

# BWI Global Report



**BWI**  
Building and Wood  
Workers' International  
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Written by BWI external consultant, Nora Wintour, and published by Building and Wood Workers' International, March 2021, Geneva

The author would like to thank all the BWI staff and affiliate union officials and members who took time from their extremely busy schedules to contribute to this study either by sending written information or by taking part in an interview. She would also like to thank the translators and interpreters who helped in this work. While the study seeks to reflect the policies and programmes of the trade unions, any errors of fact or interpretation are the responsibility of the author.

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This study was originally conceived by Jin Sook Lee, the former BWI Global Campaigns Director, who tragically passed away not long after holding a preliminary discussion with the author about its outline and contents. A passionate advocate for women's rights, social justice, and workers' empowerment, Jin Sook saw opportunities for change and seized them. We can only seek to continue on the path, the better for having known her.



# Preface

BWI and our affiliates are committed to building a gender equal better future for all. The COVID-19 pandemic has hit women the hardest because they are more likely to be working in insecure jobs and because of their additional domestic and care burdens. The increased risk of gender-based violence during the lockdowns has been well documented. For all these reasons, it is even more relevant for the BWI to focus on the many challenges facing women who work in the male-dominated sectors of construction, building materials, wood-working and forestry.

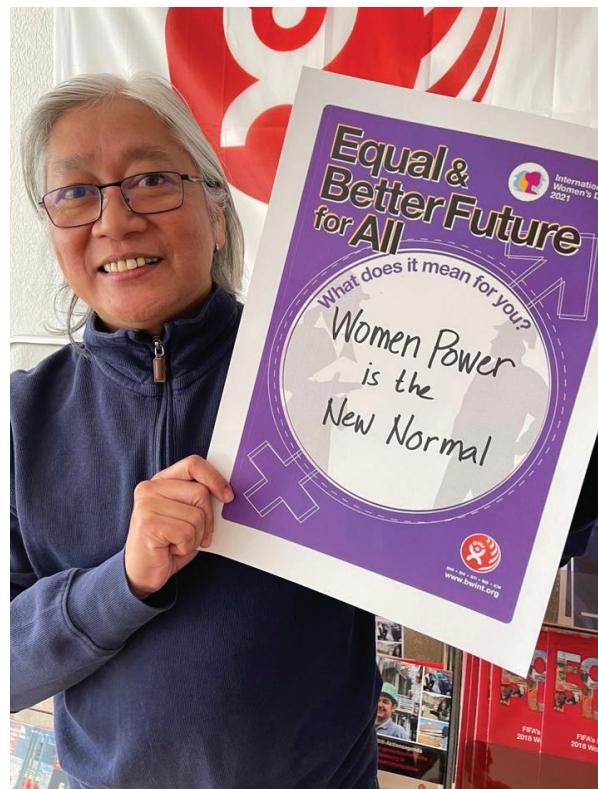
Trade unions have a key role to play in advocating for skills training opportunities for women so they can access good quality jobs; and should put forward women's specific demands about the working environment through collective bargaining and in other negotiating forums. For women to remain working in the trades, we need to first increase their numbers and they need respect from their co-workers and employers, equal pay, family-friendly working conditions and safety at work and on the journey to and from worksites.

We are far from such a reality today, there has been insufficient progress over the last decades concerning women's access to training and their participation in the construction workforce as skilled labour. On the other hand, we can celebrate the transformational changes within BWI and our affiliates. In BWI decision-making structures, training programmes and campaigns, women are active and equal participants. Many more affiliates are championing gender equality causes. Last year, there was a truly impressive participation in the BWI global campaign for trade union activism to address violence and harassment and unions have been creative in using the campaigns to empower women members and give greater visibility to their workforce contribution and role within the union.

This study will help us advance the work to promote gender equality in the workforce. It provides practical examples of the activities unions in different regions are undertaking to promote women's access to skills training and retain them in employment. It examines how unions have changed their statutes or organising strategies to recruit women members and bring them into decision-making structures. Finally, it collects good practice examples of collective bargaining gains and makes recommendations about future work in this area.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed how skewed, unequal and cruel our societies have become. It has reaffirmed once again that social justice can only be built on the basis of gender equality. So as we advocate for post-COVID 19 green economic recovery plans, let us always keep in mind a phrase that BWI Vice President Gail Cartmail often says: **'What's good for women is good for all workers!'**

In solidarity,  
Ambet Yuson, *General Secretary, BWI*





# Introduction

Women workers in the BWI sectors covering construction and building face many challenges in accessing employment. Gender-segregation of the labour force is very marked. In middle and low income countries, women work predominantly in the informal sector of the industry, with no social protection and job security and very limited training opportunities. In South Asia, the proportion of women workers in unskilled construction work is relatively high but elsewhere, the numbers of women workers remains low. In high income countries, the construction trades are extremely male-dominated.

Gender segregation limits women's employment choices and constitutes a major obstacle to equal opportunity and treatment in the workplace. Gender segregation also impacts on how men perceive women workers and how women perceive themselves, perpetuating and reinforcing gender stereotypes, which in turn negatively affect women's status and income. Women in manual labour are denied the same wages as men and are not even paid the minimum wage in some cases. Health and safety issues and sanitary facilities, particularly concerning reproductive health and personal hygiene, are inadequately addressed by employers. A sexist and macho workplace culture leaves women vulnerable to different forms of gender-based violence.

This study was first conceived as a mapping of women working in the construction trades and their representation and role within the construction unions, as well as a review of the main issues and challenges they face at the workplace. It was designed to inform a proposed global conference on women in the construction trades scheduled for mid-2020. However, because of the COVID-19 restrictions, the conference was postponed while it was agreed that in the meantime the study should go forward.

The study is largely based on interviews with BWI regional staff and union leaders and activists. It is not an audit of all BWI affiliates but instead builds on qualitative examples of good practice in key areas and from different regions. The study is divided into four main sections.

The first section examines the sectors where women are working and in what kinds of jobs, as well as any discernible trends in terms of their participation in the workforce over the last decade in different regions of the world. It provides some examples of experiences of women in trades as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Section two reviews the overall situation of access to skills training in construction trades and different initiatives in which unions are involved to promote women's access to vocational training, apprenticeships or skills qualifications' assessments and certification.

Section three examines women's participation in construction trade unions and changes over time. It reviews the extent to which women's union membership has increased and union strategies to organise women workers, including statutory changes or setting up new structures or departments within the unions. Through interviews with union leaders and women activists in different parts of the world, successful organising strategies are outlined, as well as capacity-building initiatives.

Section four examines the role of collective bargaining and social dialogue in promoting policies to transform workplaces into more gender-friendly environments. It reviews mechanisms by which unions are consulting with women workers in order to develop a bargaining agenda and the extent to which women are participating in negotiations. It provides specific examples of the issues that have been taken up in bargaining, and the opportunities to negotiate for gender equality on mega infrastructure and construction projects. It provides some examples of the impact of the BWI campaign against violence against women and in favour of the ratification of ILO Convention 190 on violence and harassment and how it has given greater visibility to women workers in BWI industries.

The study concludes with a short set of recommendations in order to strengthen and systematise the good practices that have been identified. Some opportunities to carry out advocacy on promoting better access for women to vocational training and apprenticeships are outlined, taking advantage of the current ILO work programme on this issue. The importance of continuing with the many and diverse strategies to encourage women's participation in union decision-making structures is emphasised. Some inputs into possible future work on developing and advancing a BWI bargaining agenda on gender are provided. Finally, it outlines some possible actions to promote gender equality in relation to BWI's advocacy on post-COVID-19 green recovery plans.

## Section 1: Women's participation in construction trades and challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic

The construction workforce remains male-dominated, one of the most gender-segregated of all sectors in most parts of the world. In some countries, there are more women working in mining than in construction. There has been remarkably little change in the gender composition of the workforce over the last decades. Women still represent less than 10 per cent of the total construction workforce globally and approximately 3 per cent of women in trades. There are two exceptions. In South Asia, women make up a much higher proportion of the workforce, largely in unskilled work, than in other parts of the world. In Russia and other Eastern European countries such as Moldova, Bulgaria, and Georgia, women also make up 20 per cent to 30 per cent of the workforce, although fewer younger women are taking up STEM<sup>1</sup> careers or work on site than during the former Soviet period. Women's participation rates are the lowest in Latin America and Africa and MENA regions.

Women's work in construction can be broadly divided into three main groups: women in professional and technical positions, such as architects, engineers and surveyors; women in administrative positions such as secretaries, and human resources and in store houses; and women in the on-site construction workforce. Women are generally clustered in administrative work or warehouse stores, although most unions reported an increase in women in professional and technical positions, and a very small increase in women on-site workers at all income levels.



In some parts of the world, there is a shortage of skilled construction workers and governments and employers, as well as trade unions, are considering how to encourage more women to join the construction trades. However, these initiatives have not yet made any significant impact on numbers of women working in the sector.

The COVID-19 pandemic has reversed the few gains made over the years for many women. Women have been the most affected by income and job losses. As well as the COVID-19 pandemic, many women face a triple socio-economic pandemic: increased financial insecurity, increased care responsibilities and increased risk of domestic violence. Unions have reacted quickly to protect the most vulnerable workers, prevent redundancies, maintain wages or income protection to the self-employed to the extent possible and ensure safe working conditions for those continuing to work. Unions have also conducted information campaigns about health measures to protect from the virus.

It is not yet clear what long-term impact the pandemic will have on women's workforce participation in the construction sector.

<sup>1</sup> Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) careers

## Challenges for women workers and union responses in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 – case studies from around the world



**Esther Asaba Ahmadu, Zonal Vice President and National Women's Coordinator, CCESSA Nigeria**

“In Nigeria, women were the first to lose their jobs. We faced enormous emotional stress because we were left without income from one day to the next. The lockdown and the need to care for the sick made our lives yet more complicated. The problems of sexual harassment and domestic violence increased. It has been difficult for the union to respond effectively. There have been regular meetings with employers to seek to minimise the job losses and to negotiate so that at least a percentage of the regular wage was paid rather than redundancy. We also had to educate members about the COVID-19 safety measures and to make sure that employers provided the necessary extra PPE without cost to the workers.”

**Fozert Mugabe, Deputy General Secretary, ZCATWU, Zimbabwe**

“In Zimbabwe, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, some employers forced workers to live for up to a month on the construction site without going home so as to reduce the risks of the spread of the infection. Some women stayed on the sites as well because they were scared that if they refused, they would lose their job but the living conditions were very poor. ZCATWU has demanded that employers provide adequate accommodation and food, as well as medical facilities if they require workers to live on site.”

**Marta Pujadas, Secretary for Occupational Health and Safety, UOCRA and President of the BWI Latin American Regional Women's Committee**

“Through its social network, UOCRA provides an integrated response to improve the quality of life of workers and their families. In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, UOCRA called for wage protection, job continuity and health and safety measures to protect workers. Furthermore, it formed a Crisis Committee comprising epidemiologists and other professionals, to monitor the situation and develop a COVID-19 contingency plan. UOCRA owns some hotels where workers who needed to quarantine could stay. It also developed a ‘COVID-19 National Protocol for the Protection of Workers in the Construction Sector’ and carried out regular site visits to hold talks with workers about health and safety measures. It trained groups of young workers as health promoters, to carry out information campaigns by distributing leaflets and holding talks on site and sending out social media messages.



The UOCRA Women's Department gave utmost priority to COVID-19 information work, with a focus on preventing gender-based violence. It produced audio-visual clips to support the national campaign on gender-based violence 'Not one Less' (Ni Una Menos). The clip was called 'Don't look the other way' (No mires para otro lado) and it was widely distributed on social media. The Women's Department also participated in the UN sponsored Spotlight Initiative calling for an end to femicides (#BastadeFemicidios), in the ILO/CGT trade union centre's campaign for the ratification of ILO Convention 190 on violence and harassment and in the BWI campaign on the same issue.

UOCRA has also put forward various proposals in different social dialogue institutions with the government and employers about how to invest in recovery plans to achieve a 'better normal'. Considering the impact of technological changes which could be accelerated as a result of the pandemic, it is important to plan for a just transition and employment generation for both men and women."

**Ivana Dimitrova, Shop-steward, Granit SA, SGIP N. Macedonia**

"In North Macedonia, the construction companies did not stop work during the first lockdown period. As a shop steward, I was able to make sure that no worker was made redundant at my company. However, in other companies there were many dismissals. It has been very difficult and stressful at work because when someone tested positive, the whole team had to spend 14 days in quarantine. Normally there are five engineers on the site where I work and at one time, I was the only engineer at work. The employer has been pushing for everyone to cover for the other person, even when at one point almost one third of the workforce was off sick or in quarantine."



**Anne Duggan, Education and Training Unit Coordinator, Victoria, CFMEU**

"In Australia, CFMEU has focused on protecting the safety of all workers and developed detailed COVID-19 guidelines for the construction industry. The union also called on the government and employers to guarantee indemnity payments for workers who needed to isolate or had to care for someone who was sick. It also called for flexible working arrangements for workers who had to care for children when the schools were closed. For women working from home and disclosing they are experiencing family violence, the union called for the provision of safe alternative workspaces."

# The numbers of women in construction are not increasing significantly



In British Columbia, Canada, women represent about **4%** of the skilled trades.

In Mexico, only **0.4%** of over 2 million bricklayers are women (INEG)



In Kenya women account for **10.6%** of engineering graduates <sup>2</sup>



In Argentina, in 2018, women accounted for **3.2%** of skilled construction workers

(DG de Estudios Macroeconómicos y Estadísticas Laborales)

In Sweden, women make up...



**1%** of the construction union



**2%** of the electricians' union



**11%** of the painters union

(Joseph Krantz, Swedish Painters' Union)

In South Africa, women represent **13%** of the construction workforce. **53%** are in unskilled jobs, **14%** in skilled jobs, **4%** in technical jobs and **7%** in management (SAWIC, South Africa)



In Scotland, women comprise **14%** of the construction workforce and **40%** are self-employed, with precarious work and lack of employment rights (ONS Dec. 2019)

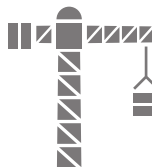


In Australia, construction is the third largest employer and women comprise only **1%** of the trades workforce and **2%** of construction apprentices (compared to 10.1% of mining apprentices).



In the USA, **9.9%** of workers in the construction sector are women and only **3.4%** are working in the construction trades.

In South Korea, the proportion of women in the construction sector has risen from **6.5%** in 2001 to **10.2%** in 2019 (KCITU own figures 2021)



In Ukraine, women make up approximately **20%** of the construction workforce (ITUC 2010)<sup>3</sup>



In India, women comprise from **30%** to **50%** of construction workers but the vast majority lack any training.

In Kazakhstan, women make up **23.5%** of the construction workforce (ILO 2011)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/business/Women-in-building-industry/2560-5492914-eboawi/index.html>

<sup>3</sup> An overview of women's work and employment in Ukraine: [https://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/Country\\_Report\\_No8-Ukraine\\_EN.pdf](https://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/Country_Report_No8-Ukraine_EN.pdf) Amsterdam, March 2010



## What jobs are women carrying out?

### Africa and MENA region

Although the numbers are not very large, in some countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, it is relatively common to find women in informal construction work, for example in stone-crushing or selling food on construction sites, or carrying out site cleaning. In some countries, such as Kenya, Namibia and South Africa, there are programmes to promote affirmative action in public procurement to recruit more women into the construction industry. However, the impact of these initiatives has been relatively limited. In South Africa, women make up 12.49 per cent of the total workforce (2011 figures) of whom 53 per cent were in unskilled trades, 14 per cent in skilled work, 5 per cent in technical and associated positions and 7 per cent in management.<sup>4</sup> According to ZCATWU, in Zimbabwe, more women are working in the construction sector compared to ten years ago.

In the MENA region, women work in building materials, particularly in ceramics as decorators and packing as well as administration but it is very rare for women to work on the construction sites or in public works.

### Asia Pacific

In South Asia, there has been a slight increase in women entering semi-skilled and skilled jobs in construction and there is greater receptivity among contractors about employing women. In India, women make up from 30 per cent to 50 per cent of the workforce. The overwhelming majority of all construction workers are on temporary contracts, or are casual workers, paid on a daily basis. Over 80 per cent are on daily wages. Women are nearly all unskilled workers, carrying out the heaviest and most repetitive jobs, classified as unskilled workers, although they may have learnt skills on the job. They are paid one third to one half of a skilled workers' salary paid to men. Women work in cleaning building sites, carrying bricks and other materials to the skilled masons and carpenters. As mechanisation increases, many of the manual jobs, particularly those performed by women, may cease to exist. One study in Ahmedabad (2006) found that the proportion of skilled workers had increased from 24 per cent to 39 per cent over a five year period.<sup>5</sup>

In Southeast Asia, there has been an increase of women in construction in Myanmar and Indonesia. In Cambodia, women are mainly working in bricklaying. In Malaysia, there are virtually no women in the construction trades but some work as cooks or cleaners on the sites. In South Korea, women are working mainly as helpers and labourers. In recent years, young women are taking up vocational training courses to be qualified as construction equipment operators for tower cranes, forklift trucks, diggers and as tradespersons such as tilers, form workers and bar benders.

In Australia, most women enter the industry as unskilled labourers and start in the lowest and most precarious work, such as cleaners and traffic controllers. Opportunities for on-the-job mentoring to aid skills development are very limited for women in such temporary forms of employment. For access to the more highly skilled trades, which provide better pay and security, a person must have both the money to afford training fees and the time availability to attend training. The pre-apprenticeship schemes are unpaid and do not lead to a job. It is only on completion of an apprenticeship that jobs and wage parity can be secured.

### Europe

In the EU, women comprise approximately 10 per cent of the construction workforce, a figure that has not changed significantly in decades. The number of young women joining the construction trades remains very low.

In the UK, women represent 12 per cent of the construction workforce and these figures have not changed much since the 1990s. Women comprise less than 3 per cent of the operatives compared to 10 per cent of the professions.<sup>6</sup> In Austria, the Construction Trade Union notes that while 8.5 per cent of apprentices in building and woodworkers are women, the tradeswomen on site only comprise 2.5 per cent of the total workforce (2015).<sup>7</sup> Women comprise about 3.1 per cent of the union membership. In North Macedonia, women are largely employed in administrative or technical posts. In one company, Granit S.A Construction, 11 years ago, there were only 20 women among 2000 workers. Now there are 80 women engineers and technicians and 320 in administrative and planning sections.

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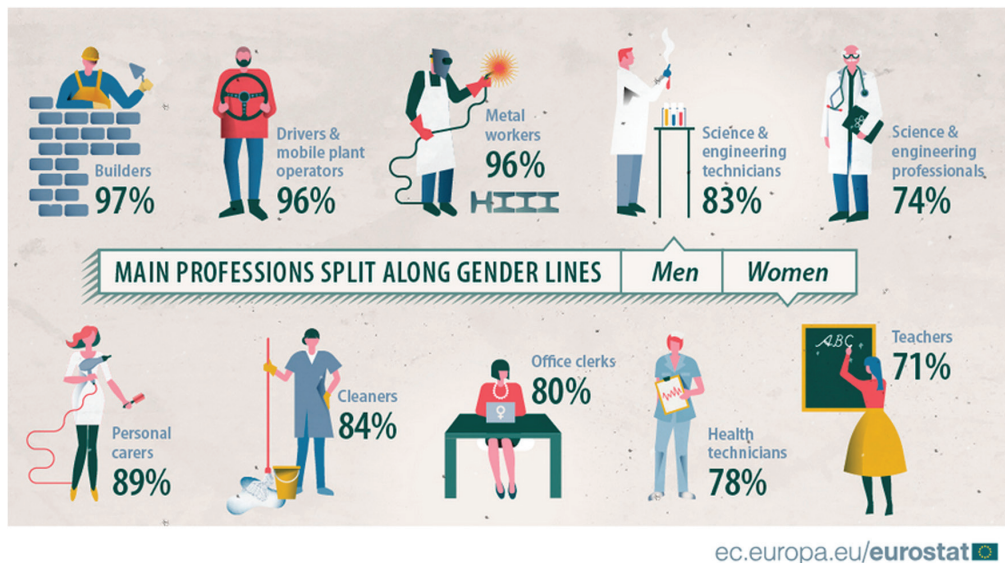
<sup>4</sup> Figures from South African Women in Construction (SAWIC)

<sup>5</sup> At the Kadiyanaka: Challenges faced by Construction Workers In Ahmedabad (2005) Study of construction workers of Ahmedabad City, Shri Purshottam Vankar et al SEWA January 2005 available at <https://www.wiego.org/publications/kadiyanaka-challenges-faced-construction-workers-ahmedabad>

<sup>6</sup> Linda Clarke et al 'No more softly, softly: Review of women in the construction industry workforce' May 2015

<sup>7</sup> 'Women in Construction': The importance of employee and trade union involvement – A survey of the Austrian situation Brigitte Schulz GBH Austrian Construction Trade union pp. 43 – 47 in CLR News 3/2015 European Institute for Construction Labour Research [www.clr-news.org](http://www.clr-news.org)

In the Nordic countries, there are increasing numbers of women in the painting industry. In Sweden, women painters are 11 per cent of the union membership, and in Denmark, they are almost 40 per cent of the union. However, in other trades, the proportion is smaller. In Norway, women comprised 8.6 per cent of the building and construction industry and in Finland the proportion is about 5 per cent (2017).<sup>8</sup>



## Latin America

In Latin America, there are more women joining construction trades in the Southern Cone countries, such as Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay. In the Andean countries, there are some women carpenters and bricklayers and heavy equipment machine operators but it is not common. Both in the Andean countries and in Central America and Mexico, women are now often employed as '*banderilleras*', the road traffic controllers with stop/go signs.

In Guatemala, gender segregation in construction is very prominent. For example, there are no women bricklayers at all. Women are working in construction materials wholesalers, either in the warehouses or as secretaries. They also work as '*quebradoras*', or stonebreakers; women collect stones from the river beds and around the foot of the volcanoes, and then break the stone for use in road construction.

In Bolivia, indigenous women often accompany their male spouses who migrate to work in construction or road maintenance. They may be considered as unpaid family labourers, or if they are paid, they only have verbal contracts.<sup>9</sup> In Ecuador, FEDESOME is a trade union of heavy machine operators which offers professional training courses and has now opened up courses on gender and occupational health because more women are joining the industry.

In Argentina, UOCRA notes that there has been a small increase in the numbers of women working as '*pañoleras*' or stockroom controllers, in electrical installations and in finishing work. In the informal brick-making sector, women work as part of a family unit, often considering they are not working but just 'helping out'. In Uruguay, according to a study in 2011, women make up 5 per cent of the construction workforce but are largely working in administration or as professionals, and a small proportion in unskilled cleaning, gardening and maintenance.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Statistics provided by Josephine Krantz, Swedish Painters Union in written submission 8.12.2020

<sup>9</sup> 'Mujeres del Sector de la Construcción en Bolivia, Oficina de la OIT para los Países Andinos, 2017

<sup>10</sup> 'Estudio de género en la industria de la construcción en Uruguay', Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo, 2018

## North America

In the USA women make up 10 per cent of the construction industry workforce (2019) with 87 per cent in office positions and only 2.5 per cent working in construction trades.<sup>11</sup> In Canada, the number of women has increased slightly in recent years, with women making up 13 per cent of the total workforce. In 2019, the number of women working directly on construction projects increased to 4.7 per cent up from 3.8 per cent in 2018. In some states, such as Alberta and British Columbia, trades women make up more than 6 per cent of the on-site workforce.

## Section 2: Women's access to vocational training, apprenticeships and skills qualifications' assessments and certification

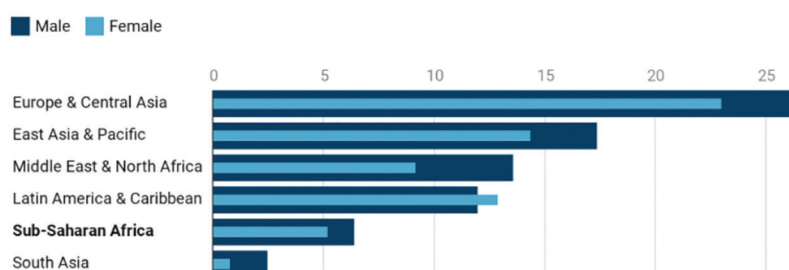
One of the biggest barriers to gender equality is segregation in employment and education and training. Despite many initiatives to encourage women to study non-traditional trades and professions, there has been very little advance in the last decade. In fact, in the EU, segregation has increased.<sup>12</sup> While fewer women than men are able to access vocational training, there are consistently higher numbers of women in full-time construction education and training in the EU as a whole than are found in construction employment. The main barriers to women's employment have not significantly changed over the last thirty years: inappropriate and poor working conditions and long hours; discriminatory recruitment practices and a male-dominated macho work ethos and culture. In some countries, including in Sweden, there is a marked tendency for tradeswomen to leave their occupation around the age of their first child.

In Europe, another significant factor is the changing structure of the labour market. The fragmentation of work, the casualisation of labour and company risk-shifting practices are obstacles to longer-term workforce development and negatively impact on initiatives to support the participation of women and other disadvantaged groups.<sup>13</sup>

## Initiatives to support women apprenticeships in trades

Globally there is a vast gender imbalance in access to technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and apprenticeship schemes. Schools do not encourage or do enough to encourage girls to consider technical skills career opportunities and there are entrenched stereotypes perpetrated by parents of young girls and partners about what constitutes a suitable career. TVET programmes are often not designed to accommodate students with family responsibilities and employers are generally reluctant to recruit women as apprentices.

Share of students in secondary education enrolled in vocational programmes (%)



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics. Data retrieved from the World Bank's Gender Data Portal.

## Africa and MENA

In Sub-Saharan Africa the formal TVET system remains small in terms of both public expenditure and enrolment. In 2017, on average 5.9 per cent of students in secondary education were enrolled in vocational programmes and the proportion has actually decreased slightly over the last decade.<sup>14</sup> Women are outnumbered by men

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.bigrentz.com/blog/women-construction>

<sup>12</sup> European Institute of Gender Equality 'Gender Equality Index' June 2020

<sup>13</sup> Thanks to Anne Duggan CFMEU Australia for this point.

<sup>14</sup> <https://blogs.worldbank.org/african/minding-gender-gap-training-sub-saharan-africa-five-things-know> August 12 2019

by a factor of five in TVET training in engineering, manufacturing and construction and in Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) which will increasingly be needed in the BWI sectors.

In the MENA region, on average 14 per cent of young men and 9 per cent of young women enrolled in secondary education are in vocational programmes, although the numbers of women in construction trades, such as painting and plumbing, and wood working are much less. There have been ILO and government funded initiatives to train women in non-traditional trades, such as plumbing, but employers are hesitant about recruiting them. The BWI MENA office is planning to commence a capacity building project in Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt for the period 2021 and 2022, which will focus in the first year on training women in organising and negotiating skills and in the second year on vocational training in plumbing and other trades.

In Mauritius, the CMWEU notes that women are interested in becoming skilled construction workers but because there is no formal structure for skills training, it is difficult for them to join the sector. There is high unemployment in Mauritius, particularly among women and young people. The union has made several proposals to the government to set up formal training schools to encourage women to get quality training, including as machine operators. The union has also opened negotiations with the major construction companies to recruit women as machine operators. While there is an agreement in principle to start training women, because of COVID-19, the project has been postponed.



**Justina Jonas Evola, Metal and Allied Namibian Workers' Union, MANWU General Secretary**

"In Namibia, more young women are registering for vocational training to become trades women. This is partly because the government has a progressive affirmative action act which seeks to support disadvantaged groups, including women. The union is also taking action. In the 2021 regional union work plans, it has been agreed that each union should contact the vocational training centres in their area to discuss how more young women can access construction skills training. Then we hope to present a consolidated proposal at national level. This is work in progress.

However, the other issue is that employers are still not recruiting many women. The union has discussed with the construction industry how they can recruit more qualified women, but the results have not been very satisfactory. There is more success in training civil engineers and architects, but they still face discrimination when it comes to job opportunities. We need to find ways to make the women that are already working in the construction industry more visible to act as role models and to encourage others to follow in their path."

In South Africa, over half the women working in construction are in unskilled jobs, with only 14 per cent of women construction workers in skilled trades, 5 per cent in technical jobs and 7 per cent in management. The Construction Education and Training Authority (CETA) has partnered with South African Women in Construction (SAWIC) to develop skills training programmes for informal trades persons, such as plumbers, electricians and bricklayers. The programme which was due to start in 2021 will include government certification of skills and support to form artisans' cooperatives so the cooperatives can tender for government sponsored projects. CETA has an affirmative action policy whereby in principle there should be 50 per cent women's participation in all its training programmes although this target has been difficult to achieve. In 2020 women comprised only 24 per cent of participants in the artisans' skills programmes.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, the government has an affirmative procurement policy whereby 30 per cent of all projects should be awarded to women. The policy has been in place since 1999 but it is not widely disseminated nor monitored in practice. The BWI affiliates, BCAWU and NUM, have supported policies to encourage more women to access vocational training programmes, while recognising that there are still significant cultural barriers.

In Zimbabwe, the vocational training centres are now managing to recruit considerable numbers of women to train as mechanics and as machine operators, and in the professions, for example there are more women quantity surveyors than men. The government has introduced technical courses into the State education

<sup>15</sup> CETA dialogue: 'Making women the centre of skills development in the construction industry', 27 August 2020 available at: <https://mg.co.za/special-reports/2020-09-02-women-in-construction/>



curriculum, so it is now more common for both girls and boys to study trades such as bricklaying and carpentry at secondary school. However, according to ZCATWU, there are still many cultural barriers and employers still discriminate against women in recruitment.

### Asia Pacific

In Australia, in New South Wales,<sup>16</sup> one study found that women comprise less than 10 per cent of the applicants to trade apprenticeship programmes, and only 2 per cent of employers have a policy to encourage female apprentices. Furthermore 20 per cent of employers considered that women would simply not fit in to the workplace culture and 40 per cent considered there would be hidden costs involved in recruiting women.

In Victoria, the CFMEU has been a registered training provider since 1993. The CFMEU established a training centre for High-Risk Work in 2005 and recruited skilled construction workers as trainers and assessors, and specialist teachers to assist workers with the literacy requirements of licensing. The training is funded through industry agreements and release for workers to attend training. Most workers receive training free of charge which facilitates women's access and participation. Because of the decline in numbers of entrants and completions in trades training programmes, in 2014, the union decided to develop a carpentry pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programme for commercial carpentry. The programme has been very successful in placing and retaining apprentices, both young women and men, from the 16 to 23 year old age group.

#### **Anne Duggan, Education and Training Unit Coordinator, Victoria CFMEU**

'Inequality of opportunity for women to participate in the construction industry is systemic and starts in our schools. Young women are not exposed to career opportunities in construction nor are they encouraged to explore options. The CFMEU delivers basic OHS training to schools to encourage young people into the industry. We train around 1000 secondary school students each year, and invariably the classes are made up of boys. We suspect that careers and other teachers are not aware enough of the vast array of jobs and opportunities available to women in the industry. So, our current project is to work with careers' teachers to expose them to the industry so they have better knowledge to pass onto young women in schools. We firmly believe that one of our roles in the CFMEU is to find and implement educational solutions and strategies that will improve the recruitment, retention and support of women in our industry and to work with those who share our ambition.'<sup>17</sup>



In India, the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) as part of its Agenda 2030 have developed a number of programmes for construction skills training, as part of its vision to achieve a 'Skilled India'. The Vocational Training Programme for Women under the MSDE aims at creating better employment opportunities for women of various socio-economic levels and different age groups. BWI in India has established a partnership with two sector skill councils, the Construction Skill Development Council of India (CSDCI) and the Paints and Coating Skill Council (PCSC) to provide skills training for women in masonry and painting respectively. The unions identify the women candidates, who are already working informally in the construction sector. The courses are residential. The CSDCI carries out the assessment of the trained candidates and issues the skills certifications.

Furthermore, in cooperation with the German Trade Union Confederation (DGB), BWI and selected affiliates have developed a skills training and capacity development programme, through rights-based training, labour laws and leadership training for women construction workers, both in India and Nepal. The unions have the dual responsibility of mobilising women workers and their families to take part in skills training and they also seek to provide post-training job linkages, by undertaking dialogue with contractors and builders' companies. In cooperation with its affiliate, UPGMD, the BWI has transformed a former child labour school at Fatehpur Sikri, Agra, Uttar Pradesh, into a skills training centre, affiliated to the PCSC. In 2019 and 2020, the training was conducted by two women 'master' (or mistress?) trainers certified by the PCSC. This project is one of the few initiatives in India that focuses on skills training for women construction workers in the informal sector.

<sup>16</sup> Women in trade apprenticeships: integrated research report by Quay Connection for the New South Wales State Training Services, March 2014

<sup>17</sup> Written submission Anne Duggan, CFMEU 9.02.2021

However, there are still considerable barriers for employers to take on women in certain skills. Generally, there is more receptivity to recruiting women as painters and in masonry than in other trades.

SEWA is also supporting skills training for construction workers in different States in North India. Since 2003, they have trained over 20,000 women. In Ahmedabad, Gujarat, SEWA sister organisation, the Mahila Housing SEWA Trust, supports the Karmika School for Construction Workers. The courses cover plumbing, electricity, stonecutting, carpentry and masonry and are from 10 days to 2 months. The women receive a stipend of INR 150 per day, and a number of local construction companies contribute to the cost, with SEWA providing the difference. The courses also include basic literacy and are combined with other income-generating activities. On completion of the course, the women are certified by the CSDCI. A 2013 survey of women who had taken part in the courses found that 50 per cent of the women had found skilled employment; that 80 per cent reported a significant rise in income and the number of days worked per month. Furthermore, the women reported that contractors treated them with more respect and cases of sexual or verbal abuse had decreased.<sup>18</sup>

Apart from skills training, SEWA is helping women register with the Construction Workers' Welfare Board of Gujarat. The construction companies must pay one per cent of the project cost of a building site into the Welfare Board fund. Once registered, workers are entitled to health insurance for the family, maternity leave, education assistance for their children and a burial allowance. However, there are many obstacles to getting women registered. *'It is a very tedious process, as the Welfare Board officials are very stringent and demand that all documents are in order. For instance, if the name is not identical on the identity card and the proof of residence, the official may reject the application. There is also a high turnover of staff at the Board and each officer may have his own requirements and procedures and you have to start from scratch. It is very cumbersome'*. Ramila Purshottam Parma, Construction Workers Coordinator, SEWA Urban Union, Ahmedabad.<sup>19</sup>

In South Korea, there are no specific vocational training programmes for women. State-funded training centres are evaluated annually by the Construction Workers Mutual Aid Association, a government agency. Starting 2021, a new innovative system will be introduced whereby additional credit points are given to training centres with a higher women's participation rate. KFCITU also has plans to demand that the government develop women-focused vocational training programmes and policies to recruit more women into the construction trades.



In the Philippines, the NUBCW notes that while there are women who complete construction skills training, they are rarely recruited by the companies, so they often change and look for other forms of employment. The main government training institute, the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), has a women's centre which provides free training courses but only a few places are available each year. Now the courses are online, which makes access even harder. NUBCW successfully lobbied for a gender-sensitivity orientation to be included in all the TESDA courses. It considers that skills training should be offered locally so it is easier for women to attend and that the union should also participate in the training.

### Europe and Central Asia

The EFBWW has called for targeted initiatives to make the construction and wood industries more attractive to women workers, with specific attention to the gender dimensions raised by the COVID-19 crisis.<sup>20</sup>

In Switzerland, women started to enter the painting profession during the 1980s and the proportion of women among apprentices increased from 4 per cent (1979) to 15 per cent (1982). In the last 20 years, the proportion of women in painting apprenticeships has levelled off at around 40 per cent. In contrast, the proportion of women among apprentices in the plastering trade is only about 5 per cent.

<sup>18</sup> <https://fr.scribd.com/document/170490531/India-Karmika-School-for-Women-Construction-Workers>

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Ramila Purshottam Parma and Rashim Bedi with author 20.01.2021

<sup>20</sup> 26 concrete demands to direct EFBWW priorities in the coming 12 months, EFBWW Executive Committee 26 May 2020 available at <https://www.efbww.eu/news/26-concrete-demands-to-direct-efbww-priorities-in-the-coming-12/929-a>

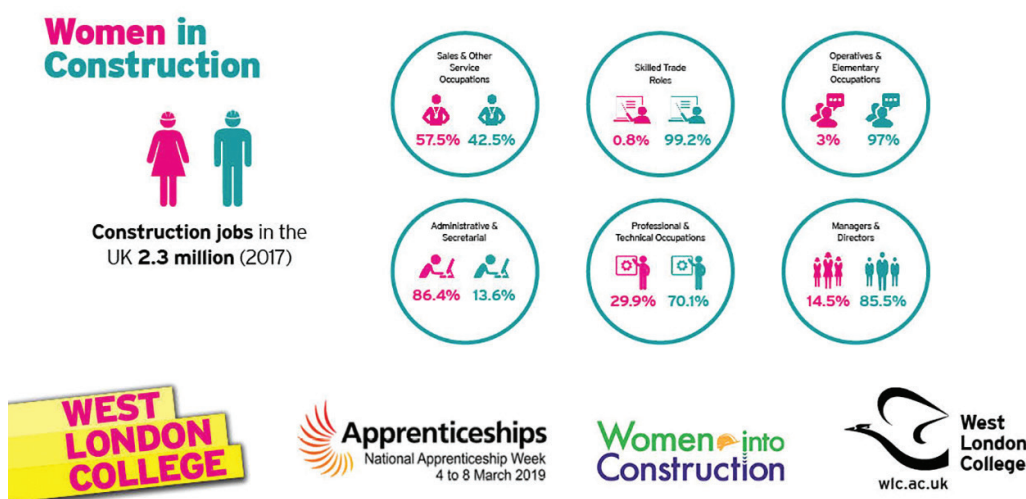
### Rita Schiavi, Chair of the BWI International Women's Committee

“The issue in Switzerland is that while there are many women apprentices in the painting trade, after a few years working they leave for other jobs. In painting companies covered by the collective agreement, the proportion of men is still around 80 percent. There may be different reasons why women are leaving. Some women may have thought that painting work might be more creative than it is in reality. But another issue is the lack of part-time work opportunities. That is why there is now a joint initiative with the employers to try and introduce more part-time work in the expectation that this may help the industry retain more women. In Switzerland, across all sectors, there are many women part-time workers but at the moment, in the construction trades, part-time work is not common at all. This project is called ‘part-time work in construction’. It will run until 2022 and I think it could have very positive results.”



A survey conducted in the German-speaking part of Switzerland from October 2018 to January 2019 found that a majority of companies (60 per cent) and employees (70 per cent) consider that companies in the painting and plastering sector should offer more part-time jobs. Women were the most in favour with 90 per cent of female painters and 5 out of 6 female plasterers stating that more part-time jobs are needed. Employees and employers cite family as the most important reason for part-time work. The second most important reason for employees is health, followed by further education and leisure and hobbies. The second most important reason cited by employers is to retain skilled workers.

The joint employer-union initiative<sup>21</sup> supports companies that want to introduce part-time work. The share of part-time jobs in the painting and plastering trade has now increased to 7.4 per cent (December 2020). Three years ago, one in 25 jobs was part-time, now it is one in 14 jobs. Over the period 2020-2022, the project aims to develop new promotional materials and tools that can support part-time work. The legal situation also needs to be reviewed and a model contract drawn up in order to clarify ambiguities, such as overtime payments and maximum working hours.



Credit: <https://www.wlc.ac.uk/newsstories/international-women%E2%80%99s-day-2019>

In the UK, women represent about 3 per cent of apprentices in the construction and built environment. UNITE, the union, cites research from the Construction Industry Training Board that women have 50 per cent less chance of being engaged as an apprentice. However, when a contractor at the Hinkley Point Nuclear Power Station in England carried out a blind recruitment process by removing the names and gender of the applicant,

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.teilzeitbau.ch>



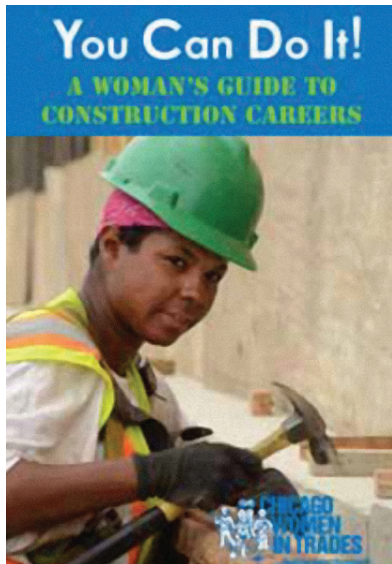
50 per cent of the recruits were women. *'It is not a lack of interest among women but direct discrimination on the part of employers', Gail Cartmail, UNITE, the Union, Assistant General Secretary.*

In North Macedonia, there has been a large exodus of skilled construction workers to other EU countries where salary levels are considerably higher. Some companies have carried out careers talks in secondary schools to encourage more women to join skilled trades and the construction professions. However, parents often put girls off saying it is not suitable for them. *'I have talked to my company managers about recruiting more women. I recommended that the company gives young women scholarships to study a trade or profession with the promise of a job if they complete the training successfully. They are still considering whether to do so.'* Ivana Dimitrova, SGIP North Macedonia.

## Latin America

In Guatemala, the construction and services union, SINCS-G, has signed a memorandum of understanding with the National University of San Carlos, to carry out online courses at the 'Nilton Freitas training centre', in Quetzaltenango. The Centre is jointly administered by the union and the municipal government and was inaugurated in February 2020.

In Argentina, the government and some provincial governments have supported vocational training initiatives for women in construction trades. *'Mujeres a la obra Santa Fe'*<sup>22</sup> provides training for women in construction trades. The non-profit organisation signed an agreement with one of the construction companies to recruit women once they have obtained the skills certificate. In Buenos Aires, the Sub-secretary of Labour, Industry and Commerce has offered free training courses for women in painting, plumbing and furniture restoration. The aim is to provide women with the skills so that they can either carry out home improvements or else work in the construction industry.<sup>23</sup> In Viedma, UOCRA has presented a proposal to the government to train women in construction trades and so that in the future, construction companies carrying out public works will be required to recruit a certain number of women workers.<sup>24</sup>



Source: Chicago Women in Trades

## North America

In Canada, the British Columbia Centre for Women in the Trades provides support and resources for tradeswomen as well as training and employment matching. In the USA, there are a number of organisations that provide support for women professionals in the construction industry. There are also networks of women in the trades that offer a range of services to help women who are planning to enter the trades, and provide mentoring and other support. BWI has hosted Tradeswomen Building Bridges to support a North American delegation to meet BWI affiliates in India and to network with trades women in the Philippines and Australia.<sup>25</sup>

Nonetheless, only 3.6 per cent of US federally registered construction trades apprentices were women in 2019. In some States, there are pre-apprenticeship programmes for women. Among others, Non-traditional Employment for Women (NEW), in New York, the Oregon Tradeswomen (OT) and Chicago Women in the Trades (CWIT) have helped to increase women's access. For example, in New York, women have now reached 14 per cent of apprentices at Sheet Metal Local 28 partnering with NEW; 12.3 per cent of NECA-IBEW Electrical Apprenticeship Training Programme, partnering with OT; and 10 per cent at Ironworkers Local 63, partnering with CWIT.<sup>26</sup> These programmes are supported by 'Women in Apprenticeships and Non-traditional Occupations' (WANTO) grants from the US Department of Labor Women's Bureau. In Massachusetts, women reached 9.8 per cent of the union apprenticeship programmes in 2020.

22 [https://www.ellitoral.com/index.php/id\\_um/256872-las-mujeres-se-abren-paso-en-oficios-de-la-construccion-iniciativa-en-santa-fe-area-metropolitana.html](https://www.ellitoral.com/index.php/id_um/256872-las-mujeres-se-abren-paso-en-oficios-de-la-construccion-iniciativa-en-santa-fe-area-metropolitana.html)

23 <https://www.riesgozero.info/areas-de-especialidad/ergonomia-y-psicosociologia/condiciones-de-trabajo/las-mujeres-aprenden-gratuitamente-oficios-relacionados-con-la-construccion/>

24 <https://www.plataformaarquitectura.cl/cl/906603/el-rol-de-la-mujer-en-la-construccion-tiempos-de-cambio->

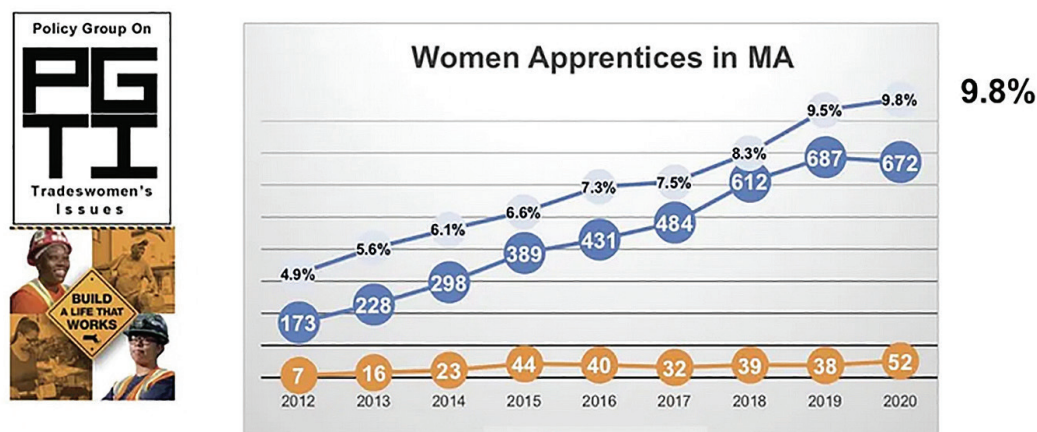
25 <https://tradeswomenbuild.org/>

26 Women-Only Pre-Apprenticeship Programs: Chicago Women in Trades and the National Center for Women's Equity and Employment, N.D. available at [https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Women-Only-Pre-Apprenticeship-Programs\\_low-res-1.pdf](https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Women-Only-Pre-Apprenticeship-Programs_low-res-1.pdf)



North America's Building Trades Unions (NABTU), is an alliance of 14 national and international unions in the building and construction unions, including some BWI affiliates. It has developed an apprenticeship readiness programmes which focus on recruiting communities of colour, women and veterans into the building trades. Working with contractor partners, it also provides construction training, operating over 1900 apprenticeship training centres.

### Current demographics of women and people of color in Registered Apprenticeship Programs in Massachusetts- Q3 2020 Report



Source: <https://policygroupontradeswomen.org/>

The Policy Group on Tradeswomen's Issues, a multi-stakeholder collaboration founded in 2008, including unions and apprenticeship programmes, has developed a framework for 'crushing the barriers' to women's access to good jobs in the union construction trades. Based on an integrated supply and demand strategy, it examines how to develop and communicate the business case; how to collaborate across stakeholder groups; make tradeswomen visible; and set targets and accountability mechanisms.<sup>27</sup>

## Section 3: Women's participation in construction trade unions

### Organising women workers - what is working and why?

Most unions report only a marginal increase in women's union membership in the construction sector over the last decade. In some countries, the number of women union members has increased because the unions have reformed their statutes and set up new structures to organise workers in informal employment or in new sectors. Often encouraged by BWI regional and international policies and programmes, and with support from BWI regional staff, unions have focused new organising campaigns on young people and women.

Nearly all unions report a major drive, often led by the senior leadership, to provide visible support for women workers. Many unions have appointed women's officers, or a Secretary for Women's Affairs, and established women's committees at different levels of the unions. Other unions have set up women's networks or women's groups to provide mutual support and to empower women. Unions have also adopted campaigns, policies and programme to encourage and support women's participation in the union and to provide leadership training so that they can stand for elected positions.

For the great majority of BWI affiliates, it is now general practice to ensure that women participate in the regular training programmes, either through a quota for women's participation or outreach to ensure women attend. Some unions have developed specific union leadership courses for women.

<sup>27</sup> Policy Group on Tradeswomen's Issues 'Gender equity in the construction workforce: A proven framework for rushing barriers' available at <https://policygroupontradeswomen.org/>

BWI has adopted strong gender equality policies, culminating in the 2017 World Congress decision to establish a 30 per cent quota for women's participation in all decision-making bodies and to ensure that 30 per cent of places on training programmes are earmarked for women, with an additional target of 30 per cent young women in regional youth and women's seminars. The election of seven women to the BWI World Board when previously there had only been one member set an important marker. Many affiliates have incorporated similar policies into their own Statutes. Over the last 5 to 10 years, BWI also systematically encouraged the participation of women in all training programmes, such as occupational health and safety and collective bargaining. In addition, a young women leaders programme was established to foster future leadership.

As a consequence, the quality of women's participation in unions has changed significantly. Women are involved in policy issues and in shaping union agendas on economic and political issues, not only on gender equality issues.

## Africa: Increasing women's participation and organising new sectors

Over the last decade there has been a marked increase in the number of women in senior positions in the Sub-Saharan African trade unions, with more women General Secretaries, Deputy General Secretaries and National Presidents. Women are also participating in occupational health and safety training and as workplace safety representatives.

*'The BWI policy of ensuring 30 per cent participation in training programmes has paid clear dividends. BWI's insistence on this policy has been important and unions have adopted similar policies. Union leaders used to say 'we have no women members' and the environment could be quite hostile towards them but that has all changed. Role-modelling has also been important - women have seen how others have taken up leadership positions and so they think they can also do it.'* Crecentia Mofokeng, Regional Secretary, BWI Africa and MENA Region.

*'In the MENA region, we have a women's network and they meet and discuss their challenges. Over the last few years, and for the first time, women have been elected onto the Executive Committees of unions whereas previously the leadership had been only men. Now women are also part of the decision-making process. BWI guidance has played a role but it is also because there is a change of mentality and the leadership now believes women should be there with them.'* Wassim Rifi, MENA Project Coordinator

In Mauritius, in 2019, the CMWEU was able to include the landscape gardening sector in the legislation governing the construction sector. There are many women in landscaping and they do the low-skilled jobs, such as maintenance, but previously they were not covered by the labour legislation. Now, due to the union's advocacy, the landscape workers have better protection and the union has 200 new women members who joined during 2019 and 2020. They are union members not yet at Executive Committee level.



**Justina Jonas Evola, General Secretary, MANWU**

"The MANWU leadership is committed to empowering women in all the sectors under its mandate. All the project labour agreements signed with contractors include negotiations on specific issues affecting women. It is never easy to negotiate these special needs with contractors but we insist. In 2021, MANWU has agreed that all regions should include women's needs in the collective bargaining proposals they put forward on wages and conditions of employment. Furthermore, the regional chairpersons have been instructed to ensure that women's issues and activities are reported on at every constitutional meeting. The union has also agreed that the shop steward induction courses will focus on the Namibian Affirmative Action Act so that they are well informed and can ensure that each workplace complies with its provisions".

In Rwanda, most construction workers are employed on informal project-based contracts and do not have formal skills qualification. Although STECOMA is seeking to enter negotiations with some construction



Source: <https://www.fnv.nl/>

companies, there are still no collective contracts for the sector. Most construction workers are trained through informal apprenticeships and have no formal qualifications. The union therefore has a different organising model which seeks to respond to the country's reality. In 2018, the union signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Rwanda Polytechnic and Rwanda Technical Vocational Education and Training Board (RTB) to issue skills certificates by carrying out on-site skills assessments for interested workers. Once the worker has a skills certificate, he or she has more job security because contractors prefer to give jobs to workers with certified skills. The certificates are collected at the union office

which is an opportunity for union leaders to explain the role and work of the union. If the worker agrees to join, their personal details, including gender, are added to the union database.

**Akayezu Laurence Marie, Youth Representative and Assistant to the General Secretariat, STECOMA**

"In 9 out of 10 cases, the workers decide to join the union. Workers only pay a membership fee when they are in work and the union keeps a database of their members. In Kigali, the union has now issued skills certificates for 5,265 workers, of whom 518 are women or about 10 per cent. In the union as a whole, maybe 18 to 20 per cent are women. The union has established women's committees from sector level to national level. So, we organise site visits to keep in touch with members and to hold meetings on safety issues or other concerns. We normally have a side meeting with the women who work on the site in a secluded place and we hear from women about the true situation for them. If there are issues about safety or gender-based violence, we can decide how best to address them.



The government has a policy to encourage more women into technical trades and there is now an increase in women taking vocational training courses in the construction trades. However, some women still lack confidence and some employers think women are not as capable as men. Through mobilisation, sensitisation and advocacy, even though our capacity is not enough, STECOMA is committed to supporting its women members."

In Tunisia, the FGBB began to organise women workers in 2015, particularly in the public works administration and in the ceramics sector. There are now 50 active women members of whom 15 are now elected trade union delegates and there is one woman on the Executive Committee.

In Zimbabwe, the ZCATWU counts about 1,500 women members, representing about 12 per cent of the membership and there is a constitutionally mandated national women's committee, with its own conference and plan of activities. Whenever there are elections at workplace, branch or national level, women are encouraged to stand. Before there were only women as branch secretaries but now there are women as branch chairpersons and women office bearers in the Executive Committee.



**Fozert Mugabe, Deputy General Secretary, ZCATWU**



“I was trained as a secretary and rose through the ranks. In 1994, I was appointed as gender coordinator and it was a mammoth task as we were still trying to integrate women into the mainstream of union activities. With the help of the BWI, I was able to get information about how to organise and recruit women workers. I have seen a lot of changes in my time but I think the most significant has been to see the change of mindset. When I joined, the industry was male-dominated and it was thought that the union leadership was reserved for men. We had to advocate for change in the union Constitution to recognise the women’s structures. We have also achieved a union budget for women’s activities because before requests for funds for women’s activities were just thrown aside as not a priority. Now we can carry out education programmes and do awareness campaigns specifically for women as well as programmes about gender equality for both men and women.”

**Asia Pacific: Developing women’s leadership and setting up women’s structures**

In Asia, there has also been a concerted drive to create women’s structures and bring more women into the union leadership. The BWI Indian Affiliates Council (IAC) was set up in 1992 but remained entirely male-dominated. In 2008, four zonal leadership workshops were held to take stock of women’s participation in the union leadership and consider how to overcome the barriers to women’s leadership. The BWI National Women’s Committee (NWC) was formally established in 2009 with the aim of promoting women union leaders to articulate and give priority to gender issues in unions’ policies and agendas. It now comprises women leaders drawn from all 47 affiliates and has a core committee of 8 elected members and it meets annually.

**Kulwant Kaur, Secretary Bhatta Mazdoor Sabha and current Chair of BWI National Women’s Committee**

“The NWC in the last 12 years has come a long way and today the NWC members are an integral part of the IAC meetings. The NWC Chair presents a report reflecting progress and making recommendations for action for the IAC each year. The same Committee structures have been replicated in Nepal and Bangladesh where the NWCs are steadily evolving. I am proud to be the Chair of an active and vibrant women leaders’ platform. We have embarked on a journey for women’s empowerment and sooner or later, ‘Hum Honge Kamyab’, we are sure to succeed.”



In Indonesia, women only represent a small proportion of the construction workforce. The Indonesian Federation of People Labour Unions that covers construction and building materials has nonetheless adopted strong gender equality policies. The statutes of the union state that the national executive committee is encouraged to meet a 30 per cent quota for women’s participation and the same for delegates at Congress. There is also a quota of 30 per cent women’s participation in training programmes and sometimes women who are not yet union members are invited to take part. Training and organisation programmes focus on union management and collective bargaining. There are also training programmes on reproductive rights and equal pay specifically for women. Women learn how to carry out advocacy and campaigns, and to identify problems, compile reports and submit cases.

In the Philippines, the NUBCW has developed three types of organisational structures, depending on the workers’ employment relationship. The traditional union structure covers members who are directly employed by construction companies. Approximately one seventh of the membership is covered by collective agreements. Under Philippine laws, 20 per cent of the workforce is needed to register a union. Increasingly, workers are self-employed or working on an informal basis, and NUBCW has developed different structures to organise this sector, which is now the majority of its membership. Women workers are generally employed in the informal sector and represent around 30 per cent of the total membership.



### Jane Vargas, Organiser, National Union of Building and Construction Workers, the Philippines

“We have community associations, called Associations of Women Workers in the Construction Industry (AWWCI) where women are organised based on the neighbourhood or community in large cities. We also have guilds for workers who share the same skills, such as masonry. We start with area mapping and contact building and then we either organise a meeting or a basic orientation seminar. The aim is to introduce the organisation, its principles and main advocacy issues and to build awareness about the workers’ situation and the national situation. Our goal is to empower workers, educate and organise them.

We organise all workers but we realise that young people and women have particular needs. Workers may have different skills, different situations but their concerns as workers are the same and if they are organised they can better negotiate. For example, an association can engage in dialogue with the local government and carry out advocacy so the government funded projects recruit women construction workers or support skills training for them.



Because of COVID-19, many workers have lost their jobs and livelihoods and many returned to the provinces. Although it is a challenge to keep in touch, the important thing is that wherever they are working they know their rights as workers and can defend and protect themselves better. We continue our advocacy and campaigns to have women workers fully recognised within the construction sites - that their skills are recognised and they do not face discrimination in terms of wages and benefits and that there are strong health and safety measures.

The current government is anti-labour and many union leaders have been condemned as terrorists and tragically some have been assassinated. So we have to work very carefully at the moment with limited meetings and activities plus there is the continuing situation of COVID-19. We know it is not just a one-time campaign but it takes continuous organising, campaigns, lobbying before the battle is won.”

### Europe: Training women in leadership skills

In Europe, while women’s membership has not necessarily increased, many union leaders note that the quality of their participation has changed significantly. Women have put pressure on male leaders to bring about changes and there has been a good response. Women are now participating not only on gender issues but in all aspects of union policy and decision-making.

In Germany, IGBAU ensures that once a woman is elected to a works council position, they are offered training consisting of three one-week courses. Subjects include labour law and the works council regulations, social protection laws and collective bargaining. These courses are generally for both men and women. There are also women’s leadership skills courses which are open to works council and non-works council members alike. The courses cover soft skills, such as communications, speech-making, conflict management, and team building. Since 2003, IGBAU also offers a training programme for women ‘coaches’ for 20 participants over a two-year period. There are five inter-linked modules and at the end of the course, the women are equipped to conduct similar training programmes themselves.

*‘When women participate in our training and seminar programmes, we have found they become much more active in the work of the union’,* Renate Wapenhensch, Federal Women’s Secretary, IGBAU.

In Sweden, over the last 5 years, women comprised from 10 per cent to 13 per cent of the members of the Painters’ Union. In vocational training schools in the painting courses, 30 per cent of the students are now women but it has not yet led to an increase in the number of women painters because employers still prefer to recruit men. The union has created a women’s network called MIRA with the aim of having one active female member in every region of the country. The women’s contact seeks to raise gender equality issues and provides advice and support to other women members. MIRA also organises conferences and small meetings for women

and arranges site visits to meet with women members. MIRA is not an autonomous group but is part of the regular information channels of the union.

**Josephine Krantz, Painter, mother, union activist of the Swedish Painters' Union and member of the BWI European Regional Women's Committee**

"We want a painting industry based on equality. Women should be able to go to their jobs in the same conditions as men without fear of harassment or discrimination. However, people still do not believe that women are capable of working well as a painter. That's true for customers, employers and even colleagues. But the main responsibility lies with the employers as they have the power to challenge the stigma by setting the example of creating an inclusive work environment."



In Ukraine, PROFUD founded the tower crane operators' union in 2018. While women comprise 21 per cent of the members, they are 45 per cent of the Executive Committee members. One of the goals of the union is to fight for additional benefits for women tower crane operators, to ensure a safe working environment. The union is also fighting for this work to be classified as a hazardous profession with the right to early retirement.

**Kateryna, tower crane operator in Ukraine**

"When I was a young woman in 1980, a tower crane operator was considered one of the best training opportunities for girls, and the majority of the operators were women. It was very easy to access the training then and my family were very proud of me when I qualified. During the period of the Soviet Union, salaries were higher and there were additional payments for working at heights, time in service and other premiums. Now the salaries are much lower and there are no bonuses and it is not classified as a dangerous profession so you do not have the right to early retirement. I'm proud to work in construction and to create things. It is a noble profession but we need to bring back the balance between the work performed and fair payment and recognition."



**Lilya, tower crane operator in Lyiv, Ukraine**



"I was working in construction and had to carry heavy weights and started to have severe health problems, and then an operation. When I recovered, I was 35 years old. I decided to train as a tower crane operator as it was less physically demanding although it required a lot of concentration. At first my family (parents, husband and three children) thought I must be joking and they were worried because of the danger. But now after several years as a tower crane operator, they are very supportive. I like the work, the altitude, observing the landscape and I have a good collaboration with the team of workers. However, the main problem is serious safety violations and very poor working conditions. Neither the government nor the employers consider occupational health and safety a priority and the labour inspection lacks real power and authority. That is why we need the union."

## Latin America: Affiliation drives for women and young workers

In Latin America, unions have upgraded their membership databases and are now better able to identify where their women members are working. Affiliation drives have focused on young people and women and the training dynamic has changed so women are systematically included in training programmes. Some unions have sought to respond to the increasing precarious nature of employment by changing the union statutes to allow for informal workers and the self-employed to become members. This in turn has opened paths to organising more women because the majority of women in construction trades are employed on an informal basis. In Brazil, because the law does not permit membership of registered unions by workers without a formal employment contract, some unions have created a new membership category of 'service member' (socio usuario) whereby the worker can access union services, such as legal support, but cannot vote or be elected. These changes have also made it easier for women to join unions.

In some countries, such as Ecuador and Argentina, the unions have organised specific training programmes for women workers. For example, UOCRA Women's Department developed a new training programme 'New masculinities in the construction industry'. During 2020, the programme went on-line and gave the opportunity for young men and women workers to discuss gender stereotypes, the sexual division of labour, violence in the world of work and what is meant by new masculinities.

### Organising women workers in Guatemala, Julio Diaz, General Secretary and Leslie Cifuentes, Secretary for Women, SINCS-Guatemala

"In 2005, SINCS-G was restructured and the statutes were reformed to create three new posts of Secretaries for Women, Indigenous Peoples and for Young People. Construction work is largely informal and there is a lot of internal migration so it is difficult to maintain contact with the workers. Now today we have around 4000 members in construction and 6800 in forestry.

In Guatemala, there really are very few women construction workers. I doubt that there is a single woman bricklayer. So we have focused on organising women in construction materials' companies. Women are mainly working in the warehouses or stores departments or in administration. Women also work in stone-breaking (quebradoras de piedrín). We have had some success in organising in these areas. We have created a women's network and have also invited the wives of construction workers to join.

The idea to set up the Secretary for Women was a political decision based on principles of social justice. BWI was also a motivation as they had supported young workers, and young women workers. I joined SINCS-G and became the first young workers' coordinator for Latin America so wanted to ensure women were present in the union too. The Women's Secretary is supported by a five-member women's committee and there are women's leaders in various Departments of the country. We organise training sessions in the houses of different members on issues that they request. Sometimes it is about health issues, others are income-generating projects, such as soap-making. During the COVID pandemic, when there is so much unemployment, we have tried to collect funds and provide food for those most in need."

In Argentina, UOLRA amended its Statutes in 2016 so that brick-makers working in family-owned businesses or the self-employed could become members. Previously, the organisation, which was founded over 70 years ago, only organised workers in factories, which represent about 20 per cent of the total brick-making workforce. Over the last 5 years, UOLRA has increased its membership very rapidly and now has 35 provincial delegates in 17 provinces.

UOLRA signed a cooperation agreement with the Federation of Municipalities so that in the future it will be possible to register the land holdings where brick kilns operate as cooperatives in the name of the union. Land tenure has been a major issue as the kilns generally operate on the periphery of towns in unused lands which as the towns expand become more valuable and their use is disputed. The union has also sought to establish Provincial Brick Makers Coordinating Committees (*Mesas Provinciales Ladrilleras*) with all main stakeholders so as to develop an integrated plan of support for the sector, including access to water, improvements to housing, and settled migration status. It is also negotiating with the Ministry of Mining Production so that for the first time, some government funding will be available for brick kilns.

The union has organised the women brick makers or '*ladrilleras*' by helping them in the first place to identify as workers with rights and not only housewives who lend a helping hand to the male members of the family. Elected at the last Congress in 2019, the new Executive Board now has 4 women out of 17 members, including



the posts of Secretary of Organising and Gender. UOLRA has organised training programmes for the women brick makers, sometimes with the support of the local government, to help them understand the value of their work and also to promote community health initiatives and family horticulture.

**Ana Lemos, Organising Secretary, UOLRA, Argentina**

“I didn’t start in the union as a militant feminist. I wasn’t born feminist but now I say I am a popular economy feminist. I have learnt through my own organising work. For some years, I was the only woman in the trade union. I also had the support of the UOLRA General Secretary, Luis Cáceres. We realised that women were carrying out many tasks in the kilns but that they did not recognise or value their work. So we started in Misiones to form a network of women brick makers. We discussed how to make women’s work visible as they carried out brick stacking, and cleaning and many other tasks. We encouraged women to take up positions in the cooperatives.

It has not been easy to win the confidence of the families. We had to visit over and over again, including house visits. We had to overcome a lot of mistrust. We spoke about Pope Francis and how he has encouraged popular economy workers to organise. We used the language of football. We said that here everyone needs to play for the team except there is no Maradona or Messi. The families work from one generation to the next and there can be up to a fifth generation working in the kilns. Many are also Bolivian migrants who come for a nine-month period. The union has helped the families to organise so they can negotiate a fairer price for the bricks depending on each zone or province and have promoted the formation of cooperatives.”



## North America: Developing support networks for women in male-dominated trades

In the USA, a number of BWI affiliates participate in the annual Tradeswomen Conference which was first convened over ten years ago to provide a support network for women working in the male-dominated industries. The ‘Trades Women Build Nations’ convenes more than 2000 tradeswomen of all ages and skills levels. The conference provides opportunities for networking, learning and leadership development. Participants have also discussed how to increase women’s participation and retention in the skilled trades and to find collective strategies to support women in a male-dominated environment. In 2020, the conference was held online and included a workshop to introduce a new mentorship and retention programme developed for and by tradeswomen: ‘Lean In Circles for Union Tradeswomen’.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>28</sup> <http://nabtu.org/twbn/>



## Section 4: Collective Bargaining and social dialogue – how unions are working to transform workplaces into more gender-friendly environments

Collective bargaining can be a transformative instrument to challenge gender-based and other forms of discrimination and address structural inequalities. For that to happen, unions need to establish participative consultation mechanisms so that women can discuss specific concerns and for these to be formulated into actionable negotiating demands. It is equally essential for women to be trained as negotiators, either in formal union training opportunities, or in mentoring programmes; and for women to participate in negotiating teams on an equal basis with their male counterparts.

Collective bargaining on gender equality issues is most effective when trade unions can negotiate national and sectoral agreements, Company-level bargaining can also play an important role in setting equality objectives, particularly if principles and targets have been established either in legislation or in national sectoral agreements. A combination of central (sectoral or cross-sectoral) agreements that set out equality principles and frameworks, and company-level bargaining on issues such as pay audits and measures concerning reconciliation of work and family life are the most effective way to ensure equality outcomes.

Despite the general downward trend in collective bargaining coverage, there are some promising developments where collective bargaining has been extended to new sectors and to workers in precarious and informal work; or where trade unions have been able to use equality legislation to promote workplace equality. Gender-responsive public services, including health, education and childcare, are important enabling factors which disproportionately benefit women as women's unpaid care work is one of the major barriers preventing them from entering paid employment.

### Preconditions for collective bargaining to impact on gender equality<sup>29</sup>



29 Pillinger J and Wintour N. 'Collective bargaining and gender equality' Agenda Publishing 2019 available at: <http://cup.columbia.edu/book/collective-bargaining-and-gender-equality/9781788210768>

Over the last ten years, in all regions of the BWI, the union collective bargaining agendas have taken up specific issues affecting women workers with much more consistency. Outside of the global North, collective agreements generally include maternity leave provisions, which on occasion improve on statutory minimum requirements and broad non-discrimination clauses which are important policy statements but often lack actionable targets for which employers can be made accountable. It is now much more common for other clauses to be included in the agreements, and for gender-related issues to be integrated into on-going bargaining demands of the unions. The collective bargaining agenda has broadened leading to a more systematic approach to addressing gender inequalities. There is a much higher priority given to how to address women's disproportionate share of domestic and care responsibilities, and increased attention to sexual harassment and domestic violence, brought into the spotlight because of the COVID-19 related lockdowns.

*'Unions are integrating gender issues into their negotiations now. It is not really a discussion any longer because the issues have been mainstreamed.'* Crecentia Mofokeng, Regional Representative for Africa and MENA Region.

BWI affiliates' priorities on gender issues include separate wash and toilet facilities for women, including with sanitary pad disposal bins, and in some cases, free provision of sanitary products; PPE in women's sizes, and including trousers and jackets, not overalls; safe transport facilities for women; extended periods of maternity leave, the right to request a change of jobs when pregnant; maternity leave and protection from dismissal; breast-feeding breaks; menstrual leave and period dignity, policies on equal pay for work of equal value; and clauses prohibiting sexual harassment and violence and procedures to submit a complaint; and advocacy against domestic violence.

Women union leaders emphasise the importance of consulting women workers about their priorities. The extent to which women participate actively in collective bargaining differs. In some countries, women are clearly integrated into the negotiating teams. In other countries, this is less common. For example, some respondents indicated that women are still generally not part of the collective bargaining forum and policy-making process.

## Africa and MENA

In Mauritius, the CMWEU has negotiated additional rest periods for women during their menstruation, and apart from 14 weeks maternity leave, women are entitled to one-hour breast-feeding breaks for 3 months from their return to work; special leave for a still birth or miscarriage; and a premium on the birth of a child of RS 3500 (approximately USD 100). Other demands still in process of negotiation include the provision of free sanitary towels, the prohibition of camera surveillance in the workplace; and that COVID-19 should be treated as an occupational disease.

In Zimbabwe, there is a national collective agreement for the construction sector. The union has been able to improve on the statutory provisions for maternity leave in the agreement, so that if women are normally carrying out strenuous work, when they are pregnant they can request to be transferred to other work. There is also time-off for breast feeding. The union has also taken up issues to ensure a safe working environment, including separate toilets and washing facilities, and PPE so that women have properly fitting work clothes, including jackets and trousers and not overalls. The union has also negotiated safe transport so that women who are picked up to work on remote sites are either seated in a separate section of the truck or have separate transport. In the cement and building materials sector, the CLAWUZ agreement also includes breast-feeding breaks for up to 6 months from the return to work and the principle of equal pay for work of equal value.

## Asia Pacific

In South Korea, the KFCITU has negotiated four-day annual training leave for women tower crane operators and a one-day menstrual leave per month for all women site workers. The union women's committee held a conference in November 2020 to discuss a series of proposals designed to bring more gender equality to construction sites. Among the main issues raised was how to ensure employers implemented regulations that stipulate women should have separate toilets on site. Another issue was the employers' obligation to provide training to the workforce on sexual harassment prevention policies and the need for PPE to be made available in sizes suitable for women.

In Australia, the CFMEU has argued for gender equity requirements in government procurement policies. In Victoria, the CFMEU in partnership with the building unions have put forward a proposal to the State government so any company tendering for a government contract must have completed a comprehensive gender equity audit and drawn up a gender equity plan. The plan must include policies and procedures that support women,

such as safe and respectful training packages for all workers, appropriate amenities, equal pay and family friendly employment policies. It should also set out how it plans to achieve mandated targets so that 10 per cent of estimated labour hours should be completed by women in trades and in non-trade work and that 50 per cent of all mandated apprentices and trainee hours should be completed by women. CFMEU has also proposed there be an independent monitoring body to audit main contractors and sub-contractors on their gender equity practices, policies and procedures. The monitoring body would provide advice to the construction industry and report to government on contractual obligations, and there should be penalties for non-compliance.

## Europe

In Europe, because of the size and complexity of mega construction projects, which mean they are often highly regulated and subject to scrutiny, it has sometimes been possible to secure agreements to set targets for employment goals and working conditions to support the recruitment of women.

### Factors for Success: Negotiating for gender equality on mega construction projects<sup>30</sup>

- An overall agreement with all stakeholders including contractors, sub-contractors, trade unions, clients and local authorities on working conditions and direct employment;
- Contract compliance measures, including equality goals in all tender documents subject to continuous monitoring;
- Recruitment targets including on gender and diversity and preference for local recruitment, and use of a blind recruitment application process;
- Training opportunities, including formal links with local colleges and universities;
- Working conditions including structured working hours, childcare provisions, inclusive maternity leave, flexible working arrangements and mentoring;
- Gender equality commitments from senior level by contractors, trade unions and local authorities;

In Austria, the GBH has been successful in improving several collective agreements regarding gender equality, including the recognition that child-raising leave be recognised in long-service related claims. The union has also negotiated higher wage increases for the lower grades which help women in particular as they are disproportionately in low paid jobs. The government introduced compulsory company income reports in 2011 and some works councils have used these reports to call for specific measures to close the gender pay gap.<sup>31</sup>

In North Macedonia, there is a national collective contract for the construction industry. However, the enforcement of its provisions is often very poor, particularly on issues such as overtime pay and working on holidays. One of the main union demands is to lower the retirement age which is currently 64 for men and 62 for women to 60 for men and 58 for women. The union argues construction is strenuous work and an earlier retirement age is needed.

In Germany, IGBAU supports affirmative action policies to address gender-based job segregation in the construction industry. While there has been a steady increase in the numbers of women architects and engineers, there is still pay discrimination. A women civil engineer is earning 20 per cent less than their male counterparts. IGBAU anticipates taking many legal cases on pay and unfair dismissals over the period 2021-2022.

In Sweden, gender equality issues are included in the collective agreement for the construction sector signed by Byggnads to ensure it is relevant for both men and women. In 2020, the focus was on strengthening protection for pregnant women so that a pregnant woman will receive an additional 10 per cent payment if they are in receipt of a benefit from the Swedish Social Insurance Agency. In addition, two working groups have been established for the period 2020-23: the first is to review gender equality, integration and diversity and the second is to draft a new recommendation against sexual harassment and other forms of harassment.

In Ukraine, it is obligatory to have a section on gender equality in each collective agreement. For the last five years, the Ministry of Labour has refused to register any collective agreement that does not have a gender equality section, including equal rights for women based on the ILO Convention 100 on Equal Remuneration. For the next bargaining round for the sectoral agreement, PROFUD intends to strengthen the language on gender equality. The draft text includes a section on promoting relations between the employer and employees,

<sup>30</sup> Based on excerpts from Linda Clarke et al 'No more softly, softly': Review of women in the construction workforce, University of Westminster and University of Loughborough, May 2015 p.10

<sup>31</sup> Op cit CLR 3 .2015 pp. 43- 47



and between employees, based on gender equality and non-discrimination; measures to prevent sexual harassment; measures to create working conditions to ensure equality between men and women at work; and measures to ensure equal pay for work of equal value between men and women.

In the UK, UNITE considers that one of the major issues for women working on sites is to ensure toilets are of good standard and kept clean through regular checks. The other issue is to make sure that safety wear is available at a good price in a range of sizes suitable for both men and women. The priority is to take up issues that the union can change and to ensure that the women who do join the workforce are not put off by basic environmental protection issues.



**Gail Cartmail, Assistant General Secretary, UNITE, the Union, United Kingdom**

“What are our women telling us? The overwhelming issue is access to clean toilets and reasonable facilities, such as the availability of sanitary wear disposal bins. It’s mind-blowing that these are still the issues in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. I’ve heard stories you can’t really believe - an employer who assigned the key to the women’s toilets to a male supervisor so that the women workers would have to cross the site and ask for the key, cross back to go to the toilet and then cross back again to return the key. Another woman reported that the supervisor had assigned a male colleague to stand in front of the toilet to ensure privacy for the women. It’s not rocket science. If you ask why women are not staying in the industry, it’s because they have to face such daily humiliation.

UNITE has adopted a period dignity campaign and had a number of wins which show that members, shop stewards and some clients are open to the conversation.

The campaign was developed holistically by the women in the union and the roll out has been phenomenally successful. It has been adopted by our shop stewards’ committees, which are very male-dominated. We take pride in the campaign because it shows that women are a valued part of the workforce. At a major site in South West England, sanitary products are now available to women in their toilet areas and there is signage around period dignity. Actually the campaign started as a solidarity action with sisters in Zimbabwe who had no sanitary pads so we organised a shipment to Zimbabwe. But then we realised that it was an issue here in the UK as well. Men don’t bat an eyelid when you talk about period poverty and the costs of sanitary items. I feel it is about being bold. In all our union offices, there are sanitary items in the toilets. We say it is the just the same as toilet rolls, a basic necessity.”

## Latin America

The BWI office for Latin America is the only region to date that has carried out a systematic analysis of the gender-related clauses in the collective agreements of BWI affiliates. A study conducted in 2015 covered 14 collective contracts in construction (8), building materials (4) and wood (2).<sup>32</sup> The study covers clauses on maternity and paternity protection, clauses on family responsibilities and occupational health and safety.

## Gender clauses in collective contracts in Latin America:

On maternity leave: the majority of the collective contracts include additional maternity leave entitlements beyond the statutory legal requirements, breast-feeding breaks, premiums for the birth of a child; the option of one-year unpaid leave and a guarantee of returning after maternity leave to the former job (SUNTRACS-Panama).

<sup>32</sup> Promoción de la Igualdad de género en la negociación colectiva ICM diciembre 2018

*On family responsibilities:* agreements include additional payments to support children's education, assistance in the case of a child with a disability, and scholarships for university studies (SINTRASKINCO-Colombia) as well as payment of 50 per cent of nursery costs for children under school age and special permission for single-parent households to take children to medical appointments (MARRETA-Pernambuco, Brazil).

*On occupational health and safety:* the contracts signed by MARRETA-Pernambuco, Brazil and the Venezuelan affiliates include specific reference to the employers' obligation to provide PPE, 'respecting gender issues'. However, the majority of the contracts are silent on this fundamental issue.

*On non-discrimination:* in the case of SINICON and SINTEPAV-Bahia in Brazil, the collective contract establishes a bi-partite Committee on Gender and Race 'with the objective of establishing programmes to combat racism and gender discrimination taking into account ILO Convention 111 on non-discrimination'.

#### **The study concludes with the following main recommendations:**

- There should be a woman representative in the negotiating team of the trade unions;
- Unions should advocate for women's rights through collective bargaining;
- Unions should research what negotiating claims have been achieved in collective bargaining agreements in other sectors at national level;
- Unions should organise information campaigns about any claims or successful agreements so as to engage women workers and to promote the organisation and retention of women workers as union members;
- Unions should work to ensure that existing laws and protections for women workers in each country are effectively implemented.

### **Campaign against violence against women and for the ratification of C190**

Trade unions have an essential role to play in ending violence and harassment at work and in the home. BWI's decision to participate along with the other global unions in the campaign for the ratification of the ILO Convention 190 on violence and harassment was supported by a very large number of affiliates from all over the world. In 2019, International Women's Day on 8 March was marked by an online campaign on the theme of Stop Gender-Based Violence and Stop Macho Culture in the workplace and communities. In 2020, BWI joined the 16-days of activism campaign to build trade union activism on violence against women from 25 November to 10 December. The significant increase in reported cases of domestic violence as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown measures meant that the campaign acquired greater relevance and urgency. For example, in Brazil, there was a 20 per cent increase in the number of femicides in some States; and in the UK, there was an 80 per cent increase in the number of calls to a domestic violence hotline during the March 2020 lockdown.

The campaign enjoyed considerable support from the male union leaders who also participated in advocacy actions. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the campaign was largely focused on on-line advocacy using national and social media. Often for the first time, union women's committees or networks were given the opportunity to take the lead in organising a union campaign and to network in national campaigns with sister unions, women's groups and other civil society organisations. Although not the main intention, the campaign has also highlighted the role of women workers in the BWI industries, and their contribution to union work.

### **Workplace policies on domestic violence**

Some unions have adopted model clauses or texts on workplace policies to address domestic violence. They include a strong commitment to confidentiality and allowing the victim to decide on the best course of action. Special provisions include paid leave; the right to request a change of workplace; leave to attend appointments; other security measures; salary advances or cash payments. Unions also advocate for workplace representatives to receive mandatory training on how to support a colleague who is a victim or a perpetrator of domestic abuse.

## Case studies of campaigns against violence against women

### UOLRA, Argentina

The UOLRA campaign was extraordinarily successful, with 93 articles and radio spots in mainstream national media. There were over 400,000 posts about the campaign and 36,000 responses. It has helped the union develop a strong social media strategy to keep in contact with its members, particularly during the pandemic.

Ana Lemos, Organising Secretary, UOLRA 'The campaign against violence against women has been something quite revolutionary for us - it is the first time we have been part of a campaign. We really didn't have the tools before and we had not discussed the issue previously but it was very relevant, particularly during the pandemic. The campaign theme was 'Safe at home, safe at work' (Segura en casa, segura en el trabajo) and we adapted it so as to use the slogan 'I work, I don't help' (Trabajo, no ayudo) to emphasise that women should be treated equally and with respect. The women workers identify with the issue and feel proud of the work. Before they did not attend the meetings very often but now there has been a major leap in their participation.'



### FEDESOMECE, Ecuador

Faviola Rueda, Women's Secretary, FEDESOMECE, Ecuador: 'There are only 70 women machine operators in Ecuador and there are not many women members of FEDESOMECE. The position of the Women's Secretary was only created last year so the campaign 'Segura en casa, segura en el trabajo' was a big challenge for us. But we decided to carry it out because of the very high number of femicides in Ecuador and there has been an increase in complaints about sexual harassment at work since the pandemic. Women machine operators are strong. You have to leave your home for up to 20 days and work in remote areas and then return. Our work is about opening the way, opening up new roads, so we felt we could accept this challenge.'



We were able to work as a team with all the 24 provincial trade unions and we were supported by our male colleagues. The men realised that this campaign benefited everyone, not just women. We received training from the BWI regional office which was very important for us. There were different themes for each of the 16 days. We also organised zoom conferences with experts on the issue of sexual harassment and violence at work and we produced a video clip. There were over 50,000 people who participated in the on-line campaign. We were so proud when the National Assembly agreed to ratify Convention 190 on 17 January 2021. Now our challenge is to make sure it is implemented and that in Ecuador women are indeed safe at home and at work'.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Excerpts from video recording of BWI zoom conference on the occasion of the World Social Forum, 'Mujeres y jóvenes sindicalistas de la construcción y materiales de la construcción en América Latina', 29 January 2021



# Conclusions and Recommendations

Over the last decade, progress in breaking down barriers for job opportunities for women in the building and construction industries has been slow. On the other hand, there has been a radical transformation of women's roles within the trade unions both within BWI international and regional structures and in many of the BWI affiliates. Unions are now well positioned to move forward on promoting gender equality at the workplace.

## Vocational training, apprenticeships and skills certification programmes

While vocational training and apprenticeship systems vary considerably depending on the national context, BWI affiliates could consider taking up a number of possible advocacy issues, taking advantage of the current ILO work programme on apprenticeships and skills development:

- Convene an online conference or a series of regional conferences to show case national good practice on union involvement to promote women's access to vocational training, apprenticeships and skills certification programmes;
- Produce a short information leaflet on the business case for recruiting a more gender-balanced and diverse workforce with examples of good practice for distribution to tripartite and bipartite skill development agencies and other stakeholders;
- Develop guidance on setting gender equality goals in apprenticeships and recruitment in large-scale infrastructure and public procurement projects;
- Engage schools and vocational training centres and other institutions.

## Strengthening women's participation in union decision-making

It is evident that the many, diverse strategies to encourage women's participation in trade unions are having positive results and that they should be continued and strengthened. In particular, the emphasis on investing in young workers' structures with a clear gender focus has encouraged many young women to join unions and become active. Women's leadership programmes, including on communications, mentoring, speaking in public and conflict resolution, have empowered women to stand for elected union positions. Training programmes, whether for women only or for mixed groups, on collective bargaining, negotiations with local government, campaigning and advocacy skills have also allowed women union activists to identify and push for an agenda of gender specific issues to be taken up in negotiating forums. Some unions have developed informal or formal mechanisms to consult with women workers prior to negotiations with employers, government or other stakeholders.

## Collective bargaining and negotiating for gender equality

To strengthen and systematise good practice on developing and advancing a bargaining agenda on gender, consideration might be given to the following:

- Building on the example of the study carried out by the Latin American region and taking forward the recommendations from the study, compile a database or research study of existing collective bargaining contract clauses on gender-related issues in each of the BWI regions;
- Through the existing regional women's committee structures, develop updated guidance on:
  - a) the business case for recruiting a more gender-balanced and diverse workforce;
  - b) collective bargaining strategies and priorities on gender-related issues, focusing first on the issues that are easiest to win such as separate toilets and suitable PPE;
- Review the existing model agreement for International Framework Agreements in order to strengthen its provisions, including a new reference to ILO Convention 190 on violence and harassment;
- Audit the numbers of women and the extent of their participation in negotiating forums, at national, sectoral or company level and in BWI forums, such as the MNC networks and the monitoring groups of the International Framework Agreements; and agree targets and set up monitoring and reporting mechanisms to advance equality goals.
- Provide training for unions on how to take forward gender issues in collective bargaining, including bargaining preparations and negotiations.

## Post-COVID-19 green economic recovery plans

BWI's aim is to ensure that the progress and pathways for women that existed before COVID-19 are quickly restored and extended.

- BWI and its affiliates could adopt advocacy strategies calling for all post-COVID green economic recovery plans to embed gender equality in their design.
- Building on the C40's 'Clean Construction Declaration' and the MOU signed in May 2021 with the BWI, ensure that gender equality targets are included in the clean construction programmes developed by this network of city mayors concerned by the climate crisis.<sup>34</sup>

In high income countries and increasingly throughout the world, a high number of job profiles in the construction and wood working trades are undergoing rapid transformation due to the greening of the industries and the digitalisation of the sector. The COVID-19 pandemic will further accelerate plans for automation with a shift towards more skilled job opportunities.

- BWI and its affiliates could adopt advocacy strategies to ensure that both men and women have equal access to training opportunities as a result of the introduction of new technology and automation.

Unions have advocated for governments to invest massively in the green transition to low energy design and materials. In particular, low energy construction requires broader qualification profiles and integrated teamwork. In turn, these requirements could lead to more formal recruitment practices which are more favourable to women.

- While calling for more formal and transparent recruitment practices, BWI and its affiliates can advocate for gender equality targets and monitoring and reporting mechanisms to track the achievement of these targets.

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<sup>34</sup> BWI endorses C40's declaration on clean construction available at: <https://www.bwint.org/cms/bwi-endorses-c40s-declaration-on-clean-construction-2314> 13 May 2021

# Annex 1: List of Acronyms

<b>AWWCI, Philippines</b>	Association of Women Workers in the Construction Industry
<b>BCAWU, South Africa</b>	Building, Construction and Allied Workers Union
<b>CCESSA, Nigeria</b>	Construction and Civil Engineering Senior Staff Association
<b>CETA, South Africa</b>	Construction Education and Training Authority
<b>CFMEU, Australia</b>	Construction, Forestry, Mining & Energy Union
<b>CMWEU, Mauritius</b>	Construction, Metal, Wooden and Related Industries Employees Union
<b>CWT, USA</b>	Chicago Women in Trades, USA
<b>CLAWUZ, Zimbabwe</b>	Cement, Lime & Allied Workers Union
<b>CSDCI, India</b>	Construction Skill Development Council of India
<b>EFBWW</b>	European Federation of Building and Woodworkers
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>FEDESOMECE, Ecuador</b>	Federación de Operadores y Mecánicos de Equipos Camineros / Federation of Operators and Mechanics of Road Equipment
<b>FGBB, Tunisia</b>	Fédération Générale du Bâtiment et Bois
<b>GBH Austria</b>	Gewerkschaft Bau-Holz/Building and Wood Workers' Trade Union
<b>IAC</b>	Indian Affiliates Council
<b>ICT</b>	Information, Communications and Technology
<b>IG BAU, Germany</b>	IG Bauen-Agrar-Umwelt/Trade Union for Building, Forestry, Agriculture and the Environment
<b>KFCITU, South Korea</b>	Korean Federation of Construction Industry Trade Unions
<b>MANWU, Namibia</b>	Metal and Allied Namibian Workers' Union
<b>MENA</b>	Middle East and North Africa Region
<b>MSDE, India</b>	Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship
<b>NABTU, USA</b>	North America's Building Trades Union
<b>NECA-IBEW, USA</b>	National Electrical Contractors Association-International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers
<b>NEW, USA</b>	Non-Traditional Employment for Women, New York
<b>NUBCW, the Philippines</b>	National Union of Building & Construction Workers
<b>NUM, South Africa</b>	National Union of Mineworkers
<b>OT, USA</b>	Oregon Tradeswomen
<b>PCSC, India</b>	Paint and Coating Skill Council of India
<b>PROFUD, Ukraine</b>	Construction & Building Materials Industry Workers' Union
<b>RTB Rwanda</b>	Technical Vocational Education and Training Board
<b>SAWIC</b>	South African Women in Construction
<b>SEWA, India</b>	Self Employed Women's Association
<b>SGIP North Macedonia</b>	Trade Union of Civil Engineering, Industry and Planning
<b>SINCS-G, Guatemala</b>	Sindicato Nacional de la Construcción y Servicios / National Construction & Services Union
<b>STECOMA, Rwanda</b>	Syndicat des Travailleurs des Entreprises de Construction, Menuiserie et l'Artisanat / Trade Union of Workers in Construction & Carpentry
<b>STEM</b>	Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths
<b>TESDA, Philippines</b>	Technical Education and Skills Development Council
<b>TVET</b>	Technical & Vocational Education & Training
<b>UOCRA, Argentina</b>	Unión Obrera de la Construcción de la República Argentina / Union of Construction Workers of the Republic of Argentina
<b>UOLRA, Argentina</b>	Unión Obrera Ladrillera de la República Argentina / Union of Workers of the Brick Industry of the Republic of Argentina
<b>WANTO, USA</b>	Women in Apprenticeships and Non-traditional Occupations
<b>ZCATWU, Zimbabwe</b>	Zimbabwe Construction & Allied Trades Workers' Union



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# Women in Trades: Skilled Sisterhood Under Construction

## BWI Global Report

BWI is the Global Union Federation grouping free and democratic unions with members in the Building, Building Materials, Wood, Forestry and Allied sectors.

BWI brings together around 351 trade unions representing around 12 million members in 127 countries. The Headquarters is in Geneva, Switzerland while the Regional Offices are in Panama, Malaysia, and South Africa.

Our mission is to defend and advance workers' rights, and to improve working and living conditions in our sectors. The BWI, above all, has a rights-based approach. We believe that trade union rights are human rights and are based on equality, solidarity and democracy, and that trade unions are indispensable to good governance.

BWI goals include 1) to promote and defend human and trade union rights; 2) to increase trade union strength; 3) to promote a stable and high level of employment in our sectors; and 4) to influence policy and strengthen the capacity of institutions and tripartite structures in our sectors.

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