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**Organising for Women's Social and Economic Empowerment by 2030**  
(based on CSW60 statement by ITUC and other global union federations)

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\* The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations.

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## Organising for Women's Social and Economic Empowerment by 2030

One of the main reasons why women join trade unions is to take charge of their own social and economic empowerment by getting organized and bargaining collectively for decent work. 70 million women worldwide are represented in trade unions; consequently, unions are key stakeholders and actors in ensuring all of the Sustainable Development Goals are met by 2030.

As unions, nationally and globally, we call on the social partners, States as well actors in the private sector, to ensure implementation of the goals truly reverses growing inequalities and achieves equity through a just transition to environmentally sustainable economies and societies. This requires investments in:

- In universal access to quality public services, including universal access to essential health care and basic income security to protect the standard of living of the sick, the unemployed, the disabled and the elderly, and those who are unable to work because they are caring for infants or sick family members.
- In free, equitable, quality education, with no hidden costs, paying particular attention to the most marginalised and vulnerable, who are too often girls and women.
- The creation of decent work, including the formalisation of informal jobs, as the most sustainable form of economic empowerment for women.

For many Least Developed Countries and Small Island Developing States the impact of climate change (Goal 13) is now a matter of basic survival. New guidelines by the UN's tripartite constituency, the International Labour Organization (ILO) for a just transition to environmentally sustainable economies, highlight the need for States to enact and implement policies that promote the creation of more decent jobs, 'anticipating impacts on employment, adequate and sustainable social protection for job losses and displacement, skills development and social dialogue, including the effective exercise of the right to organize and bargain collectively'. All such policies must also take into account the gender dimensions of environmental challenges, and specific gender policies are required to promote equitable outcomes.

Essential public services, including water, sanitation, health and education, must be excluded from public/private partnerships, blended finance and trade agreements, as such initiatives impact most negatively on women's social rights. Tax justice and progressive taxation models can provide a solid alternative base for the public policies needed to achieve gender equality.

Achieving Goal 4 on inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning depends on the removal of the structural barriers and entrenched gender norms that underpin gender inequality. This calls for some degree of legislative change in most Member States, which must be accompanied by advocacy and strong community mobilisation to build support for girls' education, and eliminate persistent barriers including early and unplanned pregnancy, child marriage and gender-based violence in and around schools and other educational settings.

Achieving the educational goal and targets equally depends on States investing in the recruitment and training of teachers and education support personnel from a wide range of backgrounds, to reflect the diversity of learners. In some contexts, this means focusing on female teachers in order to keep girls in school and enhance their participation in education.

There must be concerted State action to eliminate the sexual division of labour, which underpins the gender pay gap, and to end all gender bias around legislation and practices in job evaluation and work compensation. In order to achieve Goal 8 on decent work and social protection, and to live up to their commitments to significantly enhance women's labour force participation, States must also be in alignment



with the ILO's Future of Work and Women at Work Centenary Initiatives, and the commitment made by G20 leaders to reduce the gender labour force participation gap by 25% by 2025

The four pillars of decent work, as agreed by the ILO, are: 1) job creation, 2) worker's rights, 3) social protection and 4) social dialogue. These form a solid base for building an economic agenda for women as part of a jobs and growth plan, which values women's paid and unpaid work and aims to increase women's participation in work, supported by public care services for childcare and the aging, and family-friendly workplaces. Investing in public care services can create millions of decent jobs and support women's participation in paid work.

Serious commitment, backed by action, is required to transform exploitative and informal jobs into decent jobs for women; this is the quickest and most sustainable way to drive growth and productivity. 60% of global trade depends on contracts in supply chains where the majority of workers are women, too many of whom continue to live beneath the poverty line, in addition to facing violence and abuse in the workplace.

Gender-based violence is a manifestation of unequal power relations between women and men. Domestic or 'intimate partner' violence has a clear impact on the workplace, through absenteeism, loss of productivity and job security for the victims, and misuse of company resources by perpetrators. Further, differences between women's and men's exposure to the risk of specific forms of work-place violence are reinforced by sex-segregated workplaces. Trade unions are at the forefront of efforts to end gender-based violence at work, and are currently campaigning for a new ILO Convention to address the different forms of gender-based violence that occur in the work place.

Women in trade unions advocate and collectively bargain for a living wage, social protection, including paid parental leave, the regulation of working time, measures to combat violence and discrimination, and more. Women's work within trade unions does not only increase the economic empowerment and security of all women, it also contributes to increasing women's representation in public life. Trade union women have secured 30-50% representation of women in leadership and decision-making positions in union structures, and mobilised the support of an increased number of men to become champions for achieving gender equality.

Fundamental rights, such as freedom of assembly, association and expression, which form the pillars of democratic societies and enable workers and citizens to have a say in decision-making, are under attack in half of the world's States. Legal and institutional barriers are being introduced in all regions, to criminalise social protest and the right to strike. This has reinforced women's inequality, especially women marginalised by racism, colonialism, ableism, ageism, homophobia, transphobia and other forms of oppression because cultural norms and unbalanced power relations determine who participates in political and economic life, and who is left at the margins. Through collective bargaining, trade unions reduce inequalities by raising wage floors, and by contributing to poverty reduction and sustainable economies. Governments must respect the freedoms of association, expression and assembly, and the rights to collective bargaining and to strike.

The implementation and review process for the sustainable development goals at national level must be genuinely participatory. Social dialogue, which brings together the social partners (employers' and workers' organizations), is an excellent example of how to ensure ownership of policy processes at the national level, and should be utilised wherever and whenever possible. The follow-up and review processes must integrate instruments to hold businesses accountable at all levels. Clear regulations must be introduced or enhanced to ensure that private sector interventions are in line with the public interest, especially where public resources are used to support the private sector. The follow-up and review mechanisms must, therefore, also assess private sector contribution to the sustainable development objectives, including through adherence to international labour and environmental standards.

We believe that 'a woman's place is in her union': women play a leading role within trade unions, ensuring that unions negotiate working conditions that take women's rights and needs into account. They consistently work for law reform and social change with their sisters in the women's movements, and to hold

States to account for promises made. Women in trade unions also ensure that the gender pay gap is challenged through collective bargaining.

Women in unions, in alliance with the women's movements and supportive governments including the 'Friends of Decent Work' and the 'Global Deal' Coalitions, in collaboration with the ILO, will ensure effective monitoring and implementation of the SDGs relating to quality public services, including equitable free education for all, decent work for women, and the continuation of their social dialogue and collective bargaining rights. This will be the cornerstone of the international trade union contribution to the realisation of a transformational sustainable development agenda to achieve women's social and economic empowerment.

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