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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 International Federation of Business and Professional Women, and Women’s Federation for World Peace 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

The main focus of the sixty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women is the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the 23rd special session of the General Assembly. The review will include an assessment of current challenges that affect the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women and its contribution towards the full realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The Statement of the International Federation of Business and Professional Women for the Commission on the Status of Women focuses on: (1) women and girls at all stages of migration; (2) implementation of education for all girls through tertiary education, including science, technology, engineering, and mathematics; and (3) the importance of lifelong learning for all women (Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action #2, Sustainable Development Goal 4.3); and the human rights of all transgender people.

Migration

Particular attention must be paid to women and girls at all stages of migration – from their point of origin up to and including their destination. While acknowledging and affirming their power, their potential, and the positive contributions they have made, we must recognize that women and girls also have special vulnerabilities that call for special protection. Patriarchal structures that foster gender inequality, deprive women of decision-making power, and limit their control over resources, along with traditional definitions of family and gender, foster deep social and economic inequalities that contribute to making dislocation, displacement, poverty, violence, marginalization, and exclusion ever-present realities for women. Women in all stages of migration are especially vulnerable to these realities. Studies have shown, for example, that more women than men die during natural catastrophes, hampered in their flight by the need to care for small children, the elderly and the disabled.

The 12 critical areas of concern in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action make little and scattered reference to women in migration, except in Strategic objective E.5.: “Provide protection, assistance and training to refugee women, other displaced women in need of international protection and internally displaced women.” Migrant women are not mentioned there, nor are asylum seekers, and no protection is sought for undocumented migrants throughout. But the issue of migration in general has gained urgency and prominence worldwide, as reflected in the work of the United Nations over the past four years. Although migration has recently slowed, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees reported an unprecedented 65.3 million people displaced by the end of 2015, compared to 59.5 million just 12 months earlier, prompting the United Nations General Assembly unanimously to adopt the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants (2016). In December 2018, two new non-binding global compacts, one on refugees (Global Compact on Refugees) and one on migrants (Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration), were adopted, and the United Nations created a Network on Migration, together with the International Migration Review Forum, to support the implementation, follow-up and review of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration on a set schedule.

The sixty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women is a unique opportunity to affirm the achievements of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and, where the issue of migration is concerned, to extend its provisions to areas not considered critical in 1995. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

should be considered in the context of documents, mechanisms, and strategies that have been produced in the interim, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Global Compact on Refugees, the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, and the International Migration Review Forum. Gaps in these documents should also be addressed, specifically as they relate to women and girls in the migration process, both documented and undocumented.

The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration rests on three principles relevant to women:

1. Advocating and developing solutions to problems within a human rights framework for all individuals and communities, including eliminating discrimination and xenophobia and providing women and girls, regardless of status, with equal access to all social and economic structures, services, and benefits.
2. Recognizing women as agents of change, which demands acknowledgement of the special needs of women and girls and the need to facilitate social and economic change.
3. Grounding all actions concerning women and girls in the principle of the “best interests of the child”.

Recommendations

Implementation of these principles will necessarily involve acting on the following recommendations and thus also working towards implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development:

1. Recognizing the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination faced by migrant women and girls on the basis of sex, including pregnant women and nursing mothers.
2. Recognizing various existing forms of gender and family units.
3. Recognizing the particular vulnerability of women and girls in climate change and disaster preparedness.
4. Providing individual documentation for women and girls.
5. Ensuring access to health care, including sexual and reproductive services and care for pregnant women.
6. Ensuring freedom of association and full labor rights for all women migrant workers, including domestic workers;
7. Giving space to the formation of migrant women’s organizations and hearing their voices.
8. Recognizing the particular vulnerability of women and girls in climate change and disaster preparedness.

Education, including science, technology, engineering, and mathematics

The world is not on track to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal 4 targets by 2030 or implement the second area of concern of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action: “Inequalities and inadequacies in and unequal access to education and training”. Societal inequality shapes education inequality. Globally, there are 262 million children and youth out of school and a 617-million illiterate population. Women still represent two-thirds of the illiterate.

In low income countries, fewer than two-thirds of girls complete primary education, and only one in three complete lower secondary school; in sub-Saharan Africa, fewer than 40 per cent of female children complete nine years of education.

The education 2030 Framework for Action states that equity and inclusion in and through education is the cornerstone of a transformative education agenda, addressing all forms of exclusion, marginalization, disparities, and inequalities to ensure that no one is left behind.

Education has the potential to be an equalizer as long as girls and boys and youth and adults benefit from access to equitable and inclusive quality education for skills development to attain decent work for all (Sustainable Development Goal 8, Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action #2). Bridging the digital divide and using the potential of technology can also improve equity.

In the context of rapidly-changing labor markets and decent work for all, efforts need to refocus on improving learning outcomes for the full life cycle, especially for women, girls, and marginalized people in vulnerable settings.

Education plays a central role in empowering girls and women with information and communications technology skills, and science, technology, engineering, and math education necessary for today's labour market.

Recommendations

1. Ensure by 2030, equal access for all girls to affordable and quality technical (including digital skills), vocational, and liberal arts education at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels (Sustainable Development Goal 4.3), so that girls and women have the skills and knowledge to secure decent work (including entrepreneurship) and a decent life. The provision of tertiary education should be made progressively free.
2. Provide lifelong learning opportunities for all women.
3. Examine the cultural and structural barriers that perpetuate gender gaps in science, technology, and innovation, especially at an institutional level, in order to understand the complex trends in the continued under-representation of women in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

Transgender rights

As of 25 May 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) no longer classifies gender nonconformity as a mental and behavioral disorder. This represents an important breakthrough for millions of people worldwide who are subject to discrimination and stigmatization in the family, the workplace, society, and the health-care system. Starting from 2022, Member States will have to comply to the new norms to achieve the recognition and implementation of transgender rights without any barriers.

Transgender people often compromise their health due to difficulties in their gender transformation processes, as most of them have no option but to resort to do-it-yourself online hormone therapies. Often they have to pay for surgery themselves; to be able to afford surgery they may take up prostitution. Many of them are marginalized and have no support. Their future is uncertain in many aspects.

Conventional medicine waited over a century to institute gender medicine, which finally recognized that male and female bodies react differently to medications and drugs. Now it is mandatory to initiate a new branch of medicine, transgender medicine, in order to help transgender people psychologically, physically, and legally. Medicine needs to address this new reality.

Transgender people are increasingly facing difficulties partly because our society is changing, and there is little support for those who experience economic problems. The number of young transgender people is increasing. If we do not find a way to solve their difficulties today, Member States will risk having to spend more in the near future than what it would cost them to take care of the health of transgender people now.

Recommendations

1. Affirm that all transgender people have human rights.
 2. Support the elimination of violence and discrimination against transgender people, regarding housing, employment, public accommodations, education, and health care.
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