



## Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General  
13 December 2020

Original: English

---

### Commission on the Status of Women

Sixty-fifth session

15–26 March 2021

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 Education International, International Federation of Building and Wood Workers, International Federation of Journalists, International Trade Union Confederation, International Transport Workers’ Federation, and Public Services 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.

---

\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## **Statement**

### **It is Past Time for a Gender Equal New Normal**

The Covid-19 pandemic has laid bare the fault lines in our health and care systems and revealed a profound deepening of already existing gender and social inequalities. These inequalities are amplified by threats to peace, democracy, and human rights, as well economic, environmental and an emerging food crisis. Women, in all their diversity, are over-represented in informal work and irregular forms of employment, and are disproportionately and consistently affected by gender-based violence and discrimination, as well as intersecting systems of oppression based on class, ethnicity, race, migration status, sexual orientation and gender identity.

### **It is way past time for a gender equal new normal**

The Global Unions, representing more than 80 million women workers across all sectors all over the world, call on United Nations Member States to urgently prioritise and invest in realising a gender equal new social contract; to recognise the human right to care and build a caring economy; to ensure a world of work free from violence and harassment; and to secure equality and equity in decision-making and leadership. This will accelerate progress on achieving the promises enshrined in the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action and in the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development.

Equality and equity in leadership and decision-making is a prerequisite to achieving gender and social justice and for building prosperous, sustainable, and equitable societies and economies. However, globally women make up only one quarter of those in decision-making positions.

Unequal power relations, perpetuated by discriminatory laws and practices, legacies of slavery and colonialism, gender stereotypes, gender inequality in labour force participation, gender-based occupational segregation, both horizontal and vertical, inequitable opportunities in education and training, lack of access to quality public health and care services, as well as other essential public services such as water and sanitation, electricity, transport or judiciary, the disproportionate effect of poverty on women and lack of equal access to technology and digitalisation are root causes of inequality and inequity in decision-making and leadership, and in women's exclusion and exploitation in the world of work.

Trade unions are rising to these challenges, with millions of women in their ranks and 40 per cent women's representation in decision-making and leadership positions. Through organising and collective bargaining, trade unions secure women's rights and protections, including equal pay for work of equal value, as well as paid maternity and paternity leave. Unions can help end workplace discrimination, win access to social protection and inclusion policies for Indigenous and racialised workers, for LGBTI workers, workers living with disabilities, as well as for migrant workers, and other marginalised categories of workers, especially those positioned at the intersection of differentiating factors such as gender, class and race.

### **Shaping a World of Work Free from Violence and Harassment**

Gender-based violence deeply impacts women's lives and ability to access, maintain and evolve in paid work and is one of the most tolerated violations of workers' human rights. One third of women have experienced sexual or physical violence at home, in their communities or in the workplace. While these figures are already horrific, the emergency responses to the Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated this crisis in all sectors or occupations on the frontlines where women are perennially

more exposed to gender-based violence and harassment, including hospitality, health and social services, transport, education, media, domestic and informal work. Workers have experienced new forms of aggression related to the pandemic, such as threats of being coughed at, heightening exposure to Covid-19 infection.

The pandemic has also resulted in a surge in domestic violence, with disproportionate job losses and pay cuts in sectors including the informal sector, where women are over-represented with little or no economic independence, social and support networks, making them even more vulnerable. Home has now become the workplace for millions of workers. Until 2019, no international instrument addressed the elimination of gender-based violence in the world of work. This has changed after nearly a decade of trade union campaigning and lobbying: in June 2019, the International Labour Organization (ILO) adopted the landmark Violence and Harassment Convention No. 190 (C190) and Recommendation 206 (R206).

C190 and R206 provide vital guidance for shaping workplace cultures based on equality, dignity and respect, and health and safety. These instruments have a strong focus on gender-based violence and recognise that people whose experience of violence and harassment is exacerbated by discrimination and inequality must have the strongest and most robust protection. C190 and R206 require governments to adopt laws, regulations and policies ensuring the right to equality and non-discrimination in employment and occupation as part of the measures to prevent and eliminate violence and harassment in the world of work. The instruments apply to every sector, to the formal and informal economy and to rural and urban areas. They expand the concept of the world of work beyond the immediate physical workplace (including commuting to and from work, use of sanitary facilities and cyber-bullying), address third-party violence and require employers to address the impact of domestic violence in the world of work.

Clearly, there is an urgent need for governments to ratify and implement C190 and R206. When this is done, national laws and policies must be aligned with the provisions of the Convention. Global unions, supported by allies from feminist and human rights movements have increased lobbying and advocacy efforts to challenge all United Nations Member States to join Uruguay and Fiji, which are the first two countries to ratify C190.

### **Shaping a Caring Economy Based on Recognition of the Human Right to Care**

The Covid-19 pandemic laid bare the devastating effects of decades of austerity and under investments in health and care systems. Structural inequalities across gender, class and, in many cases, racialised and ethnic lines prevented the most marginalised groups from accessing affordable and quality public care and health services. While the health and care sector workforce, mostly women, are trapped in underpaid, informal, and precarious jobs and often denied their fundamental labour and trade union rights. Millions are risking their lives due to a lack of essential protective equipment.

Reinforcing publicness and public systems with adequate investment in equitable quality public care and health services is vital and urgent for every country to ensure dignity and health for those in need of care, and to create the conditions necessary to enable women's full and effective participation in decision-making in public life. To avoid a global care crisis, resources need to be put into the creation of millions of decent jobs in the public health and care sector, and to transform informal, precarious jobs in all sectors into decent jobs with living wages, income protection and access to social protection. Policies also need to be implemented to realize equitable sharing of unpaid care responsibilities between women, men, and non-binary people, both within households and between households and the State.

This will build resilient economies and societies, increase women's workforce participation, eradicate the gender pay gap, enable equitable access to quality public care and health services, and enhance the wellbeing of all in our societies. Shaping a caring economy is core to the agenda of the Global Unions.

### **A Gender Equal New Social Contract**

Global Unions are fundamental to bargaining for decent living and working standards for all. A new social contract must be the foundation for recovery plans in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. This will build resilience by embedding decent work, quality and gender-responsive public services, universal social protection, equality and equity and climate justice as intrinsic values in our laws and policies, economies and societies as a whole. This will effectively address critical constraints in achieving gender and social justice.

### **A Call to Action for a Gender Equal New Normal**

Global Unions call on Governments to urgently live up to promises made in the Beijing Platform for Action and to fulfil commitments made in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including the realisation of equality and equity in leadership and decision-making by addressing the following gender equal new normal pillars:

Universal ratification of C190 and its effective implementation, to shape a world of work free from gender-based violence and harassment in the world of work;

A new gender-equal social contract which builds resilient societies and economies through:

Living minimum wages and equal pay for work of equal value across all sectors;

Gender-responsive and universal social protection, including recognising the value of unpaid care work within contributory social security schemes;

Upholding fundamental ILO labour rights, including freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining;

Ratification and effective implementation of ILO Conventions that address and redress structural barriers for women's labour force participation, including C87, C98, C100, C111, C156, C183, C189 and C190;

Occupational health and safety guarantees;

Regulating business operations through human rights due diligence;

Measures to improve women's access to quality vocational education and training and to sectors with gender-based occupational segregation, including by requiring adequate and equitable sanitation provision in all workplaces and ensuring the provision of safe and gender-responsive commuting via accessible public transport;

Just transition measures for women workers affected by climate change, digitalization, and automation, adopted through social dialogue, collective bargaining, and job evaluations;

The systematic collection of gender-disaggregated data and gender impact assessments to shape policies, budgets and strategies which are gender-responsive.

A caring economy based on the recognition of the human right to care front and centre of macro-economic policy making by securing fiscal space and increased public resources and finance in:

Equitable and affordable access to gender-responsive quality public care and health services, including effective physical access to these services via well-funded gender-responsive transport services, with women included in the leadership and design of these lifeline services, and extending those services to rural and remote areas;

The creation of millions of decent jobs in the health, education and care sectors, with living wages and decent working conditions, including the transition of precarious, informal care and health jobs into decent jobs; fair recruitment of migrant health and care workers, irrespective of legal status; and

Enacting laws and implementing policies to facilitate the reconciliation of work and private life, including designing cities and public transport systems, routes and services in ways that efficiently cater to the mobility needs of women workers in all their diversity and in their role as carers; to realise the fair redistribution of unpaid care responsibilities and to recognise its value within contributory social security schemes.

---