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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# Gender and Work Part A: Investigating contexts, impacts, and effects

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## Abstract

This article introduces the first of two international Themed Collections on gender and work, published as, Part A across Volumes 35(4) and 36(2), and as Part B in Volume 36(3) of *The Economic and Labour Relations Review*. In introducing the 11 Part A articles, we identify three main themes: contexts, impacts, and effects on gender status. Contexts include climate crisis, uncertain gender impacts of artificial intelligence (AI), and ongoing skill under-recognition in feminised 'ancillary' occupations. Impacts include increasing care load and violence in traditionally feminised teaching work, LGBTQ+ workers' intertwined experiences of stigmatisation and job insecurity, and immigrant experience of unregulated care work in private households. Impacts on well-being, safety, and security include restricted access to nutrition, rest, creativity, life cycle, and community participation, and diminished status, agency, voice, and recognition of productivity contribution. An alternative productivity calculus is provided in articles documenting the benefits of Australia's universal statutory 10 days' family and domestic violence leave entitlement, a proposed Indian green jobs guarantee programme that could transition millions of women into the formal labour market, and an Australian calculation of the unrecognised GDP contribution of breastmilk. A Sub-Saharan African article shows that legally mandated maternity protections are inaccessible to women in informal labour markets. In the context of the United Nations' key normative and programme role, and its stocktakes of equality and empowerment milestones, we foreshadow questions of official structure and grassroots agency to be addressed in the Part B exploration in (Volume 36(3)) of informal economy work, community agency, and intersectional voice.

**Keywords:** Climate change; empowerment; equality; gender; gender-based violence; LGBTQI+; productivity; reproduction; work

## Introduction

In 2024, for the first time since its inception in 1990, *The Economic and Labour Relations Review* (ELRR) issued a call for papers on Gender and Work (Naidoo, Junor and Carney 2024). A strong response came from many parts of the world, and the result, supported by the journal's normal rigorous review selection and revision process, appears in themed groupings of 18 articles spread across Volumes 35(4), 36(2), and 36(3). The order in which these groupings appear reflects the timing of the review and revision process. As guest editors, we pay tribute to all those who contributed to this work, and particularly the work of our third guest editor Tanya Carney, who passed away in September 2024, before the

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endeavour came to fruition. Her contribution to shaping this collection was invaluable. The collection follows on the heels of the groundbreaking First Nations Themed Collection in ELRR 36(1).

The 11 articles that we review below are the first instalment of the Gender and Work collection, which offers global perspectives contributing to a stocktake of changes in the role of work as an enabler of, and barrier to, women's status and well-being, and of women's agency in shaping these changes. The call for papers invited contributions examining progress or prospects in gender and work, exploring contexts of enablement, constraint and response, and advancing the theories through which these are conceptualised. The articles reviewed below provide a tripartite framework, offering a comprehensive analytical lenses, covering:

- Conditions and contexts of work and their impacts on safety, security, and sustainability
- Well-being and capability, including nutrition, reproduction, rest, creativity, life cycle, and community
- Women's status and empowerment, including questions of rights, freedom, independence, inclusion, non-discrimination, voice, respect, recognition, and value.

This framework allows an assessment of whether there are grounds for hope in a movement towards the attainment of feminist and LGBTQ+ goals in work – paid and unpaid, formal and informal – and an analysis of obstacles, how they are being confronted, and with what effectiveness.

Stocktakes generally reveal, critique or contribute to some shifts of perspective, often in response to changed contexts. Such shifts may involve a refocusing of policy or practice, or they may be theoretical, involving reconceptualisations. Key theoretical reconceptualisations within feminism have included the very widespread uptake of the concept of intersectionality, describing interlocking structures of gender, racial, and class power (Crenshaw 1991), and the concept of the double erasure of subaltern voice by colonial/patriarchal voices and academic interpreters (Mohanty 1984; Spivak 1988). A key policy reconceptualisation that has flowed through both ground-up and top-down policy and practice is that of empowerment, a term whose narrowing since the 1995 UN Beijing Conference is critiqued in the article by Breitkreuz and Baird (2025) in this collection.

The concept of equality too has taken on a range of meanings, some relying on and others challenging or extending, concepts of sameness – for example, equal opportunity, direct and indirect discrimination, or equal outcomes. Equality at work is a rights-based concept dating back to the 1948 Universal Declaration on (General Assembly, 1948) that prohibits discrimination (Article 7) and guarantees the right to free choice of employment, just and favourable conditions of work, protection against unemployment, equal pay for equal work, just and favourable remuneration, trade union membership (Article 23), and rest and leisure (Article 24). In order to avoid implicit use of masculine and heteronormative comparative benchmarks in measuring equality, the 2024 Regional Gender Equality Profile for Latin America and the Caribbean (2024) uses an intersectional and environmental perspective, criteria based on integrating Sustainable Development Goals (UN DESA 2015) and the comprehensive Beijing Platform for Action (UN Women 2015) as strong equality benchmarks, as well as recent ILO Decent Work Conventions (ILO nd) and countries' ratification of the recent extensions to the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women to include Rights of Indigenous Women and Girls and Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN Security Council, 2000). It further incorporates reporting on measures to combat violence against women's physical,

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sexual, and psychological integrity, as well as gender differences in the performance of unpaid care. Among further potential criteria for unbiased gender equality measurement are two suggestions in the present collection for extending the reporting of productivity contributions. Cortis and Naidoo advocate moving beyond the automatic equation of labour intensity with low productivity in the valuing of interactive 'ancillary' or 'support' work, and (Julie) Smith provides a methodology for measuring the economic value generated by the production of breast milk in supporting infant health. In introducing the two collections, we consider the contexts to which theorisations of the gender and work nexus have responded in a dynamic environment. Even during the process of curating this themed collection, the world has been changing rapidly. In setting the scene for the articles that follow, we begin by surveying the gender impacts of some of these changing contexts of action.

## Immediate contexts

### *Accelerating climate change*

Ecological catastrophe has already become manifest in the Pacific region, where climate change has reduced the economic security of many women, increased their workloads, diminished their education access, and led to increased gender-based violence. Alston et al (2025), in documenting these impacts, have been careful to emphasise women's agency in responding to them, and to avoid casting women as victims.

It is thus urgent to explore the possibility of a gender-based reorganisation of work in ways that meaningfully contribute to a preventative response to climate change. Orsatti and Dinale (2024), in surveying literature on gender-based regulatory and industrial relations responses to natural disasters in Australia over the past decade, note that unfortunately the focus has been on disaster response rather than prevention. Whilst more encouraging examples are emerging of women working to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, these tend to be on a small local scale, such as urban waste recycling initiatives documented by UN Women (e.g. Hoang 2025). The reporting of such initiatives, as if a sufficient number of them will add up to a solution of the global heating problem, is an example of a reliance on the discourse of individual empowerment, critiqued in this collection by Breitkreuz and Baird. By contrast, the article by Thampi in this collection presents a feasibility study that demonstrates how a large-scale green energy job guarantee programme in India could provide stable employment for millions of women currently driven by economic distress into agricultural self-employment.

### *Gendered violence*

Globally, the scale of the incidence of family and domestic violence (FDV) was laid bare during COVID lockdowns (Gavin and Weatherall 2022; Piquero et al 2021). In Australia, one policy response has been to implement measures to address gender violence as one of the key pillars of a ten-year governmental gender equality initiative. The article by Cassells et al (2025) fills a critical evidence gap by demonstrating the affordability to employers of providing paid family violence leave as one strand of that initiative.

Although this themed collection does not include research on gendered work in conflict zones, it is being published in the context of a dire struggle for survival by people displaced by conflict, living with an aftermath of devastation or with heightened risks of gender-based violence, and experiencing food insecurity and the loss of families and livelihoods. The United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security (OSAGI 2004) emphasises the need to recognise women, not as war victims, but as key agents of crisis prevention, peace processes, and post-conflict reconstruction (UN Security

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Council 2000). This is a heroic expectation, in the light of the UN Secretary General's lengthy report documenting gendered violence (UN Secretary General, 2024).

## Technological change and gender: impacts of artificial intelligence (AI)

Globally, the context of women's labour market-based work has shifted with the rapid spread of generative artificial intelligence (AI). This has occurred before questions have been adequately addressed relating to gender bias in algorithmic representation, gender equity in the work of technology development, and the balance between gendered labour-displacement and augmentation, skilling and deskilling in the use of AI applications.

Recent research suggests that gender inequality in AI development and deployment creates interconnected risks and opportunities for women's work. Wacjman et al (2020) argue that the ongoing gender divide in technology education is creating a feedback loop, whereby women's under-representation in AI development produces gender biased machine learning, reinforcing gender stereotypes. An impact assessment by Gmyrek et al (2023) for the International Labour Organization (ILO) finds that clerical work is the occupation most exposed to AI displacement, with 24% of jobs at high risk and an additional 58% at medium risk. They argue for the importance of monitoring employment impacts, coupled with inclusive approach to upskilling and reskilling for non-tertiary educated groups at risk.

In this respect, the first contribution to this Themed Collection (published in Volume 35(4)) examines the implications of AI for women working in the legal profession (Lee, Foley, Tapsell and Cooper 2024). As well, a forthcoming Contested Terrains contribution by Varghese and Rajeev in Volume 36(3) discusses the stereotyped gendered subservience evident in Indian chatbots.

## Contribution of this collection

These developments underscore the importance of a wide-ranging gender and work stocktake. The range of issues covered in this collection helps capture something of the interconnected nature of contemporary challenges facing women and LGBTQ+ people across diverse work contexts. They provide analyses of concrete issues of gender and work, and ways in which goals and obstacles to achieving them are being framed and addressed, and to what effect.

2025 is an appropriate year for a stocktake. It marks 80 years since the signing of the UN Charter commitment to 'the equal rights of men and women', followed in 1946 by the creation of the Commission on the Status of Women and in 1951 by the adoption of ILO (International Labour Organization) Convention 100 on Equal Remuneration. What obstacles did these early high hopes encounter? What weaknesses in the conceptualisation of equality have subsequently emerged and how have they been addressed? 2025 also marks 50 years since the first World Conference on Women in Mexico and the inauguration of International Women's Year. To what extent did the Plan of Action reflects the aspirations of Global Majority women, in the context of an emerging global neoliberal order? As well, 2025 marks the 30th anniversary of the 1995 Beijing Conference, with its plan of action based on equality and empowerment. To what extent did this agenda embrace the politics of intersectionality that was by then emerging? Finally, 2025 is also mid-way through the decade during which nations were to have achieved the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, and in which gender equality and empowerment were seen as the 'necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world'. This raises the question of whether there are signs of global progress to be made towards 'sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment'

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and decent work for all' and pay equity (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) 2025).

Indirectly, the overview of the 11 articles that follow enables a reflection on these questions, by providing mainly empirical insights into contemporary debates and everyday issues affecting the lives of people towards whom lives these policy aspirations and agendas, are directed. We provide a summary of each article, drawing out these debates and issues.

*Women's economic empowerment: a global pathway to gender equality?*

As the first article this collection in 36(3) s, Breitkreuz and Baird (2025) caution against the mainstream global consensus that women's economic empowerment represents an unqualified pathway to gender equality. Defining women's economic empowerment as women's capacity to contribute to, and benefit from, economic activities on terms that recognise the value of their contributions, the authors apply a critical-feminist lens to demonstrate how empowerment discourse has evolved from a broad, collectivist approach to a narrow, individualised focus on economic participation, rather than structural change. Despite benefits in national economic growth, advances in women's tertiary educational attainment and labour market participation, and enhanced women's autonomy, the authors argue that the reduction of women to economic instruments, and the concomitant perpetuation of structural inequalities undermine real progress towards gender equality. Their analysis identifies three fundamental risk areas: the instrumentalisation of women as a country's 'natural resource' that prioritises national economic prosperity over individual well-being; a focus on labour participation without consideration of current labour market realities; and insufficient attention to the scope of largely invisible and unpaid reproductive work undertaken by women.

The authors, however, express cautious optimism about the potential of the UN Women's 2024 Economic Empowerment Strategy, which calls for systemic transformation of economic systems and regulatory frameworks with rights-based cross-cutting approaches that recognise the intersecting forms of discrimination and the contributions of paid and unpaid care work.

*Promise and peril: gender, technology, and the future of work in the legal profession*

Published in Volume 35(4), this article is based on interviews with senior legal stakeholders. The authors, Lee, Foley, Tapsell & Cooper 2024), find that the introduction of digital technology in the legal profession poses very real career risks, with four possible and contradictory outcomes with implications for gender equality. In terms of career impacts, they identify four possible trajectories: bifurcation of the profession into high- and low-value sectors; democratisation – opening the profession to more freelance work; humanisation – freeing lawyers to provide more human-centred services; and flexibilisation – allowing more work from home. They argue that which of these outcomes eventuate, and in which combination, will depend on the strategies adopted by legal institutions, professional associations, and employers. If the benefits of new technologies are to be harnessed, active strategies will be needed to achieve a gender-equitable future in legal work.

*Towards a gendered and green job guarantee programme in India*

Thampi's (2025) analysis of India's predominantly informal employment landscape provides crucial evidence for reconceptualising work as both an enabler of women's status and a vehicle for climate action. The study examines the intersection of the gendered nature of productive and reproductive labour and the disproportionate vulnerability of

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women to climate change. In India, despite relatively high economic growth, 80% of the workforce is informally employed, and since 2018 women have been 'largely entering the paid workforce in distress-driven agricultural self-employment'.

Applying an input–output framework to nationally representative employment data, Thampi explores the possibility of creating decent formal jobs for women in the clean energy sector through government job guarantee programmes targeting universal basic services and climate mitigation activities. The results indicate that a gendered and green job guarantee programme could potentially generate 36 million jobs, with 11.6 million employment opportunities specifically for women. The findings reveal how government intervention in green energy investments can instrumentally create more gender-equitable employment that simultaneously addresses women's exclusion from secure productive labour and their disproportionate burden of unpaid reproductive labour, while advancing climate action.

### *Gender segregation and women's 'ancillary' occupations*

Cortis and Naidoo (2025) expose how, despite decades of progress towards Australian workplace gender equality, occupational segregation channels women into ancillary roles that are systemically undervalued and rendered invisible. Drawing on Fair Work Commission occupational analysis and Census data, they show that several ancillary occupations are among Australia's most feminised industries, characterised by low pay, part-time work, and award reliance.

Health care receptionists belong to an occupation group that is highly feminised (over 90%) and located across feminised industry classes. In this case study, the authors demonstrate how work framed as supplementary to health care professionals is actually essential to service delivery. Receptionists perform critical informal triage roles, manage patient pathways and expectations, and maintain workflow and system functionality, all of which rely on complex affective and organisational skills. The authors challenge gender-based undervaluation by demonstrating that receptionists are not ancillary but vital to health care service productivity.

The paper calls for a fundamental reconceptualisation of productivity and skilled work, challenging how male-dominated formal occupational skill classifications systematically exclude women's complex interpersonal and coordination skills. Recent legislative changes to Australia's Fair Work Act now enable the Fair Work Commission to address systematically, gender-based undervaluation across all feminised occupations, signalling hope for transformative change (Fair Work Commission, 2025). How far this hope will be realised is, however, an open question.

### *The 'double whammy': associations between LGBTQ+ identity, non-standard employment, and workplace well-being*

Ablaza, Perales and Elkin (2025) address a significant gap in labour market research by examining how employment arrangements differ for LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+ individuals, focusing on non-standard employment (NSE) and its impacts on workplace well-being. NSE includes self-employment, fixed-term contracts, part-time, and casual positions.

Using data from the 2024 Australian Workplace Equality Index Employee Survey, the authors provide evidence that LGBTQ+ employees are overrepresented in NSE arrangements and that these arrangements more negatively affect their workplace well-being compared to non-LGBTQ+ employees. This double disadvantage is problematic because LGBTQ+ employees face both general employment-related stressors from NSE (such as job insecurity, lack of benefits, and wage penalties) and additional minority

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stressors from their stigmatised identity (such as discrimination, identity concealment, and expectations of rejection), which compound multiplicatively rather than additively.

This research reinforces that employment structures can systematically amplify existing inequalities, especially with those who are already marginalised and experiencing the most severe barriers to workplace security and well-being.

### *Workplace policy responses to family and domestic violence: Assessing employers' costs and benefits of providing 10-days paid leave*

In an empirically driven paper, Cassells, Duncan, Hailemariam and Mavisakalyan (2025) make a significant contribution to workplace policy research through a comprehensive economic analysis of employers' costs of providing 10 days of paid FDV leave. Even though FDV affects over one-quarter of women and one-eighth of men in Australia, with profound consequences on gender equality and workplace productivity, the authors address a specific evidence gap regarding employer costs that had previously limited development of more generous paid FDV leave provisions.

Using a bottom-up demographic calculation combining Australian Bureau of Statistics Personal Safety Survey data with wage profiles from the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey, the authors estimate actual costs to employers ranging from $13.1 million to $34.3 million for award-covered employees. These costs are modest, and drawing on the literature, are substantially outweighed by enhanced workplace productivity and reduced costs from decreased absenteeism, turnover, and recruitment expenses.

This is one instance where cogent argument has prevailed: since February 2023, ten days of FDV leave is legally mandated as one of the National Employment Standards, available to all employees experiencing FDV (Fair Work Ombudsman 2025). The paper remains relevant because it offers a methodological template for evaluating similar workplace interventions.

### *Accessing maternity protection: Structural barriers in the informal economy in Sub-Saharan Africa*

In a comprehensive study, combining legislative- and interview-based research, the article by Mokomane, Grzesik-Mourad, Sprague and Heymann (2025) examines access to maternity protection provisions among informal workers across Sub-Saharan Africa. Maternity protections include workplace safety precautions, anti-discrimination measures, paid maternity leave with cash and medical benefits, and workplace breastfeeding support arrangements.

The legislative review reveals that, although all Sub-Saharan countries provide legal maternity protections for formal workers, there is a major gap in extending these provisions to informal workers. Drawing on interviews in Mozambique, Tanzania and Togo, the countries with the most comprehensive legislative maternity protections in the region, the findings highlight critical implementation barriers including lack of awareness of legislative frameworks, information gaps between unionised and non-unionised workers, unaffordable financing for self-employed informal workers, and inadequate institutional enforcement. Notably, the findings indicate that union membership dramatically improves workers' knowledge of rights and ability to access benefits

The contribution by Mokomane, Grzesik-Mourad, Sprague and Heymann (2025) demonstrates both obstacles and hope. Legislative frameworks can fundamentally restructure social protection systems. Countries such as Mozambique, Tanzania, and Togo have pioneered innovative approaches explicitly recognising informal workers. Yet even comprehensive legislative protections are insufficient without addressing the deep structural barriers that hinder implementation.

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*Care during crisis: Au pairing before and after a global pandemic*

Also addressing an aspect of work in the informal economy, Kintominas (2025) examines how the COVID-19 pandemic exposed and intensified the gendered and precarious nature of such work in Australia. Through interviews with temporary migrant au pairs and Australian parent employers, the research reveals that au pair work, a form of live-in domestic and childcare labour, functions as essential yet invisible reproductive work that enables professional women to meet 'ideal worker' demands.

The pandemic created a social experiment as government policies shifted so that au pairs' status oscillated between vulnerability and empowerment. Initially, pandemic restrictions left au pairs vulnerable to exploitation in a saturated care labour market, and without access to formal work or emergency relief measures, turning their employment into 'survival work'. However, as restrictions eased, emergency childcare measures were withdrawn, and visa restrictions were relaxed, labour scarcity in the migrant care market empowered au pairs to negotiate better conditions and wages.

The research demonstrates a structural contradiction in which both invisible care work and temporary migrant labour are essential for social reproduction, yet are systematically marginalised by specific policy configurations. Consistent with other articles in this collection, Kintominas (2025) argues that regulatory frameworks shape reproductive labour arrangements (who does care labour and how is care labour organised), perpetuating and challenging gendered care norms.

*Valuing human milk: applying economic pricing to measure lactation in national accounts*

Smith (2025) challenges the exclusion of women's unpaid lactation labour from national statistics, reflecting what feminist scholars argue is a gender-biased view of economic growth and progress that essentially renders the non-market productivity of women's labour invisible and thus unvaluable. The resulting inadequate support for the work of breastfeeding has adverse health effects for mothers and babies. Yet Smith (2025) argues that the monetary value of human milk production meets official criteria for inclusion within accounting valuation frameworks. It can be produced, stored and traded, responds to market incentives, and generates observable market prices.

Using market-derived prices to value women's unpaid breastfeeding work, Smith demonstrates that actual milk production in 2018 contributed 0.4% of GDP in both Australia and Norway. However, she argues that actual production volumes fall significantly short of biologically feasible potential (reaching only 38% in Australia and 59% in Norway) due to competing labour market demands, inadequate maternity leave policies, hospital practices that disrupt breastfeeding, and competition from cheaper commercial milk formula alternatives. These barriers reflect a systemic problem that prioritises commercial formula markets over supporting women's breastfeeding capacity.

The paper calls for economic and accounting systems to recognise the critical role of women's unpaid labour and unpaid household production to economic prosperity. It provides evidence for the 'beyond GDP' agenda and the need for policy responses that advance economic justice for women while improving women's and children's rights to health and food.

*US teachers, overwork, and perceptions of work-time reductions: evidence from Massachusetts*

Moos and Wiener (2025) examine the potential for work-time reduction policies to improve working conditions of teachers in public schools in the United States. Drawing on focus group interviews and time-use diaries, the study investigates the need to reduce contracted hours without loss of pay or instructional time.

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The findings document extensive overwork and significant 'mental load' affecting teacher health, family relationships, and retention. However, most teachers identify themselves as hardworking perfectionists with strong emotional attachment to student welfare, making it psychologically difficult to organise workload demands that might be perceived as harmful to student learning outcomes. These deeply internalised professional expectations around care, duty, and perfectionism align with feminist political economy concerns, given that teaching remains a predominantly female profession shaped by gendered care work norms. Despite union membership and collective bargaining experience, teachers primarily view overwork as a personal boundary-setting problem rather than a collective issue.

The paper points to the unique challenges in care work when professional identity intersects with collective labour organising and bargaining. It contributes to this Themed Collection's examination of how gendered and cultural expectations of care work and structural working conditions constrain workers' ability to achieve improvements in well-being, while also demonstrating that union membership does not automatically translate into collective action for better conditions.

### *Gender and Australian school leaders experiences of workplace violence by students, parents, and colleagues*

Blackmore, Rahimi, Arnold and MacDonald (2025) investigate gendered patterns of workplace violence against school leaders, by examining the experience of bullying, physical violence, and threats of violence across different school levels (primary vs secondary), sectors (Government, Catholic, and Independent), and leadership roles (principal vs assistant/deputy/acting (ADA) principals). Using logistic regression models based on 10 years of longitudinal data from the Australian Principal Health Safety and Wellbeing survey (Australian Catholic University and Deakin University, 2025), the analysis identifies significant gender disparities.

Women school leaders are more likely to experience threats of violence and bullying than their male counterparts, particularly in secondary schools, and in government and Catholic sectors. Perpetrator patterns are distinctly gendered, with women school leaders more likely to experience bullying from colleagues and physical violence from students, but less likely than male leaders to experience threats or physical violence from parents.

The authors argue that as schools are a microcosm of society, school-based programs that challenge societal norms and power dynamics are insufficient without broader community and policy coordination. Together with the findings of Cassells, Duncan, Hailemariam and Mavisakalyan (2025), this study reveals how gender-based violence, whether experienced directly in the workplace or in domestic settings, operates as a fundamental barrier to women's full economic participation and leadership. Gender equity reform requires both rapid-response protective measures (such as FDV leave), and longer term structural and cultural changes to address the underlying conditions that perpetuate violence against women.

## Conclusion

Overall, this collection addresses emerging and enduring issues with which women are grappling in their daily lives. The opening article challenges the optimism about prospects for women's economic empowerment offered by policy discourse since the 1995 Beijing Conference. For too many women and LGBTQ+ people, paid work remains characterised by insecurity, subordination, marginalisation, and undervaluation.

Whilst labour market work has not brought the hoped-for empowerment, the gender work situation is worse in non-standard areas of employment and informal labour

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markets. This collection provides evidence of the multiplicative effects for workers experiencing both employment insecurity and other forms of marginalisation. This includes the stigmatised identities of LGBTQ+ workers or the lack of access to maternity protections in Sub-Saharan Africa's dominant informal sector.

Meanwhile, traditional gender roles in the household economy continue to be seen as unproductive as a result of a flawed conceptualisation of productivity that still privileges market-based work and discounts the value of reproduction and nurturing. At least in Australia, with the extent of domestic violence laid bare, the economic value of FDV leave has been accepted. But it is not yet clear whether in India, there is acceptance that women in distress-driven individual subsistence could be gainfully employed in large-scale climate-change mitigation projects.

Overall, there are limitations in the framing of the goals and 'benchmarks' defining gender equity in work. Can the concept of equality be useful, or does it necessarily rely on a male or normative comparator? Can the concept of empowerment be rescued from identification with liberal-feminist notions of the economic status of atomised individuals? Does an alternative discourse of 'inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment', 'decent work for all' and pay equity resonate with our sense of global reality in 2025, which is marked by the threat of climate catastrophe, the human rights consequences of devastating wars, political repression, and forced migration? Does it accord with a world marked by disempowerment, a lack of respect for reproduction, care and support-giving, and the dominance of the informal economy? If not, what is to be done?

The contexts outlined in this introductory article, and the concrete evidence analysed in this Themed Collection, reveal the fundamental irrationality, as well as inhumanity, of the present gender relations of work. Part B of this Collection (to follow in Volume 36(3)) will provide further evidence, focusing on women's work outside the Global Minority form of waged labour market employment, with examples of caste, class, and racial oppression. As well, it will document women's participation in forms of communal work and solidarity (Ghosh 2018). In introducing it, we will attempt to address responses being explored, including by Majority World/Global South world feminisms and intersectional voices.

**Supplementary material.** The supplementary material for this article can be found at https://doi.org/10.1017/elr.2025.10047

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