

## Second Triennial Report On The Situation Of Women In E.I. Member Organisations, In Education And In Society

### Women in Society

The situation of women in society is a matter of unremitting controversy. On the one hand, there are those who say that changes have been so profound and far-reaching that affirmative action measures by governments and organisations, including trade unions, to ensure women access to managerial positions and full participation in all activities no longer serve a useful purpose. Increasingly proposals to end such legislation are being brought forward. At the opposite extreme, there are those who say that nothing has happened at all, that things are much the same for women as they ever were despite all efforts, little headway has been made. It's a point of view, but not one we share in EI.

Changes there have been, and in abundance. To say the opposite would be to minimise and devalue the all-embracing, broad-based contribution that the women's movement has made to the humanisation of society throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and that it continues to do as the century draws to a close. To ignore these changes would be unfair to those who have thrown their vital energy and commitment into ensuring that women are acknowledged as human beings, with all of the rights this accords. Not to acknowledge these changes could bring about the opposite of what is sought by those who speak of the 'unfinished business' that remains to be done for the women's cause. In fact, it would simply stop them in their tracks. Activists could well be forgiven for asking, 'What's the point of going to all these lengths if they then tell us there haven't been any changes - and there aren't going to be any either?'

The question therefore is **Have things changed enough?** Acknowledging that there have been changes does not mean we are content with the current situation. This is where we agree with those who say there is still a long way to go. In many corners of the world, both industrialised and developing, social exclusion has a female face.

The increase in the number of single-parent families, and of homes where the head of household is a woman, is having a mixed impact on women's autonomy and on hopes for greater equality between the sexes. On the one hand, this situation can contribute to a reduction in domestic violence, a softening of authoritarian family models and a change in how women are viewed and valued. The other side of the coin is ever-lengthening working hours to meet the family needs and the isolation and loneliness of many women working in a wide range of jobs, including education.

Paradoxically, a number of factors, including the decline in spending power and/or opportunities for secure, lasting, employment, the introduction of informal and precarious forms of employment, the existence of part-time jobs and single-task contracts, all highlight women's social role in providing an income that pays for **basic necessities** (e.g. food) essential for survival. Women's income is also required for **human necessities**. These are more wide-ranging than basic needs, but they are no less vital for a decent life; education is unquestionably one of them.

However, the personal and collective cost that women pay for all of these demands is still exceptionally high, and their work continues to be poorly rewarded. And we are not just talking here in terms of money. As we know, women's entry into the labour market is related, among other things, to the level of education they have achieved. Here, too, the gender issue is crystal-clear. It is much more common for a woman to leave school early than it is for a man. If there has to be a choice between those who carry on studying and those who remain outside the educational system, it is common practice for women to be forced to abandon their studies.

Other factors aggravating the problems already facing women include their poor nutritional standards, their living conditions and the quality of medical care for reproductive health. Evidence provided by numerous research studies from around the world points to an unequal distribution of food between men and women, and between boys and girls. Teachers in developing countries are all too aware of this situation from their observations in the classroom.

The 'silent emergency' of malnutrition, as UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund) calls it, particularly affects girls and women. The crisis is linked in the first instance to the thousands of women noted in maternal

mortality figures partly as a result of a shortage of food. As the UNICEF 1998 Report points out, *'In some parts of the world, notably Latin America and East Asia, there have been dramatic gains in reducing child malnutrition'*. However, in these self-same regions, the recent effects of economic policies designed to respond to the challenges of globalisation are jeopardising gains. As the UNICEF Report says, *'overall, the absolute number of malnourished children worldwide has grown.'*

*"When women are respected and manage resources in a community, their own and their children's nutritional status is improved."*

**Source: UNICEF, The State of the World's Children 1998**

Another dimension closely connected to the question of gender and the social position of women deals with psychological and emotional factors. Two of these, anxiety and depression, are disorders shared by millions of women the world over. It should be clearly understood that we are not talking here of mental illness, but of stress related symptoms brought about by the crippling pressure of living in a culture where expectations and demands seriously undermine a woman's individual capacity for resistance. In only a few parts of the world are these disorders treated as work-related problems. Generally they are not seen as important. Health workers appear to agree on the 'the mental health model of the healthy person' (always in the masculine gender). Stress related disorders, common among female teaching staff, are interpreted on the basis of criteria that are biological or are associated with the sensitive, delicate 'eternal woman'. We share the point of view that the issue is related to the gender question and the demands made on women. Social position too appears to play a role in well-being. Many factors come together to produce the stress that is increasingly noted in women fulfilling multiple roles.

In fact, women criticise themselves and become distressed as a result of their inability to maintain all of the roles demanded by society and by the nuclear family. The continuing burden imposed by society, through accepted male and female models of behaviour, when combined with the additional pressures as outlined concerning work continue to take a toll on women.

In a profession as highly feminised as teaching and education generally, these considerations are highly relevant. These concerns will provide a framework in which to log the information summarised in the course of this Second Report.

*"Education is a human right and an essential tool for achieving the goals of equality, development and peace. Non-discriminatory education benefits both girls and boys and thus ultimately contributes to more equal relationships between women and men. Equality of access to and attainment of educational qualifications is necessary if more women are to become agents of change. Literacy of women is an important key to improving health, nutrition and education in the family and to empowering women to participate in decision-making in society.*

*Investing in formal and non-formal education and training for girls and women, with its exceptionally high social and economic return, has proved to be one of the best means of achieving sustainable development and economic growth is both sustained and sustainable."*

**Source: Beijing Action Platform 1995, Strategic Objectives and Actions, B. Education and Training of Women, page 46**

## 1.1 Principles

Article 2 of the Constitution. The aims of the Education International shall be:

*(h) to combat all forms of racism and of bias or discrimination in education and society due to gender, marital status, sexual orientation, age, religion, political opinion, social or economic status or national or ethnic origin;*

*(i) to give particular attention to developing the leadership role and involvement of women in society, in the teaching profession and in organisations of teachers and education employees.*

## 1.2 **Implementation**

### 1.2.1 **Article 10 – Executive Board**

(c) *The Executive Board shall be composed of twenty three (23) members, including:*

- (ii) *a General Secretary;*
- (iii) *ten (10) members, two from each region, and*
- (iv) *seven (7) members;*

*at least two of the Vice-Presidents and at least one member from each region shall be women.*

#### **Executive Board 1993-1995**

Members	Women	Percentage
25	7	28%

#### **Executive Board 1995-1998**

Members	Women	Percentage
24 (currently 23*)	11	48%

\* Originally included Founding President Albert Shanker (died February 1997)

### 1.2.2 **Regional Committees**

#### **Period 1993-1995**

Regional Committee	Members	Women	Percentage
Africa	17	7	41%
Asia and the Pacific	17	8	47%
Europe	26	7	26%
Latin America	14	6	42%

#### **Period 1995-1998**

Regional Committee	Members	Women	Percentage
Africa	14	6	42.8%
Asia and the Pacific	16	8	50.0%
Europe	35	10	28.5%
Latin America	12	6	50.0%

### 1.2.3 **Sectoral Standing Committees**

#### **Period 1993-1995**

Sectoral Committees	Members	Women	Percentage
Pre-school and primary Education	10	3	33%
Secondary education	10	3	33%
Vocational education and training	10	2	20%
Higher Education	9	2	22%

#### **Period 1995-1998**

Sectoral Committees	Members	Women	Percentage
Pre-school and primary Education	10	5	50%
Secondary education	10	3	33%
Vocational education and Training	10	3	33%
Higher Education	10	2	20%

**1.2.4 Attendance of women at the Harare Congress, 1995**

	Delegates				Observers				Guests				Executive Board			
	Men		Women		Men		Women		Men		Women		Men		Women	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Africa	93	78	27	23	52	74	18	26	4	80	1	20	2	100	0	0
Asia and The Pacific	77	71	31	29	2	29	5	71	0	0	0	0	4	80	1	20
Europe	111	69	49	31	4	31	9	69	11	69	5	31	6	100	0	0
North America and the Caribbean	67	56	53	44	39	32	83	68	2	67	1	33	3	50	3	50
Latin America	27	84	5	16	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	67	1	33
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>375</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>23</b>

**Article 15 – Status of Women Committee**

*‘A Status of Women Committee shall be established to recommend policies and activities to be undertaken by the Education International to promote equality of women and girls in society, in education and in the trade union movement.’*

**Composition of the Status of Women Committee**

<p><u>During the period 1995-1998</u></p> <p>Chairperson: Kounka Damianova – SEB – Bulgaria  Catherine S. Chirwa – TUM – Malawi  Jennifer Lavia – T&amp;TUTA – Trinidad &amp; Tobago  Eneide Moreira Luna – CNTE – Brazil  Linda Logan Smith – CTF – Canada  Ase Lovdal – NL – Norway  Britta Naumann – GEW – Germany  Carol Parker – NZEI – New Zealand  Enelda Rosales – MPU – Panama  Assibi Napoe – EI Executive Board – FESEN Togo</p>
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**Meetings of the Committee:** 11-12 October 1994  
28-29 March 1995  
28-29 October 1996  
26-27 June 1997  
19-20 March 1998

The Committee decided in the course of its five meetings to adopt the following recommendations:

- that a permanent post of Co-ordinator, and another of Assistant or Secretary, in the Brussels office should work solely on matters relating to equal opportunities and the status of women ;
- that the person responsible for women’s issues should be able to take part in activities organised at regional and sub-regional levels;

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- that a Women's Seminar should be held before every Regional Conference, and a Women's Caucus should be held prior to each World Congress, until such time as positive action of this kind bears fruit;
- that the EI publications shall carry information and articles on questions of equality and the status of women in education, in affiliated organisations and in society;
- that a triennial report on the situation of women be presented to the World Congress in order to continue the monitoring of the changes (e.g. advances, successes and obstacles) taking place;
- that an EI delegation should participate in the 1995 World Conference in Beijing, in order to ensure that the voices of women teachers and education employees were heard in this forum;
- that EI produce training materials on the critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform of Action;
- that women teachers should take part in the activities of the programme on education for health and prevention of HIV/AIDS starting at school;
- that research should be carried out into the professional and trade union situation of women teachers and education employees working in the various regions. Suggested subjects include:
  - Feminisation of the teaching profession.
  - The training of female teachers.
  - How to stop sexist stereotypes in education.
  - Social security reform and its impact on women.
  - Women's health.
  - Occupational diseases suffered by women teachers.
  - Young women teachers and their relationship with the trade union movement.
  - Retired teachers and how to make use of their experience.
  - Child Labour and Education.
  - Women's issues and regional processes of economic integration.
  - The gender perspective in union policies.
  - Violence against women in school.
- that women's trade union training should be improved at the national level and be equal to training made available to their male colleagues;
- that, as equal opportunity is one of the priorities of EI policy, the positive action adopted by EI should be continued and supported by similar measures in affiliated organisations;
- that member organisations should be encouraged to use training materials prepared by the EI on the status of women;
- that the EI should continue with its campaign of disseminating the Policy Declaration on Women in Education and Teacher Unions, a document approved at the Harare Congress.

Committee members reported on concerns, successes and failures, of women teachers in the various regions that they come from. The scope of the work is limited to the resources available, but it nonetheless sowed the seeds of actions that have been developed in conjunction with the Secretariat; members also played an important consultative and advisory role on behalf of the Executive Board.

In order to implement the work required the EI has held pre-conference seminars for women in Latin America, Asia Pacific and in the North American/ Caribbean region.

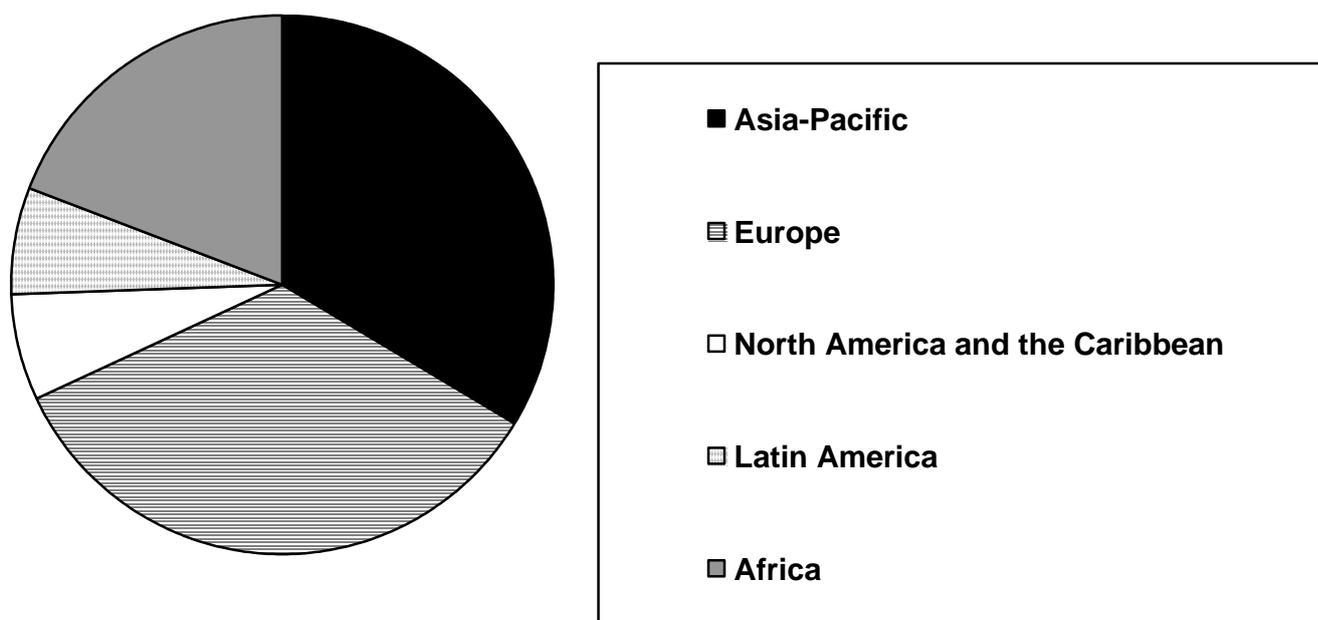
Activities for women have been organised in Morocco, Montevideo, Mexico and Colombia which have focussed on follow-up to Beijing and to developing national activities which can be continued by women's groups in the union. The regional offices in Asia Pacific co-ordinate the work of the SAARC women's network and are helping develop a network in ASEAN. In Africa the regional office has participated in the establishment of an African women's network while work in the Caribbean done by the regional office has focussed on the strategic objectives of the Beijing Platform of Action with a special emphasis on legal literacy. All of these activities have benefited from funding by EI co-operating organisation.

The training materials developed since the Harare Congress continue to focus on the priority concerns of the Beijing Platform of Action. The Girl Child, Women and the Economy and Women and Human Rights have been completed. These have been added to the materials on Education and Training of Women and to the series of training materials on violence against women completed for the last Congress. The poster issued for International Women's Day dealt with women and human rights. The EI calendar for 1998 focussed on equality of women.

EI was represented on the ICFTU Women's Committee and at the ILO meeting on Breaking the Glass Ceiling: Women in Management.

## II Women in affiliated organisations

This second report to the Education International World Congress on the situation of women in affiliated organisations, in education and in society results from the analysis of 110 questionnaire responses received. 39.4% of EI member organisations replied. Responses from the regions were distributed as follows:



**Asia-Pacific: 37 replies, Europe: 38 replies, Latin America: 7 replies, North America and the Caribbean: 7 replies, Africa: 21 replies.**

We realise that the figures are distorted by the disparity in replies by region; we therefore present these statistics as a sample, which we nonetheless believe to be representative of the situation as a whole. A list of organisations that replied to the questionnaire is attached to the report.

The suggestion that the affiliates should provide data by gender was not acted upon in all cases, or even in a majority of cases.

19% of responses did not include the percentage of women members in the organisation, 30% did not reply to the question on the percentage of women delegates attending their last National Congress, 40% ignored the question on the percentage of women members of joint and national councils, and 18% passed over the question on women's representation on their respective executive structures.

In the organisations that replied to the questionnaire, women members are in a majority (i.e. they account for 50% or more of the membership); however, in 64% of the responses, women's representation on leadership committees did not even reach 30%.

### The highest percentages of women on leadership bodies by region (based on sample returns)

Organisation	Africa		
	Congress	National Committee	Executive Council
SEENA – Gabon	16.6%	30.0%	40.0%
TUM – Malawi	45.6%	No reply	21.4%
FSEC – Central Africa	No reply	26.0%	44.4%

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TAE – Eritrea	16.0%	16.0%	40.0%
NANTU - Namibia	No reply	37.5%	53.3%

**Asia-Pacific**

Organisation	Congress	National Committee	Executive Council
ACTUG – Sri Lanka	78.1%	No reply	47.0%
PLTA – Pakistan	No reply	No reply	100.0%
TTA – Tuvalu	No reply	No reply	62.5%
WSTA – Western Samoa	No reply	No reply	75.0%

**Europe**

Organisation	Congress	National Committee	Executive Council
NL – Norway	52.9%	68.5%	71.4%
SL – Norway	40.9%	42.8%	66.0%
EEPTU – Estonia	90.0%	82.6%	62.5%
Läraryrbundet - Sweden	80.0%	No reply	58.8%

**Latin America**

Organisation	Congress	National Committee	Executive Council
OTEP – Paraguay	52.8%	No reply	50.0%
CTERA – Argentina	59.2%	28.2%	38.4%
CNTE – Brazil	No reply	50.0%	No reply
PRICPHMA – Honduras	51.5%	No reply	No reply

**North America and Caribbean**

Organisation	Congress	National Committee	Executive Council
CTF – Canada	43.3%	58.6%	60.0%
JTA – Jamaica	77.6%	58.1%	43.7%
NEA – United States	68.0%	69.5%	33.3%
SLTU – St Lucia	No reply	36.3%	14.2%

75 of 110 replies to the questionnaire noted that the union had adopted a Policy for Equal Opportunities between Men and Women. 32 responses indicate that the union does not have such a policy, and 3 did not reply to the question. The majority (70%) said equality provisions were covered in by-laws, but only 25 responses indicated that posts of responsibility in the union were reserved for women as an affirmative action measure.

However, the majority of organisations responding (52.7%) reported that they had introduced a women’s participation policy. When asked about strategies for achieving this objective (e.g. holding a meeting or ‘women’s caucus’ prior to their congresses), 64 organisations said they did not have specific activities to encourage participation. 36 said they did, and 11 gave no reply.

60% of responses state that the organisation has a Secretary, Commission, Department or special area of work on women’s issues.

**III Women in education**

‘There can be no doubt that equal opportunity for men and women will depend largely on education and more particularly on educational counselling and programmes designed to rectify existing imbalances. EI pledges to support such measures, in theory and in practice.’

**Source: EI Policy Declaration on Women in Education and Teachers’ Organisations, Harare 1995**

The information supplied confirms earlier analyses pointing to the large numbers of women at pre-school and primary level, and at secondary level teaching “feminised subjects” (like social sciences and the humanities). Figures also show that women’s participation in vocational and higher education is still low.

### GENDER AND MANAGEMENT

Education management in South Africa has traditionally been and remains male dominated at the most senior levels of decision-making. Gender equality in education management and development is more than ensuring that there is an increase in the numbers of women in management positions through affirmative action strategies. It is also about the nature of the institutional culture, the value systems of decision makers, whether they are women or men, and taking cognisance of the gendered roles of women and men in a way that facilitates them performing well in their work environment.

Ensuring gender equality therefore entails equal as well as preferential treatment. Diversity in senior decision-makers in the education system helps improve the quality of the education system. It can ensure that one dominant culture does not determine the nature of the education system and the diversity is embraced.

Women in positions of power are often resisted because of the prejudice of male colleagues. Women need to be trained to recognise and deal with these issues as they arise, rather than be accused of failing. Gender equality needs to be considered in advertising, recruitment procedures, interviews, recognition of prior learning and acquired skills, criteria for promotion, appraisal, ensuring women are in situations in which they can be promoted, mentoring and networking, exit interviews and so on.

**Source: Gender Equity in Education, report of the Gender Equity Task Team, Dept. Of Education, South Africa 1997**

The figures also confirm steady growth in part-time work (16.4% of female primary teachers reported by GTUESR in Egypt, and 18.9% of female secondary teachers according to the report from JTU – Japan).

#### ***Part-Time Work : An issue of Opportunity or of No Choice***

*‘The increase in the number of women teachers at all levels is attributable to an identifiable increase in the number of women entering the labour market in a-typical jobs, that is to say, work which is either part-time or on a short-term contract.*

*This phenomenon is particularly prevalent in education. For women teachers it is very often their only chance to obtain their first job, or more often, to return to work after a break to bring up children or care for elderly dependent relative, but they pay the price ... 60% of the women interviewed across the European Community all working on fixed term contracts, said they had been unable to find permanent employment ... Similarly, the same survey clearly showed that part-time work strengthens segregation. It tends to restrict the kind of jobs which are open to women, and ‘makes it difficult, if not impossible for them to attain senior positions.’*

**Source: Feminisation of the teaching profession, May 1996, ETUCE**

Eighty-seven organisations replied that there is no difference in pay between men and women with the same qualifications. Thirteen however, replied in the affirmative when asked if women’s average income was lower than that of men. The majority of organisations replying to the questionnaire said that legislation in their countries relating to education and employment recognised equality between men and women, but practice still does not reflect reality.

We are, however, aware that in some countries legal provisions remain that limit women’s rights to work freely, to inherit, and do not promote implementation of equal pay for work of equal value. Too few have legislation dealing with sexual harassment at the workplace.

The main obstacles to equality in the teaching profession highlighted in the questionnaire include:

- “priority is given to men”
- powerful, conservative gender stereotypes (sometimes strongly influenced by religious or traditional beliefs)
- “the onus of family responsibilities that women have to bear”
- a gender-segregated labour market
- “lack of prestige and status for teachers”
- “girls are not sent to school, and therefore cannot move on to professional jobs”
- “no safe transport available for girls and women”

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- “higher education is still for men”
- “we are discriminated against on grounds of maternity leave, and because we care for children when they are ill; if we didn’t do it, nobody would look after them - or after sick elderly relatives – at all”
- “lack of self-confidence and self-esteem”
- “part-time work breeds insecurity”
- “the sexist aspirations of the education system”
- “husband’s permission needed to work”
- lack of sufficient, relevant information available to women
- poverty
- “no disciplinary action taken over sexual harassment”
- “no real opportunities for taking up positions of responsibility”
- “nobody cares about the problems of young women teachers; being a woman and a young, recently-qualified teacher is just one big problem”

We have quoted the from the responses to the questionnaire because we believe they provide a clear, vivid picture of the reality that faces women teachers.

As far as basic and lifelong vocational training is concerned, 30 organisations report that equality of opportunity considerations are not dealt with in teacher training for men or women entering the profession. The young female teacher referred in one of the above statements is an example. 27 organisations indicate that no opportunities exist at any point in their careers to study issues of equality.

Twenty-five of the 110 questionnaires returned say that there are committees mandated to revise school books and teaching materials with a view to getting rid of negative gender stereotypes and sexist language. Only 40 replies indicate that women teachers receive enough information on their rights.

### **The role of the Education International**

In response to the question of how EI can best help member organisations in their work to attain equality the following sample shows the range of activities requested of EI.

- “help us defend our rights”
- “set up women teacher committees at the regional level, and encourage all affiliates to have one at the national level as well”
- “incorporate women into decision-making”
- “organise more activities at the regional level to enable women teachers to discuss their problems together and work out solutions”
- “continue production of information and training materials”
- “encourage affiliates to adopt clear equal opportunities policies within the union”
- “help us to put pressure on our governments to pass legislation and adopt measures of positive action”
- “help us to produce materials in local languages and aimed at indigenous women teachers ”
- “support training and organisational projects for women teachers in developing countries”
- “set up a database on matters of interest to women”

A significant percentage of replies give a positive assessment of currently available materials, and express gratitude for the work done so far.

### **Conclusion**

The number of responses from EI member organisations were the highest number received for any EI questionnaire and we are very grateful to those who took the time to reply. However as noted in the report only 39.4% of member organisations replied. If EI is to build a reliable data base, truly reflective of the situation of women in teacher organisations and in education, we require a much higher level of response. We appeal to

member organisations to assist us in fulfilling the requirements of the Congress decision to produce a report on the situation of women in education unions.

Within Education International constitutional structures, progress has been made in ensuring gender equity at the decision making level of the Executive Board and in some of the Regional Committees. The Sectoral Committees, established to advise the Executive Board on professional issues, had equity only on the pre-school/primary level committee. The supreme decision making body of Congress was still composed of 69% men.

EI member organisations also recorded progress with women's participation in national decision making structures. An anomaly noted in the European region shows increasing participation of women at the national level but the corresponding regional structure still has fewer than 30% women members.

EI member organisations working to advance gender equality are also reporting a change in some of the priorities of their work. The impact of the trends that accompany globalisation have been felt in the education sector where reports of contracting out of services, part-time contracts, lack of security accompanied by changes to benefits, often made without a gender impact analysis, are having strong repercussions particularly on women. Given the continuing increase in the feminisation of the education profession these issues are resulting in requests for work to focus on changes to:

- maternity and parental benefits;
- childcare and elder care;
- the impact of increases to the age limits before retirement pensions can be claimed particularly on women who remain in the classroom;
- The impact on women of changes to healthcare provisions.
- monitoring the impact on women of unemployment in the education sector where it exists and the implications for the education sector of the retirement of a significant percentage of educators within five years in some parts of the world.

In addition to continuing with the work on training materials for use with women, EI is asked to work on the materials produced on the priority objectives of the Beijing Platform of Action and to promote adoption and implementation of these objectives by governments at every opportunity. This is particularly necessary in the work done at the international and regional levels with the United Nations and its specialised agencies, ILO, UNESCO, the World Bank, WHO and increasingly with UNICEF on education of girls and Child Labour. Close cooperation with ICFTU allows EI to contribute the work on behalf of all women workers and to get support for EI's priorities and objectives from a broad coalition of workers whose children are largely users of publicly funded education.

EI must continue its work to improve the status of women in education and in society in view of the new challenges posed by the globalisation of economies. We must ensure input from regions through regional or sub-regional activities and that help establish priorities for this work. There continues to be a need for a strong voice for women within the EI structures to ensure that equality remains at the core of EI's work. Pre-conference activities in all regions are recommended as part of the EI work programme to help continue the momentum of the work done to date.

There is also a need for an international conference to examine the impact of the feminisation of the teaching profession on different regions of the world. Continuing cooperation with ILO on this issue is recommended.

Overall improvements to the situation of women in teacher organisations, in education and in society show slow but steady progress. This progress is not sufficiently well established to be taken as the standard that will continue to exist but is a cause for cautious optimism.

1998 is the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. As we note in our report equality remains part of the unfinished business of human rights and we support the statement from the Declaration and Programme of Action that

**"The human rights of women and the girl-child are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights. The full and equal participation of women in political, civil, economic, social and cultural life, at the national, regional and international levels, and the eradication of all forms of discrimination on grounds of sex are priority objectives"**