

ETUC ACTION PROGRAMME ON GENDER EQUALITY 2016 – 2019

Adopted at the Executive Committee 7-8 June 2016

Introduction

The Action Programme on Gender Equality sets the priorities on equality between women and men of ETUC members at both European and national level. It follows on from and is built on the achievements of the previous [Action Programme on Gender Equality covering the period 2010 – 2015](#), an [ETUC Congress document](#) adopted in Paris in October 2015. It finally complies with the commitments of the ETUC Action Plan adopted by the June Executive.

The Action programme on Gender equality aims to foster and coordinate ETUC members' action to achieve equality between women and men in the labour market and in society in general. This is a main imperative both for the EU - set in a number of Treaty articles (2, 3 TEU, 4 TFEU and in a number of Council Directives¹) - as well as for unions at all levels.

Renewed efforts to achieve gender equality are strongly needed. The economic crisis has eroded progress achieved in the last 20-30 years. In a number of Member States, austerity measures, often imposed without proper consultation with social partners, did not include any gender assessment and had a strong negative effect on the quantity and quality of female employment.

Gender equality has also fallen off the radar of several Member States and in some respects at European level as well. Despite the lobbying of trade unions, civil society organizations and the adoption of several European Parliament resolutions calling for a robust EU policy on gender equality, very little has happened over the last five years.

According to [a Eurobarometer survey realized in 2015](#), nearly all Europeans (94%) agree that equality between women and men is a fundamental right and a large majority (76%) think that this should be a priority for the EU. Nevertheless, what seems to be a priority for EU citizens has not been reflected by EU action.

In fact, among the incongruities detected at EU level we can mention: the EC withdrawal of the proposal to revise the maternity leave directive; the blocking in the Council (since 2013) of the proposed Directive on improving the gender balance among non-executive directorates of companies listed on stock exchanges; the lack of a systematic gender approach in the economic governance process / European Semester, and finally the downgrading of the Gender Equality Strategy for the period 2016 – 2019 to a staff working document.

It is worth mentioning the recent initiative to address the '[challenges of working parents](#)', which has been included in the Commission work programme 2016 and has been followed by the first stage consultation of the social partners in November 2015. Although it is too early to assess the impact of this initiative, which at this stage does not specify the legislative and non-legislative measures that the EC intends to undertake to improve work life balance, it remains the fact that this is the only example of EU-level action in the area of gender equality which has been undertaken since 2010.

Gender equality in 2016: challenges and gaps

The situation of women and men in the labour market continues to be heavily unbalanced. Women tend to be concentrated in low paying sectors and professions and thus receive low pay because those sectors are undervalued in society despite making a huge contribution to the economy. They also face major obstacles to achieving top positions within companies. The crisis has altered the evidence documented by statistics.

¹ See "EU Gender Equality Law acquis": http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/files/your_rights/eu_gender_equality_law_update2013_en.pdf

On the surface, the employment gap as well as the pay gap between men and women has narrowed, but under the surface things are more complex and the effects diversified among men and women. Gender gaps are closing not because women have improved their situation, but because men saw theirs getting comparatively worse. At the same time, more and more families depend on women's work — a majority of mothers are also breadwinners or co-breadwinners. Key trends² on gender equality in Europe include:

- The **employment rate** for women was 64,5% in 2015 but is well below the rate of men (75,6%) and, with large differences between member states (between 46% and 78%), while unemployment is slightly higher for women (9,7%) than for men (9,5%);
- Women work **part-time** more often than men (accounting for over 70% of part-timers) and an increase has been documented in the lower paid jobs (retail sales, cleaning and helping). The share of involuntary part-time work among women and men has risen for both sexes steadily since 2008;
- Women also outnumber men in fixed term or **temporary agency contracts**;
- When measured in **full-time equivalent employment** rate of women stands at 53,7% compared to 71,9% for men;
- The **impact of parenthood** on labour market participation is very different for women and men - only 65.6% of women with children under 12 work, as opposed to 90.3% of men and parental leave is taken by only 2,7% of fathers;
- Working men devote 9 hours a week to **care** – women 26 hours;
- Women are still paid 17% less than men per hour per work. The **gender pay gap** has not narrowed in recent years; More than 70% of low-wage earners in Europe are women and in most European member states, 17% of women live in poverty compared to 15% of men;
- Older women are particularly at risk of deprivation. Women's average **pension** is 40% lower than that of men;
- Despite high women's **education achievements** (they account for nearly 60% of EU university graduates) decision making positions at political and economic level are predominantly held by men. The proportion of women on the boards of large publicly listed companies rose from 11.9 % in 2010 to 22.7 % in 2015, but only 4% of CEOs;
- Women continue to be held back not only by glass ceilings that stop them rising up the work hierarchy, but also by glass walls that segregate women into particular jobs and shut them out of others. Women outnumber men in the so-called "**5 Cs occupations**": catering, cleaning, caring, clerical and cashiering;
- Women lag behind in **decision-making positions in trade unions** too: although there is a constant increase of female workers joining unions (nearly 45% of ETUC members are women), female trade union leaders at cross-industry level account for nearly 18% according to the ETUC 8th of March Survey;
- One woman in five in Europe has been subjected to **domestic violence** and one out of two reported some form of **sexual harassment** in the workplace. At the same time cyber-harassment against women is becoming a widespread behaviour.

The [Gender Equality Index](#) developed by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) shows that the EU is still only half way towards gender equality and that the progress per Member State and per domain (work, money, knowledge, time, power and health) has been very uneven since it was last measured in 2013. It has been calculated that at this pace it will take 70 years before true gender equality is a reality.

² Source of figures: Eurostat

- Women are not a homogeneous group and the diversity of women's and men's lives require gender mainstreaming as well as specific measures in order to identify and correct persistent barriers to gender equality. The situation is particularly difficult for women belonging to specific vulnerable groups: such as young women, black and ethnic minority women migrants and refugees, disabled and elderly women. Some of the major challenges they face include the following:
- Today's **younger generation** is not immune to gender stereotypes and disparities. Gender inequalities in education persist: boys drop out of school more than girls and encounter more difficulties in reading. Girls are more likely to have a higher education degree, but remain underrepresented in Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematic and related careers and overrepresented in fields of study that are linked to traditional female roles such as care-related fields. Girls' employment perspectives are also less positive than boys'. The rate of those 'not in education, employment or training' (NEET) is consistently higher for women since before the crisis. The proportion of inactive young women remains double that of young men.
- **Migrant women** have fewer opportunities and resources than male migrants and are more likely to face multiple discrimination. Both male and female immigrants are twice as likely to be unemployed as those born in the EU. Immigrant women tend to be significantly over-represented among the economically inactive and are an under-utilised source of skills. Female asylum seekers and refugees are more vulnerable and are exposed to risks of violence, exploitation and slavery. Such risks came to the fore in 2015, as Europe faced a surge in the number of asylum seekers, including a growing number of women and children. About 33 % of first time applicants registered in January 2016 were women. Conditions in the reception sites fail to meet minimum standards for the mitigation of gender-based violence.
- Numerous studies have shown that **women with disabilities** suffer double discrimination on grounds both of their gender and their disability. They show higher rate of unemployment, are more likely to suffer poverty, at a greater risk of social exclusion and encounter greater difficulties in entering the labour market, making it harder for them to lead independent lives.
- **Elderly women** (especially those aged over 65) are traditionally at greater risk of poverty and often receive pensions barely above the minimum subsistence. The gender pay gap, which directly affects pension rights, or the fact that they may have worked in their partner's undertaking without remuneration and without social security affiliation, puts them in a very vulnerable situation. Poverty among older women also derives from caring duties. The generation of women over 50 is described as a "sandwich generation" or as "working daughters and working mothers" as they often take care of their parents and their grand children and thus face bigger obstacles to enter or remain in employment.

ETUC renewed commitment on gender equality

At the 2015 Paris Congress, all ETUC members committed to continue to place the gender equality high on their agenda. The role of trade unions in fighting discrimination and unlawful behaviour between women and men is of foremost importance and should be based on coordinated action which addresses both the public and private sector, all instances of trade union representation (works councils from the company level to the European one) as well as at a global and political level, for example ensuring compliance with ILO Conventions, UN and International Human Rights Protection.³

³ Over the years the ETUC adopted a number of policy documents to guide its action on gender equality: a Charter on Gender mainstreaming at the Seville Congress (in 2011), two equality plans (in 1999 and 2003), several ad-hoc positions to: foster reconciliation of work, family and private life (2007 and 2016); improve maternity protection at EU level (2009); reduce the gender pay gap (2008) also through collective bargaining (2015); enhance gender balance in trade unions (2011) and in company boards (2012). Gender equality was also addressed in the context of the cross-industry EU social dialogue. In their last work programme, covering 2015 – 2017, the EU social partners committed to promoting better reconciliation of work, private and family life and gender equality to reduce the gender pay gap.

Gender equality does not happen without a strong political commitment, it requires transformational change, which also involves organizational and strategic setting. The role of trade unions' women's and/or gender equality committees should be preserved and where needed reinforced. Their work and advice should be closely linked to the work of other policy or specific group committees. In order to avoid that gender equality becomes a "women's issue" gender mainstreaming should become a consolidated policy of trade unions and be accompanied with specific measures (policy action, projects, awareness-raising activities, etc.) in the field of gender.

Through this Action Programme ETUC itself and its members (national confederations and European Trade Union Federations) commit to specific areas of action interlinked one to each other:

- I. **Implement gender mainstreaming into all policies and address shortcomings where needed;**
- II. **Promote equal economic independence for men and women and fight to eliminate the gender pay and pensions gap;**
- III. **Tackle the challenge of work-life balance;**
- IV. **Overcome gender representation gap in trade unions' and companies' decision making bodies;**
- V. **Combat sexual harassment and violence at work.**

Priority 1: Implementing gender mainstreaming into all ETUC policies and address shortcomings where needed

Objective: Gender mainstreaming requires both integrating a gender perspective to the content of the different policies, and addressing the issue of representation of women and men in the given policy area. Both dimensions – gender representation and gender responsive content - need to be taken into consideration in all phases of the policy-making process

The implementation of gender mainstreaming into unions' action remains a challenge. ETUC will continue to put efforts to fully reach the objectives set in its [Charter on Gender Mainstreaming](#) adopted by the Seville Congress.

ETUC members therefore commit to integrate the dimension into all decision making bodies as well as into Committees and ad-hoc groups. An assessment of ETUC women's committee representation into the various fora will be undertaken before the mid-term conference and adequate recommendations will be taken.

Special attention will be given to gender mainstream policy area such collective bargaining, social dialogue and economic governance process.

Key actions to reach this objective to be undertaken by the ETUC and its members include:

- An ETUI training dedicated to gender mainstreaming, to be organized in 2017;
- The existing ETUC coordination on collective bargaining will integrate a specific dimension on agreements aiming at fostering gender equality;
- High-level EU policy priorities, such as the European economic governance / European Semester, the Pillar of Social Rights, the Investment plan, Digitalization and Migration, etc. will fully integrate the trade unions' agenda with gender aspects at both national and European level. Monitoring and assessment exercises will be regularly undertaken by the ETUC Secretariat and the Executive Committee;
- Mechanisms to encourage gender mainstreaming, such as statistics clearly showing the percentage of men and women in a given domain, studies and checklists will continue to be developed;
- The role of women's and/or gender equality committees should be ensured by all affiliates. Where missing, appropriate structures should be put in place, according to national practices;

- Action will be coordinated with the ETUC communication department and with affiliates (including communicators) at national level for the International Women's Day (8th March); the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women (25th November) and other significant dates/events;
- Support the achievements of the UN sustainable development goals and more specifically Goal "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls".

Priority 2: Promote equal economic independence of women and men, fight to eliminate the employment, gender pay and pensions gap

Objective: There is a need to strengthen the quality of female employment. Unions' should address direct and indirect discriminations that more than ever affect women in the labour market. At the same time women's employment rate should be improved in view to achieve the EU target of 75% of men and women in employment by 2020. This can only be reached through an integrated approach which tackles issues such as women's pay and working conditions, including adequate reconciliation measures (priority 3), which impact on women's capacity to enter, remain and progress in the labour market. Issues such as the pensions gap as well as the income gap between women and men should be integral part of the broader objective to promote equal economic independence between women and men.

Key actions to reach this objective to be undertaken by the ETUC and its members include:

- Continue lobbying on revising current Directive 2006/54/EC on equal pay;
- Assessing implementation of EC Council Recommendations on pay transparency;
- Follow-up of ETUC Resolution "[Collective bargaining - our powerful tool to close the gender pay gap](#)" calling trade union weight in collective bargaining to close the wage gap between men and women;
- Promote a ETUC/ETUI Study on the causes of the gender pension gap and highlight at political level its impact and measures to close it;
- Contribute to European Equal Pay Day;
- Submit a EU project gathering good practices to overcome horizontal occupational segregation;
- Integrate the gender perspective into future ETUC position on minimum income;
- Influence policy priorities on the gender pay gap in National Reform Programmes and in the framework of the European Semester at both EU and national level.

Priority 3: Tackling the challenges of work-life balance

Objective: Reconciliation of work, family and private duties is one of the main challenges of working people and individuals in general. A combination of measures combining working time arrangements, provision and quality of childcare and elderly care facilities as well as a coherent system of leave arrangements in a manner that supports both women and men work-life balance is strongly needed in a number of countries and professional sectors. ETUC will further strengthen its action in this domain in order to help improve the current situation and adopt adequate minimum standards at EU level, in view of the commitment taken by the European commission.

Key actions to reach this objective to be undertaken by the ETUC and its members include:

- Contribute to social partners' consultation on the new EU initiative addressing the challenges of work-life balance faced by working parents and caregivers;
- Continue to lobby for an improved legislative framework at European and national level in the area of family-related leave and working time arrangements;

- Promote the exchange of good practices among members;
- Influence policy priorities on work-life balance in National Reform Programmes and in the framework of the European Semester at both EU and national level;
- Lobby for investment in childcare and social care, improvement in the pay and employment conditions for workers in these sectors for good quality public services.

Priority 4: Overcome gender representation gap in trade unions' and companies' decision-making bodies

Objective: Further measures are needed to overcome the under-representation of women in leadership positions and decision making in trade unions. The increasing numbers of female trade unionists, yearly documented by the ETUC 8th of March Survey (<https://www.etuc.org/circulars/etuc-8th-march-survey-2016-0>) is not reflected in union leadership positions. Gender balance and vertical segregation of women should be addressed not only in trade unions but also within companies.

- The 8th of March Survey will continue to be published yearly and its results shared with affiliates and decision making bodies. Where possible ad-hoc exchanges will be organized by the ETUC and the survey outcomes will be presented to the Executive Committee;
- Continue lobbying on adoption of the proposed Directive on women in company boards;
- Assess the follow-up of Congress Resolution on improving gender balance in the ETUC;
- Put in place adequate measures supporting women taking up decision making positions in trade union structures;
- Implement a ETUI leadership training programme for future women leaders;
- Organize a high-level meeting with top female trade union leaders at cross-industry and sectoral level in order to share ideas and priorities.

Priority 5: Combat sexual harassment and violence at work

Objective: To contribute to eliminate gender-based violence and harassment at work through adequate measures and actions protecting those people (most usually women) and those sectors mostly exposed to violence and harassment, also by third parties. Continue to make the link between domestic violence and work-level protection.

Key actions to reach this objective to be undertaken by the ETUC and its members include:

- Finalize the ETUC project “Safe at home, safe at work” and consider the adoption of a policy resolution;
- Continue to lobby for a legislative framework at European level, on the basis of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence;
- Continue to support the implementation of the European social partners' agreement on combating harassment and violence at work, also in coordination with the members of the Social Dialogue Committee;
- Call for an ILO convention on gender based violence;
- Promote good practice guidance developed by affiliates at national and sectoral level.

Implementation, reporting and evaluation of the Action Programme

In order to successfully meet the objectives that have been identified in the Action Programme on gender equality, ETUC member organizations have committed themselves to promoting a sense of ownership, shared responsibilities and actions at all different levels.

As a first step, affiliated organizations will give adequate visibility to this Action Programme. It is therefore recommended that affiliates translate the Action Programme into their national languages, send a copy of the translation to the ETUC to achieve EU-wide visibility may through ETUC's channels, and disseminate and discuss it with trade union representatives.

The ETUC Secretariat will be responsible for leading some specific key activities to meet the objectives of the Action Programme and recourse to EU funding, if necessary.

An evaluation of progress to achieve the Action Programme will be put forward to the Executive Committee and a more consistent review of this instrument will be assessed on the eve of the ETUC Mid-Term Conference in 2017. The women's committee will have a strategic oversight of the implementation of the key actions identified.

ETUC and its member organizations will mobilize sufficient resources to carry out the key actions of the Action Programme on gender equality.