



Education International  
Internationale de l'Éducation  
Internacional de la Educación  
Bildungsinternationale

**TO ALL MEMBER ORGANISATIONS  
TO THE EXECUTIVE BOARD**

Brussels, 17 February 2016

**International Women's Day – 8 March 2016  
Calling on all member organisations to 'Step it up for Equality'**

Dear Colleagues,

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**President**

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Fred van Leeuwen

The official [UN Women theme for International Women's Day \(IWD\) 2016](#) calls on governments to 'step it up for gender equality'. As the global union of teachers and education support personnel, Education International is proud to mark International Women's Day 2016 by highlighting the august history of women's activism within trade unions. The presence and participation of women trade unionists has been, and continues to be, a driving force behind trade union movements' contributions to the struggle to achieve women's economic empowerment.

Trade unions occupy a unique position in democratic societies because they perform a dual role: they lead efforts to secure, promote and protect workers' rights; and as organisations that are democratically run, they also enable their members to learn about and experience the inner workings of a democratic system. A strong union movement benefits all workers. Women structures and gender equality policies within trade unions have been central to women's union activities, not only in terms of increasing their numbers and broadening the scope of their union participation, but also as an important means for (inter-generational) mentorship and knowledge transfer.

As education union activists, the women leaders and members of EI's member organisations do not only work hard to further women's economic rights, but also to increase gender equality within education. In the run-up to the adoption of the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs), these efforts included ensuring that gender equality issues were not overlooked among the chosen targets and indicators that will measure fulfilment of the education goal by 2030.

As the world begins the mammoth task of implementing the new SDGs, EI member organisations in all regions applaud the continuing efforts of our women activists and leaders.

We also recognise, however, that the struggle for gender equality within unions, in education and in the wider society, is ongoing.

Therefore, we call on all affiliates to re-new their commitment to gender equality by taking action and 'stepping it up' for gender equality in order to:

- make it possible for women to engage in unionism by ensuring that union meetings, processes and activities are more gender-sensitive;
- increase the number of women in leadership positions;
- formally integrate gender equality concerns into collective bargaining processes;
- intensify efforts to close the gender pay and pension gaps.

Gender equality is a human rights issue that affects us all, and is central to the democratic functioning of our unions and our societies. As educators, we must never forget that we are at the forefront of this struggle.

Yours sincerely,

Fred van Leeuwen  
General Secretary