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## High-Level Conference: Europe for Gender Equality? Taking Stock – Taking Action

30 SEPTEMBER – 1 OCTOBER 2019

HELSINKI, FINLAND

Conference outcomes





At the beginning of the new term of the European Parliament and the European Commission and on the eve of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action, it is time to take stock of progress made in gender equality in the EU and to discuss directions for future action. The conference on gender equality, which was organised by Finland's Presidency of the Council of the EU, discussed the priorities and lines of action of future EU gender equality policies based on the findings of the Beijing+25 report. The focus of the conference was on the relationship between the economy and gender equality and ways to strengthen the links between gender equality and economic and budgetary policies in the EU.

The conference brought together 280 participants from various stakeholder groups representing experts and policy-makers from EU member states and EU institutions as well as NGOs, social partners, academia, international organisations and the media. With a view to fostering cross-sectoral discussion on future gender equality policies and gender mainstreaming, the speakers and participants represented several policy/expertise areas, including gender equality, economy and budgeting.

The first day was dedicated to a discussion on the challenges of gender equality and ways of strengthening gender equality policies in the EU, with a particular focus on gender equality and the economy. The presentation of the main findings of the EIGE's Beijing+25 report paved the way for a discussion on priorities and directions for action in the next five years. The participants emphasised the necessity to pursue a strong EU gender equality strategy containing both specific measures and gender mainstreaming. The political commitment of the whole Commission as well as cross-sectoral cooperation, gender-sensitive policy analysis and monitoring with clear timelines were highlighted as crucial elements to ensure effec-

tive implementation of the strategy. The ministers in charge of gender equality should meet regularly. Concerning future priorities, the EU should continue to combat gender-based violence and close the gender gaps in areas such as employment, pay, pensions and decision-making. The EU should also tackle the emerging challenges of gender equality, posed notably by digitalisation, migration and climate change. It was pointed out that the EU's gender equality policies should address the situation in different Member States and reach out to all stakeholders, including CSOs. A wide array of measures is needed, such as legislation, awareness raising and exchange of good practices. Finally, there was a general agreement that there is growing political momentum for advancing gender equality in the EU.

The keynote speaker Shahra Razavi from UN Women highlighted the interconnection between EU and global gender equality policies as well as the economy and gender equality. Her speech and the ensuing discussion emphasised the importance of gender equal social policies for the economy: social protection, services and education should be regarded as investments that benefit the society and promote sustainable economic growth. Several panelists called for changes in macroeconomic and fiscal policies in the EU context, in particular in the European Semester. One possibility suggested is to integrate the Sustainable Development Goals into the Semester and to promote gender equality as an integral part of this policy process.

Throughout the conference, the importance of intersectional perspectives to gender equality and the need to look at the situation of people in a vulnerable situation were underlined. In order to develop education, employment, gender equality, integration and social policies, we need to look at intersecting inequalities. This concerns, among others, measures to improve the situation of single parents and Roma and migrant women. As for equal pay, discrimination still exists in the EU, mainly due to the lack of pay transparency and inefficient enforcement of legal instruments. Several examples were cited of company level measures to close the gender pay gap and to promote diversity and women's careers.

The second day more specifically explored financing for gender equality in the framework of the European structural and investments funds (ESIF) and the potential of gender responsive budgeting. The ESIF are among the main financing instruments for the development of social cohesion, including gender equality. However, it is currently not possible to analyse the extent to which these funds advance gender equality. The speakers stated that gender equality needs to be integrated better in the ESIF. For gender equality promotion in ESIF programmes to be successful, sex-disaggregated data, EU-level decisions and objectives, awareness raising and gender competence support for all stakeholders is needed in all phases of the programme cycle. These elements should be included in the future MFF, including ESIF programmes. More comparable, consistent data is needed to support the policies, and there has to be a budget to match the policy objectives and to secure their implementation.

The fifth plenary session explored the potential of and requirements for successful gender-responsive budgeting (GRB). GRB was seen as essential for sound, transparent and effective budgeting, potentially creating a more gender-equal society and more efficient

policy actions. Tried and tested good practices exist in some Member States, but progress at EU level has been slow. Improvements could be achieved in the EU by implementing legal obligations throughout the planning and budgeting processes, with a strong commitment to gender budgeting. GRB could be integrated in existing methodologies and institutions by means of stronger cross-sectoral cooperation. Expertise on gender equality and other relevant themes is needed to obtain an integrative perspective.

The closing session emphasised the need for cooperation among all the stakeholders and for continued actions towards a more gender-equal Europe. The role of NGOs and men as actors for gender equality was highlighted.

## Key messages:

- We need a strong EU strategy on gender equality and the commitment of the entire Commission to it. Clear timelines, efficient monitoring and strong cross-sectoral cooperation are needed to ensure the implementation of this strategy.
- Gender equality should be a political priority on the EU agenda, with regular meetings of gender equality ministers.
- EU gender equality policies should tackle both old and emerging challenges of gender equality, and include intersectional perspectives.
- Gender mainstreaming should be strengthened in the EU's economic policies, including the post-2020 strategies and the European Semester.
- Gender-responsive budgeting and gender impact assessment contribute to effective, democratic and gender-equal economies and budgeting – at the EU level and in the Member States.
- Cross-sectoral dialogue and cooperation are the elements of success in gender mainstreaming.
- All stakeholders are needed, including civil society organisations, to work for a more gender equal Europe.

Discussions at the conference contributed to the Council Conclusions on *Gender-Equal Economies in the EU – The Way Forward* and provided valuable input for the policy debate on *the Future Gender Equality Policies and Gender Mainstreaming in the EU* at the EPSCO Council on 10 December 2019.

Further information and photos on the conference are available at the website [https://stm.fi/en/article/-/asset\\_publisher/korkean-tason-konferenssi-europe-for-gender-equality-taking-stock-taking-action-](https://stm.fi/en/article/-/asset_publisher/korkean-tason-konferenssi-europe-for-gender-equality-taking-stock-taking-action-)

Watch the video from the first day of the conference:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iRFB-sWiCzo&feature=youtu.be>

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