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Statement submitted by European Women’s Lobby, 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

General Situation

The multiple crises that our planet is undergoing – health, economic, political, conflicts and war and, climate change – are deeply interconnected and feed each other. The predominance of patriarchal societal practices and hypermasculine ideals have resulted in spiralling poverty and social exclusion which impacts disproportionately on women and girls.

Women and girls are the most impacted by poverty around the globe and additionally suffer from intersectional and structural discrimination. The Covid-19 pandemic and its aftermath has accelerated pre-existing conditions of extreme poverty especially for women and girls. The risk of poverty and social exclusion is even higher for Black women and Women of Colour, single mothers, women above the age of 65, women with disabilities, women with low levels of education, women from migrant backgrounds, young women, Roma women, women from rural areas and women from religious or ethnic minorities face additional and intersecting forms of discrimination when accessing education, healthcare, employment and social services. We call on the European Union (EU) and all UN Member States to adopt a feminist economic model enshrined in economic justice, social justice and environmental justice that actively seeks to leave no woman or girl behind. Ending the feminisation of poverty is an urgent priority which requires political will and actions at different levels.

Access to sexual and reproductive health and rights and bodily autonomy

In order to decrease risk of poverty and to increase gender equality, women and girls need to be able to access their sexual and reproductive health and rights and to decide over their own bodily autonomy and family planning, especially as single mothers are among the most vulnerable groups in relation to poverty.

EWL recommends feminist sexuality education for all girls and boys, as education is a crucial accelerator for gender equality. Feminist sexuality education is a comprehensive tool, which holistically includes not only biological, but also social, ethical, psychological, legal and historical material on building healthy relationships, feminism and women's rights, applying a structural perspective and involving an analysis of power-relations between women and men while supporting full access to and understanding of sexual and reproductive health and rights.

A life free from male violence against women and girls

Male violence against women and girls (VAWG) is recognised as an international long-term global pandemic. It happens across Europe, and yet due to a lack of European harmonisation of legislation, the remedies and prevention methods taken by governments are haphazard and a lottery for the women and girls experiencing violence. The feminisation of poverty and the risk to suffer from male violence against women and girls are deeply connected. Women without economic independence and financial means are less likely to be able to leave their violent partner or a discriminatory work environment. We call on the European Union (EU) and all UN Member States to end all forms of violence against women and girls and implement gender-sensitive legislation like the EU Proposal for a Directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence including a common approach to rape that protects all the victims.

Climate change and digital skills

Climate change and the development of the digital dimension at work and at home plays a core role in fighting poverty to enhance gender equality. The green transition triggered by the current climate challenges is a significant opportunity to develop more politically, economically, and socially equal societies. It is crucial that our response to these challenges does not exacerbate existing inequalities between women and men and girls and boys. For this transition to empower women and girls, the EU must entrench its actions on sex-disaggregated data, it must also ensure that gender is mainstreamed in climate policies and regulations, that gender-budgeting is applied to climate and sustainable finance, and finally that all women are equally represented in decision-making. Another important angle to fight poverty is the inclusion and empowerment of women and girls in STEM field and as active parts of developing digital skills for the labour market. Women and girls, through greater investments in STEM studies for girls is paramount to shaping future generational leadership in the digital space.

Value of (Care) Work

Women have the lion share of domestic and unpaid care work and have no time to invest in paid work, in political participation, in leadership, in their careers and in all areas of life. The responsibility of unpaid work rests on women's shoulders and especially on the shoulders of migrant women resulting in lower pay, higher levels of poverty, lower employment and a massive gender pension gap, leaving older women exposed to poverty and insecurity.

We call for an economic and social model, which values care and puts care at the centre. We call for a Care Deal that replaces the male-breadwinner model by an equal-earners-equal-carers model to ensure that both women and men share caring responsibilities throughout their lives. This requires a massive overhaul of the care system to place the issue of value at its core. This means valuing the (formal) sector in terms of pay and working conditions; making it an attractive career option for men, which would also have an impact on challenging gender stereotypes mirrored in the gender segregated labour-market, and also respond to the shortages in staff that the sector is experiencing. It also requires investments in a multitude of services (informal and formal), including but not limited to: community-based services, independent living, respite care, and the participation in the design of services by those who care and those who are cared for.

The European Women's Lobby is very concerned by the exponential increase in homelessness among women, one of the most visible forms of the feminisation of poverty. We call on the EU and all UN State parties to carry out research on homelessness among women and to ensure that all policies addressing homelessness includes a gender dimension, in particular in the EU Platform on combatting Homelessness. We also call for gender sensitive housing policies.

Key asks

The European Women's Lobby and its members recognise that systemic, structural and policy changes are urgently required globally to achieve equality between women and men and to end the feminisation of poverty.

We call on the EU, the UN Member states and stakeholders:

- To apply a gender lens to all fiscal, economic, employment and social policies and reforms;

- To systematically carry out gender assessment of economic and social policies so as to address the structural causes of the feminisation of poverty
- To adopt a Care Deal recognising that care is the backbone of a feminist economic model;
- To provide women access to decent quality work, including a decent income, equal pay to close the gender pay, pensions and poverty gaps, adequate social protection, paying specific attention to women with higher rates of unemployment and lowest pay such as women with disabilities, migrant women, older women and women living in rural areas;
- To guarantee the individualisation of social protection rights and (progressive) personal taxation;
- To ensure the access of all women and girls to their sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and bodily autonomy;
- Ratify ILO Convention 190 on the elimination of violence in the world of work, to promote women's and girls' access to education, training and careers;
- To ratify and remove all reservations to CEDAW;
- In the context of the EU:
 - adopt a Care Deal for Europe, on par with the European Green Deal and Digital Agenda, with earmarked investments, embedded in a human rights framework, and a holistic life-cycle approach
 - integrate gender budgeting into EU's budget and in particular the future 2027–2033 Multi Annual Financial Framework (MFF) and to establish a dedicated Task Force;
 - proactively prevent the escalation of energy poverty when implementing the revised EU Energy Efficiency Directive and the Renewable Energy Directive, as it is a growing problem for single-parent households, of which women represent the majority;
 - Include a gender dimension in the European Platform on combatting homelessness.
 - Adopt and implement the EU Directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence including a strong common approach on rape and protection, prevention and support mechanisms for victims and access to justice and compensation to survivors all across the EU.

Gender equality, including addressing the feminisation of poverty cannot be achieved without the full and effective participation of women and of women's organisations and civil society.