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### Commission on the Status of Women

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**Statement submitted by Education International, International Federation of Building and Wood Workers, International Federation of Journalists, International Trade Union Confederation, and Public Services International, non-governmental organizations 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

Global Unions demand: Guarantee decent jobs for women and equitable access for all to new technology.

Advancing gender equality in the age of digitalization and technological changes requires concerted actions to respond to persistent gender gaps in the world of work, such as access to quality public services, education and training and technology and digital skills. These gaps are rooted in structural, economic and social systems, have deepened during the economic, climate, health and care crises and are mirrored in the digital world.

While technologies and digitalisation can provide significant benefits to workers and society, they can undermine women's human rights, labour rights, foster gender stereotypes, undermine access to gender responsive, quality public services, particularly when technologies are not shaped by social dialogue with workers nor regulated in the public interest.

Rights and protections at work and equitable access to new technology for all.

The digital divide within and between countries will leave many behind, particularly women in all their diversity: nearly half of the world's population are barred from accessing quality and affordable internet and many countries lack access to sufficient technology transfers, which will entrench poverty. Any economic gains made with new technology and digitalisation are not being shared equitably, by the technology sector itself where massive fortunes are amassed by a few and remaining mostly untaxed, while business uses digitalised data for private profits, routinely undermining public good as well as privacy rights. When public services go digital, the lack of access to digital technology deprives many, including women in the informal economy, of access to vital government public services and support.

While technology and digitalisation can have positive impacts on workers and people's lives, and facilitated remote and home-based working, more workers are subjected to highly intrusive and pervasive employer surveillance in the home working environment. Digital technology is being deployed to increase outsourcing and subcontracting, undermining workers rights, job security and wages.

Digital labour platforms have been used to undermine women's labour rights, including wages, conditions, social protection, occupational health and safety, collective bargaining and freedom of association. Furthermore, new technologies, and associated forms of work such as platform work or telework risk to reinforce stereotypical gender roles, touted as a way for the women to reconcile paid and unpaid work while increasing stress and workload for women juggling work and family demands. These risks are magnified for women in informal and non-standard work arrangements. Regulatory frameworks are essential to guarantee decent jobs and access to social protection.

While Artificial Intelligence (AI) has potential to enable progress for women workers, gender biases found in Artificial Intelligence training data sets, algorithms and devices can potentially spread and reinforce harmful gender stereotypes, discrimination and negatively impacting women's labour market opportunities.

Digital evolution must be intentional. Decisions regarding technological shifts must be informed by an intersectional gender lens, to determine whether they contribute to or effectively solve the challenge. Negotiating the introduction of technology with unions protects the interests of workers, achieve more efficient and effective deployment of the technology, minimize negative impacts and ensure economic gains from technology are shared. This crucial role of unions has been

steadily undermined by attacks on freedom of association and collective bargaining, and the use of technological applications to avoid the employment relationship, putting workers under the authority of algorithms and applying intrusive surveillance.

### **Gender-based violence and harassment (GBVH) in the world of work**

The increased use of new technologies, including cloud and web-based applications to facilitate teleworking, online communications and monitoring and surveillance to monitor workers' performance, are leading to worrying increases of stress, pressure and gender-based violence and harassment across various sectors. The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) found that almost two-thirds of women journalists have suffered online abuse. Research from the International Labour Organisation (ILO) indicates that the increase of teleworking- is leading to a higher risk of cyberbullying and harassment online for women. An alarming rise of online bullying and harassment, fueled by the proliferation of misinformation and disinformation and enabled by digital platforms, also has real-life consequences for women and marginalized communities targeted by misogynist hate groups who organise online.

In response to online gender-based violence and harassment, trade unions have centered the impacts of digitalisation onto the collective bargaining agenda. The union representing journalists in Peru provides legal support on tackling cyber harassment and abuse. The International Federation of Journalists has developed guidelines for unions and media on how to handle harassment, and has called on social platforms to take responsibility when a journalist is being harassed. The European Trade Union Confederation agreed to a social partner framework agreement which addresses risks from worker surveillance, prevention of violence and harassment, and the right to disconnect.

The increase of remote work and the growing tensions derived from economic, political, climate and health crises has seen more workers exposed to domestic violence. Trade unions can, including through the effective use of collective bargaining agreements, negotiate for policies that protect workers from all forms of violence in all environments. In 2021, IndustriALL issued guidance on telework and Union Network International Global Union drew up principles with guidelines for negotiators and the employer's duty of care to prevent and address violence and harassment and domestic violence during teleworking/remote working. An agreement between unions and Vodafone Italy set out provisions for wellbeing at work during remote working, including protections and leave for survivors of domestic violence.

### **Equitable access to education, training and lifelong learning**

As over 90% of jobs have a digital component, addressing the gendered digital divide in education is essential to a girl's future life outcomes and well-being. Technological shifts in the organization of work will become a constant feature of the world of work, requiring women's equitable access to lifelong learning education and training systems.

Advances in technical knowledge and innovation are taking place in every industry, delivering new jobs, requiring digital and science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) related skills. Given existing labour force patterns, the vast majority of workers entering these jobs will be men. To date, only 35% of all students enrolled in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics education are women and only 30% of researchers worldwide are women. To enable equitable job access, women and girls need guaranteed access to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics education, technical vocational education and training (TVET), formal and non-formal education apprenticeships and traineeships as well as digital skills

training. While other skills, such as critical thinking or social-emotional skills at all levels, remain fundamental to the development of the whole-person.

Gender-transformative plans across the entire education and training systems are urgently needed to overcome the digital gender gap. Teachers and their unions must be included in developing, implementing, and monitoring technology in education.

Governments have become increasingly dependent on privately-funded digital infrastructure, privatization and commercialization in education. However, as the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education has identified, this poses considerable challenges to equity and inclusiveness as there is little evidence that technology companies effectively serve hard-to-reach communities.

Governments must fulfill their duty to deliver equality, public education to all, especially girls in all their diversity by fully funding their education systems.

While progress towards achieving gender equality in education has been made, remote learning remains out of reach for at least 500 million students. 11 million girls will not return to school this year - one of the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Solving the digital divide must be done in tandem with other socio economic challenges impacting gender equality, such as poverty, child labour or the burden of unpaid care and domestic work.

Transitioning towards a new social organisation of care and a carbon free and sustainable economy.

Developments in technology and digital products and services deliver opportunities for the creation of millions of new jobs while others will be left behind. Given the already persistent gender gaps in the world of work and a world challenged by multiple crises, it is high time to build fairer, inclusive and dignified societies. This requires a shift in priorities towards adequate public investments in gender-transformative and inclusive plans.

Global Unions call on governments to engage in social dialogue for the adoption and implementation of gender-transformative plans to ensure:

### **Equitable access to technology for all**

Governments and international institutions must bridge the global digital divide, in countries and between the North and the South, to bring internet connectivity to all the world's people as a human right and to ensure equitable access to technology for all; ensure gender transformative proactive digitalisation policies and strategies including for improving access to quality public services; implement tax reforms to ensure tech companies pay their fair share of tax in the country where profits are generated;

For technological change to serve the common good, governments must design and implement regulatory frameworks that ensure equitable access to technology for all, reinforce fundamental International Labour Organisation standards and other internationally recognised human rights. This includes regulating technology companies to protect the public interest and fulfillment of human rights;

Strengthen public governance of data and algorithmic systems to ensure quality public services, and public control of public systems and data sovereignty, addressing gendered biases that exist within Artificial Intelligence and digital infrastructures, and ensure democratic participation of unions and representation of women in automated decision-making systems through social dialogue and collective bargaining, including workers' data and privacy rights.

**Equitable access to quality public education, training and lifelong learning**

Gender-transformative plans across the entire education and training systems, ensuring women's access to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics-related education, training and jobs and access to re-training and skills development for women whose jobs are impacted by digitalisation and automation;

Adequate public investment in education and training and implementation of the right to public quality education for all as a basis for all roles that contribute to a well functioning society, and for free lifelong learning systems including continuous professional development, development of knowledge, capabilities and technical skills while at work and when preparing for and seeking work.

**Jobs, wages, rights and protection in the world of work**

Guarantee digital rights, founded on the International Labour Organisation's fundamental standards and supported by the implementation of those standards, which are vital for supporting decent work, overcoming gender disparities, including in accessing and using technology and to ensure workers' health and safety, privacy and decent work/life balance;

Adopt legislation to ensure workers engaged in the platform economy are recognised as employees, entitled to decent work and ensure that workers in platform and other digitally-mediated and technology-related businesses have full organising and collective bargaining rights;

Adequate investments and gender-transformative plans for the creation of 300 million decent jobs in the health, care and education services - accessible for all - and in green infrastructure and other sectors, with policies and measures to overcome persistent sectoral and occupational segregation;

Social dialogue around the impact of digitalization and Industry 4.0, including concrete measures and action to ensure the effective implementation of International Labour Organisation C100 and 111, enabling pay equity and equal treatment and opportunities for women in a more digitalised world;

Effective policies and legislation to sanction online abuse, including the training of law enforcement and the judiciary and the increased responsibility of social platforms to address hate speech, harassment and violence. Guarantee the right for everyone to a world of work free from violence and harassment, including gender-based violence and harassment through universal ratification and effective implementation of International Labour Organisation Convention 190, including International Labour Organisation Recommendation 206.