

61st Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, 13 – 24 March 2016

The Netherlands' Civil Society Priorities for the Agreed Conclusions

Women's economic empowerment is key to the realisation of women's rights, and to achieving a truly gender equal world. Overcoming gender inequality, in turn, is not only a pressing moral and social issue but also a critical economic challenge. In a full potential scenario, in which women play an identical role in labour markets to that of men, as much as USD 28 trillion or 26 per cent could be added to the global GDP by 2025.¹ The 61st session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women comes at a decisive moment, as we stand on the brink of a technological revolution that will profoundly alter the way we live, work and relate to one another. In light of these developments and of the priority theme of CSW61 – *Women's Economic Empowerment in the Changing World of Work* – the Netherlands' civil society has identified a set of priorities for the Agreed Conclusions of CSW61.

Where Do We Stand?

The ideal picture of the full potential scenario is still a far cry from becoming reality.

- Women continue to participate in labour markets on an unequal basis with men. The global **female labour force participation** stood at **49.6 per cent** in 2015 (against 76.1 per cent for men) and has been decreasing since 1995. In 155 countries, women even face **legal restrictions on the economic opportunities** available to them;²
- Globally, women bear responsibility for **75 per cent of unpaid work**, especially in providing care, which creates tremendous value for the economy, yet inhibits women's physical and economic mobility, forecloses opportunities to learn and earn, reduces women's formal labour market participation and reflects a deeply entrenched structural advantage enjoyed by men that transcends cultures;
- Limited protection and fulfilment of women and girls' **sexual and reproductive health and rights** restricts their possibilities to pursue paid and decent work and access education and political participation. Access to sexual and reproductive health services, information and education empowers women and girls to make informed decisions about the number and spacing of their children and prevents early and/or unintended pregnancies. Currently 225 million women worldwide wanting to avoid pregnancy do not have access to effective contraception methods;³
- If current trends prevail, it will take over 70 years before the **global gender wage gap** – currently estimated at **23 per cent** - is closed completely.
- More women than men work in **vulnerable, low-paid, or undervalued jobs**;
- **Sectoral and occupational segregation** contributes significantly to gender gaps both in terms of the number and the quality of jobs. The ILO notes that occupational segregation has increased further over the past two decades, particularly in response to skill-based technological change. Between 1995 and 2015, employment increased fastest in emerging economies. Yet the absolute change level was twice as high for men as for women (382 million vs. 191 million respectively).⁴

The Changing World of Work: The Fourth Industrial Revolution

The world of work is on the verge of undergoing a series of fundamental changes that will determine how the gender gap in the labour market will develop over the coming years. This **Fourth Industrial Revolution** is characterised by a range of new technologies that will fuse the physical, digital and biological worlds, affecting all industries. While some drivers of change - i.a. the further automation of domestic work and boost of flexible working - have the potential of narrowing the gender gap, others are expected to deepen it. This is especially true from an employment perspective.

- According to the World Economic Forum, between 2015 and 2020, **5 million jobs will disappear** in 15 developed and emerging economies, affecting both some of the female- as well as male-dominated sectors, so that this disruptive change will fall almost equally on women and men. That in itself indicates a widening of the gender gap, as women make up a smaller share of the overall labour force;
- Moreover, given women's low participation in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) professions, one of the fastest-growing areas of job creation, **women stand to gain only one new STEM job for every 20 lost across other job families, whereas the ratio for men is one new job for every four lost elsewhere.**⁵

The conclusion is clear. If current industry gender gap trends persist and labour market transformation towards new and emerging roles in STEM-related fields continues to outpace the rate at which women are entering those types of jobs, women are at risk of losing out on tomorrow's best job opportunities.

Recommendations

Economically empowered women have access to education and life-long learning, decent work, control over economic resources and over their own time and bodies - as their bodily integrity is respected and protected by law -, participate meaningfully in economic decision-making at all levels, and can access quality public services (incl. safe and reliable public transport, quality sexual and reproductive health services, health and day care). The following recommendations are key to achieving this.

1. Education, Human Rights and Health

Economic empowerment for women starts with the guaranteed access to, and equitable participation in, quality education from early childhood onward. 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 and are not restricted by stereotyped ideas of women's and men's societal roles and sectors.

The Agreed Conclusions therefore must:

- Stress that **education is a human right**, and that equal access to education at all levels, training and science and technology for all women and girls is imperative to realising gender equality and making progress across all SDGs, as well as an economic necessity in the context of global economic and technological changes;
- Call on Member States to ensure the integration of **comprehensive sexuality education** (CSE, incl. on SRHR and HIV/AIDS) in all curricula, that includes scientifically accurate non-judgmental information about sexuality, sexual diversity and human rights. CSE challenges gender norms and stereotypes and increases awareness about healthy and respectful relationships based on gender equality;
- Promote the development of **gender-sensitive and gender-transformative curricula at all levels** and take concrete measures to ensure that educational materials challenge social and cultural gender norms, by portraying women and men, youth, girls and boys in positive and non-stereotypical roles (particularly in the teaching of STEM subjects), in order to address the root causes of occupational segregation and the unbalanced division of unpaid care and domestic work;
- Ensure the implementation of measures aimed at **making STEM more attractive for women and girls**, i.a. through curricula that highlight the broad societal applications of STEM; the exposure of girls and boys, women and men, to female role models in STEM and through sensitising parents, students, teachers and career counsellors, i.a. through a mandatory **training on gender sensitive teaching**, to make teachers more aware of gender differences, their own gender biases, and the way these biases contribute to perpetuating gender stereotypes;
- **Promote education** of women and girls, boys and men **on the importance of economic independence and the training of entrepreneurial skills.**

¹ McKinsey Global Institute, *The Power of Parity: How Advancing Women's Equality Can Add \$12 trillion to Global Growth*, published September 2015, available on: <http://www.mckinsey.com/global-themes/employment-and-growth/how-advancing-womens-equality-can-add-12-trillion-to-global-growth>

² World Bank, *Women, Business and the Law 2016: Getting to Equal*, published September 2015, available on: http://wbl.worldbank.org/~/_media/WBG/WBL/Documents/Reports/2016/Women-Business-and-the-Law-2016.pdf

³ WHO, *Fact Sheet: Family Planning/Contraception*, published December 2016, available on: <http://who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs351/en/>

⁴ ILO, *Women at Work: Trends 2016*, published March 2016, available on: http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/-/dgreports/-/dcomm/-/publ/documents/publication/wcms_457317.pdf

⁵ World Economic Forum, *The Future of Jobs*, published January 2016, available on: <http://reports.weforum.org/future-of-jobs-2016/>

2. Preconditions and Terms of Employment

Favourable terms of employment (incl. in male-dominated STEM-related fields, where attention for preconditions of particular importance to women is still under-developed) are crucial to the equal treatment of women in the work place and achieving their economic empowerment and independence.

The Agreed Conclusions therefore must:

- Call on Member States to **implement policies to recognise, reduce and redistribute unpaid care work**, which is essential to promoting women's economic rights and independence. This includes social protection policies and an increased investment in care services, incl. quality childcare. Parental leave should be enshrined and enforced in national law, be equal for men and women and offered to *all* caregivers, non-transferable and paid according to each parent's salary;
- Call on member States to ensure access to **water services and sanitation facilities**, which reduces time, health, and care-giving burdens on women giving them more time for i.a. paid work;
- Call on Member States to ensure that **part-time and temporary work** – in which women are over-represented – is decent work, by ensuring equal treatment for women and men in non-standard jobs vis-à-vis standard workers with regards to entitlements and benefits on a pro-rata basis;
- Call on the ILO and its Member States to draw up an ILO standard on ending **gender-based violence (GBV) in the work place**, which would be a significant step towards improving women's working conditions worldwide while at the same time increasing productivity and decreasing health care costs and sick leave as a direct result of GBV at work.⁶

3. (Access to) Resources and (Macro-)Economic Decision-Making

In order for women to be economically empowered and be equal to men in the world of work, they must have equal access to economic resources and decision-making, incl. at macro-economic level. Macro-economic policies, incl. fiscal, monetary and trade policies, have a different impact on women and men. They shape the overall economic environment for realising women's human rights by affecting opportunities for paid employment, resources for policies aimed at reducing inequalities, and the demand for women's unpaid labour.⁷

The Agreed Conclusions therefore must:

- Call on Member States to enact policies that **support women's enterprise development** in the context of decent work, which will include banking the unbanked, financial inclusion of women, training, positive government procurement commitments and sectoral policies that unlock credit and access to markets for women's enterprises (particularly in STEM-related fields);
- **Protect civil and political rights** incl. the right to freedom of association, assembly and speech and the right to organise and collectively bargain, that allow women activists to organise unions and other collectives and be decision-makers in economic policies that affect their work;
- Urge Member States to ensure a **gender balance in decision-making at all levels**, especially pertaining to economic policy, programmes and services, incl. corporate boards, central banks, international financial institutions and governance mechanisms pertaining to the World Bank and development banks and the WTO;
- Call on Member States to implement **gender-responsive budgeting**, involving a sex-disaggregated analysis of the allocation and beneficiaries of distinct categories of government spending, the incidence of tax policy and beneficiaries of public service delivery, in order to identify gender-specific impacts of budget policy;
- Call on Member States to adopt a **rights-based approach** as a framework for the development and evaluation of economic policy choices that support gender equality, and that constitutes an alternative to GDP growth, low inflation and state efficiency as the primary goals of economic policies.

4. Migration

Lack of decent work opportunities accompanied by the retrenchment, privatisation and outsourcing of public services, the promotion of export processing zones, and the exponential growth in supply chains, has provoked a **rapid growth of female labour migration**. These migrants frequently do not have the same labour rights as native workers and often end up in low-paid and undervalued jobs in the informal economy, i.e. as domestic workers. Although migrant women have a more vulnerable position than their male counterparts, a recent ILO report shows that their labour participation is in fact higher than that of migrant men.⁸ States should thus acknowledge and make use of the added value of migrant women to their economies.

At the same time, the world is witnessing the **largest refugee crisis since WWII**.⁹ During the journey, the asylum procedure and the process of integration, female refugees are particularly vulnerable. Employment is crucial for the successful integration of refugees as it facilitates economic and social participation. Moreover, it provides self-esteem, facilitates contact with members from outside the immediate community, and can offer the opportunity to learn. The Netherlands' civil society thus calls upon all stakeholders to address the inhumane situation for women and girls fleeing war and conflict, while at the same time recognising their strength and potential.

The Agreed Conclusions therefore must:

- Call on Member States to **ensure inclusive, non-gender stereotyped asylum and integration policies**;
- Call on Member States to take urgent action to **combat sexual abuse and trafficking** in conflict areas and refugee camps;
- Urge Member States to implement **gender-sensitive policies and programmes for women refugees and migrant workers** and provide safe and legal channels that recognise their skills and education and fair labour conditions, facilitate their productive employment and decent work and integration into the labour force, incl. in STEM, and ensure that all women, incl. care workers, are legally protected against violence and exploitation;
- Promote the increase of the number of Member State signatories to and ratifications of **ILO Convention 189 on Decent Work for Domestic Workers** and **ILO Recommendation 204 Concerning the Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy**;
- **Support migrant workers organising** in home and host countries to demand their full labour rights.

5. Marginalised Groups and Discrimination

Apart from refugee and migrant women, there are a number of marginalised groups of women that face intersecting forms of discrimination in the work place. They include, but are not limited to pregnant women, single mothers, LGBTQ+ women, elderly women, women living with HIV/AIDS, rural and indigenous women, workers with disabilities and sex workers. In light of the centrality of "leaving no one behind" to achieving the SDGs, these groups must not be overlooked.

The Agreed Conclusions therefore must:

- Call on Member States to recognise the global increase in polarisation and manifestations of racism, xenophobia and intolerance against (religious) minority and marginalised groups and take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social, educational, employment and other measures **to combat the manifestations and root causes of intersecting forms of discrimination** and to protect and promote the rights of *all* women and girls, ensuring their full and effective participation and inclusion in society.

⁶ CNV Internationaal, 'Violence at Work is Not Part of the Job: A Guide to Prevent Violence Against Women at Work, published 2016, available on:

file:///C:/Users/Lisanne/AppData/Local/Microsoft/Windows/INetCache/Content_Outlook/DWYE3K2G/CNV_Internationaal_Stop_Violence_At_Work_webversie%20clickable.pdf

⁷ UN WOMEN, policy Brief no. 4: Why Macroeconomic Policy Matters for Gender Equality, published 2015 <http://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2015/12/macroeconomic-policy-matters-for-gender-equality>

⁸ ILO, *ILO Estimates on Migrant Workers: Results and Methodology*, published December 2015, available on: http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/labour-migration/publications/WCMS_436343/lang-en/index.htm

⁹ European Commission (ECHO), *ECHO Factsheet: Syria Crisis*, published in February 2016, available on http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/aid/countries/factsheets/syria_en.pdf