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Statement submitted by Northern Ireland Women’s European Platform, 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

Succeeding in achieving women's economic empowerment is at the heart of succeeding in the attainment of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals. However, the promise of the Sustainable Development Goals, their targets and the optimism surrounding them remains critically challenged by persistent inequalities, prejudice and stereotypes and regression of rights and progress, exacerbated by austerity policies that disproportionately further disadvantage women across Europe.

Participation

Failure to ensure the participation of women in leadership and in policy and decision making will mean failure to achieve the 2030 Agenda.

In Northern Ireland a Commission on Flags, Identity, Culture and Tradition (<https://www.northernireland.gov.uk/news/foster-and-mcguinness-announce-membership-commission-flags-identity-culture-and-tradition>) was established in June 2016 following the Stormont House and Fresh Start Agreements, political agreements to deliver the Good Friday Agreement — the international treaty for peace equality and rights in Northern Ireland. The Commission has 15 members of whom only one is a woman. The Commission was established following protests that women were significantly represented in, around arrangements for flying flags, including the United Kingdom's Union Flag. It is difficult to see how the exclusion of women from a Commission to address this matter and the fundamental issues of identity, culture and tradition meets the requirements of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, United Nations Security Council Resolution 2122, the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW (2013) Concluding Observations for UK) or the requirement in Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 on public bodies in Northern Ireland to promote equality of opportunity between women and men.

We ask Government to ensure women's participation in political and public life as committed to in the Good Friday Agreement and required by international mechanisms and in meeting the Sustainable Development Goals.

Limitation of women's participation in the economy through good jobs is a limitation of women's rights and hinders growth and the economy. We need to underpin the political will for change, the determined actions and gendered approaches. Women earn less, have fewer economic assets, experience the burden of unpaid work and care, face greater poverty in paid work or in unpaid work and more often face risks from informal and unprotected employment than men.

Priorities in women's economic empowerment

Leadership and commitment

Norther Ireland Women's European Platform calls on governments to demonstrate leadership in and commitment to women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work through:

- taking steps to ending discrimination in the workplace including in relation to pregnancy and maternity and ensuring access to justice for those women subject to discrimination;
- developing a comprehensive action plan on the gender pay gap and gender pension gap that adopts a whole life approach including action on: gender stereotyping, subject choice and careers guidance in schools; occupational segregation; valuing care and improving childcare, parental leave and flexible working; and discrimination and violence against women in the workplace
- protects women from precarious working practices and commercial exploitation
- promotes women's empowerment in employment where they are currently under-represented.

An enabling environment

We ask that governments ensure that institutions work for gender equality across all departments and public bodies using both mainstreaming and positive action measures through:

- robust and comprehensive gender impact analysis;
- gender budgeting;
- data disaggregated by sex and by other equality grounds and on the basis of socioeconomic disadvantage.

Women's voices at the centre

We ask that governments ensure that women's voices, often left to the end, must be heard at the beginning and be central to all public policy and decision making, according to the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women whole life view. This should, as an immediate priority, be the case in any policy and decision making following the referendum on membership of the European Union.

A radical approach to care

Crucially and specifically, we ask that governments take steps to avert the developing crisis in care.

Women make up the bulk of the care workforce, which tends to be low paid, and also carry out most of the unpaid care for children and elderly relatives — the care workforce is 80% women, usually paid below living wage and often employed on zero hours (precarious) contracts.

Steps must be taken, including:

- revaluing care;
- promoting shared family and caring responsibilities; and

- ensuring appropriate, accessible and affordable childcare and appropriate adult social care, at home, in supported environments and in residential care that protects rights and dignity and treats women with respect.

No one left behind

We ask that governments ensure the economic empowerment of women through promoting equality in work and in the economy through: demonstrating the business case for equality and for women in good jobs; promoting social capital; and ensuring that economic policies have a requirement for equality for their success.

Conclusion

If we fail to achieve the economic empowerment of women we will fail to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals as a whole. Northern Ireland Women's European Platform supports and encourages the work of the High Level Panel for Women's Economic Empowerment in securing change across governments for women's rights and equality.
