

For translation into Spanish and French

Women's comprise less than a fifth of the global workforce in the banana export industry. The research found the highest participation of women in the industry in the Caribbean excluding the Dominican Republic, where 40% to 45% of workers and small producers are women, and the lowest participation in Latin America (12.5%), the Dominican Republic (12.5%) and the Cote d'Ivoire (11%). A historical and cultural analysis reveals a correlation between levels of gender equality in society, and levels of women's involvement in the banana industry. Migration is also a factor that explains the differences between countries, as both family responsibilities and the dangers of irregular migration mean women are less likely to migrate to work on banana plantations.

Production tasks considered suitable for women vary considerably between regions, and sometimes between countries within regions. Where small women producers in the Caribbean undertake all tasks involved in production, in Latin America, women's involvement is almost exclusively limited to the packing stations. West and Central Africa falls between these two points. This role division based on gender impacts both women's access to work and is the main factor in the gender pay gap which exists across the industry, where women employees and casual workers consistently earn less than their male co-workers.

The research found serious issues in the management of Occupational Health, Safety and Environment for women workers. In particular, pregnant women are normally rotated to lighter tasks only in the final months of their pregnancy and both pregnant and breast feeding women often continue to work in direct contact with pesticides and chemicals, contravening the guidance from the World Health Organisation and putting the health of their unborn/new-born child at risk. Another issue expressed across the industry was sexual harassment. This is a human rights and gender discrimination issue with resulting impacts on health and safety, including stress, particularly in the absence of effective complaints and grievance mechanisms.

The other priority concerns expressed by research participants were lack of education and training, lack of access to childcare, and the difficulty of managing their triple workload. Recognition of the socio-economic importance of women's work in the domestic and care economy, where children are born and raised to become the next generation of workers, producers and consumers, is a necessary starting point for responding to the challenges women face in any part of the global banana industry.

The report concludes with suggested recommendations to be discussed at the Third Conference of the World Banana Forum, and the Second World Banana Forum Global Women's Meeting, which will be held in the days immediately prior to the Conference.