bibliography at the end of this study guide.

The Status of Sex Work Laws by Country 2016



Source: [ChartsBin \(2016\)](#)

As one can see on this map, there are four major views when it comes to the legalisation of sex work. This section will explore those positions.

- 1) Any form of sex work is illegal and is considered as criminality. Punishments vary considerably from one country to another going from being fined to prison sentences or even death penalty. Cultural and ethical issues related to sex work are often what pushes countries to criminalize it. For instance, some countries like China consider sex work an immoral and unethical activity and thus send sex workers along with their clients to specific detention centres to ‘re-educate’ them. Some ex-detainees spoke up to denounce the bad treatment that they received there including forced labour and forced medical examinations (France24, 2019). At the opposite, some countries also prohibiting sex work do not take any effective step to eliminate it and sanctions are rarely applied. Nowadays, prohibition and repression of sex work remains one of the most common views around the world, especially in the vast majority of Asia and Africa (World Population Review, 2019)
- 2) Sex work is partially legal which means that some types of sex work remain illegal. Countries sharing that position usually fall into two categories. The first one is called ‘abolitionism’ and include countries where sex work itself is legal but organised activities and third-party involvement are not. For instance, in the United Kingdom, operating a brothel and controlling sex workers is illegal which prohibit sex workers from benefiting from labour rights as ‘managing a sex business or profiting from sex work is illegal’ (Sexuality, Poverty and Law Programme, 2019). The second category of countries partially legalizing sex work is called ‘neo-abolitionism’ and is often referred to as the Nordic model. In countries adopting this view, selling sexual services is not illegal but buying sex and organizing commercial sex are illegal. For example, this is the case of Sweden which criminalize sex workers’ clients in order to reduce the demand and help sex workers to exit the commercial sex industry. Such a position is linked to the belief that sex work is a human rights’ violation and an inherently violent expression of male dominance (Nordic Model Now, 2019).
- 3) Sex work is legal and regulated which means that each state creates its own legislation to control and regulate it. The extent to which the state control sex work and the specific conditions under which it is considered as legal can vary from one country to another. At the moment, several UN member states took the decision to legalize and apply specific rules to sex work. For instance, in the Netherlands, brothels have to be licensed and comply with rules concerning safety, health and sanitation while in Uruguay, local municipalities have to establish specific public areas where sex

work is permitted and regulated by a set of requirements (Sexuality, Poverty and Law Programme, 2019).

- 4) Sex work is decriminalized which means that all 'laws and policies criminalizing, or penalizing sex work are removed' (Amnesty International, 2016). Decriminalization is what most sex-worker-led organizations advocate as they argue it is the only way to fully protect sex workers' rights, to ensure their access to justice and to empower them (Armstrong, 2017). Decriminalization is different from legalization in the sense that, when a nation legalizes sex work, it creates very specific laws which disempower sex workers who cannot operate inside those regulations (Amnesty International, 2016). At the moment, New Zealand is the first and only country which has decriminalized sex work when it passed the Prostitution Reform Act in 2003 (Crichton, 2015). Moreover, a concern that often comes back when talking about decriminalization is whether it encourages sex trafficking or not. To this, Amnesty International answers there is no evidence suggesting this causal relationship and that decriminalization actually helps fighting against trafficking as it gives proper rights and better conditions to sexual workers (Amnesty International, 2016).

II) Discussion

The link between prostitution and poverty

'To those seeking to eradicate sex work at whatever cost, I say first you must eradicate poverty, destitution, hunger, inequality, and discrimination'

Alex Feis-Bryce - RightsInfo CEO

Poverty, difficult economic situations and unemployment are often seen as 'strong push-factors forcing women into prostitution' (Schulze, 2014). In this way, the notion of consent can become blurry as evidence shows that most women do not actually choose to become sex workers but have the necessity to do so to survive (Amnesty, 2016). In their study on prostitution, Melissa Farley and several other researchers interviewed 854 people from 9 countries who have been recently or are currently sex workers. The results showed that '89% of these respondents wanted to escape prostitution but did not have other options for survival' and that 'a total of 75% had been homeless at some point in their lives' (Farley et al, 2004). In 1992, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) acknowledged that poverty and unemployment can be major factors pushing women to enter prostitution

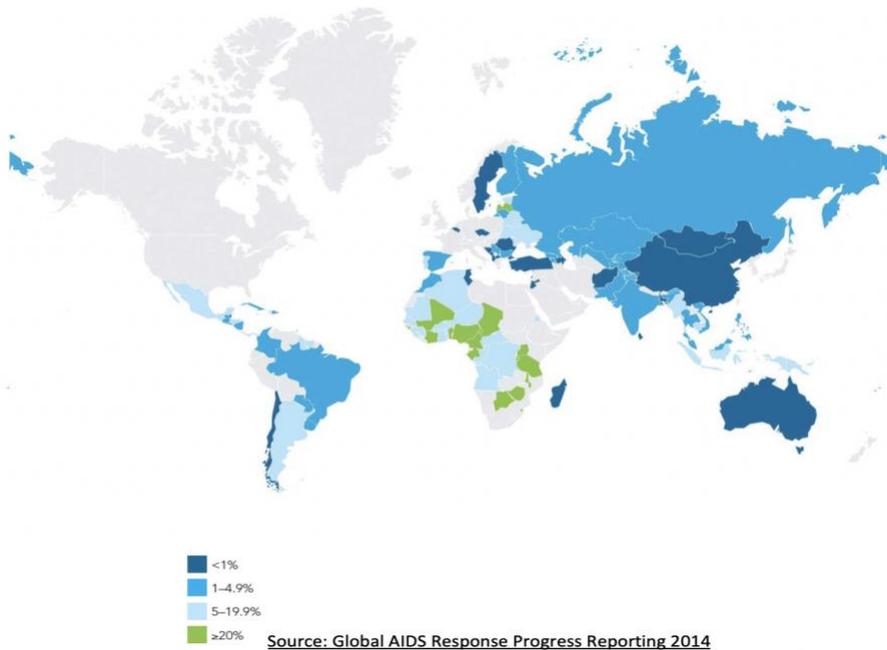
(CEDAW, 1992). Moreover, in their 2013 note, UN Women clearly specify that they understand that ‘sex work is not always a choice and acknowledge that it is often bound up with poverty, vulnerability and discrimination and can lead to violence against women’ (UN WOMEN, 2013).

Safe sex and sex worker’s health rights: preventing the transmission of AIDs

1) Why are sex workers at particular risk of HIV transmission?

It is widely recognized that sex work and unprotected sexual services have a major impact in the transmission and spread of HIV and other sexually transmissible diseases. Avert, a source of information on HIV and AIDS, show that sex workers are part of the highest risk groups for HIV as they are ‘13 times more likely to become infected with HIV than adults in the general population’ (Avert, 2018). This number can vary between regions and countries. However, even in countries with high rates of HIV infections, HIV prevalence among sex workers remains higher than among the general population (UNAIDS, 2014). UNAIDS identify 4 top reasons explaining why HIV prevalence is higher among sex workers (UNAIDS, 2014). The first reason of this increased risk of HIV is violence which can happen anywhere and can be perpetrated by anybody whether it is sex workers’ clients, the police or other individuals. Violence against sex workers can be physical but also sexual as sex they are often victims of forced unprotected sex and sexual abuse which can lead to HIV infections. Moreover, when sex work is criminalized, sex workers cannot report violence, have access to justice or benefit from protection usually offered to victims of such violence. This is why criminalization of sex work is considered as the second reason of HIV prevalence in the sex industry. Indeed, when prostitution is illegal, HIV prevention programmes and services are not accessible for sex workers. Moreover, some countries such as Kenya or Russia consider the possession of condoms as an evidence of sex work leading to sex workers’ arrest or to the confiscation of their condoms (UNAIDS, 2014). In addition to that, stigma and discrimination against sex workers are also major barriers preventing their access to health services. Indeed, because sex workers face legal but also social discrimination, they are often scared to use health services and to get tested for HIV as it implies hiding their occupation (Avert, 2018). Finally, a major issue related to the spread of HIV is the lack of funding and risk reduction programmes for sex workers. At the moment, very few countries have established HIV programmes specifically designed for sex workers and many of them are badly implemented because of the lack of funding and interest from governments (UNAIDS, 2014). In this way, many evidences show that punitive environments and restrictive laws limit the availability and access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support for sex workers and their clients (Schulze, 2014).

HIV prevalence among sex workers, 2009–2013



2) Prevention

In order to close the gap and reduce sex workers' vulnerability to HIV, UNAIDS, WHO and several other organizations developed universal guidelines (UNAIDS, 2014). Those recommendations apply to all countries in order to prevent the spread of HIV and other sexually transmissible diseases among sex workers. They include the following requirements: addressing violence, decriminalizing sex work, implementing free HIV counselling and testing services for sex workers, setting up health and social care services meeting the needs and circumstances of sex workers as well as the reducing of stigma and discrimination through education. In addition to that, Avert reminds that empowering sex work communities is also crucial to the process (Avert, 2018). Indeed, 'where capacity of sex worker communities has been strengthened and where they are given the opportunity to design, plan and implement services for themselves, sex workers have shown that they are strong, capable allies in the HIV response...often in the face of enormous adversity, sex workers in partnership with others have led the development of effective, evidence-informed services that help to reduce their vulnerability to HIV and mitigate the hostile environments that perpetuate their vulnerability' (UNAIDS, 2014).

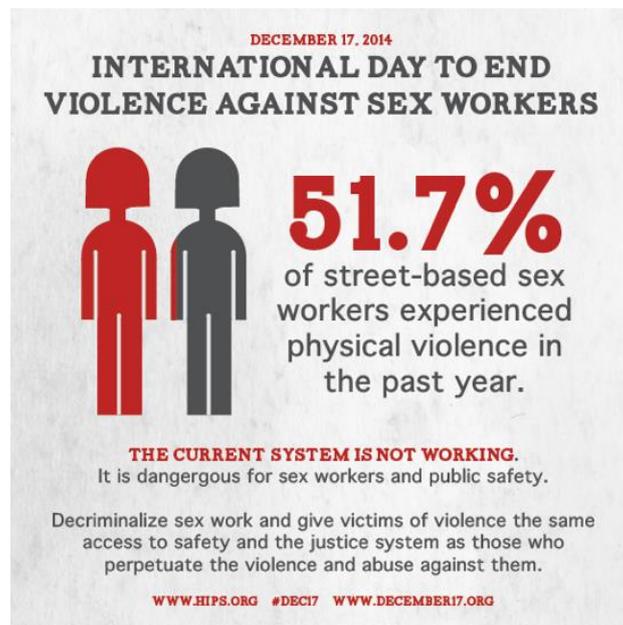
Violence and Discrimination against Sex Workers

As it was discussed before, in addition to legal and administrative discrimination, sex workers also have to deal with hate crimes as well as sexual and physical abuses. Indeed, criminalization of sex work and thus unequal protection under the law leave sex workers without any defence against punches, rapes or even attempts on their lives as they cannot report them. In 2017, an article in BBC News shared the testimonies of two anonymous female sex workers telling about their daily experience with violence (Owen, 2017). One of them explains that every time she comes to report violence to the police, she is the one threatened to be arrested and prosecuted for working in a brothel instead of the attackers being pursued and prosecuted for their crime. In one of their reports, WHO specify the different types of violence that can affect sex workers: physical violence, sexual violence and emotional and psychological violence (WHO, 2013). While physical and sexual violence have been addressed in this study guide, emotional and psychological violence is often forgotten. Among other human-rights violations it includes:

- Having money extorted
- Being insulted, humiliated, belittled or publicly shamed
- Being forced to consume drugs or alcohol
- Being arbitrarily stopped, subjected to invasive body searches or detained by police
- Being arrested or threatened with arrest for carrying condoms
- Being subjected to coercive health procedures such as forced STI and HIV testing, sterilization, abortions
- Being deprived of sleep by force

This list could be even longer but gives a good overview of the amount of abuses that sex workers have to fight against in their daily life. In 2016, Amnesty International published an executive summary on sex work in Papua New Guinea including testimonies highlighting crimes and other abuses against sex workers (Amnesty International, 2016). Delegates are encouraged to have a look at it in order to look at concrete cases of violence against sex workers.

Source: Hips.org



III) Points a Resolution Should Address

Given the multiplicity of views and opinions held by countries present in this committee, working towards a consensus, making compromises and finding points of agreement will be a difficult but crucial task for all delegates. Below are some of the topic's areas that will be important to explore during committee sessions.

Legal Status of Sex Work, Sexual Exploitation and Trafficking

- Is decriminalization of sex work the best way to protect sex workers' rights?
- How to differentiate sex work from trafficking and sexual exploitation when the notion of consent is blurry?
- How can member states address the causes leading women to enter the commercial sex industry?

Human rights' violations against Sex Workers

- What measures can be taken by member nations to protect sex workers from sexual violence and sexual abuse?
- How to provide sex workers with assistance (whether it is legal or medical assistance) in countries where sex work is illegal?

- How can member states cooperate with sex workers and sex worker-led organizations to ensure that their rights are not violated?

Access to Health Services and the Spread of Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs)

- What is the responsibility of developed nations in ensuring better health conditions for sex workers in developing nations?
- What social changes are needed in order to tackle the issue of HIV infection among sex workers? How to avoid sex workers' stigmatisation?

IV) Further Readings

The aim of this study guide is to give delegates an overview of the Topic B 'Improving the conditions of sex workers in developing countries' which will be discussed during the committee sessions.

It is especially difficult to talk about 'bloc positions' and to try to classify countries in static groups when it comes to prostitution as depending on their culture, their beliefs, their customs but also the composition of their government, states can have strongly different policies and views on that topic. Because of that, it is crucial for delegates to make up-to-date research on their respective represented states' laws regarding sex workers and to check which nations share similar views. Thus, this study guide is only the starting point of your research.

In the next section, delegates can find a bibliography including papers and articles that were used to write this study guide but also additional resources that can help them to get a deeper knowledge of the topic. However, once again, delegates are strongly encouraged to make their own research and explore more resources by themselves. A selection of four documentaries was also added to this bibliography in order for delegates to benefit from diverse sources of information. We especially recommend the documentary *Whores' Glory* whose director Michael Glawogger followed sex workers with a non-judgmental attitude in three different countries: Thailand (Bangkok), Bangladesh (Faridpur) and Mexico (Reynosa). In this documentary, the film director tries to stay neutral as he writes that "prostitution is not to be condemned or defended. Prostitution simply is. It is like war. War is" (Holden, 2012).

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