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Statement submitted by National Women's Council of Catalonia, a non-governmental organization 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

Written statement by the National Women's Council of Catalonia for the sixty-first session of the Commission on the Status of Women

On 8 March 2016, the International Labour Organization published a new report on the challenges facing women when it comes to finding and keeping a decent job. The report “Women at Work: Trends 2016”, which gathered data from 178 countries, states that inequality between women and men persists in global labour markets, in respect of opportunities, treatment and outcomes. The report indicates that urgent action must be taken to tackle these inequalities if the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is to be achieved. This Agenda features 17 Sustainable Development Goals with targets that include eradicating extreme poverty, combating inequalities, empowering women and ensuring universal access to health, education and water.

Nowadays, having a job is no guarantee of escaping poverty. It is therefore necessary to formulate economic policies and development plans that “promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all” (Sustainable Development Goal 8).

Situation of women in Catalonia

This is not very different from the situation of women in the international labour market. They tend to be less represented than men in the paid labour market. The participation rate for women in Catalonia is almost nine points lower. When they are employed, they work fewer hours — with seven in ten part-time contracts being held by women. Women are the ones who reduce their paid working hours and the ones who use unpaid leave to look after children — representing 97 per cent of all such requests. They spend less time working, largely because of the demands of reconciling work and family life. This is due to the fact that care work and domestic work still fall to women.

In addition, the division of roles based on gender tends to assign care and support roles to women. This also leads to segmentation of production sectors in the paid labour market, with women working in sectors and jobs — such as treatment, care and services — that are less highly valued by society than traditionally masculine sectors and jobs.

Discrimination and attribution of roles are two of the factors that explain inequalities in accessing, retaining, promoting and benefiting from the same labour-market conditions.

As a result, women’s salaries are 25 per cent lower than those of men. The wage gap is one of the most obvious effects of the different roles in society and the structural *machismo* that prevails in most organizations and companies where there is a de facto limitation on women’s opportunities to map out their professional careers and develop their potential.

Another result is the gap in social benefits. Given that Spain’s contributory benefits system penalizes a lack of labour-market participation, men’s retirement

pensions are 72 per cent higher than the average for women — with women's benefits in general being 40.5 per cent lower than those of men.

The National Women's Council of Catalonia is drawing attention to this situation and its further deterioration since the beginning of the crisis. Labour reforms have made for a more flexible labour market while worsening the labour conditions of the most vulnerable groups and the most insecure sectors where women make up the majority. In addition, austerity policies imposed from Europe and the enshrining of debt repayment in the form of a constitutional mandate have resulted in social policy cuts in areas such as dependent adult care, equality, education, health and social services.

We condemn the fact that women are the main victims in two ways: as workers — because female workers are overrepresented in such sectors; and as users of these services.

We are alerting people to the increasing ageing of the Catalan population and the need for carers and services for older adults. Against the backdrop of austerity policies and the persistent collective view of differentiated roles, there could be a predictable flight of female workers away from the paid employment sector towards the private sphere of unpaid care work. Also relevant here is the role of migrant women who take on the care needs of northern families, often in exchange for low wages, no social protection and no recognized rights. This form of migration generates what is known as the “global care chain”, whereby other networks of women care for the people they have left behind in their places of origin.

In Catalonia, lone-parent households have higher rates of poverty and are more likely to become poor than two-parent households, with four in every ten people living in households with a single provider being poor (40.01 per cent). Gender is a fundamental part of profiling lone-parent families, as 82 per cent of such families are headed by women with low levels of education in an insecure economic situation.

Furthermore, many lone-parent families find it extremely difficult to reconcile home and family life, due to scant or non-existent public policies to support their needs. This greatly exacerbates the poverty situation of these families.

We should not forget that own-account workers are a group that has grown by 17 per cent at the State level and that 35 per cent of working women are self-employed. This group suffers inequalities compared with female employees. If they wish to request maternity leave, for instance, they will receive the relevant benefit for sixteen consecutive weeks at 100 per cent of the base salary. This means that the minimum level will cover 260 euros a month, as well as their still having to pay self-employment fees to keep their business open. They do not have an hour a day for breastfeeding. This means that remedial measures should be introduced to avoid such inequalities.

Special attention should be given to women with functional diversity and from various ethnic origins, as well as to older women and those from rural areas. As a result of unemployment and unstable paid work, many families rely on old-age pensions as their sole means of survival. This economic dependence often leads to the psychological and physical mistreatment of older women.

Proposals

In light of the above, and with a view to making progress towards real and effective equality, the National Women's Council of Catalonia calls on Governments to:

- Monitor, check and enforce compliance with equality legislation.
- Promote shared responsibility of women and men for care and reproductive tasks by — *inter alia* — giving men and women equal and non-transferable parental leave, promoting reform of working hours and introducing co-education policies in schools.
- Boosting resources allocated to social and equality policies to bolster the welfare state in Catalonia.
- Introducing measures to improve the labour and social conditions of women in Catalonia.
- Combating wage inequality between men and women in the labour market, as such inequality is one of the most serious forms of discrimination within the system of labour relations and fundamental subjective rights of women.
