



# Economic and Social Council

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## Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-fourth session

9–20 March 2020

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 by World Federation of Trade Unions, a non-governmental organization 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

The World Federation of Trade Union, which represents more than 97 million workers in 130 countries all over the world, is hereby submitting positions and recommendations for the promotion and solution of contemporary issues faced by women worldwide. Our analysis is in line with the main focus of the sixty-fourth session of Commission on the Status of Women, which is on the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the United Nations General Assembly.

The World Federation of Trade Unions is hereby continuing its timeless contribution to the works of the Commission on the Status of Women in the framework of its general consultative status in the United Nations since 1946. Our analysis sets out our view on the contemporary needs and rights of women in comparison with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The positions that are going to be analyzed in the following paragraphs constitute a concise codification of the collective positions of the World Federation of Trade Unions as adopted in resolutions and decisions of global and regional congresses, conferences, workshops, and other initiatives that have taken place recently with the participation of trade unionists representing millions of workers from every region of the world.

In our understanding, the majority of women is facing double exploitation based on one hand and foremost on its social position and role in the productive process (which is also the same position of the majority of men). On the other hand, the second cause of the exploitation of women is gender discrimination and gender inequalities. Women's problems are not limited to the inequalities of work, wages, opportunities, and education, but are also expanding to all problems, barriers, and exploitation that are faced by workers and popular strata as a whole regardless of gender, biological differences, or other differences. Therefore, the problems that contemporary women are facing and that need to be eliminated are not only those that arise from gender and are listed in the fifth goal of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls), but are also matters of all 17 Sustainable Development Goals: poverty; starvation; unemployment; health; wars; climate impacts; exclusion from education and technologies; and more.

In addition, the particular measures and objectives aiming to reduce gender inequalities and overall social exploitation experienced by women have an important but limited perspective. The World Federation of Trade Unions puts forward specific proposals and measures, and prepares several actions to reduce the social gap and eliminate the impact of dual exploitation of women. However, the definitive and meaningful liberation of women can only result from a total change in the whole social reality and all its forms and permutations, including its structure and relations of production.

The three dimensions of sustainable development as defined by the United Nations: economic; social; and environmental, as far as we are concerned, are interconnected and cannot be addressed or achieved if we approach them separately and statically. Also, above all, they could not be approached and addressed independently from the frame productive model of contemporary society. This approach will not be explained further as it has been extensively analyzed in our recent multi-page issue, *The Present and Future of Work*.

In this statement, due to the limited length of the text and for targeting reasons we will focus on the following specific issues:

The World Federation of Trade Unions, noting the relative improvement and reduction of the income gap between men and women, is concerned about the large

gender pay gap for equal work that still exists. Various international surveys report that women earn around 77 per cent of men's salaries for equal jobs. This reveals the need for intensification of measures and escalation of the mobilization of workers and both friends against this distinction. In many cases, the absence of an official database helps the underpayment of women. The elimination of the income gap is a fundamental issue that is reported, inter alia, as Sustainable Development Goals 5.1 and 8.5 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as well as in paragraph F: women and the economy of Chapter IV of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and was adopted in the resolution of the twenty-third special session of the United Nations General Assembly. For the uncovering on this issue, the United Nations in cooperation with the Member States should set up a database on the disclosure and revelation of income inequalities in every country and occupation and develop specific legal acts for the banning of the pay gap. We call upon all workers, men and women, to continue and increase their struggle for the common and equal improvement of their working terms and conditions.

The percentages of unemployment among genders prevailed one of the toughest aspects of gender inequality. Female labour-force participation is 49.6 per cent of the global female population and at the same time, male participation is 76 per cent of the global male population. Unemployment among women creates negative chain effects linked to all aspects of an individual and expand gender inequality. The increased rates of unemployment among women exacerbate household financial distress and create conditions of social marginalization and pressure for women to accept lower wages. The goal of the Commission on the Status of Women should be to establish programmes to eliminate unemployment among women and to ensure equal employment. This issue is reported in Chapter II and in paragraph F: women and the economy of Chapter IV of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and was adopted in the resolution of the twenty-third special session of the United Nations General Assembly.

According to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which was adopted as a commitment by the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly Resolution, maternity is a key problem that contributes to both low employment rates and increased dismissals of women. It is estimated that 60 per cent of working women have no legal right to motherhood and 5.9 per cent of women do not receive remuneration during maternity leave. Many employers either target systematic layoffs of pregnant workers or terrorize them not to get pregnant in order to keep their jobs. The World Federation of Trade Unions requires adequate maternity leave with full remuneration during the leave. We also demand the creation of the preconditions and state subsidy for childcare at stations with appropriate facilities and skilled staff for a reasonable period after the end of parental leave.

The barriers that women face in education at all levels are reflected in their underrepresentation at every level from basic education to scientific research and academic careers. The related data on gender inequality at both the lowest and most advanced levels of education are indicative since 2 out of 3 of the 781 million illiterates under the age of 15 globally are women and only 30 per cent of scientific researchers are women. According to Sustainable Development Goal 4 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and paragraph B: education and training of women of Chapter IV of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which was adopted in the resolution of the twenty-third special session of the United Nations General Assembly, the World Federation of Trade Unions requires universal and free primary and secondary education for every child and public programmes for the elimination of gender inequality in higher education as well as scientific and academic occupations.

The World Federation of Trade Unions struggles for the quality upgrade of women's involvement at all levels and aspects of social life, focusing on attracting and encouraging more women to participate in trade unions and collective organized struggle. Undoubtedly, by reducing the barriers and constraints that women face, the improving of the proportional representation of women in decision-making centres and positions of power will be a normal consequence. However, we do not agree with the manner this issue is raised in Sustainable Development Goal 5.5 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and paragraph G: women in power and decision-making of Chapter IV of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which was adopted in the resolution of the twenty-third special session of the United Nations General Assembly. The issue, as it is raised, does not focus on removing the restrictions that result in the underrepresentation of women in decision-making centres, but rather aims to ensure the equal participation of women in all centres of power. As far as we are concerned, gender and the particular characteristics of a policymaker do not play a primary role; the main issue is whether the essence and direction of implemented policies serve the interests of popular strata and workers. Modern world history boasts examples of women or individuals from minority groups who have implemented anti-labour policies affecting women and their respective minority groups. The promotion of female policymaker idols regardless of the direction of the policy they pursued does not only promote the liberation of women, but blurs the goal of active and effective participation in all aspects and levels of social and political life.

According to Sustainable Development Goals 5.1, 5.2, and 5.3 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and paragraphs D, E, I, and L of Chapter IV of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which were adopted in the resolution of the twenty-third special session of the United Nations General Assembly, the World Federation of Trade Unions condemns all forms of exploitation, violence, coercion, and discrimination against women. It strongly condemns the unacceptable phenomenon of coercion in marriage and sexual harassment under any circumstances and especially against underage girls. At the same time, we are strengthening our work to ensure respect for and implementation of human rights, as well as the end of wars and war crimes that harm women and people as a whole.

The World Federation of Trade Unions underlines that the general goal set by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, to realize the human rights of all and to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, as well as the commitment that "no one will be left behind" are far from the prevailing reality of a society mired in inequality and exploitation.

The World Federation of Trade Unions is committed to continue contributing through its general consultative status in the United Nations Economic and Social Council on the path it has paved since 1946 for the elimination of all inequalities and discrimination against women. But above all, it is committed to escalating its historic mission of organizing trade union struggles of workers around the world for the satisfaction of their contemporary needs and the removing of all forms of discrimination and exploitation in society.

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