

Written Statement for CSW 65

**by the International Federation of Business and Professional Women,
endorsed by.....**

Education for girls and women

Women's empowerment and full effective participation and decision-making in public life as well as gender equality can only be achieved through education. Girls' education is a critical pathway to achieving gender equality. Barriers to girls' education are also barriers to gender equality.

Education transforms lives. Equitable education's unique power has been recognized as a catalyst for wider development goals. Evidence demonstrates that education is a development multiplier but the world still has 132 million girls out of school.

Even in the classrooms, many girls face discrimination and sometimes violence. Textbooks, teaching methods and school curricula still often reflect deep-rooted biases. This is particularly true in the science and technology fields. We must let young girls know that they too can become the programmers, engineers and leaders of tomorrow in a world deeply transformed by the digital revolution. With the Covid 19 pandemic, technology is key and girls and women must be digitally empowered with the relevant skills to become full digital citizens, participate fully in public life and make decisions.

Education empowers girls and women to overcome discrimination and stereotypes. Girls and young women who are educated have a greater awareness of their rights, and greater confidence and freedom to make decisions that affect their lives, improve their own and their children's health and chances of survival, and boost their work prospects.

Education enhances job opportunities. By benefiting women in particular, education and lifelong learning can help narrow gender gaps in work opportunities and pay, bringing about gender equality.

Women in politics

Female leadership has been most successful in limiting the number of cases of COVID -19 in countries led by women as demonstrated by President Tsai Ing-wen in Taiwan, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern in New Zealand and Prime Minister Sanna Marin in Finland. Listening to different perspectives, having excellent communication skills and a participatory and collaborative style of leadership and reaching decisions through evidence are hallmarks of female leadership. Yet out of 194 countries only 10% are led by women.

Women's leadership is also particularly important in solving the crises of today such as pandemics and climate change which all cause disruption in issues of social protection such as health, education, food, water, housing and immigration, issues that women experience every day in their communities.

To increase women's participation in government there needs to be outreach and training offered to grassroots women by women leaders to encourage them to run for office. An effective example of this was in the US 2018 election for the House of Representatives. Women's organizations recruited and trained younger women to stand for election. Similarly, in Switzerland in 2018 when the female umbrella organization «Alliance F» started to collaborate with the female groups of the parties and encouraged women with the slogan "Helvetia calls" to run for office. Over 500 women participated in Congress elections in 2019, most of them had

never been members of a party. Today, there are 42% women in the House of Representatives. The alliance continues with its efforts in cantonal parliament and government elections. These efforts were enhanced by a peaceful women's strike on June 14, 2019, in which over 500'000 women participated.

Women in management

Before the pandemic, globally the share of women in senior management was improving. According to Catalyst, in 2019, the proportion of women in senior management roles globally increased to 29%, the highest number ever recorded. 87% percent of global mid-market companies have at least one woman in a senior management role in 2020. However, there are still fewer women higher up the corporate ladder. A 2020 Mercer study shows a leaky pipeline for women in leadership: Executives: 23%; Senior managers: 29%; Managers: 37%; Professionals: 42%; and Support staff: 47%. Women currently hold 32 (6.4%) CEO positions at S&P 500 companies. However, COVID19 has disproportionately negatively affected women, particularly working mothers as school and childcare support have been upended. A leading consulting firm, McKinsey finds that all the progress from the past six years could be erased.

Women play a huge role in leadership of the arts, as heads of our cultural organizations and museums – i.e., as directors and executive directors as well as board chairs of these organizations, across all sectors --performing arts organizations, museums, universities, non- profits focused on the arts, etc. Over the last several decades, but especially in the last twenty years, women in the arts world have been paving the way to lead our institutions into new directions through collaboration, innovative thinking, cultural diplomacy, active listening, stewardship and understanding of our global interdependence.

In the past, women and men left their companies at comparable rates. Due to caregiving challenges of COVID 19, more women than men are considering leaving the workforce. If women do leave the workplace, there will be fewer in the pipeline for leadership with profound effects. Corporate performance can be close to 50 percent higher when women are well represented at the top. Senior women positively impact a company's culture as they embrace employee-friendly policies and programs and champion diversity and inclusion. The choices companies and governments make in the coming months will impact on gender equality for decades to come.

Women on Boards

Good boards and governance lead to better financial returns and long-term value creation. And, a key component of board quality is diversity. This goes beyond gender and includes ethnicity and diversity of business/life experiences.

However, with respect to gender diversity, 2018 data from Corporate Women Directors International shows that women hold just 16.7% of public company board seats globally. Northern and Western Europe are leading, with averages of 36.3% and 26.7% respectively, followed by the US and Canada with 20.9% and Eastern Europe with 15.5%. These are followed by Africa at 14.4%, Asia Pacific at 12.8%, Latin America at 7.4%, and the Middle East at 0.9%. These variances are largely the result of quotas put in place by some countries in recent years. Countries without quotas (including the US) generally fall to the bottom of the rankings.

As we can see, there is quite a distance to go to get parity in this arena. It is often expressed that there are not enough qualified women to fill the seats, which is most certainly not the case. We need only take up the mantle to look, and to continue to provide leadership opportunities to

women in the pipeline. There are several organizations working to achieve this result but without quotas. The driving force will be the commitment from the current Chairpersons/CEO, and board members already at the table.

Migrant Women

Female Migrants, Asylum Seekers, Refugees and Climate Refugees (migrants) carry a disproportionate level of stigma and difficulty, and face worse challenges than their male counterparts. Those fleeing from violence, slavery, or loss of social acceptance through abandonment, rejection, or widowhood (especially resulting from Covid) often do not have the education and language skills needed to complete paperwork and interviews required for initial entry into a destination country. In addition to barriers from bureaucracy, they are expected to endure violence, physical attacks, and short rations when accepted into camps. Camp settlements often are not built to protect lone women from physical attacks by other camp members. Separate stakeholder engagement activities are critical for women, of different age groups, and whether alone or part of a group or family, so that each one can have a full voice, and the right to speak up.

Women and Violence

Sexual violence, anti-Black violence, race-based violence, anti-immigrant and anti-LGBTQ+ violence – in women's homes, schools, institutions, workplaces, and communities has increased during the COVID 19 pandemic. The worse the economic situation becomes, the worse the violence becomes, with very little social protection.

The new ILO Convention 190 will protect migrant women against violence and harassment at the workplace.

Women in Conflict Resolution

Women leaders must play a key role in promoting human rights in conflict resolution. Peace negotiations should include the voices of women on both sides to ensure that the resulting agreements include the necessary protections for women. The most outstanding example currently is Afghanistan. Will the improved access women have gained to education and the labor force be eroded by the Taliban? It is essential that women are guaranteed seats at the table and that their voices are heard. Women's equal rights must be enshrined in peace agreements and subsequent legal arrangements. Most importantly, these guarantees must be monitored to ensure that the protections remain in place and the requirements be implemented.

Women have been crucially involved in leading the way to peace in conflicts as remote from one another as Northern Ireland, the Balkans and the Middle East. Their ability to reach across borders and achieve consensus with women on the opposite side is an element of peace-making that should not be neglected. They can often play a crucial role in Track II diplomacy, creating opportunities for frank and open discussion that leads to solutions. Although India and Pakistan are often engaged in disputes, women activists from both countries have quietly worked together to promote women's health and protection against violence.

Efforts must be made to ensure that women decision-makers have leadership roles in all spheres - government, politics, bureaucracy, private sector, law, academia, media and the arts. Women politicians such as Indira Gandhi, Golda Meir and Benazir Bhutto inspired women around the world, most especially in countries struggling with the threat of war or economic challenges to

seek leadership positions. Perhaps the most powerful woman in the world today is Angela Merkel who has steadfastly upheld one of the most important human rights – the protection of refugees.

At a time when ultra-nationalism has achieved a grip in countries around the world, we must look to women to overcome narrow identity politics and lead the way to the fulfillment of the human rights enshrined in the UN Charter.

Recommendations:

- Ensure that education policies prioritize gender equality, eliminate all barriers to girls' completion of 12 years of free, publicly funded, quality compulsory education, and encourage their participation in Science Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM).
- Women's organizations and grassroots movements should train and support women to run for political offices and ensure equal numbers of male and female candidates.
- The crisis should be viewed as an opportunity to accelerate investment and policies to support building a more flexible, empathetic workplace.
- To help increase the percentage of women on boards; the quota system gives a very distinct boost to gender diversity. Moreover, government procurement laws which give women led businesses a certain quota (s. Kenya 30%, South-Africa 40%) or ask companies receiving state contracts to have gender parity in management and on the board, support women in decision-making.
- One way of monitoring women's progress is to ensure women hold the relevant positions in international organizations. They need to be involved in shaping and disseminating appropriate messages and ensuring that women of relevant background and authority are prominent when new messages are formulated and delivered.
- Women migrants need to be afforded not only the ability to speak, but also the ability to manage their immediate lives in a dignified and safe manner. Their voices can have a significant impact in changing the current dynamic in camps, settlements, and upon application for status at the destination. Special attention is also needed to assist and safeguard migrant labor whose jobs have been terminated as a result of Covid, and are now stranded, cannot return home, or return home without anticipated remittance payments.
- We urge UN member states to ratify the ILO Convention 190 to protect women at the workplace.
- We urge all states in conflict situations and peace negotiations to follow Resolution 1325 of the UN Security Council and implement gender parity in peace negotiations.