

**Women have often had to fight for the right to work, and for safe working environments.**

Concern over the moral and physical wellbeing of women workers led to the introduction of gender-specific protective legislation, beginning with the 1833 Factory Act. This was designed to protect women from injury through exposure to toxins or through excess work. But it was also used to exclude them from high-paid employment, meaning they had to work longer hours for a living wage.

The Factory Acts provided jobs for educated women as factory inspectors; their investigations highlighted problems in women's working environments, and helped foster alliances between women of the working and middle classes.

Many employers required women to resign from their posts on marriage: this was known as the 'marriage bar'. This practice was only outlawed by the Sex Discrimination Act of 1970. It meant that women's jobs often gave no opportunity for progression or promotion. Older women with dependents might be paid the same wages as teenagers living at home.