**BWI ERWC Statement on International Workers Memorial Day**

**Protect Workers! Stop COVID-19**

**Women for equal, safe and inclusive workplaces and societies**

On the eve of the International Workers Memorial Day the BWI European Regional Women’s Committee calls on governments, employers and all the stakeholders to overcome the COVID-19 crisis with the goal to build more equal, safe and inclusive workplaces and societies.

The COVID-19 pandemic is deepening existing inequalities, exposing women amongst those who are affected most. The ILO has estimated that full or partial lockdown measures affect almost 2.7 billion workers, representing around 81 percent of the world’s workforce. Women across every industry, including BWI sectors, are hardest hit by the pandemic.

Global statistics before the COVID-19 pandemic showed that women around the world make up to 60 percent of the world’s working poor. The global gender pay gap is at 16 percent with women paid up to 35 percent less in some countries. Around 740 million women around the globe working the informal economy. Women earn less, save less, hold less secure jobs and have less access to social protections. Therefore, women have limited capacity to absorb economic shocks.

The situation for women workers in Europe reflects global trends. The European Institute for Gender Equality indicated that nearly a quarter of women workers across the EU are in precarious employment. For migrants, the situation was even worse: nearly 35 per cent of non-EU born women work in precarious jobs. The European Commission highlights that gender pay gap in the EU is about 16 percent on average with the highest gender pay gap in Estonia (22.7 percent) and the lowest in Romania (3 percent).

Before the COVID-19 pandemic women were doing three times as much unpaid care and domestic work as men. Schools and childcare closures have put additional burden on women asthe demand for unpaid childcare has increased. This constrains women’s ability to work, particularly when jobs cannot be carried out remotely, like in construction and forestry.

Lockdowns to prevent the spread of COVID-19 resulted in many of women locked in their homes with abusers. There are many reports of increased domestic violence in many countries. For example, domestic violence cases increased by 30 percent in France during the first week of the lockdown.

BWI affiliates in Europe and worldwide in close collaboration with other trade union centers and civil society organizations are campaigning for the ratification of the ILO Convention 190 against violence and harassment in the world of work supplemented by the ILO Recommendation adopted last year. These instruments recognize the impact of the domestic violence on the world of work and provide protection mechanisms. Today more than ever it is crucial to campaign for the ratification of the ILO Convention 190.

The BWI European Regional Women’s Committee recognizes that existing social protection systems in Western Europe gradually mitigated negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women. The current crisis underlined the importance of the welfare state and highlighted the failure of the austerity measures. We acknowledge that women in many countries of the world are much more exposed to the economic and social shocks and our solidarity actions could provide necessary support for women in distress.

The BWI European Regional Women’s Committee considers that recovery from the COVID-19 crisis should lead to a more equal and safer world of work, where women rights and representation are included in all the aspects of political, economic and social systems. Gender equality is not a matter of action “after the crisis” – it is time to act now.

In particular, the BWI European Regional Women’s Committee considers the following necessary steps in the BWI sectors that are mainly male-dominated:

* Develop solidarity support programs and actions for women in distress due to COVID-19 crisis
* Put pressure on the MNCs to take responsibility and provide necessary support for women workers who don’t have access to social security systems, including women workers in the MNCs supply chain
* Include women representation in all COVID-19 response planning and negotiations at the workplace level, industry level, national and international levels.
* Intensify the BWI campaign for the ratification of the ILO Convention 190 with specific emphasis on the impact of the domestic violence.
* Continue the BWI campaign Value Women’s Work with the specific focus on the gender pay gap, unpaid work done by women and access of women to the social protection system.
* Put pressure on governments, employers and all the stakeholders to keep issues of gender equality on the top of the agenda despite of economic, political and social shocks