

A large, abstract graphic composed of multiple overlapping, hand-drawn style circles in shades of purple and green, framing the central text.

Bearing the  
brunt, leading  
the response  
Women and  
the global  
economic  
crisis



## Introduction

As we in the UK fight savage, ideologically driven cuts that are hitting women and the poorest the hardest and hollowing out our public services, we also stand in solidarity with our sisters around the world in their battles for equality and social justice.

Women are shouldering the economic crisis in every corner of the globe. Women are more likely than men to be in vulnerable jobs, to be unemployed, to lack social protection and to have limited access to and control over financial resources. Women in both developed and developing countries are facing job cuts, loss of livelihoods, increased responsibilities in all areas of their lives and even an increased risk of violence.

This collection of stories, articles and case studies from individuals, unions and NGOs shows just how deeply the global economic crisis has affected women all over the world. This impact has been felt in many different and varied ways, from the austerity measures sweeping Europe to lack of job security, increased food prices and the increased risk of sexual and domestic abuse.

But whilst women have unarguably been hardest hit, they are also leading the response. Their stories serve to inspire us all. In Zimbabwe women have come together to demand economic justice despite threats to their safety. In Peru women banana workers are fighting to maintain their rights as the market is squeezed. In Nepal women workers took to the streets to protest against discriminatory employment practices.

Women all over the world are organising in their unions and in their communities to challenge cuts, discrimination and oppression and to fight for their right to decent, secure and sustainable work.



Frances O'Grady  
TUC Deputy General Secretary



*¡Denun*  
**Las jornadas 3x4-4x4-5x4**  
**Metas de producción de 450 a 500**  
**a 6 mil movimientos**  
*“La Salud es*

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The TUC would like to thank all of the unions, organisations and individuals that have contributed to this publication.

## UK and Europe

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### Women and the cuts in England

Below: Campaigning against education cuts

The government's savage austerity programme – including £18bn of cuts to social security and welfare and hundreds of thousands of job losses in the public sector – is clearly going to hit women hard. Particularly pregnant women, women pensioners and single mothers.

Women make up 65 per cent of the public sector workforce. Just under 40 per cent of women's jobs nationally are in the public sector, compared to around 15 per cent of men's jobs, so women's unemployment is set to soar as public sector jobs are cut.

We already know that women will pay for roughly 72 per cent of the changes in taxes, benefits and tax credits set out in the budget. The Comprehensive Spending Review in October 2010 ushered in further cuts and welfare reforms which have shifted yet more of the burden onto women and families.

A raft of benefits relating to pregnancy and families have been axed or frozen. The Health in Pregnancy Grant, Child Benefit, the Baby and Toddler Elements of Tax Credits have all been cut or frozen, to name but a few. Other cuts such as housing benefit cuts will disproportionately affect women as more women rely on these benefits than men.

If family-related benefits and tax credits are taken out of the equation, women still pay 66 per cent of the welfare changes compared to men who pay 34 per cent. This is because women will also be hardest hit by housing benefit cuts and the switch to CPI uprating for benefits and pensions.

The TUC's own research as well as research from other organisations such as the Women's Budget Group and Gingerbread, the charity for single parents, show that single mothers will be particularly hard hit by the cuts. Research commissioned by the TUC shows that female lone parents will lose 18.5 per cent of their net income (-£3,121 in cash terms).



Women are more likely than men to use public services, from social care to libraries, education, nurseries, sexual/reproductive health services, and healthcare services in general. So any cuts to services are clearly going to affect more women than men.

The TUC is already receiving reports of 250 Sure Start centres facing closure and 2,000 Sure Start workers receiving “at risk of redundancy” letters. Not only does this mean predominantly women losing their jobs, but it also means thousands more women may be forced out of the workplace as their childcare options are restricted.

Unions are leading the fight back against the cuts to women’s jobs, services, and family benefits. Many unions are producing their own campaigning materials for women and working with other unions and voluntary sector organisations to campaign against cuts locally. Women will have a strong presence in campaign activities calling strongly for an alternative approach.

More information ➔ [www.tuc.org.uk/equality](http://www.tuc.org.uk/equality)

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## Impact of the economic crisis on women’s safety and support in the UK

In the centenary year of International Women’s Day, there is real anxiety about the impact of the economic crisis on women’s safety and support. The TUC analysis showing how the coalition government’s public sector cuts and changes to welfare benefits will impact disproportionately on women is deeply worrying. Increasing women’s financial dependence on men can increase their vulnerability to male violence and sexual exploitation.

The links between women’s poverty and violence are well established; for example women with low incomes are much more likely to experience domestic violence. Proposed cuts to legal aid pose a further risk to women’s safety by making it harder for them to leave abusive relationships and resolve child contact issues.

The vast majority of abuse victims do not report incidents to the police so specialist services, such as refuges,

violence projects, and black and minority ethnic women's organisations are vital for helping women escape violence and rebuild their lives. However, there are widespread fears about the impact of the cuts on this already fragile and patchy sector and services are already being threatened. Recent Ministry of Justice funding to stabilise the sexual violence sector is a rare ray of light. Furthermore, the closure of the Women's National Commission will impede access to Westminster for organisations campaigning against violence against women, particularly the smaller ones.

It is estimated that violence against women costs UK society £37bn a year. This is a major social and economic problem that needs long-term solutions, not short-term cuts.

#### **End Violence Against Women Coalition**

More information ➔ [www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk](http://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk)

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## Portugal: A crisis for women

In Portugal a worker can be on a temporary or fixed-term contract for up to three years before she must be given a permanent contract.

One of the consequences of this crisis is that many thousands of fixed-term contracts all over the country were not renewed or made permanent and therefore thousands of people are being laid off, especially young people and above all young women. Women are also struggling to find decent jobs relevant to their qualifications. Although women are over-represented in universities and achieve better marks than men, they enter the labour market with precarious contracts and in low qualified jobs, for instance as supermarket cashiers.

Portugal is facing a demographic problem with a population growing older and older (one of the oldest at a global level) and where young women, as well as suffering from gender discrimination (in spite of legislation), are confronted with the inequity of the labour market. This is a real obstacle for having a family.

There are many tragic stories about the unemployment situations of women due to this crisis. In the north of Portugal, in a place called Vila d'Este (Vila Nova de Gaia) with 17,000 inhabitants, very near to Oporto, more than 6,000 women are now unemployed.

In Portugal there is a special social benefit, RSI (Social Income for Inclusion), which aims to ensure some income for citizens and their families so that minimum and basic needs are satisfied and to promote social and labour inclusion.

In 2010, for the first time, Portugal had unemployment rates that were higher than the EU average, near 11 per cent, i.e. more than 600,000 people.



**Alice is 31 years old and has a degree in international affairs of the Economic School of the University of Coimbra. She is now facing unemployment despite having worked well at her job for three years for a bank. Unfortunately, she had a fixed-term contract and due to the economic crisis, this bank decided to cut about 600 jobs amongst their employees at national level by dismissing non-permanent staff and through retirement.**

**This occurred exactly at the end of the maximum legal limit to be recruited as a permanent worker.**

**Alice is married and has a young daughter, who is deaf, thus needing special education and care. Her husband is not as qualified and he was an employee of a factory producing car components that has declared itself bankrupt. His unemployment benefit is coming to an end and their situation is therefore becoming critical.**

These cases demonstrate the impact of the economic and social crisis in Portugal. In order to solve these awful problems it is crucial to achieve better gender equity, decent jobs and also to support working and unemployed mothers and fathers.

More information  **UGT-Portugal [www.ugt.pt](http://www.ugt.pt)**

## Asia

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### Pune, India. Chaya Manik Sontakke's story.



Waste picking used to be how hard-working Chaya fed her family—until the recession struck. Widowed with three young children and few options, Chaya turned to waste picking at the age of 20. When she learned about Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Panchayat (KKPKP), the trade union of waste pickers in Pune, she joined and began selling what she'd collected at Kashtachi Kamai, a cooperative scrap store that offers fair prices, accurate weights, transaction receipts and profit sharing. She was able to save money in the credit cooperative and send her children to school.

When the opportunity arose to collect recyclable waste from Infosys Technologies, one of India's foremost corporations, Chaya's daily earnings improved. She formed a group of 14 workers who shared earnings equally.

"Life as a waste picker has never been luxurious, but the Infosys work did transform my workday and bring in a lot of stability. We ate at the company canteen and had regular hours," she explains. "I saved regularly in the credit co-op and took a loan... to buy a small plot of land." There, she constructed a two-room house.

"Then the recession hit, and company cutbacks meant less waste was produced. Chaya says the quantity of scrap was halved, and so was the waste pickers' income. "Our costs have not gone down. The mini-truck costs as much and our group is the same size so we earn less, meanwhile the costs of essential commodities have gone up."

She has coped by cutting back on meat and fish. Also, she can't be as liberal with spending on her children's education. "Sometimes they have to pester me for a week before I get them a note book or a new pen."

Chaya remains strong. "Life is not too bad, but I have seen better, and there may be worse to come. Thankfully I have my own house!"

More information → **Women in Informal Employment Globalising and Organising**  
[www.wiego.org](http://www.wiego.org).

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## Women and migrant workers in Nepal

Nepal, one of the least developed countries in the globe, has been hard hit by the global crisis. The effects have been less felt in the formal sector but are still severe for the national economy due to a heavy dependence on Nepalese migrant workers sending money home (23 per cent of Nepal's GDP) and income from tourism. The economic downturn has seriously affected workers' lives, making them more vulnerable, increasing the number of people in poverty, particularly women and children who are facing hunger and malnutrition. These circumstances are meaning more women are being forced to migrate to work as domestic workers, with low pay and no social or any kind of security in jobs rife with discrimination and exploitation.

Women are facing rising unemployment, often being made unemployed first as employers continue to employ their male counterparts. Nepal Bayern Electric (NBE) is an electronics manufacturing company; its products are exported to Europe and North America. The factory mostly employed young women workers but in 2009 it laid off 50 per cent of its workforce due to decreased demand. The management tried to only get rid of women workers, not the supervisors, most of whom are male. The workers took to the streets to protest. Now, they are scattered in the informal sector or do home-based work with a very low income.

"The management wanted to lay off the workers in the name of economic crisis. They want to lay off only women workers. We are facing a crisis at home," said Bijaya Subedi, chair of the union.

The impact on the economy of returning migrant workers is huge. According to the Association of Nepal Foreign

Right: Workers take to the streets in protest at the sacking of workers by Nepal Bayern Electric



Employment Agencies, more than 3,000 Nepali migrant workers have already returned from Malaysia, Dubai, Qatar and Macau.

In Malaysia, they have taken steps to discourage migrant workers from entering the country. This is due to returning Malaysian migrants needing to find employment in their own country. The authorities decided to double the fee charged to incoming migrant workers to work in Malaysia. Currently, the total number of Nepalese working in Malaysia stands at 500,000.

The number of Nepali workers leaving for foreign employment tumbled by 17 per cent during the first eight months of this fiscal year as compared to the same period last year. This is having a serious effect on the national economy and unemployment rates in Nepal.

More information ➔ **General Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions**  
[www.gefont.org](http://www.gefont.org)

## The Americas

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### Rights for the banana workers of Peru

“In Peru, women banana and agro-industrial workers are increasingly struggling against instability, inequality and discrimination in the workplace. We are sacked for being pregnant or for joining a trade union. We are also now being subjected to the national ‘law for the promotion of agriculture’ (law 27360) which is limiting our ability to organise workers on the ground and expand our national trade union movement. This law must be abolished and our labour legislation must be improved rather than weakened.

Right: Fátima Del Rosario Herrera Olea, whose words are reproduced here, is a banana worker campaigning against deregulation



“The small producers and exporters of Peru send their fruits to countries such as the US and Europe. The pressure to keep prices low means that the fruits arrive in those countries wrapped in labour rights violations and for this reason the women of the Agricultural Trade Union of Peru (SITAG-Peru), are hoping to develop our strategic alliances with trade union organisations and consumers across the world so that we can work together in the fight for the respect of our labour rights in these difficult times.

“In Peru the current instability of the labour market wears the face of a woman; it is our responsibility to fight to improve our working conditions to ensure that we are employed with decency and dignity from this day and onwards.

“We must step up our commitment to the fight against the current politics of labour rights deregulation that we are facing not only in Latin America but across the world.”

More information ➔ [www.bananalink.org.uk](http://www.bananalink.org.uk) and **Make Fruit Fair Campaign**  
[www.makefruitfair.org.uk](http://www.makefruitfair.org.uk)

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## Migrating for work: Mexico

“What I want most in life is for my children to have what I couldn’t have: an education. This is what made me decide to go to the States and I will get there... My son always said he wanted a motorbike, just a small one, and I said, look my love, when I get to the States I’ll buy you one. Well, with my first pay packet, I won’t buy him the bike but I made a promise and I’m going to keep it.”

Every year tens of thousands of people leave their homes in Central America and journey north through Mexico as irregular migrants. Driven by grinding poverty back home, they travel in hope of reaching the USA with its promise of work and a new life but all too often their dreams are turned to nightmares.

All irregular migrants are at risk of abuse, but women and girl migrants are especially vulnerable. Criminals and corrupt public officials target them for trafficking and sexual assault. Sexual violence, or the threat of sexual violence, is often used



as a means of terrorising women and their relatives. Many criminal gangs appear to use sexual violence as part of the 'price' demanded of migrants. According to some experts, the prevalence of rape is such that people smugglers may require women to have a contraceptive injection prior to the journey as a precaution against pregnancy resulting from rape.

Many women migrants are deterred from reporting sexual violence by the pressure to continue their journey and the lack of access to an effective complaints procedure. In Mexico, migrants who have been raped have to deal not only with the stigma associated with sexual violence, but also with the risk that if they report the crime they may be deported. As a result, women migrants rarely report sexual violence and are very unlikely to file criminal complaints.

Amnesty International recently launched *The Invisibles*, a film in four parts in which migrants travelling through Mexico describe their hopes and fears. Part 2 describes the sacrifices made by many women migrants, like Ana (pictured above; not real name), who risk their lives on one of the most dangerous journeys in the world to seek a better future for their children.

Watch the films and take action here: [youtube.com/invisiblesfilms](https://www.youtube.com/invisiblesfilms)

More information ➔ **Amnesty International** [www.amnesty.org](http://www.amnesty.org)

## Africa

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### Robbing Mary of her lifeline to pay Martha a pittance: Nigeria

The Obafemi Awolowo University Teaching Hospital Complex (OAUTHC) is one of the better known specialist health and research institutions in Nigeria. Over the last few years the university has been enacting the economic reform policy of the federal government which is having grave consequences on job losses and pay and conditions of staff.

The management of the hospital used the directive from federal government to "cut costs" and "improve efficiency" as an excuse to undercut staff, get rid of less experienced staff and decrease the numbers of staff on permanent contracts.

Most of the affected staff had served less than ten years while older, perhaps more experienced workers continued in service. Severance benefits were also underpaid to staff. The policy from federal government was seriously abused and measures put in place to protect workers were ignored.

Perhaps in recognition of this the federal government in January 2009 issued a directive that all laid off workers in the teaching hospital be recalled back to work. However casual, non-unionised workers had been engaged in the place of the unionised workers that had lost their jobs. While the average monthly wage of the previous unionised workers was about 23,000 naira, casuals who replaced them are paid an average of 7,000 naira only. Despite protests the teaching hospital failed to re-employ the workers they had laid off, preferring to keep on the cheaper casualised labour.

The lives of many women have been seriously altered by this decision.



**Bolanle Ouda, 46 years old with four children.**

**“I had to relocate back to the village to farm. My children have dropped out of school. My eldest son, 20, is now a farmhand instead of continuing with his education. One of my children was ill for two years. I could not take him to the hospital because I can’t afford the bills. I can’t even tell you what was wrong with him because he was not properly diagnosed. My aged mother is also suffering because I can no longer care for her like I used to.”**

Right: Affected workers protesting at the OAUTHC premises





### Comfort Ogunyemi, 47 years old, married with five children

**“Since the job losses, life has been hell. Most painful for me is the fact that my eldest child, who was a Part two student of industrial mathematics at the Federal University of Technology, Akure has had to stop his education because I could no longer assist him. We survive on the little petty trading I’m now doing.”**

The women feel that they suffer a lot of humiliation and contempt sometimes from their husbands and their children who cannot understand why they can no longer provide for them like they used to do. Many marriages have broken down while other marriages are undergoing severe stress. The families, campaigning groups and unions are still asking the question: why would the OAUTHC authorities choose to make so many families suffer especially when the federal government has reversed the earlier decision to lay off the workers?

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### Zimbabwean women campaigning for economic justice

Since February 2003, members of the Zimbabwean social justice movement WOZA (Women of Zimbabwe Arise), have been repeatedly arrested while taking part in peaceful demonstrations against the worsening social, economic, and human rights situation in the country.

While in detention, the women are held in poor and overcrowded conditions for periods ranging from a few hours to several days. WOZA activists have been threatened and assaulted by police officers, who have also obstructed their access to lawyers.

In April 2010, 500 WOZA members marched peacefully to the office of the Zimbabwe Electricity Supply Authority (ZESA) to protest about poor services and excessive billing from ZESA. Whilst the group were waiting for the management of ZESA to address them, riot police armed with tear gas and shotguns arrived. Sixty-one WOZA members were arrested.



Amnesty International members have been campaigning long and hard in support of WOZA activists. Though the pressure has not yet ended the suppression of their rights, it has certainly improved the way police treat activists during arrests and while in detention. When arrests happen, Amnesty members write and call the police stations where the women are held, urging the police to release them. WOZA activists report being told by police “to tell your Amnesty friends that we did not ill-treat you”.

“Amnesty International is our big sister,” says WOZA co-ordinator Jenni Williams, who has been arrested over thirty times. “When I’m in prison, if I know that someone, my big sister, is shouting for me, telling people about me, then I feel less distressed, less frightened and less alone. When we began as WOZA as a non-violent civil disobedience movement, people thought we were crazy and civil society didn’t want to engage at all before Amnesty International started writing about us. It helped us arrive as human rights defenders.”

More information ➔ **Amnesty International** [www.amnesty.org.uk/woza](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/woza)

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## Kenyan women marching against hunger



Antonina Masita lives in Kibera, one of the world’s biggest slums on the outskirts of Nairobi, Kenya and scrapes together around 20–30 Kenyan shillings (KS) a day from manual work. With this she has to provide for herself and seven children. Ordinarily a bag of maize costs 50 KS. But in 2008, a bag of maize shot up to 100 KS, almost a week’s wages. This incredible price spike happened when maize and wheat prices shot up, causing one billion people to go hungry and sparking riots across the world from Egypt to Haiti. During the price hikes, many families like Antonina’s ended up surviving on just one bowl of porridge a day.

Supply and demand alone cannot explain such sharp rises in food prices. There is another explanation, as supported by the Food and Agriculture Organisation, amongst others. Bankers betting on the price of food are amplifying price



volatility in global food markets. As Goldman Sachs, Barclays Capital and others make huge profits from speculation on food commodities, millions are pushed deeper into hunger and poverty.

People in low income countries like Kenya have to spend a large part of their earnings on food. So if the price of food goes up, those who are already struggling are pushed over the brink into starvation and often financial ruin.

Kibera Women for Peace and Fairness, a campaigning group formed in 2007, mobilised against unaffordable food prices, marching on the government to demand cheaper food. Food prices eventually dropped and with more certainty of knowing where their next meal is coming from, they were able to start campaigning on issues such as better living conditions and an end to violence against women.

As Fanice Onjala, the secretary of Kibera Women reports, rocketing food prices increase financial pressures, leading to increased domestic violence as relationships become strained. Fanice and her fellow campaigners are determined to change the popular belief that if a man doesn't hit you, he doesn't love you. "We say there is no justification for violence against women. Once you say that, you are a change-maker," she says.

In recent months food prices have shot back up to 2008 levels. Financial markets must be brought under control quickly to prevent another global food crisis and to stop women's rights from moving further down the agenda.

More information ➔ **World Development Movement [www.wdm.org.uk/food](http://www.wdm.org.uk/food)**

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## Setback for African women

The global financial and economic crisis presents significant challenges for African countries. The crisis represents a serious setback for Africa because it is taking place at a time when the region is making progress in economic performance and management. It has posed serious challenges for the region as a whole, as well as for Ghana.

In Ghana, there are huge differences in access to and success in education between men and women. According to the Ghana living standards survey in 2000, 44.1 per cent of women as opposed to 21.1 per cent of men have no formal education. Poverty is a major factor preventing women from continuing their education to tertiary level.

The majority of women do not have higher education or marketable skills. This affects their place in the jobs market, having an impact on earnings and increasing their economic dependence on men. There is evidence to suggest that the situation has worsened since the economic crisis.

Women are becoming even more vulnerable to abuse and sexual violence. As a result of the global financial crisis women have become more financially dependent on men due to losing their jobs. This cements their low status in society and vulnerability to abuse.

Women in Africa are relegated to the background as far as public decision-making is concerned. In Ghana, women account for less than ten per cent of people in public office. This does not make for gender friendly policies or approaches to dealing with the economic crisis.

However, Ghana has taken important steps at the national level to mitigate the impact of the financial crisis on women and the economy in general. But financial constraints and low literacy rates limits the range of policy measures that Ghana can adopt in response to the crisis. The international community needs to provide appropriate assistance to the region to prevent the financial crisis from turning into a regional humanitarian crisis.

More information  **Ghana Trades Union Congress [www.ghanatuc.org](http://www.ghanatuc.org)**

## Worldwide

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### No cushion to fall back on: informal employment worldwide

There's a misperception that the informal economy offers a "cushion" in times of economic crisis, but research conducted in 2009 and 2010 found the global recession has further impoverished informal workers and their families.

The study was conducted by the Inclusive Cities project partners and coordinated by Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO). The research involved two rounds of interviews and focus groups with 102 home-based workers, 63 street vendors and 54 waste pickers in 14 urban settings across Africa, Asia and Latin America. In 2009, incomes had fallen for 77 per cent of respondents, while 52 per cent reported another decrease between mid 2009 and 2010.

For street vendors already grappling with a significant drop in consumer demand, the situation was made worse by increased competition as the newly unemployed turned to vending. Input costs also rose but, as one Durban, South Africa vendor said, "I can't increase my prices... who am I increasing them for? There are no customers here."

Instead, many increased their already long work hours. However, unpaid work at home still loomed, particularly for women.

One South African woman remarked, "All these things fall on my shoulder, I feel that I am being pulled back...there is no moving forward."

Decreased earnings and persistently high inflation meant many had to restrict their families' diets. In 2010, researchers learned school withdrawals were on the rise, with 16 per cent reporting children (slightly more often girls) had to stop attending school. Parents worried how this would affect children's future prospects. One widow from Ahmedabad, India noted, "My youngest daughter was studying in fourth standard .... Now she works as a kitchen helper earning 5 rupees (less than 7 pence) a day."

Unfortunately, economic emergency relief measures rarely targeted informal workers, many of whom lived in crisis even before the recession. A return to the pre-crisis approach to informality will only perpetuate poverty and inequality.

To see the study results and the policy recommendations made by study participants, visit [www.inclusivocities.com](http://www.inclusivocities.com).

More information [↗](#)

**Women in Informal Employment  
Globalising and Organising  
[www.wiego.org](http://www.wiego.org).**

Right: Textile women campaigning for jobs



## Jobs cuts worldwide: history repeating itself

“Cut to reduce the fiscal deficit” is the mantra of the UK government. With the argument that we should have austerity now in order to have a better future, thousands of people have lost their jobs.

The cuts frenzy that is hitting people today is the old history that millions in Africa, Asia and Latin America had to face in the 1980s when the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank launched their crusade of structural adjustment programmes. The aim was to reduce deficit and state intervention to stimulate growth.

The implementation of these policies did not bring the desired economic growth; in fact it led thousands in developing countries to misery. War on Want research *Forces for Change*, documented the cases of Zambia, Ghana, Malawi and Mozambique where cuts on public expenditure and reforms of the public sector resulted in more retrenchments. Women were hit hardest and they had to join the informal sector making a living as street vendors or marketers.

A decade later, developing countries were again forced to accept foreign

investment policy with the promise of economic growth. Cheap labour, resources and tax exemptions were given to companies with very limited state control. Thousands of poor women desperate for jobs ended up working in textile factories and agro-export plantations where labour rights are systematically abused. War on Want and trade unions in Zambia, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka have been fighting the appalling conditions that women have to endure in the textile and flower industry, while big companies make billions of profit.

Today the financial crisis has created another wave of job losses and again women are bearing the brunt. War on Want partner, Codemuh, reports that about 15,126 jobs have been lost in the textile industry in Honduras.

The struggle against the cutting of our jobs, basic services and labour rights must grow in solidarity.

More information [↗](#)

**War on Want**  
[www.waronwant.org](http://www.waronwant.org)



## Worldwide

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### Women working in transport: organising for growth

The world trade slowdown resulting from the global economic crisis has had an inevitable impact on the movement of goods and people. Transport and distribution service workers are already feeling the impact, particularly where there are job losses, cutbacks and deregulation as a response to the crisis and falling demand.

For the global transport industry, women are amongst the worst affected. Women tend to be the lowest paid workers, and it is always the lowest paid who suffer the most because they are seen as 'dispensable'. Gender-based occupational segregation is particularly pronounced in transport, and it is likely the crisis will accentuate this trend. As in other sectors, women transport workers are concentrated in low-paid and casualised work, often working in services contracted out to companies such as cleaning, catering and call-centres that lack secure employment conditions for workers.

All this means that strong unions organising women workers are more important than ever. To win and keep women members, transport unions around the world are tackling the issues that are important to women through both collective bargaining and organising campaigns. It's an opportunity for growth in the union. And through organising non-union workers they can prevent

wage under-cutting and union busting campaigns by the private sector.

For example, the Kenya Dock Workers' Union campaigns on a range of issues including gender sensitisation, child abuse and women's rights protection. The union's case work has helped to open up to women job opportunities that were once male-dominated. Violence against women in the workplace has dramatically decreased.

Moreover, for the many women who work in public urban transport, there can be some new opportunities. Effective and affordable public transport becomes even more important in a recession, and is essential to economic recovery. In some countries, commuters are abandoning their cars in favour of trains and buses due to economic and environmental concerns.

But during the last decade, investment in public transport has become more dependent on private financing, leaving existing essential services, as well as funding for improved transport infrastructure, vulnerable. This makes union campaigns against privatisation and for decent public services all the more important.

More information →

**International Transport Workers' Federation**  
[www.itfglobal.org](http://www.itfglobal.org)

At [www.tuc.org.uk](http://www.tuc.org.uk) the Altogether for Public Services campaign page has resources and articles to download. Further information can also be found on the gender equality pages of the TUC website. Documents offering more detailed analysis of the gender impact of welfare reforms and links to external articles on this subject will soon be available in the gender equality pages of the TUC website.

Blogs relating to the cuts, welfare reform and equality can be found on the TUC's Touchstone blog website

[www.touchstoneblog.org.uk](http://www.touchstoneblog.org.uk)

The TUC has launched a campaign website where public service users can write about their own experience of the cuts and post details of demonstrations, individual union campaigns, and regional campaigns and activities.

[www.falseeconomy.org.uk](http://www.falseeconomy.org.uk)

You can also follow the TUC's international work on Twitter. For updates follow [@TUCGlobal](https://twitter.com/TUCGlobal) and [@TUCnews](https://twitter.com/TUCnews)



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