



## Economic and Social Council

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### Commission on the Status of Women

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**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and  
to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly  
entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and  
peace for the twenty-first century”**

### **Statement submitted by Legion of Good Will, 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.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

In the year that the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women marks its 25-year anniversary, Latin America and the Caribbean have unfortunately seen an increase in levels of extreme poverty, affecting mostly women.

The Legion of Good Will, a Brazilian non-governmental organization (NGO) with 70 years of experience operating internationally, presents below its successful experiences in strengthening female entrepreneurship and employability.

The 2018 edition of the Social Panorama of Latin America, a report published by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), reveals that the region has registered a decrease in its social indicators since 2015. It is women who suffer the most: while 40 per cent of the employed population in Latin America have incomes below the national minimum wage, this number jumps to 48.7 per cent among women and 60.3 per cent among young women aged 15 to 24. The female participation rate in the world's workplace is lower than that of men (50.2 per cent compared to 74.4 per cent), while their unemployment rate is higher (10.4 per cent compared to 7.6 per cent). In an analysis published in 2019, the World Bank forecasts that this scenario will continue due to the unsatisfactory performance of the main Latin American economies.

The Legion of Good Will was founded on 1 January (World Peace and Universal Brotherhood Day) 1950 by the late radio broadcaster, writer, and poet Alziro Zarur in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. In 2018, the organization provided over 15 million services and benefits to families in situations of poverty. Its schools, social service centres, and shelters for the elderly total 96 units in Brazil, Argentina, Bolivia, Paraguay, Uruguay, Portugal, and the United States, and they are maintained by the people of each country.

The actions taken for women's economic empowerment that we share in this statement follow the strategic guidelines set out in the 1980s by the Legion of Good Will's president, educator Paiva Netto. In an article published in the 2019 edition of the Good Will Women magazine, he reaffirmed this as a priority: "It is urgent to strengthen an ecumenism that crosses barriers, appeases hatred, promotes an exchange of experience that instigates global creativity, corroborating the value of social and humanitarian cooperation among partnerships as, for example, in popular cooperatives in which women play a key role, highlighting the fact that they are completely against waste. There is a lot to learn from each other. The opposite of that is undoubtedly the path of violence, brutality, and wars, which have invaded homes around the globe. Alziro Zarur (1914–1979), late founder of the Legion of Good Will, used to emphasize that battles in the name of Goodness require bravery. Simone de Beauvoir (1908–1986), French writer, philosopher, and feminist, got it right when she stated that: 'All success cloaks a surrender.'"

To summarize: Every time we overcome arrogance and prejudice, there shall always be something fair and good to assimilate from the components of this great Noah's Ark that is the globalized world today. That is the reason why we recommend the union of all people for the good of all, since we share a single home: Earth. The abuses of its inhabitants have been demanding an imperative measure: either we seek integration or we will head towards disintegration. That is why we should strategically work in partnerships that promote effective prosperity for the popular masses.

### Training female entrepreneurs

In 2019, the Legion of Good Will started a partnership with the Ela Póde (She Can) programme in Salvador, Brazil, developed by the Instituto Rede Mulher Empreendedora, with support from Google. The programme trains women in situations of socioeconomic vulnerability over a period of two years through a network of multipliers acting mainly in the less developed regions of Brazil's northern and northeastern regions. Unemployed, black, and mixed-race women with limited education are given priority.

Because of this initiative, the participants saw an increase of 10–20 per cent in their income, as well as an increase of 10–15 per cent in the employability rate. It also promoted growth of three - five per cent in work positions in businesses that were set up and strengthened with the support of the programme. Another benefit is the attention given to the formalization of these businesses, allowing women who own micro-businesses to sign contracts with companies and government bodies, obtain credit, and apply for health benefits and paid maternity leave.

The Ela Póde programme also offers on-site and online qualification aimed at developing the technical, social, and emotional skills needed for entrepreneurship. It also provides access to events, courses, mentorship, networking, and companies for professional monitoring. All those taking part in the programme through the Legion of Good Will also receive support from social workers. It should be mentioned that many women do not start their business by choice. Research by the Rede Mulher Empreendedora found that 75 per cent of those making the decision to set up their own business were motivated by motherhood, which requires flexible working hours, so as to take care of their children's needs.

Data released in 2019 by the Brazilian Micro and Small Business Support Service reveal that women account for 34 per cent of all owners of formal and informal businesses in Brazil. They consist of over 9 million businesswomen who earn, on average, 22 per cent less than men. The study also pointed out opportunities for improving the business environment in Brazil for these women by, for example, combating the difficulty in granting loans to female entrepreneurs. Despite being less likely to default than men (3.7 per cent against 4.2 per cent), women take out loans of on average \$3,000 less than men and at 3.5 per cent interest higher.

One of the participants in the course in Salvador, Eunice Silva, did not even see herself as an entrepreneur: "I really liked everything about the course, but what I enjoyed most was the entrepreneurship lessons. I'm a nail technician, I sell pititinga (a small local fish) and other seafood, and I also do housework. I get by. I do many things. I'd like to be able to take a step further, so that I can achieve my dreams. I'm always willing to do something new in my life."

A similar initiative was developed in Argentina in partnership with the National Ministry of Social Development. Between 2017 and 2019, the Legion of Good Will of Argentina took part in the Family Assistance programme, which benefited 200 families living in situations of social vulnerability. The project is part of the National Social Protection Plan and was carried out in the Juan Pablo II and La Merced districts, located in San Pedro de Jujuy, almost 1,600 kilometers from Buenos Aires. Both communities were set up as settlements that became urbanized gradually and precariously.

The organization offered 13 workshops on generating income, including topics such as: entrepreneurship; organic vegetable garden; nutrition; bread making; construction using sustainable materials; electrical courses; handicrafts; and cutting and sewing. These workshops resulted in products made by the participants themselves and sold at a local fair to neighbouring families and communities.

One of the families that benefited from the Family Assistance programme was that of María Rosa Mamani, a resident in the Juan Pablo II district. She, her husband, Roberto Carlos Almazán, and their daughter, Ailen Guadalupe, live in a house with earthen floor where the rooms are made of canvas and tree trunks. Because of a physical injury, Mr. Almazán was unable to continue working as a bricklayer. In view of this situation, his wife decided to take a bread-making course offered by the Legion of Good Will. With the help of their neighbours, they built a clay oven at home, bought a table and some trays, and started their own business.

### **Integrating young women into the world of work**

Another successful multi-stakeholder partnership in favour of vulnerable people, particularly adolescents and women, is the Good Will Apprentice programme. The initiative has been adopted in three of Brazil's biggest metropolitan regions, assisting, so far, around 2,000 young people. With this programme, the Legion of Good Will, in addition to offering professional qualification, integrates into the labour market people aged 14–24 who are looking for their first job or training to practice a profession.

What is unique about the organization is that it addresses issues that empower the participants of its programmes, especially young women. For example, it informs them about the measures that protect them against various forms of harassment in the workplace and how to report them. This is a result of the Ecumenical Citizen Pedagogy, applied by the organization in all its programmes for adolescents and adults. This proposal comprises, along with the Pedagogy of Affection, the organization's educational line, created by Paiva Netto.

In Brazil, the Apprenticeship Law, which celebrates its twentieth anniversary in 2020, determines that medium and large companies must hire a minimum percentage of young people who are 14–24 years old as apprentices. In this special category of employment contract, with a maximum duration of two years, they spend a period of their working day attending a course that corresponds to their professional activity. While they acquire the theoretical knowledge in the organization, they put into practice what they learn in partner companies where they are hired as apprentices, which allows them to gain experience and earn formal income along with labour and pension rights. The Legion of Good Will combines this work with its social assistance services, increasing the chances for young people in situations of vulnerability to get a formal job. In addition to providing support for them and their families, the organization raises awareness within partner companies for a non-discrimination practice with those who have been out of prison or are doing some type of community service, for example. The Legion of Good Will also works to promote gender equality in the programme. As previously stated, the number of young women earning less than minimum wage in Latin America and the Caribbean is 50 per cent higher than the average of the working population, which is already as high as 40 per cent.

Finally, to combat this disparity in the long term, the organization restates the important role of education in promoting equality. To prevent children and teenagers from having to face sexist remarks and attitudes, we need to improve girls' and boys' self-esteem within their families and in their schools, in a partnership that values their natural characteristics and acknowledges their expressions.

The fact that educators in our schools support students just as they are, listen to what they are feeling and thinking, and respect their dreams has strengthened these students and boosted their confidence to hold on to their own opinions and not to be afraid to express themselves. The girls in particular are encouraged to pursue the career they choose, to develop resilience for challenging moments in life, and to engage in social causes.

The Legion of Good Will would be happy to share our experience and work methodology with governments and organizations committed to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. With the hope that the next 25 years of this global agreement will bring further progress for the female population, we greet all participants of the sixty-fourth session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women.

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