

# WOMEN IN LABOUR MOVEMENTS

## Lead

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## Contributors

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## Decent work is at the heart of gender equality

Trade unions are committed to advancing the strategic objectives of the Beijing Platform for Action, and to meeting the targets set by the Sustainable Development Goals, with particular attention to SDG 4, 5 and 8. Through organizing and collective bargaining unions play a critical role in achieving gender equality by ensuring women can access decent work, which is central to women's economic independence and autonomy, and at the heart of gender equality.

We propose that the aspirations of the BPfA can be made real by action on four key axes:

- Guarantee the fundamental human rights of freedom of association and collective bargaining of **all** women workers;
- Invest in care for gender equality and development, to redistribute the burden of unpaid care; work, to ensure access to quality public services and to create millions of quality green jobs;
- Eliminate gender-based violence and harassment in the world of work;
- Promote women in leadership through a feminist approach to leadership.



## Structural barriers and negative trends

**Women's labour force participation** in the region is stagnating and stands between 51,6 % to 55,8% which is 12% below that of men (for Northern, Southern and Western Europe: 51,6 %, Eastern Europe: 51,8% and Northern America: 55,8%). **Women are over-represented in precarious, part-time jobs and non-standard forms of employment across the**

**region.** Precarious work is particularly prevalent in sectors with high numbers of women workers including health care, education and the service sectors. For instance in Germany,  $\frac{2}{3}$  of precarious workers are women - workers who lack social security or access to pensions - and having high rates of informal (migrant) domestic workers in private households. In the Nordic countries and across the region, the proportion of women working part time jobs is a key obstacle to gender equality: affecting women's income and pension security, promotion opportunities and prolonging gender stereotype roles in family life.

**Gender gaps in pay and social protection persist:** Worldwide, more than half of the global population has no social protection coverage, and less than 30 per cent enjoy comprehensive social protection. experiencing lower coverage rates and substantially lower benefit levels, especially with regard to maternity protection, retirement pensions, unemployment benefits, occupational injury and accident compensation schemes and survivors' benefits. In the EU, women's pensions tend to be 37 per cent less than men's. Women earn on average 16% less than men: ranging from 25.6% in Estonia, 21 % in Germany to 3.5% in Romania. However, a very low gender pay gap may simply mean that there are fewer women in the labour force. . A survey of the European Trade Union Confederation (2019) across unions identified labour market segregation and unpaid care responsibilities as the major factors for the gender pay gap. While Iceland became the first country to enforce equal pay (2018) , still only half of the EU member states followed a 2014 recommendation from the European Commission to tackle the gender pay gap.

**Austerity measures and the privatisation of public services** including health and social care, education, transport, electricity, water and sanitation **have had disproportionately negative impacts on women's human rights and have increased gender gaps in employment and social protection.** Current deficits in the quality and provision of care services will create a severe global care crisis and increase gender inequalities at work, if not adequately addressed. In Spain, drastic cuts in the health and education sector (between 2012 – 2014) increased the precariousness of women's jobs who form the majority of the workers in these sectors. Care workers – the majority of whom are women, and disproportionately migrant women and women of colour – too often experience discrimination, job insecurity, including zero-hours contracts, low pay, poor working conditions and violence and harassment at work. In Europe 2,5 million domestic workers work in the care sector, many migrant women workers who are vulnerable to exploitation, violence and abuse.

**Women perform 76.2 per cent of the total hours of unpaid care work – more than three times as much as men.** This work is invisible in the System of National Accounts and measurements of Gross Domestic Product yet presents a major obstacle to women's emancipation whilst contributing trillions of dollars to the global economy. Canada's market-based child care system only provides access to a licensed, regulated space to one in five children under five and in many communities child care remains unaffordable for many, meeting or exceeding the cost of housing. Only six countries – Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Slovenia and Malta - ensure that there is no gap between well-paid maternity and parental leave and access to quality early learning and child care. In

Germany, where parents have a legal right to childcare for children under three, the labour force participation of mothers has increased.

There has been considerable progress towards achieving **gender equality in education** since the adoption of BPfA, and gender disparities in out-of-school rates have decreased considerably over the last fifteen years. However, despite girls outperforming boys in education at all levels in most countries in the region, women still have worse employment and learning outcomes than men. This is due in part to the fact that women are less likely to undertake and graduate tertiary level education in high-paying fields, including STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) disciplines. **Only 6% of women complete a degree in engineering, compared to 25% of men.** Within **the teaching profession**, the majority of early childhood educators are women, but fewer than one in two tertiary level educators are women. And when it comes to leadership, the data shows that gender inequality also persists in OECD countries: **there are more male headteachers than females, and only 18% of full professors in Europe are female.**

**Gender-based violence remains one of the most tolerated violations of workers' human rights.** According to statistics, 35% of women - 818 million women globally - over the age of 15 have experienced sexual or physical violence at home, in their communities or in the workplace. Gender-based violence and harassment pervades the world of work, affecting all sectors and occupations. For instance across Europe, one in six workers report having been subjected to acts of violence, harassment and unwanted sexual attention (Eurofound), around 90 % of victims of sexual harassment are female. A union (TUC) survey on sexual harassment at work in UK found that more than half of all women and nearly two-thirds of women aged 18 to 24 years said they had experienced sexual harassment at work and a union survey in Bulgaria found that over half of women transport workers experienced violence from passengers. After years of union campaigning, the vast majority of States in the region voted for the adoption of ILO Convention 190 and Recommendation 206. In Canada progress was made with the adoption of legislation on violence and harassment in federal workplaces and paid domestic violence leave in most jurisdictions.

**Unions are a powerful force for realizing gender equality, both in workplaces and in our communities.** There is a distinct correlation between unionization rates and achieving gender equality in the world of work. In the Nordic countries - with one of the world's highest unionization rates - most of the gender equality policies first came through collective bargaining and in the US case studies provide evidence how women enjoy higher pay when unionized. Across Europe, 45.1 per cent of the union members are women and when including Central Asia, women make up 51.16 per cent of the total trade union membership. Through trade union campaigns and policies, unions in Europe and Central Asia have reached 30% women in decision-making and leadership positions and made commitments to reach 40 per cent representation.

**Attacks on civil rights and liberties, including trade union rights,** are a significant and growing obstacle to women's ability and opportunity to organise to change their working realities. The majority of the world's workers, particularly women, disabled workers and migrant and domestic workers, are disenfranchised of their rights to freedom of association

at work. For instance in Canada, 50,000 postal workers were deprived of their right to strike and forced back to work on 27 November 2018 following the adoption of a special law by the federal government. Among the issues leading to the dispute was pay equity and equal treatment for rural and suburban mail carriers, mostly women workers. According to the ITUC's [Global Labour Rights Index](#), Europe saw an increase in violent attacks against trade union leaders and a growing trend of charging and sentencing workers for their participation in strike action. There is an erosion of collective bargaining rights, with 40% of European countries excluding workers from the right to establish or join unions, 68% violating the right to strike and 50% violating collective bargaining rights. Turkey and Kazakhstan are among the top 10 violators.



## Progress on implementing the Beijing Platform for Action

The trends and evidence provided in the previous section show that States concerted action is required in closing the persistent gender gaps in women's labour force participation, pay and social protection, including the gender pension gap of 37%, to address women's over-representation in precarious, part-time jobs and non-standard forms of employment, to eradicate gender-based violence and harassment in the world of work and effectively address multiple forms of discrimination and intersecting systems of oppression based on class, race, migration status, sexual orientation and gender identity.



## Recommendations beyond Beijing+25

**To take serious action to advance the BPfA, States must**

- **Respect and promote the rights to freedom of association, peaceful assembly and collective bargaining.**
- **Ratify** all relevant international and regional human rights instruments that guarantee the rights to freedom of and collective bargaining, including ILO Conventions 87, 98, 151 and 154 and ensure that the right to freedom of association and the right to organise can be exercised by everyone **without discrimination**;
- **Actively create an enabling environment** for workers to establish independent trade unions and engage in collective bargaining;
- Support **tripartite social dialogue** between government, employers and trade unions to prevent and remove barriers to gender equality;

- Support the negotiation, signing and implementation of **Global Framework Agreements** between transnational companies and Global Unions, and mandate that businesses perform gender-focused due diligence with respect to human rights throughout their global supply chains.

### **Invest in care to promote gender equality and avert a global care crisis**

- Commit **a minimum of two per cent of national income** to investment in quality public care services;
- **Adopt gender-responsive macro-economic policies** by securing fiscal space for investments in gender responsive quality public services, public social protection systems and sustainable infrastructure and reverse the expansion of corporate power, which is enabled through the use of tax incentives, public-private partnerships, tax evasion and trade agreements on public services;
- **Remove gender bias** from macro-economic policymaking, including through recognising and valuing unpaid care and domestic work in the System of National Accounts;
- Enact laws and implement policies to facilitate the **reconciliation of work and private life** including through **ratification and implementation** of ILO Conventions 183 on maternity protection and 156 on Workers with Family Responsibilities. Mandate **paid parental and family leave** and provide pension care credits for time spent out of the labour force to raise children/care for dependents;
- **Integrate gender perspectives** into urban and rural planning and **expand public transport** to provide women with safe, equal access to public services including education, childcare and healthcare and to their place of work;
- **Invest in gender-responsive social protection systems** that guarantee universal access to essential health care, access to basic pensions and guaranteed minimum unemployment benefits;
- **Address the over-representation of women in precarious employment, low wage employment, and the informal economy** by adopting measures that ensure universal access to a living wage and social protection. This includes an evidence-based and regularly adjusted statutory national minimum living wage, as well as programmes to facilitate access to formal employment and to ensure informal workers have access to social protections in line with ILO Recommendation 204;
- Implement laws, policies and programmes to address both **horizontal and vertical occupational** segregation and secure **equal pay for work of equal value** in line with ILO Convention 100 on equal remuneration;
- Adopt measures to improve women's access to **quality vocational education and training**; and **just transition measures** for women workers affected by climate change, digitalisation, and automation.

## **Eliminate gender-based violence and discrimination in the world of work**

- **Ratify and effectively implement the ILO Violence and Harassment Convention (C190) and Recommendation 206**, through law, policy and collective bargaining. Particular attention should be paid to sectors or occupations that are more exposed to gender-based violence and harassment, such as hospitality, health and social services, transport, education, media sectors, domestic work and informal work;
- Promote workplace policies to **address the impacts of domestic violence in the world of work**, such as paid domestic violence leave, adjustments to working patterns and access to counselling services for victims of domestic violence;
- Enact laws and policies to **prevent, address and redress gender-based discrimination** in line with ILO Convention 111 on discrimination in employment and occupation. This must include measures to prevent and dismantle discrimination rooted in intersecting systems of oppression based on class, gender, race, sexual orientation and gender identity and migrant status.

## **Recommendations from the working group**

The group agreed the following two priorities in order to guarantee the fundamental human rights of freedom of association and collective bargaining of all women workers:

- Eliminate gender-based violence and discrimination in the world of work including through the ratification and effective implementation of ILO Convention 190 on Violence and Harassment and its accompanying Recommendation 206. Particular attention should be paid to sectors or occupations that are more exposed to gender-based violence and harassment, such as hospitality, health and social services, transport, education, media sectors, domestic work and informal work;
- Invest in care to promote gender equality and avert a global care crisis by:
  - Committing a minimum of 2% of national income to investment in quality public care services, and adopting gender-responsive macro-economic policies that are free from gender bias;
  - Addressing the horizontal and vertical occupational segregation, and the over-representation of women in precarious employment, low wage employment, and the informal economy by adopting measures that ensure universal access to a living wage and social protection.