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Statement submitted by Federation of American Women’s Clubs Overseas, Graduate Women International, International Alliance of Women, International Federation of Business and Professional Women, Soroptomist International, Virginia Gildersleeve International Fund, Inc. and Zonta 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.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

We, the undersigned international and national non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council present for the information and consideration by the participants of the 61st session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women the following statement on the theme:

Women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work

The world of work is dynamic, influencing and being influenced in turn by changing social and economic norms. To respond to these changes, enabling women's economic empowerment is a moral imperative for States' commitment to international human rights. It is also good business sense for inclusive growth and development. The modern and changing world of employment is characterized by increasingly fluid populations. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 65.3 million people were forcibly displaced in 2015, women and girls accounting for roughly 50% of them. Women's economic opportunities may change dramatically through destabilization and displacement — they may be enabled or compelled to enter labour markets, though restrictive laws and rules can limit opportunities. Many are forced to take up informal jobs as a result. The challenges of conflict and violence are not confined to the countries in which they manifest but many of the difficulties that women face generally such as discrimination, violence and exploitation are faced to a higher degree in employment following migration. Graduate Women International and the co-sponsoring organizations are highly concerned at the persisting economic barriers faced by refugee girls and women.

As demographic composition varies, so does the availability and demand for work. The global workforce deficit for 2030 is predicted to have severe shortages due to aging populations and reducing fertility rates. For example, China faces a shortage of up to 24.5 million people by 2030; Brazil 40.9 million people and Germany 10 million. Growth in certain sectors, such as the science and technology sector, will face a critical workforce shortfall in the future if the skills demand is not met. The arrival of refugee populations with the right facilitation and investments can supply workforce needs as well as being an empowering economic, cultural and learning opportunity for both immigrant and host populations.

Graduate Women International strongly believes that the provision of relevant, quality education and skills training for refugee women is critical to break the cycle of poverty that many endure and to involve them in a greater decision-making role in any reconciliation and peacebuilding process. Gender equality and fair representation of the population to promote innovation and diversity requires the equal participation of all women including refugee, indigenous and disabled women. Investment in building human capital of refugee women and youth enables them to make the best use of their skills and capacities, and better able to contribute to their own and their communities' well-being.

Graduate Women International is encouraged to see international standards and declarations recognize the need for equality of access to education and training for the self-reliance and economic empowerment of all refugees, particularly

women and girls. These standards must be implemented and enforced to have any measurable effect. The Sustainable Development Agenda 2030 commits to “Leave no-one behind” including those in conflict-affected and volatile settings. International standards for employment — as laid out in the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions and recommendations, apply to all women and girls. Sustainable Development Goal Reduced Inequalities, Goal 10, target 10.7, which facilitates safe, responsible migration, is of particular relevance to reduce the multiple vulnerabilities of women migrants and those working in the informal economy, as does Sustainable Development Goal 8, Decent Work target 8.8.

Graduate Women International emphasizes timing is critical to take action on empowering refugee populations, and this is recognized at the highest levels. At the United Nations General Assembly Summit on 19 September 2016 refugees were the focus; countries committed to “Ensure that all refugee and migrant children are receiving education within a few months of arrival; and strengthen the positive contributions made by migrants to economic and social development in their host countries”. This commitment was upheld in the New York Declaration September 2016 Comprehensive Refugee Framework, 13 (b) Take measures to foster self-reliance by pledging to expand opportunities for refugees to access, as appropriate, education, health care and services, livelihood opportunities and labour markets, without discriminating among refugees and in a manner which also supports host communities. As the European Commission affirmed in its Action Plan on the integration of third country nationals, Brussels 7 April 2016 — “National economic and social policies will need to cater for the recent inflow of third-country migrants and refugees, in particular to provide for their immediate needs and their integration into the labour market and society”.

Recommendations

Taking into account the need for gender equality in the changing world of work and States’ legislative commitment to integrate and empower women refugees, Graduate Women International makes the following recommendations:

Labour rights for refugee women

- Implement and monitor new and existing legislation addressing challenges for migrant women, protection of labour rights and their economic empowerment by States, institutions and civil society.
- Introduce qualification transfer systems and accelerated certification programmes to recognize foreign qualifications, for example the right of teachers to teach in their country of settlement.
- Take steps in identification and matching of refugee expertise and transferable skills with international institutions to help utilize global training and talent and encourage self-reliance are an essential step towards long-term economic empowerment.

Education skills and language training for the country of settlement

- Develop and introduce tailored, accessible life-long education and training for marginalized women including refugee, disabled and indigenous women.
- Put in place language and training courses, job counselling, and skills training tailored to meet labour needs of the host country in specific settlement areas.
- Identify applied learning strategies that combine vocational and non-vocational skill-building, such as literacy training with mobile phones as a learning tool.
- Support women in advocacy, dialogue and agenda-setting skills so they can participate effectively in sensitising local and national authorities to their most urgent needs.
- Provide training and mentoring in financial support including the use of banking systems to facilitate women entrepreneurs.
- Improve market skills, specialized knowledge and professional networks for women to help them access and navigate markets more effectively.

Gender disaggregation of data

Put in place measures to collect and analyse data disaggregation by sex, age and migratory status in order to systematically monitor progress of vulnerable groups — including migrant women and girls — to protect their human rights and guarantee access to health, education, and employment for all.

Cultural integration programmes

- Provide refugees with information on the country of resettlement, helping them building realistic expectations about their new life, making them aware of their rights and their duties, and equipping them with language and other skills that can help them succeed in their new environment are key elements to facilitate their integration.
- Foster co-operative relationships, by initiating skills and cultural exchange programmes that encourage mutual understanding of the migrant and host population such as Finland's national "Let's Read Together" programme.

Protection against gender-based violence in the workplace, trafficking and exploitation

- Promote safe and secure working environments for all women migrant workers and take protective measures for migrant women to mitigate the risk of exploitation.
- Ensure reporting channels and legal recourse to justice for abuse, assault or exploitation of migrant women.

Financing

Graduate Women International calls for international implementation of the migration-related provisions of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for

Development. Both the 2030 Agenda and Financing for Development outcomes have prioritized gender equality and women's empowerment as a key objective, enabler and beneficiary of sustainable development and financing for development efforts.

Economic empowerment of women is essential to enhance gender equality and secure women's equal status and participation in modern economies and every professional, social and political field.
