

On International Women's Day, IFUW promotes the economic empowerment of women as a key priority in the post-2015 development agenda

Geneva, Switzerland, 8 March 2015 – Today, on [International Women's Day](#), the International Federation of University Women ([IFUW](#)) urges policy makers, education sectors, labour unions, and private sector businesses to recognise, promote and support the critical role of **women in the economy**. IFUW strongly encourages schools, vocational training centres and other learning institutions to include business acumen and financial and digital literacy in the curricula to foster entrepreneurship amongst girls and women. Women's economic empowerment is an essential condition for sustainable development, social change and fiscal growth, requiring concerted interdisciplinary and multilateral action to close the significant and widespread gender gap. IFUW calls on all governments to formally adopt specific international commitments in the post-2015 development agenda, including measurable targets and benchmarks, for the increased participation of women in the economy, especially in leadership positions. IFUW calls on all States to ensure that national legislation is in place to prohibit gender discrimination in the workplace, with particular focus on applying the principle of equal pay for work of equal value. All educational and vocational policies should take into account and provide for the needs of marginalised and at-risk groups, including women with disabilities and those from indigenous, minority or migrant backgrounds or those displaced by war.

President of IFUW, Catherine Bell, expressed particular concern over the significant underrepresentation of women graduates and professionals in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), and information and communications technology (ICTs). "Diversity of ideas is a quintessential element of success within STEM and ICT industries. The distinct gender gap in innovation-related industries has serious consequences for long-term sustainability, competitiveness and economic development. We must therefore encourage and support greater female participation at all levels, especially at management level. This is not only a non-discrimination issue, the business case for increased numbers of women leaders is compelling; research has shown that executive boards with greater female participation yield greater returns for their shareholders. It is critical, therefore, to encourage girls and women to study science and technology-related subjects in school and university. This requires concerted efforts to combat the gender-stereotyping that has traditionally seen an over-representation of boys and men in these fields."

The statistics on women graduates and professionals within ICT underline the concern that the gender gap is in fact worsening in many countries and regions. In the European Union (EU), [only 29](#) out of every 1,000 female graduates have a computing or related degree, and only four go on to work in ICT-related activities. At the top professional level, the statistics are equally disconcerting: only 19% of the decision-makers in ICT in the EU are women, while at the top 100 global technology companies, only 6% of Chief Executive Officers are female. Paradoxically, women are vastly over-represented in the informal economy, and are more exposed to vulnerable, low-paid or [undervalued jobs](#). Despite being recognised as area of concern in the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) in 1995, the economic participation of women is still far from equal with that of men. IFUW calls on international policy makers to use the occasion of the 20-year anniversary of the BPfA and the forthcoming adoption of the post-2015 development agenda to reaffirm and re-strengthen its commitments to significantly accelerate the representation and interests of women in all spheres of the economy.

The International Federation of University Women ([IFUW](#)) is based in Geneva, Switzerland, and has an international membership. Founded in 1919, IFUW is the leading girls' and women's global organisation advocating for women's rights, equality and empowerment through access to quality education and training up to the highest levels. IFUW is in special consultative status with ECOSOC and is an NGO maintaining official relations with UNESCO.

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