



## EUROPEAN REGIONAL OFFICE WORLD FEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS

1st European Meeting of WFTU Women Workers after 18<sup>th</sup> congress.

The starting point for our work is the Rome Declaration of the 18th WFTU Congress in Rome in May 2022, which defines the WFTU plan of action in the current international framework.

Europe - overview

The historical phase we are going through is very difficult for workers, peoples and for us class oriented trade unions who fight every day to defend workers' rights and build a society without exploitation of man on man and the environment.

The economic crisis and inter-imperialist competition are opening up increasingly dramatic scenarios. An economic crisis that is a crisis of a model, the capitalist model, which no longer has any room for valorisation. It is the MPC that has reached its limit: the conditions for growth commensurate with the size of world capital and its need for valorisation are no longer there, unless we move towards a generalised war, with the unknown of a nuclear breakout.

The only margins for growth may come from an ever-increasing exploitation of the Work Force and the globe's increasingly limited natural resources, but also from the clash and competition between the great historical financial-economic-state blocs and the Euro-Asian powers that are objectively antagonistic to the old western blocs. In this case, the objective is to take away slices of markets, territories and labour by military force. The ongoing war in Ukraine can spill over into a nuclear conflict at any moment, as the capitalist mode of production does not provide for any alternative to competition and competition, to its ultimate consequences.

The economic and social costs of this new phase of harsh international confrontation are falling heavily on workers in European countries, who are paying for these choices in terms of welfare cuts, wage hikes, high inflation, and a sharp rise in the cost of living.

The shifting of huge resources by state governments from welfare and social needs to arms expenditures is leading to an increasingly pressing need to organise trade union and social protest.

Europe- working women

Pandemics, war, the energy crisis, and the high cost of living widen the gulf of gender inequality, increase poor and underpaid work, exploitation and marginalisation in which women and young people predominantly find themselves.

Precariousness is becoming more and more a condition of life from which it is difficult to break free, while the blackmail of dismissal for women is also associated with the figure of increasing harassment in the workplace and the resignation phenomenon.

There is a close correlation between worsening working conditions, lack of access to employment, economic discrimination and the obstacle course a woman has to take in order to free herself from violent ties and save her skin.



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The economic violence that sees the primacy of dismissals of women, compulsory *part-time work*, the strategy of redundancies disguised as transfers kilometres away from home. That which aims at progressively increasing working hours in the name of unbridled competitiveness for the benefit of a ruling and entrepreneurial class that thinks about grinding profits and squeezing the working class.

The rhetoric of the mother of the family justifies the reduction of services by burdening women with care work. Billions of hours of unpaid work from which to extract incredible economic value.

The defence and reinforcement of the welfare state, as well as the demand for decent working conditions that are not subject to permanent precariousness, and for wages that are in line with the real cost of living, are inalienable conditions.

On the whole, the increase in the presence of women in the labour market has represented and continues to represent an opportunity for capitalism to exploit gender differences as an opportunity to exploit labour and strengthen its domination.

This is evident from the trend in the female labour force, which has grown over the last few decades, reaching 67,7% in 2019, data are different in each country. With pandemic for example in Italy in December 2020 there were 101,000 fewer employed persons than in 2019 and, of these, 99,000 were women. Even looking at the annual data, this trend is confirmed, with female employment falling by 3.8% between 2019 and 2020, while male employment fell by 2.6%, with a contraction that even in 2021 continued to be more marked for women than for men compared to 2019 (-2.7% compared to -2.3%).

These data are a good representation of the historical trend whereby women's access to work has always been bound and linked to the needs of capital, fluctuating during periods of crisis when women have greater difficulty in entering and greater ease in leaving the labour market, accentuating the female component of poverty in the long run (the so-called 'feminisation of poverty').

Today we speak of the '**feminisation of work**', a phenomenon that is having clear repercussions on the characteristics and type of work exploitation, as well as on the redesigning of families and cohabitations, social functions and established roles: an element, among other things, to be borne in mind also in the dynamics of family violence, sometimes connected with the loss of the social role of 'breadwinner' by the man. A particular aspect of this phenomenon emerged during the pandemic, where the introduction of smart working accentuated the dynamics of overlapping and further exploitation of the productive and reproductive sphere.

Systematising the multiplicity of different components, two 'type profiles' of women seem to have emerged at the moment. **The army of working women subject to horizontal and vertical segregation, the unemployed, the unemployable and the precarious. And the model of a woman**



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**in step with the new productive context: freelance professionals, entrepreneurs, managers, mistresses, commanders and representatives of other high qualifications.**

In the current crisis, the level of exploitation of women becomes the measure of the exploitation of so many other categories, but in a tendentially a-conflictual phase, this exploitation is not finding an outlet in movements that conflictually set themselves the goal of improving material living and working conditions. Thanks to their high level of education and the ongoing process of the 'feminisation' of labour, women can take on a specific function, in which to invest, in the context of capitalist restructuring of the productive environment: an example is the investment of institutions on digital culture and careers in STEM disciplines (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics), in which women are still under-represented and in which, therefore, margins of exploitation open up that can meet the need for scientific advancement in a sector such as technological innovation that has a strategic value in the intensification of inter - imperialist competition. The canons of bourgeois women's emancipation become an instrument of propaganda and ideological offensive perpetrated by the imperialist countries both internally, in terms of political and ideological stabilisation, and in terms of global competition and ideological warfare of the west towards the enemy, currently identified above all in China and Russia: an element, the ideological one, that risks permeating deep into the mass consciousness, even among the ranks of those who by material conditions should be on the right side of the barricade.

Within capitalism, these elements are then quite relevant on a European scale and assume a particular function in the process of building the European imperialist pole. Faced with the worsening condition of women, the European Union is trying to paint itself pink and set itself up as the champion of women's rights: the ideological mystification operated on the fate of women serves, however, to actually cover up the ongoing attempt to amplify the internal selection of female labour.

In fact, the words of European Commission president Von der Leyen date back to July 2022, stating that in order to eliminate the fateful 'gender gap', it would be enough to increase parental leave and child and elderly care, the so-called 'work-life balance', so that women could devote their time to their careers: words that, behind a pink curtain, reveal the need for European imperialism to valorise the female workforce while maintaining the general framework of exploitation of gender differences and revealing a concept of female emancipation linked to the individual success of a few women, on the back of the misery of many.

The attempt in progress is clear: to subsume, according to the capitalist restructuring taking place at European and continental level, the key words of women's struggles by transforming, for example, the concept of equality and equal rights into the liberal concept of 'equal opportunities' (of domination...) and emancipation into 'empowerment'. And it is in this context that the investments aimed at women and envisaged in the NRP fit: incentives for female entrepreneurship,



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funds for work-life balance, incentives for girls' education and vocational training, especially in STEM subjects. All measures aimed at ensuring an army of current and future female workers chosen to be used in the EU's restructuring process.

A prospect, from an ideological point of view, of emancipation that is entirely individualistic and individualistic, aimed at creating (for those who make it) women who will exploit other women, invested in roles of power and management, instead crystallising the situation of the majority of women who will feed that 'reserve army' of labour that is most exploited or ready to be set aside in times of crisis.

### **WFTU-women**

For us in the WFTU, in the class trade union movement, the role of working women is fundamental. The role of women workers in the labour process, in trade unions, in the political struggle, can give additional strength to the class struggles of the present and the future. The class trade union movement has always maintained a firm stand and has consistently fought for equal rights for women workers, for equality at work and in all aspects of life; it has fought for an end to slavery and trafficking in women, for women's right to vote, for their right to participate in trade unions, in political parties, for their presence in government and state offices, and for women's participation in social and cultural activities.

Today, in all capitalist countries, working women are subjected to relentless exploitation. They mostly work part-time, temporary and unprotected jobs. They are paid less than men and have access to lower pensions. Working women are the first to be unemployed. In many countries violence against women is on the rise, prostitution and trafficking networks are spreading, economic migration is separating many mothers from their children and husbands. Today, working women have increasingly limited access rights to education, cultural activities and leisure.

When we talk about 'gender issues', we are referring to the further exploitation that women suffer in society as a consequence of their gender (i.e. we are talking about a combination of social and gender discrimination). This discrimination has mental, cultural and moral repercussions, as women are prevented from fully and equally developing their capacities. However, the crux of the problem is that these negative effects primarily affect working-class women. On the other hand, middle-class women find the means and possibilities to solve their problems.

Therefore, the solution and the way out lie in the common struggles of women and men against the social system that creates the exploitation of man by man. After all, it is the task of the class struggle of the trade union movement to fight for small and big problems until the final liberation of our class. This has also been the compass that the WFTU has followed, with special consideration and focus on the organic inclusion of women in the struggles of the class trade union movement, not as a decorative element, but as an integral part and condition of the final triumph of the working class.



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conclusion

The strong resurgence of conflicts, struggles, strikes are born in response to these political choices. Particularly in France and England, the strikes and demonstrations of the last few months and which are still ongoing are filling the squares as not seen for many years. Organisations affiliated or close to the WFTU are in all countries at the head of these struggles and strikes involving millions of workers, blocking production and services, and advancing not only strictly trade union demands but also putting at the centre the clash with the capitalist mode of production and the need for a profound social transformation.

The response to this extraordinary resumption of a cycle of struggles that is involving, albeit with varying intensity, all European countries is violent in terms of both repression and regulatory discipline. Not only the denunciations, arrests, and convictions that have affected all the sectors in the vanguard of struggles and strikes, but also a very strong legal clampdown in an attempt to cage the struggles within a series of measures restricting trade union freedoms, freedom to strike, and freedom of organisation.

The bosses, the bourgeoisie, and the governments know perfectly well that this phase of intense exploitation, wage reductions, and new austerity will last and that this will inevitably provoke a counter-attack by the class with the increase of protests, mobilisations and strikes organised and led by class unionism. This is why they have initiated their own season of caging struggles and rights that over time will lead to the disarmament of the class.

Class trade unionism does not have only one enemy, the conflict between capital and labour has become part of the conflict between labour and trade unionism accomplice to capitalist and exploitative policies. That trade unionism whose mission is harm reduction rather than the defence of class interests and the struggle to change the capitalist mode of production.

In Europe, the ETUC brings together many of these trade union confederations, certainly including the Italian ones.

It is necessary for the WFTU, through its affiliated European unions, to indicate to the women workers of our continent a perspective of all-round struggle that, starting from the legitimate demands for emancipation from an absurd and instrumental minority in the workplace, places itself at the head of the more general class conflict to which all workers are called.

The phase we are currently going through and to which we will be heading in the coming years will be one of severe hardening of overall living and working conditions. The systemic crisis of the MPC sees its beating heart in the countries of mature capitalism, engaged in a no-holds-barred struggle to maintain a position of global dominance, challenged by the advance of other countries and economies once defined as 'emerging', first and foremost the BRICS countries, which have long been demonstrating development capacities superior to those of the West.



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Multipolarism is advancing, driven by the economic, technological and scientific strength of these countries, potentially putting the whole of humanity in a much better condition than the way the world was run after the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the end of the USSR, which saw the revival of fiercely anti-grassroots economic and social policies, along with an imperialist and colonialist military interventionism on the altar of which entire countries and millions of lives were destroyed, from the former Yugoslavia to Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya and many others.

War has once again become the main tool with which the Euro-Atlantic imperialist pole and its military instrument, NATO, attempt to resolve an unprecedented systemic crisis of capitalism. The conflict in Ukraine finds its origins and roots in this crisis, setting the conditions for a potentially devastating deflagration for all humanity due to the possible use of the atomic weapon. Alongside the armed conflict, which sees, along with Ukraine, many other countries and peoples devastated by the indiscriminate use of weapons of mass destruction built by the one industry that makes billions in profits, there is another conflict that also reaps tens of thousands of dead, wounded, maimed, and more generally immense misery and suffering for millions of human beings. It is the one against the popular sectors, affected by criminal policies aimed at extracting maximum profit from the only productive factor that gives meaning to the exploitation mechanism and enhances it: the workers.

All our energies as class unions must be concentrated on this ground. For the umpteenth time in recent history, workers' interests are inextricably linked to the fight against war, in their own countries in the above-mentioned forms and at planetary level. The watchword 'war on war', with which the European workers' movement countered the tragedy of the First World War, is extremely topical again. In a profoundly different situation from that era, our class enemies are bringing all of humanity back to the brink of a conflict that threatens to end the very existence of mankind on the planet.

This we believe is the ground on which to engage our workers in the immediate future. A fight without quarter against the internal economic and social war promoted by the continental bosses through the European imperialist pole and the complicit trade unions organised in the ETUC and against the war on our borders.

We must strengthen the WFTU, working more and more in regional and sectoral offices and carry the flags of international trade union organisation in all our struggles

we must strengthen and coordinate our trade union organisation, building common paths on general times and connecting struggles in different countries and practising real internationalist solidarity.

In the midst of this struggle to impose peace with social justice, it is necessary to bring to life all the specific demands that characterise this important European meeting of WFTU women workers, which we greet with the militant trade unions of Europe for the modern rights of working women

**WE STRENGTHEN OUR STRUGGLE FOR EMANCIPATION & EQUALITY AGAINST THE VIOLENCE OF OUR EXPLOITERS.**