



**Statement on behalf of the
European Union and its Member States**

**At the
UNECE
Beijing + 20 Regional Review Meeting
Geneva, 6-7 November 2014**

Closing the gender gaps through economic and social policies

Item 5

Geneva, 7th November 2014

Item 5: Closing the gender gaps through economic and social policies
Position of the European Union and its Member States

Chair,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union and its Member States.

The following countries align themselves with this declaration¹: Turkey, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Iceland, Serbia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Armenia.

On the eve of the 20th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action, we can all agree that we have made progress on gender equality in the EU. Social patterns are changing away from a male bread-winner model to double-income families. Young women remain in education or vocational training for longer. In fact, in the EU nowadays women constitute 60 % of new graduates in secondary education: therefore a gap positive for women, for once. Women have entered the labour market in great numbers and contribute to the European Union's economic growth and competitiveness. Many of these changes came as a result of political and regulatory pressure.

However, gender gaps continue to exist in education, employment and entrepreneurship, due in particular to existing stereotypes.

Stereotypes persist in education and training systems and continue to influence the choices of girls and women as well as boys and men in regard to subjects of study, areas of training and levels of educational and training attainment. Girls are less likely to choose scientific or technological fields of study, despite similar performance levels compared to boys. Male graduates outnumber female graduates in science, mathematics and computing. In contrast, female graduates largely outnumber male graduates in social sciences, business, law, welfare and health. This affects the employment possibilities, career development, pay and lives of girls and women as well as of boys and men, often with negative repercussions for girls and women.

¹ Turkey is a Candidate country; the Candidate countries the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania as well as potential candidate country Bosnia and Herzegovina continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process; Candidate Country Iceland continues to be a member of the EFTA and of the European Economic Area.

In the last decades in the EU, the gender gap in employment levels gradually shrank thanks to targeted policies, which have led women to increase their participation in the economy and their contribution to family finances, which in turn has contributed to gender equality and women's rights. Despite this, women's employment rate in the EU stands at 63% - that of men at 74% and the gender pay gap is still 16% on average. Also most people employed with a part-time contract are women. Inequalities exist in pay and pensions and are cumulated in life conditions for elderly women who get approximately 40% lower pensions than their male peers.

The persistence of stereotypes based on traditional gender roles remains an obstacle to the equal sharing of family and domestic responsibilities between women and men and hinders the realisation of gender equality at the workplace, on the labour market and in society. In the EU, despite progress achieved, women continue to shoulder a disproportionate share of the burden of unpaid household work, raising children and taking care of the elderly and other dependants. This adversely impacts on their opportunities to engage in paid work and in particular in full time work.

We must increase women's labour market participation, because it is a pre-condition for their empowerment and economic independence and it has a positive overall economic impact. We must raise awareness, tackle stereotypes and empower women to make non-traditional choices and to climb the decision-making ladder. Key for this is to support women and men in their efforts to reconcile work, family and private life. This is high on the EU political agenda and an important part of our main economic strategy, the Europe 2020 Strategy and the achievement of one of its targets: 75% of employment rate in the EU by 2020. It is a fact that without more women in the labour market the EU will not achieve this target.

What is needed is an holistic approach and we would like to share with you our experience with the "reconciliation policy-mix" made by childcare services, parental leaves, and flexible working arrangements, we've built in the EU:

- The EU supports the creation of more affordable and higher quality childcare services through the European Investment and Structural Funds. Moreover, Member States' childcare coverage is measured through a common indicator against an agreed EU target, the so-called Barcelona target.

- The EU legislation guarantees minimum standards for maternity and for parental leaves. The EU legislation on Parental Leave² gives each working parent the right to four months leave after the birth or adoption of a child. At least one of the four months cannot be transferred to the other parent – meaning that it will be lost if not taken – offering incentives to fathers to take the leave.
- Moreover, flexible work arrangements for both women and men, and equal career opportunities are promoted.

Policies to reconcile work and private life have also often proved to be positive to counter-act the current demographic trends: in many countries with a more developed and comprehensive system higher fertility rates combine with higher female employment rates, while the opposite is true for many countries with less favourable systems.

The continuation of these policies and in particular the provision of services, is therefore crucial, especially in a time of crisis. We therefore need to prioritise investments in care and support services that benefit both women and men and allow for a more equal sharing of household, family and care responsibilities. Good quality in terms of services provided and working and pay conditions remain key issues if we want to avoid the perpetuation of gender labour market segregation.

Thank you Chair.

Question to panellists

How to engage men in equally sharing family and working responsibilities? How to support the increasing contribution of men to family life and overcome the stereotypes they still face inside their workplace and in society?

² Council Directive 2010/18/EU of 8 March 2010 implementing the revised Framework Agreement on parental leave concluded by BUSINESSEUROPE, UEAPME, CEEP and ETUC and repealing Directive 96/34/EC.