



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

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

The way forward: gender equality for inclusive and sustainable societies

Item 9

Geneva, 7th November 2014

EU STATEMENT
UNECE Beijing+20

Item 9: The way forward: gender equality for inclusive and sustainable societies
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.

2015 will be a key year in the definition of priorities at a global level. The definition of a post-2015 agenda, which will be universal, thus concerning also the UNECE region and the EU, coincides with the 20th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action.

The EU shares a common understanding that gender equality and women's rights are key to addressing the MDGs "unfinished business" and to accelerating global development beyond 2015. There is no chance of making poverty history without significant and rapid improvements to the lives of women and girls in all countries. There is no chance to have sustained growth without the participation of women and girls on an equal footing with men in all aspects of life, in particular in economic activities. This is one lesson we can learn from the MDGs and the EU experience.

Since the launch of the MDGs in 2000, the world has achieved parity in primary education between girls and boys and girls have benefited most. Furthermore, many countries facing the greatest challenges have made significant progress towards universal primary education, with parity progressing most in Western Asia and Sub Saharan Africa. When girls get access to schools they tend to outperform boys.

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.

The existence of a specific Millennium Development Goal to “promote gender equality and empower women” has been a powerful stimulus for action by governments and donors, including in the EU and its Member States. This recognition also led to the integration of gender perspectives in other goals through targets and indicators.

Shall we then be happy of our achievements and decrease of level of attention and prioritisation of gender equality? The answer for the EU is of course no.

Gender equality is an “unfinished business” and needs to be prioritised in the post-2015 agenda. We still have some important challenges: for one, the global results in primary education may not reveal important regional disparities, secondly, the enrolment rate does not tell us how many students actually completed education and finally, girls still face greater barriers to access high schools and universities. Measured in terms of job opportunities, progress towards parity has been slow and non-existent in some countries. The same picture emerges for women’s political representation. Last but not least, progress on the reduction of maternal deaths has been disappointingly low;

No country in the world can be said to have achieved gender equality. Despite progress, in the EU, gender gaps are still present in all aspects of life.

Gender equality, women and girls’ rights and empowerment are therefore among the priorities that the EU will support in the post-2015 agenda, which will build on and complete the above-mentioned “unfinished business”, but will also go beyond it. The EU seeks to ensure that gender equality, the empowerment of women and human rights of women and girls are reflected as a stand-alone goal in the forthcoming UN post-2015 agenda and integrated into all goals through targets and indicators measured by sex-disaggregated data.

Building on previous commitments and past achievements, we will set out a common vision for a more prosperous, equal, peaceful and environmentally healthy planet. This agenda must be universal, transformative, sustainable and overarching. Some of the central issues that will make this framework transformative are gender equality, rule of law, peace, and good governance.

The way we deal with gender equality can determine how transformative the agenda can be and whether or not we can take development to another level. We ask for a strong focus on the empowerment and rights of women and girls. We want to promote and protect women’s and

girl's right to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health, free of coercion, discrimination and violence. (Language from AC 59 CSW. OP 34 B (nn)) And we ask for a strong focus on gender equality and on preventing and combating violence against women as essential preconditions for equitable and inclusive sustainable development, as well as important values and objectives in themselves.

We need to tackle the structural causes of gender inequality such as violence against women and girls, unpaid care work and the unequal share of family and care responsibility between women and men, the gender pay-gap, limited control over assets and property, and unequal participation in private and public decision-making. Men and boys need to be included in the process. Of course the fight and to eliminate sex-based discrimination remains also a priority.

In conclusion:

- The Post 2015 Framework should ensure a rights-based approach encompassing all human rights. It should also address justice, equality and equity, good governance, democracy and the rule of law, with a strong focus on the empowerment and rights of women and girls and gender equality, and on preventing and combating violence against women as essential preconditions for equitable and inclusive sustainable development, as well as important values and objectives in themselves. We remain committed to the promotion, protection and fulfilment of all human rights and to the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the outcomes of their review conferences and in this context sexual and reproductive health and rights.
- Achieving gender equality is not possible without the participation of men and boys who should become agents of change. We must educate and raise awareness of young men and boys on how to prevent gender stereotypes, discrimination and violence against women and girls. There are many men who want to play their part and we need to think about how best to engage with them to secure their involvement in the campaign for gender equality.
- We should give continued support to the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) and all related resolutions on women, peace and security, and in particular end impunity for any acts of sexual violence in conflict.

Thank you Chair.

Question to the panellists

The post-2015 agenda will have to be universal thus addressing and fully engaging all groups of countries and not only the developing ones. What are the main challenges and opportunities the UNECE region will face in promoting gender equality within this new context?