

Building back equally: Making the case for equality and diversity in recovery

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Since early this year, Europe has found itself in the deepest crisis in decades. As with previous economic and financial crises, like the Great Recession, this crisis is increasing social inequalities in our societies. As the OECD Employment Outlook 2020 outlines, the COVID-19 crisis is having a greater impact on some workers than others.

IndustriAll European Trade Union condemns and unites in opposing structural inequality, discrimination and entrenched disadvantage faced by women, ethnic minority workers, disabled and LGBT+ workers which have meant unequal exposure, disproportionate impact and deaths from Covid-19.

Some industries with a high proportion of female workforce, e.g. the garment industry, have been especially hard hit. The closure of care facilities led to an increased double burden that is still mostly shouldered by women. They have been trapped between the need to reduce working hours while at the same time being pressured to go back to work fulltime. The challenge has been even bigger for single parents. Before the Covid-19 outbreak, women in the European Union spent 13 hours more than men every week on unpaid care and housework. With the closure of schools, workplaces and care facilities for older relatives, their unpaid workload is likely to further increase. Incidences of domestic violence have increased and despite this a number of countries have suggested that they would withdraw from the Istanbul Convention against violence against women and girls (notably the current Polish and Turkish governments). At the same time, however, more men took over care responsibilities and household chores during the months of forced teleworking than ever before. There is an increased awareness now for the value and the extent of reproductive work. Many workers working from home also appreciate the absence of time and stress of commuting to the office, spending more time with their children and spouses and the increased flexibility of the working hours.

More generally, the pandemic has accelerated structural changes towards more sustainability, digitalisation and in the way services are delivered. The twin transitions towards a more digital and decarbonised economy are well documented but this crisis is also the opportunity to raise the need for a social transition towards a more inclusive and diverse labour market. Europe must avoid the mistakes and unintended consequences of previous crises. Research and literature from past decades indicates that women were disproportionately impacted up to seven years later than their male counterparts in previous crises (in employment, in education, in political representation).

All three transitions – digital, green and inclusive – demand innovation in work and work organisation. Much attention is focused on the first two but systematic attention should be addressed to the latter transition as well. Increasing the diversity of our industrial workforce is vital to guaranteeing the future of sustainable production in Europe. To build on this and shape a recovery that works for everyone,

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new ideas and inspiration are needed, a new leadership culture, creative collaboration and deeper reflection on how these changes have impacted on different groups in society.

Unlike previous crises, the Covid19 pandemic has affected us beyond our economic life, and has had major impacts on our private lives, our health, our educational achievements and opportunities, our relationships. This crisis is special in that we do not merely experience an economic downturn that will be followed by a recovery to much the same world of work afterwards. The uncertainty of the public health crisis is creating a new normal for many workers and their families.

IndustriAll Europe believes that this crisis should spark a business case for greater diversity for more sustainable industries and resilient societies in the long term!

Building back better and more equally: the case for increased diversity in industry

In many workplaces, a certain degree of flexibility is likely to remain in the new normal. There are opportunities as well as challenges to be addressed. With all the digital tools in place, the tried and practiced new ways of work organisation, the interest for a complete rollback is relatively small – on both companies' and workers' sides. New challenges for collective bargaining and labour law, including the terms of telework and the right to disconnect, will need to be addressed to ensure a healthy work-life balance for all. In this regard, greater reliance on working from home necessitates stronger digital workplace policies to support mental wellness. Responsibly regulated and implemented, this new normal does not only offer perspectives for a better work-life balance for everyone but also increased employment chances for people with restricted mobility.

A recovery that works for everyone cannot be built on a roll-back of equality gains – the contrary, there must be a strengthening of equality rules to underpin a transition to a more equal and inclusive society. Therefore, notably, it must be assured that work-life balance is guaranteed for all equally, and that no one finds themselves pushed out of the 'new workplace'.

IndustriAll Europe is committed to fight for a recovery that increases equality and diversity in our industries and societies. Europe has agreed a historic recovery plan of significant proportions. Just as we want that public spending and borrowing to ensure the sustainable technologies and Just Transitions needed for future industrial jobs in Europe – we must ensure that public funds are strengthening the diversity of our labour markets.

Therefore, all recovery funds and social support should be subject to equality audits. We appeal not only to governments and employers but to all trade unions, shop stewards and (European) works councils to make decisions with an eye to equality and diversity. No data, no sensitivity: informed decisions can only be taken with sufficient data. All those who have not yet introduced systematic data collection to enable equality budgeting, impact assessments, etc. that are sensitive to gender, age, (dis)abilities must urgently do so.

We want to treat this pandemic not only as the challenge it clearly is for all of us, but also as a chance. Making the most of it requires:

- The regulation of remote work, working time and work organisation through social dialogue

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- Equal pay: a clear obligation for employers to ensure this and a strong European directive on pay transparency
- Access to training, especially on the (new) digital tools for all (also for those who are often left behind: e.g. disabled, older workers, particularly women)
- A renewed effort to make STEM jobs attractive and accessible to all
- Manufacturing workplaces that remain attractive in comparison to the office environment
- A work culture that embraces diversity
- A clear commitment to equal opportunities on all levels
- Support and assistance to victims of domestic violence in line with the ILO Violence and Harassment Convention and Recommendation
- Family friendly policies that offer better and equal opportunities to combine work and care

At the same time it is of utmost importance that we remain vigilant against a backlash against equality rights and rising discrimination whether targeting women, ethnic minorities, disabled people or the LGBTIQ+ community.

Finally, industriAll Europe recognises that in today's crisis women and ethnic minorities have paid a high price because many work in our frontline and public services, and 'essential roles'. IndustriAll Europe wishes to repeat our solidarity with and respect for our public services workers and those in other essential services that have been at the forefront during the pandemic, often risking their health and even lives for everyone else. We are grateful.