



# makeITfair in Poland

This is a summary of the report "Production of Next-Generation Electronics in Poland - Gender Aspects", KARAT, December 2007

In the drive to keep prices as low as possible, electronics factories have been shifting their production to countries where labour costs are low and environmental standards are not so strict.

Much of the production has been outsourced to China, where about half of the world's mobile phones and laptops are made. Other factories have sprung up in India, Thailand, the Philippines, Mexico and in new EU countries like Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic.

Although the electronics industry is relatively small in Poland, it is developing at a rapid rate. The share of foreign investment is growing fast; the larger firms are generally fully or partly owned by foreign companies such as Dell, Kimball Electronics Poland, Jabil Circuit Poland and Flextronics International Poland. Poland is very popular for the production of LCD computer monitors, which saw investments from Funai, Sharp, LG Philips LCD and LG Electronics in 2006.

## **SUBSTANDARD WORKING CONDITIONS**

makeITfair has looked into the working conditions of electronic workers in Poland – and the results suggest a worrying similarity with conditions normally associated with factories in the developing world. makeITfair interviewed a small sample of workers in a factory that employs 3,000 people and produces parts for mobile phones. They work for 12 hours shifts with just two 15 minute breaks – and earn between 200 and 350 Euro per month (including overtime). This is barely enough money to get by. Workers told us that conditions were often hot and dusty – and that the work is exhausting and tedious.

Not surprisingly, the turnover of workers is very high. A number of workers complained about difficulties with taking sick leave, leave to look after sick children and holiday leave they are entitled to. Many workers are subcontracted by employment agencies, which has a negative impact on workers' rights.

To make matters worse, unions in the industry experience problems protecting workers – particularly in terms of wages and working conditions. makeITfair's research has shown that less than two out of every five electronics workers belong to a union – with many workers believing that unions cannot help them.

## **WHAT CAN BE DONE?**

Although this research does not claim to be representative for the entire sector, the outcome emphasises the need to monitor the working conditions and the environmental impacts of this expanding new sector in Poland. While new jobs and new investment for Poland are both desirable, we need to make sure that workers are treated fairly and not exploited. As an increasing number of Polish workers vote with their feet and migrate to neighbouring EU states, demands related to improving wages and working conditions can and should be made.

Big brand electronics companies need to take responsibility for the labour abuses that are occurring in their supply chain. In turn, consumers should demand more responsibly produced electronics goods, ask questions and communicate to big brand electronics companies that they want to buy products that are sustainable and ethically produced.

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