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Our approach to tackling gender inequality in our supply chains

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11 January 2022

Workers in global supply chains are critical to our everyday lives: they grow the food we eat, make the clothes we wear and keep products we need moving around the world. When you pick up an apple in our store, it's been planted, grown, picked, packed and delivered to us. When you choose a new pair of jeans, the cotton has been grown, picked, dyed and weaved; the fabric has been cut, sewn, assembled, labelled and packed, all before making its way to our stores. Female workers play a critically important role in these supply chains. The vast majority of garment workers – approximately 80% – are women [\[1\]](#), however, the highest-paid positions in garment factories are majority male [\[2\]](#). Within agriculture, women do the majority of the labour, yet men own the land they work on [\[3\]](#). Empowering these women is essential for us to continue to serve our customers. Therefore, it's vitally important that we recognise the unique challenges that women workers face and play our part in breaking down these barriers. We want to be part of a world where women can succeed and fulfil their full and vibrant potential.

Gender inequality is a global challenge

We know that women face unique challenges in the workplace – whether that's on a farm, in a factory or any other setting. There are hidden barriers that limit women's ability to engage and succeed in their work. For example, women often take on work that is invisible and unrecognised, such as unpaid family labour on farms. This invisibility, combined with issues such as gender-based violence, sexual harassment, and social expectations about what roles women should or shouldn't play, all limit how women can equally participate in and benefit from working in global supply chains.

We also know that certain groups of women face further discrimination – for example, based on race or ethnicity, migrant status, social status, religion, disability, age, marital status, or sexual orientation. Where gender inequality intersects with other forms of discrimination, this contributes to making certain groups of women more vulnerable.

Women must not be left behind in a net-zero world

As part of our ambition to be a truly inclusive retailer, we want to push for change. Our approach to tackling gender inequality is framed by our commitment to being net-zero by 2035. As part of a just transition to net-zero, we want to place the people in our supply chains at the heart of our move to a low carbon world.

The global transition to net-zero will undoubtedly disrupt how global supply chains operate, and the roles of workers will change. We are committed to working seamlessly across our Plan for Better ambitions to understand where women work within our supply chains and the barriers they face. We will push for a just transition that protects women’s livelihoods and opportunities for work. For example, women’s land rights, access to technology and access to finance all impact their ability to participate and benefit in our agricultural supply chains, particularly as we move towards net zero.

We are ready to stand up and play our part in this global and complex challenge. This isn’t just the right thing to do – there is huge potential for businesses to benefit by making progress towards gender equity. For example, when women workers enjoy safe and secure working conditions, studies show that this leads to reduced turnover, higher productivity, and improved reputation [4].

Our approach to tackling gender inequality

We have a strong history of empowering women in our workforce and supply chains. We have signed up to the UN Women’s Empowerment Principles that promote gender equality and women’s empowerment, as well as the [30% Club](#) and the [Women in Finance Charter](#). We regularly publish gender-related data such as our gender pay gap, and more recently, our ethnicity pay gap. We encourage our suppliers to do the same through our Human Rights Policy and our Sustainable Sourcing Policy:

- Our [Human Rights Policy](#) is aligned with the UN Declaration of Human Rights, the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, and the ILO Core Conventions. The policy outlines our human rights commitments - which include women’s rights - to our colleagues, customers and suppliers.
- Our [Sustainable Sourcing Policy](#) requires all our suppliers to meet the Sainsbury’s Code of Conduct for Ethical Trade which is based on the ETI Base Code. This includes the principle of no discrimination – including equal pay for equal work, and no discrimination in access to employment, training, promotion or termination.

Our Board is committed to tackling gender inequality. Sainsbury’s Group HR Director and member of our Operating Board, Angie Risley, is responsible for our approach to human rights, which includes women’s rights. Our Gender Board Sponsor, Jim Brown, champions our work to create a better gender balance, including in our leadership teams, within Sainsbury’s.

Spotlight: learning from our success

By working collaboratively with our colleagues, we have developed impactful policies to support women and recognise the unique challenges they face. We aspire to learn from the successes in

our own workforce when expanding our approach into our supply chains.

- We were the first FTSE100 company to include carers in our Parents and Carers policy, recognising that of the 6.5 million unpaid carers in the UK, 58% - or 3.34 million - are women
- Our Colleague Guide to the Menopause was launched on World Menopause Day 2021, which aims to raise awareness of the different ways menopause can affect women in all aspects of their lives, including at work
- Training on inclusion is mandatory for line managers, reaching over 16,000 of our managers. Our colleague inclusion training has been completed by over 165,000 of our colleagues
- In the UK, almost one in three women aged 16-59 will experience domestic abuse in her lifetime. We have developed a guide to domestic abuse to support colleagues and line managers to identify domestic abuse and know what support is available to them
- Our Guide to Discrimination, Bullying, Harassment, Sexual Harassment and Victimisation is available to all our colleagues and outlines our zero-tolerance approach to discrimination against women, gender-based violence and harassment
- Supporting our colleagues at all stages of their careers is a big part of our commitment to be truly inclusive. Our Family Leave Policy was recently enhanced to recognise the important time away from work needed to have a family

Our commitments to tackling gender inequality

We are committed to respecting women's rights across our supply chains - it is critically important to us that the women who grow or make our products are not being exploited or exposed to unsafe working conditions. In order to see real changes for women, we commit to:

1. Encouraging all our suppliers to sign up to UN women's empowerment principles and publish gender-related data through our human rights and sustainable sourcing policies
2. Tracking the gender profile of our supply chains, including the proportion of women working in our supply chain, the proportion of women in trade unions and/or worker committees and the proportion of women in supervisory positions. By understanding the gender profile of our supply chains, we are better placed to respond to the challenges faced by women workers
3. Where economically possible, we will buy products from producers and processing facilities run by women. Initially, we will focus on gathering data to understand our current levels of purchasing from women-run suppliers. We will report on our progress on an annual basis
4. As part of our broader commitments to addressing human rights in our supply chains, we commit to conducting and publishing at least one human rights impact assessment (HRIA) each year. Recognising the need to act quickly within our high-risk supply chains, we will conduct three human rights impact assessments in high-risk sectors by 2022. In each HRIA, we will ensure that women and other vulnerable groups (such as smallholders and minority people groups) are given special consideration and inclusion so we can identify issues most pertinent to them. We will ensure that findings and data are separated by gender, and we will publicly share the lessons we learn and where we encounter challenges. Where possible, we will collaborate to create system-wide change

We are currently undertaking a human rights saliency assessment and expect gender inequality to be within our salient human rights risks. Through this assessment, we aim to better

understand the barriers women face within our supply chain, including:

- The prevention of gender discrimination in hiring, training and promotion
- Recognition of hidden or unpaid productive roles and women's greater unpaid care work
- Prevention of sexual harassment and abuse during the recruitment process, in the workplace and when travelling to and from work
- Women's safe and effective access to grievance mechanisms and remedy

We have ambitious plans for the future

We are in the process of identifying our most salient human rights risks, which will include consideration of women's rights across our supply chain. These most important issues will inform our human rights strategy, and form part of our targets and commitments for Sainsbury's. We will publish our targets and commitments in 2022.

Only by working together will we see systemic changes for women

If one thing is clear, it's that tackling the global issue of gender inequality is not something that Sainsbury's can achieve alone. Collaboration with other stakeholders will be essential to drive change and improve the situation of women in our supply chains. Collaboration with our suppliers, other retailers, and non-government organisations, with goals and ambitions in line with ours, will help us create the level of change we need to see. We will continue to support our suppliers to help them achieve their gender ambitions, and we will continue to engage with other initiatives on gender equality. Together, we can create truly inclusive and sustainable supply chains that value women in the workforce and help them fulfil their full potential.

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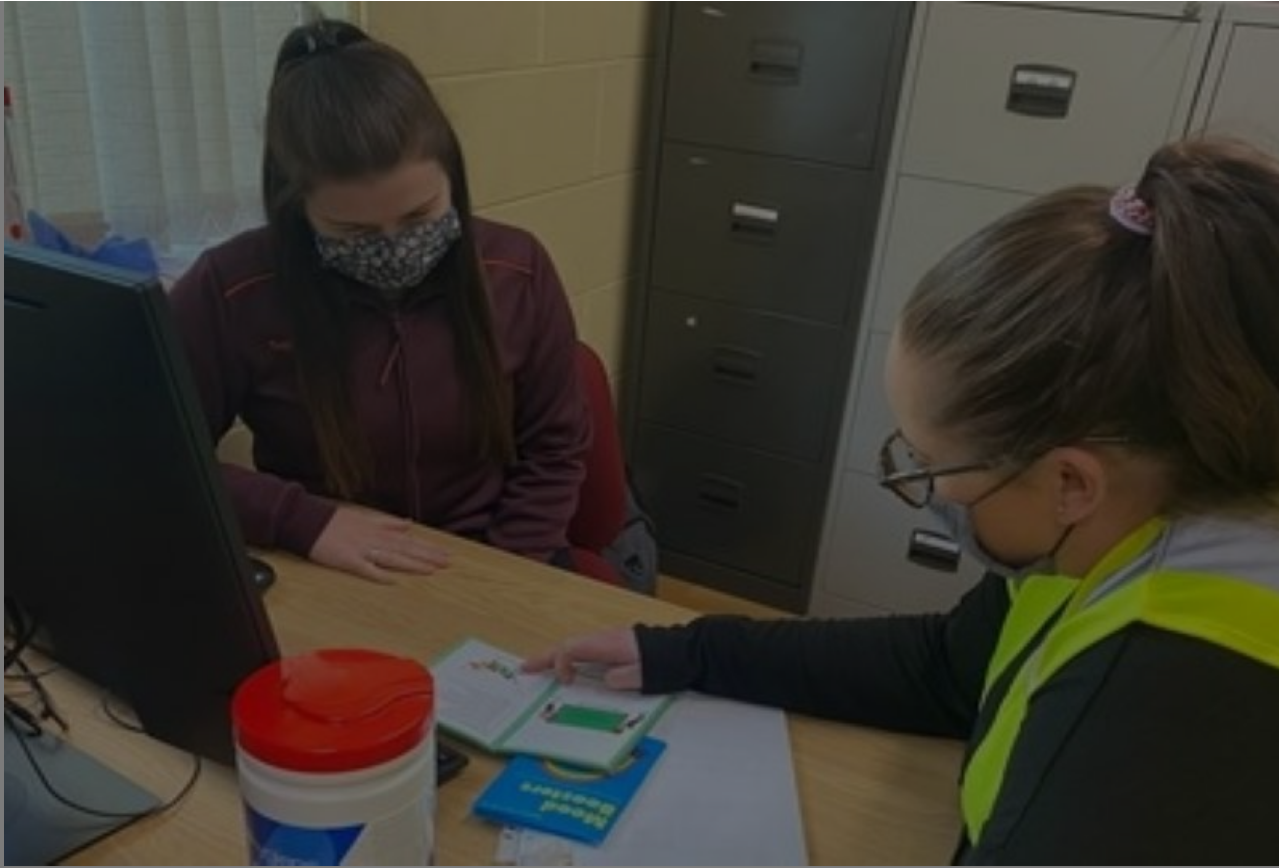
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