

## Quality education for girls and decent work for women – from the classroom to the workplace

Contribution of Education International (EI), Public Services International (PSI), International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)

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Honourable Ministers of government, colleagues, trade union and NGO represent

I am pleased to have the opportunity to contribute to this important dialogue on education and Science, Technology, Training for women and girls, and their linkages with career paths and decent work. I am here today representing 200 million workers, of which 70% are women, organized within Education International, Public Services International and the International Trade Union Confederation.

We offer our congratulations to Ms. Michelle Bachelet and wish her and UN Women a smooth journey forward in implementing this very important agenda. The trade union movement offers its support and constructive assistance.

To be sustainable, policies to advance women's economic empowerment must address their transition to decent work, which is a key challenge. They must address the full range of development challenges and structural distortions hampering the achievement of gender equality.

All countries are faced with the challenge of achieving sustainable economic growth in a globalized world where technological and scientific knowledge are key to progress. We know that investment in quality public services is a key driver of development and necessary to achieve gender equality. Trade unions have grave concerns with the erosion of public services which governments are undertaking in response to the current economic crisis. If the Millennium Development (MDG) and Education for All (EFA) goals are to be achieved, investment in the public sector, especially education and training, must be maintained and increased.

Persistent gender inequalities in education systems, in the school-to-work transition and in the working life need to be addressed. Denying women opportunities for full participation results in the loss of a valuable resource. Women's participation in the economy and democratic institutions is fundamental to achieving sustainable development and social justice. Gender inequality is exacerbated along the continuum from school to working life.

True, strategies to improve access to education have been put in place in many countries. These have resulted in increased enrollment, but gender inequality remains in primary school. High drop-out rates are still prevalent, especially for girls, and especially in secondary education, which is key for empowering girls. Drop-out rates are clearly associated with poverty and also the related phenomenon of child labour. Girls face additional challenges because of their upbringing, both at the home, and also of vulnerable, at risk employment in the entertainment industry or as domestic workers. When education is of sufficient quality, when girls are safe, low cost, free, relevant, and will send them to school.

Achieving quality primary and secondary education and ensuring universal access are key to overcoming the development challenges of structural distortions. Positive, safe, relevant, and welcoming learning environments are key. Policies need to be formulated in a gender-inclusive way and along three major

- Improving the curriculum, methodologies, learning resources and career guidance to ensure equal opportunities, relevance to learners; to motivate lifelong learning; to provide a smooth transition to the world of work. Portrayal of women and women in non-traditional roles must be included, and stereotypes excluded.

- Improving the learning and physical environment, for access, for well-being, safety and security, including sanitary facilities, and for making buildings and technical equipment accessible and welcoming to girls;
- Improving the care of teachers, especially in rural areas, by providing science and Technology, through recruitment, pre- and in-service teacher education and training, adequate remuneration, manageable teaching and learning conditions. Including gender training for teachers as role models. Teacher's class conduct is also crucial.

Gender equality in education cannot be achieved without the commitment and active effort of teachers and school managers. Gender sensitivity training must be a core part of teacher training, not only to change attitudes and stereotypes but also to enable teachers to encourage girls, to empower them and advise them on careers and entering work worlds for students and teachers alike.

Such core policies serve to create the enabling environment for girls, such as when girls gain access, that include, for example, the increasing number of girls at women are completing university level programmes in S&T and engineering, but this is not being translated into equal career chances and salaries. After initial entry opportunities for career advancement are minimal, and retention is poor.

A high level of vertical segregation has been noted, with women concentrated in the lower echelons of the occupational ladder, facing barriers that hinder advancement to senior research and managerial positions or professorships. As a result, women have not been able to cross the school to work continuum in S&T fields, but are particularly impacted in the university to work transition.

A mismatch between educational attainment for women, on the one hand, and care of advancement and employment opportunities, on the other, as compared with men, is persistent.

The normative framework necessary to support policies to exist.

- The Beijing Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women;
- Key ILO Conventions: the Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (100), the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1959 (No. 113), the Workers' Right to Responsibility Convention, 1981 (No. 156), the Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No 183).

These can serve to overcome the full range of development challenges and gender inequalities that impede the smooth transition from the classroom to the career path and the decent workplace. The framework must now be systematically applied. Adequately funded strategic action is urgently needed to implement these policy frameworks.

EL, ITUC and PSI call on member States to take effective steps to provide and strengthen policy interventions that will lower the structural discrimination and transfer of risk to the chances of girls and women in terms of quality education and training, the unappreciated and enhanced contributions of women in productive employment and decent work, the dignifying and full participation as citizens in democratic and socially just societies.

Thank You.