

Statement by the Delegation of the Republic of Estonia.

Item 5 – Closing gender gaps through economic and social policies

Chairperson,

De facto gender equality cannot be achieved unless equal opportunities are provided for women and men for economic independence.

In Estonia, the gender pay gap is one of the widest in the EU. Research shows that there are a variety of reasons behind this inequality. Reducing it presupposes tackling all the different gender gaps in the labour market and their causes.

One aspect negatively influencing the position of women in the labour market and their incomes is their still heavy care burden. For example, among women and men with children under 3 years of age the employment gap is almost 60 percentage points. As a comparison, the gap is less than 10 percentage points by the time the youngest child is of a school age.

In order to support women`s full and active participation in the labour market, we have taken measures to improve provision of a high-quality and affordable early childhood education and care system, to create legal support for parents to reconcile work and family life and to achieve more equal sharing of domestic and care responsibilities between women and men. We have also implemented awareness raising measures targeting employers.

The Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner is promoting gender equality through empowerment, awareness raising and gender mainstreaming. The project has improved the capacity of our equality body to provide counselling and legal support to women who have been discriminated because of their pregnancy or when returning to work from the child-care leave. Complaints concerning possible discrimination of pregnant workers and parents of small children have formed a majority among the complaints made to the Commissioner this year.

Equal economic independence will stay only a distant dream unless joint efforts are taken both on national and international level to provide employers also with a wider awareness that only an organisation that values gender equality is a quality working place. To support this,

we have introduced relevant obligations into the Gender Equality Act and provided guidance and trainings for employers to give them knowledge and skills to promote gender equality.

It is also important to continue and intensify efforts to reduce prevalence of gender stereotypes. The main activities of a recent campaign in Estonia were career days for boys and girls and a widely noticed series of video clips bringing everyday gender stereotypes to the attention of a general public demonstrating their negative influence on work and career choices and people's lives. We also integrate gender equality issues into higher education curricula, including teacher training. These efforts will hopefully provide a solid foundation for targeting gender stereotypes already in kindergartens and schools, thereby decreasing their prevalence and negative impact to the lives of future generations.

Chairperson, to conclude my delegation would like to pose a question to the panel.

The synthesis of country reports highlighted that the economic crisis was a big setback in terms of the gender equality. Do you see any missed chances in using the momentum of such crisis to promote gender equality or in how gender mainstreaming could have facilitated for a quicker recovery?