



NATIONS UNIES

COMMISSION ÉCONOMIQUE
POUR L'EUROPE

ОБЪЕДИНЕННЫЕ НАЦИИ

ЕВРОПЕЙСКАЯ ЭКОНОМИЧЕСКАЯ
КОМИССИЯ

UNITED NATIONS

ECONOMIC COMMISSION
FOR EUROPE

PLEASE CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

**Statement by Mr. Ján Kubiš
United Nations Under-Secretary-General
Executive Secretary of the United Nations
Economic Commission for Europe**

**at OECD 50th anniversary Forum,
Panel on Gender
(Education, Employment and Economic Empowerment)**

Paris, 24 May 2011

Mr. Chairperson,
Distinguished Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. [As we have learned from our panellists,] All human development and human rights issues have gender dimensions. And as we have seen, over the years following the adoption of the Beijing Platform of Action, gender issues have continuously remained high on global and regional policy agendas and in the programmes of international organizations, including the OECD and the United Nations.

UNECE work

2. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) is no exception in this respect. In fact, we have been among the forerunners in advancing gender statistics, that is, statistics that reflect the realities of the lives of women and men and policy issues relating to gender equality. We are also supporting the mainstreaming of gender into economic policies and are committed to building knowledge and capacity on women's entrepreneurship.

3. Indeed, for an evidence-based policy, one needs to measure the situation and processes that the policy is targeting. Since the mid-1980s, UNECE has been

providing a sustainable platform for methodological work and exchange of good practice in gender statistics. The recently published comprehensive manual on this topic is one good example where joining forces from many countries with rather different social and economic situations can be successful, resulting in an authoritative reference material.

4. We have also paid attention to develop capacities in gender statistics in our member States, in countries of Eastern and South-eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia in particular, which has resulted in the increased availability of information about the situation of women and men in those countries.

UNECE Gender Database

5. This is illustrated in the UNECE Gender Database that provides easy access to policy-relevant indicators on gender issues through interfaces in English and Russian. Consolidating this information for the entire UNECE region that embraces North America, Europe and Central Asia adds important value in comparing gender issues across countries with very different development levels and cultural background, as data on countries of Eastern Europe and Central Asia are often unavailable in other international data collections.

6. Let me give you some examples relating to education, employment and economic empowerment.

Gender differences in education and employment

7. In contrast to other regions, gender parity in education has practically been reached in the UNECE region. In most countries women now outnumber men in tertiary education. However, we observe strong gender differences in the educational choices of women and men. Men continue to dominate in the science, mathematics and computing programmes while women dominate in business administration, law, social sciences, journalism, humanities and the arts. These different educational choices contribute to gender segregation in the labour market and persistent gender pay gaps.

8. Women's labour market participation in the UNECE region has increased in recent years and is the highest in the world. But, as we all know, women's participation in economic activity is significantly lower than that of men, because family responsibilities and especially childcare can exert a significant constraint on women's participation in the labour force.

Economic empowerment

9. Gender equality in the economy is not only a matter of equal access to the labour market, and of equal opportunities to access decent jobs. Entrepreneurship is also an important pillar for women's economic empowerment. Setting up their own business can be a good opportunity for women to gain economic

independence and overcome poverty. Women entrepreneurs are known to provide an important contribution to sustaining economic growth, job creation and to improving the living standards of their families and communities.

10. It is well known that so far, far fewer women than men run a business in the UNECE region. The highest proportions of women among employers — above 30% — can be found in the Russian Federation, Kazakhstan, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. In all those countries, women slightly increased their share over the last decade. In most European Union countries and in South-Eastern Europe, the percentage of women among entrepreneurs has stagnated between 20 and 30%.

11. These figures indicate that women face obstacles in setting up and running their own business. Women's success as entrepreneurs depends on a supportive society which promotes their full and equal participation in the public sphere. This starts with equal access to education, and continues with providing women with equal opportunities in paid work and economic and public decision-making.

12. Gender stereotypes in education and society can discourage young women from envisaging themselves as future entrepreneurs. Young women **need positive role models** to increase their confidence and self-esteem. We need to put in place **adequate support systems** that support women across the different stages of developing their business and that provide them with access to information, training and the necessary financial resources.

13. We know that due to their family and domestic responsibilities, women **have less time for paid work** than men, and less time and resources to set up and strengthen their business contacts or participate in business training courses. This can disadvantage them compared to male entrepreneurs.

14. The gender pay gap and women's larger share of unpaid work result in less than men accumulated wealth and assets. This in turn along with traditions to inherit less property than men in some countries disadvantage women when it comes to assets needed for collaterals to obtain bank loans. Therefore it is important that **financial services** and government policies take into account that women and men entrepreneurs face different conditions and challenges. It is not enough that policies do not discriminate against women. **We need targeted programmes to overcome the disadvantage women continue to face.**

15. These may include, for example, to encourage girls to choose science and technology programmes to tackle gender-segregation in education, and to offer affordable child- and eldercare services to enable women with family responsibilities to meet the time requirements of their businesses. They also include policies that encourage and enable men to play a stronger role in the family and domestic labour thus enabling a more equal sharing of responsibilities for earning and caring. We know too well that unless equality in the family is promoted, women will always continue to be disadvantaged in the labour market.

UNECE contribution to women's economic empowerment

16. At UNECE we pursue a three-fold approach to supporting women's economic empowerment through women's entrepreneurship development:

- **First, we work to improve awareness of the situation of women and women entrepreneurs** in the region and on the need for a gender-sensitive policy environment. This is supported through research, data collection, capacity building for statistical offices in the region to collect sex-disaggregated data on economic indicators. In cooperation with the World Bank, we recently produced training videos on 13 key topics including the "gender pay gap", the "reconciliation of work and family life" and "gender, entrepreneurship and access to finance". They can be downloaded from the UNECE website.
- **Second, we work to build capacity on women's entrepreneurship development.** We support women's business associations and entrepreneurs through training programmes, including in new technologies, to increase women's opportunities in the formal economy. UNECE has collaborated with the Golda Meir Mount Carmel International Training Center and Israel's Agency for International Development Cooperation since 2006 in providing biannual training workshops for professional women from Eastern Europe, South Caucasus and Central Asia. These workshops cover support systems for women entrepreneurs and information and communication technologies (ICTs). Furthermore we organize policy seminars and entrepreneurship forums to provide the opportunity for dialogue between entrepreneurs and policy makers, and networking opportunities for women entrepreneurs.
- **And third, we encourage gender-sensitive economic policy making** through the exchange of good practice, research and evidence-based policy recommendations to governments in our member states, notably in context of regional reviews of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

Concluding remarks

17. Achieving gender equality and improving the status of women remains one of the great global challenges in this century, and as we know, there are many facets to it, many more than the ones we have discussed here. As we have also seen in this panel, there are many players who can give valuable contributions to different elements of this process using different approaches.

18. To conclude, I would like to emphasise the great importance of international cooperation in tackling this global challenge. Sharing and learning from experiences at events like this one, reaching consensus on policy objectives, but also joining forces to prepare technical materials and sharing data, are all indispensable for progress towards gender equality. I hope our deliberations today contributed to this.

19. Thanks to the organizers, panellists and the audience.