



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission on the Status of Women

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**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”**

### **Statement submitted Graduate Women International, International Federation of Business and Professional Women, National Alliance of Women’s Organisations, Widows for Peace Through Democracy, Women for Water Partnership and Zonta International, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council\***

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

Advancing women's economic empowerment in the world of work is essential for achieving gender equality, realising human rights and for sustainable development. When governments, businesses and communities invest in empowering women in any workplace, and in eliminating inequalities, countries, communities and families see improvement in health, participation in education and poverty reduction. Aligned with this recognition should be given to the role of men in family and care support, especially where this would enable women to play a stronger active role in the workforce.

Efforts to realise gender equality in the workplace for women are a vital strategy for economic and social development as part of sustainable development. Women and girls comprise the majority of people living in poverty, and experience persistent and multidimensional inequalities, thus limiting economic development potential.

Through Paragraph 6 of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda Countries have committed to achieving women's empowerment in the world of work. They need now to enact transformative measures to achieve those commitments.

- Dedicated resources should be provisioned to advance gender equality as part of sustainable development, especially sustainable development goal 5. A lack of practical action on realising the economic empowerment of all women and girls, as well as marginalised groups, in all countries will prevent the success of the sustainable development goals. These actions should include the opportunity for women to contribute to the economic well-being of their countries regardless of their family care status;
- Education, both formal and informal, has a vital role to play in ensuring that women are empowered in the changing world of work. Through education, women and girls can develop skills needed for success in the world of work. Education and training should take into account that the employment empowerment needs of women vary from place to place, and should be tailored so that they are most appropriate to those;
- Legislation should provide employers with incentives to allow flexible working hours, to combat sexual harassment in the workplace and protect women and girls from sexual violence across all workplaces and education systems. Legislation should encompass recognition that women empowered through education and the reduction of restrictions and barriers which inhibit their contributions in the world of work can increase overall economic productivity and prosperity;
- Marginalised groups such as indigenous women, migrant workers and those with disabilities continue to be excluded from participating fully in the economy; worldwide women have an employment rate that is 26% less than men. Socioeconomic policies and legal frameworks must be strengthened so that women and men can fully and equally participate in the workforce. Around 830 million women workers worldwide are not adequately covered in practice by maternity leave. (International Labour Organization (ILO) 2014) While there are international guidelines on maternity leave (not always

followed) there are no international guidelines on paternity leave. These types of socioeconomic policies have a direct impact on the ability of women and men to fulfil their potential to contribute to a society's economic and social well-being;

- Traditionally, a low value has been placed on work sectors dominated by women. This includes caregiving, education, and other services within the home. A shift in the value of these working areas, and a more gender-neutral division of household labour must be achieved in order to promote gender equality. Such changes would promote women's ability to fully participate in the economy, and access decent work.

### **The Impact of Education and Training**

Access to quality education will not guarantee equal access to economic prosperity, inclusion in the formal economy, jobs and leadership positions however it will play a major role. Even in locations where education parity is close to achievement or where female educational attainment has outstripped that of men, women still do not hold an equal proportion of jobs at every level and in every sector. This has been demonstrated to as a result of other forms of gender discrimination which operate in the workplace and in society.

Concerted action must be taken to ensure that all women and girls are able to access continuing and lifelong education and training, both formal and informal, ensuring that women are able to adapt their skills to the changing world of work. Increased access to education and training which provides technical skills and appropriate language skills are vital.

Women should be equipped with skill sets to pursue work and careers in multiple areas, and to become entrepreneurs. A specific focus on industries and sectors where women are underrepresented, for example in science, technology, engineering and math, will be fundamental for worldwide economic development.

Specific and targeted efforts should be made to ensure vulnerable groups access the education women need to be empowered in and for the world of work. Migrant women, refugees, those living in rural areas, older women and other minority groups often have significant challenges in accessing vocational education which prevents them from being empowered in and for the world of work. In many communities, adult and older women do not benefit from expanding access to vocational education, and therefore remain economically behind, (and not empowered). More programmes need to be rolled out targeting vulnerable economic groups that were previously "left behind" in development efforts to ensure equal participation and empowerment.

### **Entrepreneurship, Employment and the Role of the Private and Public Sectors**

The private and public sectors have an important role to play in empowering women in the world of work. Change of priority interests by the private sector within the context of sustainable development to support women's empowerment can be achieved; the private sector must complement and support state responsibilities, which in themselves should be strengthened.

As part of achieving gender equality in the job market women must be awarded full and equal legal, property, water and land rights and access to financial resources. Increasing financial awareness through training would enable the development of women-led and owned small and medium enterprises, which have a critical role to play in achieving women's increased contributions in the world of work and thus contributing to the 2030 Agenda.

As employers, the private sector must take specific actions to increase the number of women in leadership positions, improve gender diversity across all sectors, and provide more access routes for women into the world of work.

It is increasingly acknowledged and accepted that women's empowerment in the world of work is a fundamental requirement for economies to become more productive and innovative. Socially accepted practices which create barriers and place the value of women's work as lower than men's are not acceptable. Statistics worldwide show continuing evidence that women are being paid less for equal work and are underrepresented at all leadership levels.

### **Implementation, Policy Measures and Actions**

The following actions and policy measures will aid implementation of the 2030 Agenda and expedite processes that will ensure women's empowerment in the world of work.

- All ILO Conventions should be implemented by Member States in accordance with commitments made to provide gender equality in the world of work;
- More must be done to prevent trafficking of women, to prevent modern day slavery and to ensure that all women from these vulnerable groups, are able to access quality education and training;
- Recognition for legislative and financial support must be given to marginalised groups such as single carer families, migrant and refugee women, older women, women in isolated and rural communities to enable them to contribute fully to the economic structures and processes of their countries;
- Parental leave policies should ensure that both parents can share caring responsibilities. The dual demands of work and family are demands that often men do not share with women, and in many cases, women are the sole care providers at home. This division of responsibilities results in discrimination and barriers to women's empowerment at every level in the workplace. Only once caring and household responsibilities are shared will society be equal, to the benefit of both men and women.

### **Legislation**

Legislation by Member States is an essential tool for achieving equality in the workplace and for ensuring that employers can be held accountable for discriminatory practices. Legislation breaks down barriers and opens up opportunities for women to play their part in the world of work, either as employees or as entrepreneurs and business women.

Legislative reform should ensure that:

- Women's land rights and inheritance are recognised empowering them to contribute to the economy of their local communities and providing for their families;
- Women receive equal terms and conditions in their employment as men, including equal pay;
- Working environments are inclusive, and safe, with facilities that allow women to equally participate in employment and leadership opportunities;
- Sexual harassment is formally recognised as a form of discrimination and gender-based violence;
- Women have freedom to travel in their own right enabling them to participate fully in the world of work.

### **Data, Monitoring and Evaluation**

Thorough and transparent gender-differentiated statistics and indicators are vital as an accountability methodology. They are also fundamental as a means to develop appropriate financing strategies and for the fulfilment of human rights and gender equality commitments.

- Sex-disaggregated data: In order to take into account gender-specific disadvantages and needs, it is important to compile gender disaggregated data in many other areas, e.g. the distribution of property and assets between women and men, sensitive issues like gender-based violence;
- Gender-sensitive indicators: These will specify whether inequality between the sexes has increased or decreased over time, e.g. in the employment sector, indicators measure access to productive resources or wage ratios.

Sex-disaggregated data and gender-sensitive indicators should be collected nationally, regionally and globally in order to measure gender gaps and consequently adjust development programmes to rectify inequalities and to ensure women's empowerment in the world of work.

At a minimum, the implementation of the guidance given in the Transformative Agenda 2030 should be a priority. This would provide data disaggregated on the basis of age, sex, geography, income, disability, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity and other factors relevant to monitoring inequalities (including multiple inequalities experienced by women and girls). Although some indicators are measured by household (not by individual), it is still crucial that the data collected for those indicators is disaggregated, as it is important to know how the household is comprised. Without this information it will be difficult to properly and fully identify the gaps and challenges facing women and girls' economic empowerment as part of sustainable development.

### **Conclusion**

Economic empowerment should be a human right for all since it is fundamental to empowering individuals, families and societies. Women's contributions are essential for economic growth, enhancing families and communities.

More must be done to expand the range of economic opportunities available to women, not only to enter the world of work but also to reach the highest positions in their fields and positions of leadership. Women often face intersecting discrimination which is compounded in the world of work; race, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, geographic location, disability, and other factors can all contribute to women being discriminated against in the workplace. Women's empowerment in the world of work should result in women being equally represented across all sectors and in all positions. As the world moves toward the achievement of the 2030 agenda the increasing contribution of women in the world of work will generate contributions to stronger communities and a stronger global economy.

This statement is supported by Graduate Women International, International Federation of Business and Professional Women, National Alliance of Women's Organisation, Widows for Peace Through Democracy, Women for Water Partnership and Zonta International.

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