

Trio Presidency Declaration on Gender Equality



Federal Ministry for
Family Affairs, Senior Citizens,
Women and Youth



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MINISTRY OF LABOUR, FAMILY
SOCIAL AFFAIRS AND EQUAL
OPPORTUNITIES

Trio Presidency Declaration on Gender Equality

Germany, Portugal and Slovenia, the Member States holding the Presidency of the Council of the European Union during the 18-month period from July 2020 to December 2021, hereby present this joint declaration on gender equality.

Gender equality is a fundamental human right. As such, it is not only a core value of the European Union but also a prerequisite for sustainable and inclusive growth and the functioning of our democracies. It is one of the crucial indicators of a free, open and just society. The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed once again that women are structurally disadvantaged because they still carry the main burden of paid and unpaid care work, which is not yet adequately recognised and valued. Gender equality is not an add-on but crucial and urgent, even more so in times of crisis.

Over the last few years, progress in gender equality has been made and important steps have been taken in many EU Member States. However, no country in the EU has achieved full gender equality. While some Member States have reached notable progress, others are stagnating or even slipping backwards. It is a fact and an imperative at the same time that we must not allow the achievements we have made to be eroded. Progress should not be taken for granted. The COVID-19 pandemic shows that the goals achieved are tenuous, that gender stereotypes and inequalities remain deeply-rooted and that women and other vulnerable groups are in particular danger of suffering from economic and social disadvantage.

We – Germany, Portugal and Slovenia – stand united and will act united in our ambition to strive for gender equality in Europe and the world.

With this declaration, we call for a strong commitment of all EU Member States and institutions to make gender equality in Europe a reality for all. In order to unleash the full potential of all citizens, we must ensure that women and girls, in all their diversity, enjoy full equality in all spheres of society, including the labour market.

We welcome the Commission's new Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, which includes the following policy objectives: ending gender-based violence, challenging gender stereotypes, closing gender gaps in the labour market, achieving equal participation across different sectors of the economy, addressing the gender pay and pension gaps, closing the gender care gap and achieving gender balance in decision-making and in politics. The strategy pursues a dual approach of gender mainstreaming in all policy areas combined with targeted actions including an intersectional approach.

Recalling

The Europeanⁱ and internationalⁱⁱ human rights framework that obliges and encourages the international community to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

Stressing that

Gender stereotypes are a root cause of gender inequality and affect all areas of society. Because of gender stereotypes, boys and girls limit their choices in their educational, professional and private lives. They consign women to minor and still undervalued roles in society, strongly contributing to the persisting gender care gap, to labour market inequalities and to the gender pay and pension gaps. The discrimination that women face in all spheres of society on the basis of their sex intersects with the discrimination they face based on other grounds such as age, racial and ethnic origin, migrant background, religion, disability, sexual orientation and gender identity. Women face a higher risk of poverty at all stages of life, particularly women from vulnerable groups such as those from ethnic minorities, migrant and refugee women, older women and women with disabilities.

Emerging new technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI), are becoming increasingly omnipresent in our work and personal lives, bringing many advantages as well as challenges for society. While AI can bring solutions to many societal challenges, it risks intensifying gender inequalities. Algorithms and related machine-learning, if not transparent and robust enough, risk repeating, amplifying or contributing to gender biases that programmers may not be aware of or that are the result of specific data selection. The under-representation of women and girls in ICT and STEM studies and in the labour market, problems linked to working conditions and work patterns (e.g. remuneration, discriminatory practices, job security and access to social protection policies), the gender pay gap, gender stereotypes, gender bias and sex-based discrimination, mean that women are excluded from certain rapidly advancing technological fields. This not only prevents women from fully benefiting from the economic opportunities offered by AI but can also lead to new forms of discrimination, for example, if existing gender biases are replicated in the context of new technologies such as computer algorithms.

The majority of victims of gender-based violence are women and girls. Despite all efforts, women and girls in the EU still experience various forms of violence, including physical, sexual, economic and psychological violence, cyber violence, gender-based harassment and stalking. All EU Member States parties to the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention) must meet the obligations of the Convention.

No crisis is gender-neutral and the COVID-19 pandemic will exacerbate gender inequalities in the EU. Women are on the front line in the fight against the pandemic. They are particularly affected by the increase in unpaid care and domestic work and struggle to reconcile their paid work with family and private life following the closure of schools and care facilities. Therefore, the health, economic and social implications of the COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately affect women, in particular those belonging to vulnerable groups, and hamper their participation in the labour market, deepening the gender pay and pension gaps as well as exacerbating the unequal division of unpaid care and domestic work and reducing women's economic independence. The risk of domestic violence has grown due to lockdown measures and emerging data in many Member States indicates that domestic violence has increased during the pandemic. In times of crisis, existing victims' support systems are put under strain and solutions may need to be adapted to ensure they are effective and accessible. The Trio Presidency will strive to make gender equality an integral and fundamental part of social and economic recovery plans and to improve support systems for victims of domestic violence across the EU.

The Trio Presidency calls for

1. Holistic measures to increase knowledge and data on the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic in the field of gender equality and for a definition of adequate and gender-responsive measures in all policy areas, including violence against women and domestic violence, economic inequality, and the inequalities between men and women regarding paid and unpaid work. Gender equality must be a fundamental part of social and economic recovery plans. In this context, a gender perspective should be mainstreamed in all policies and measures and all relevant actors involved, including women's rights organisations.
2. Decisive progress in the negotiations on the proposal for a Directive on improving the gender balance among directors of companies listed on stock exchanges and related measures.
3. Swift progress in the negotiations on the forthcoming proposal for binding pay transparency measures in order to tackle the gender pay gap.
4. High standards for preventing and combating all forms of violence against women and girls and protecting and empowering victims and survivors of gender-based violence everywhere in the EU; and with this in mind, support for the EU's accession to the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention) and an initiative for a Europe-wide telephone number on which the respective national violence against women helplines can be reached.
5. All Member States to increase their efforts and develop specific actions to close any remaining gender gaps, such as the gender pay gap, the gender employment gap, the gender pension gap or the gender care gap.
6. A stronger commitment of the EU Member States and the EU Commission to take measures to combat gender-based online violence, including incitement to violence, hatred or discrimination.
7. Regular debates on gender equality and gender mainstreaming at ministerial level, including reflection on the possible renaming of the EPSCO Council so as to include the term "Equality".
8. Gender mainstreaming in all fields of action and policies of the EU and the Member States.
9. Better availability of sex-disaggregated data and promotion of reports as a tool to advance gender equality.
10. The systematic and comprehensive implementation and monitoring of the Commission's Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 by the Member States and the Commission.
11. The active implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

Activities to be carried out during the presidencies of Germany, Portugal and Slovenia

Germany

We want to tackle the gender pay gap by promoting a gender-equal distribution of unpaid care work.

Germany will analyse the link between gender inequalities in unpaid care work and gender inequalities in earnings and pay. The unequal distribution of care responsibilities (caring for children or for elderly relatives and relatives with disabilities as well as household tasks) between women and men is a common problem across the EU. Germany will **identify and organise discussions on policy measures towards reducing the gender care gap and thus narrowing the gender pay gap with a view to achieving more equal labour market participation between women and men.** The COVID-19 pandemic has made two issues even more obvious. On the one hand, women and men need to share unpaid care work on a more equal basis in order for them to be able to participate in paid work to the fullest possible extent. On the other hand, the availability, accessibility and affordability of high-quality public facilities and support services for childcare and care for the elderly as well as for household tasks are crucial for enabling women and men with care responsibilities to participate in the labour market and thus to contribute to the economic well-being of society as a whole. Germany wants to discuss different paths that are not mutually exclusive but rather complement one another to encourage a more equal distribution of unpaid and paid care work between women and men. This includes, in particular, providing fair and decent working conditions, including fair wages for care workers in the field of professional care work, such as health, personal care and education, most of whom are women.

We want to end all forms of violence against women and provide essential support services for every woman in need.

The Istanbul Convention obliges all Member States to take the necessary measures to prevent all forms of violence, protect all victims from any further acts of violence and to provide for immediate, short- and long-term support services. The EU Member States provide such support services, but it appears that the **support system for women affected by gender-based violence** is not equally accessible to all women. The groups that are most likely to face challenges in this regard are **women and girls affected by intersectional discrimination and/or with multiple support needs.** Women with disabilities, women with drug addictions, migrant women and refugees, among others, have specific needs which have to be taken into account by the service providers in charge of the support system. The lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed women to domestic violence on an even larger scale than before, thus highlighting the importance of an all-encompassing and resilient support system. One of the main goals of the German Presidency will be to explore how the EU Member States can provide **support systems for women affected by gender-based violence that are accessible to all those in need.**

The German Presidency plans to organise the following events:

- The **High Level Group on Gender Mainstreaming** on 14 and 15 September 2020
- A **parliamentary afternoon** on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on gender equality in the EU in cooperation with the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) “Women in focus: coronavirus and gender equality in Europe“ on 19 November 2020
- An Informal **Meeting of the Gender Equality Ministers** on 19 and 20 November 2020 in Potsdam, Germany. The meeting will focus on the two priorities of the German Presidency: preventing violence against women and promoting gender equality in the labour market in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic
- The discussion and possible **adoption of Council Conclusions** on “Tackling the Gender Pay Gap: Valuation and Distribution of Paid and Unpaid (Care-) Work” at the Council meeting “Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO)” on 3 December 2020 in Brussels

Portugal

We want to assess and discuss the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on gender equality.

No crisis is gender-neutral in terms of impact, and every crisis carries specific demands and consequences for women and men as a result of existing gender relations and associated inequalities. The Portuguese Presidency wants to identify and analyse the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the participation of women in the labour market and on their income and working conditions, with particular regard to women's overrepresentation in affected economic sectors. The Presidency will focus on work organisations and the way they have reacted to the crisis, especially in sectors with strong horizontal segregation of women and men, looking at new ways of working, meeting workers' needs and expectations and reconciling work, family and private life.

The Portuguese Presidency aims to **ensure that progress on gender equality made so far is preserved and wants to push for gender-responsive approaches when addressing the upcoming challenges.**

We want to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence.

The Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention) was adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on 7 April 2011 and entered into force on 1 August 2014. This international treaty establishes a pan-European legal framework that recognises violence against women as a human rights violation and a form of discrimination. It aims to protect women and girls from all forms of violence, and to prevent, criminalise and eliminate domestic violence and violence against all women and girls.

The Portuguese Presidency aims to **mark the 10th anniversary of the Istanbul Convention by taking stock of its implementation** in the Member States, **pushing forward the EU's accession to the convention, and organising a debate on the implications of the COVID-19 crisis on violence against women and domestic violence**, particularly in terms of patterns and dynamics of violence, as well as state and civil society responses.

The Portuguese Presidency plans to organise the following events:

- **High Level Group on Gender Mainstreaming** in January 2021
- **Trio Presidency side event at the 65th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)**, in March 2021
- **EIGE's Research note** on the "Impact of the COVID-19 crisis on gender equality"
- **Policy Debate** and possible adoption of Council Conclusions on the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on gender equality at the meeting of the "Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO)"
- **High-Level Conference** on the 10th anniversary of the Istanbul Convention in April/ May 2021

Slovenia

We want to address gender equality prospects in labour markets digitally transformed by artificial intelligence and platform work.

Digitalisation and new technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI), can play a critical role in building trust and accelerating the inclusion of more women in the labour market. The changes to work patterns caused by the COVID-19 crisis and the resulting increase in the digitalised and AI-based solutions has shown the importance to address digitalisation, especially AI, in the context of gender equality. Organisations will need to pay more attention to the diversity of the teams when developing their AI solutions. Doing so will help prevent gender bias and maximise digital technologies' and AI's potential to transform the workplace in an inclusive way.

The Slovenian Presidency aims to tackle certain specific key gender challenges in the digital and AI labour market. AI is an important digital transformation tool and a key driver of change and innovation, but it also has a disproportional impact on women and men. Therefore, we aim to analyse the consequences of new forms of work for women, focusing on issues such as the following: the lack of women employed in the digital and AI sector, gender segregation in education and the digital and AI labour market, the gender pay gap, automation of jobs, platform work, working conditions and the working environment, the security of jobs, autonomy and flexibility that also affect work-life balance, and the reproduction of gender stereotypes and sex-based discrimination caused by digitalisation, AI and platform work.

Slovenia will identify and discuss policy measures to achieve equal representation of women and men in the AI labour market, so as to unlock women's full potential in this field and to ensure equal benefit for women and men from the changes caused by AI and platform work. The risk of opaque decision-making and algorithmic discrimination based on gender, age or race will need to be identified and solutions envisaged to prevent the violation of EU values and fundamental rights, including non-discrimination and gender equality.

We want to tackle cyber violence as a form of violence against women and girls.

Violence against women and girls is a violation of fundamental human rights, and thus all forms of violence against women and girls are to be condemned as a violation of women's full enjoyment of human rights, which must be actively promoted and protected in an integrated and comprehensive manner. Violence against women affects women and girls of all ages, cultures, ethnic and social backgrounds and it can happen everywhere: at home, at work, on the streets and online.

In order to effectively tackle and prevent cyber violence, it is important to raise awareness among target groups and the general public, so that they recognise the seriousness of the problem and understand that the issue of cyber violence needs to be addressed from a gender perspective. We believe it is important to step up EU work on this issue. Therefore, during the Slovenian Presidency, the issue of cyber violence against women and girls will be discussed at the political level.

The Slovenian Presidency plans to organise the following events:

- **High Level Group on Gender Mainstreaming and Trio Presidency meeting** in September 2021 in Slovenia
- **EIGE research report** on gender equality prospects in labour markets digitally transformed by artificial intelligence and platform work, linked to the review of the BPfA indicators on Women and Economy
- The discussion and possible **adoption of Council Conclusions** on “Gender equality prospects in labour markets digitally transformed by artificial intelligence and platform work” at the meeting of the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO) in Brussels, Belgium
- **Ministerial conference** on “Quality of Work for Life Quality” (tbc)
- **High-level political debate** on new technologies and cyber violence against women and girls (tbc)

ⁱ Gender equality is a fundamental value of the EU enshrined in the **European Union Treaties and the Charter of Fundamental Rights**. Since 1957, the Treaties have provided a legal basis for legislation, policy and funding for gender equality. Equality between women and men, and non-discrimination are “fundamental values” (Article 2 TEU) and “objectives” (Article 3 TEU) of the EU. The EU shall promote equality between men and women in all its activities (Article 8 TFEU) and combat discrimination in defining and implementing its policies (Article 10 TFEU). Each Member State shall ensure that the principle of equal pay for male and female workers for equal work or work of equal value is applied (Article 157 TFEU).

The **European Pillar of Social Rights**, jointly signed by the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission on 17 November 2017, which reaffirms gender equality as one of the EU’s key principles and underlines that regardless of gender, equality of treatment and opportunities regarding employment, social protection, education, and access to goods and services available to the public must be ensured.

The **New Strategic Agenda 2019-2024**, adopted by the European Council on 21 June 2019, which defines the political priorities of the European Union for the coming years and commits the European Union to do more to ensure equality between women and men, which is both a societal imperative and an economic asset.

The **Commission work programme** published on 29 January 2020 (adjusted on 27 May 2020 as part of Europe’s Recovery).

The **2019 Trio Presidency Declaration on Gender Equality** proposed by the Trio Presidency of Romania, Finland and Croatia.

The **2018 Joint Declaration on Gender Equality** proposed by the Presidency of Austria and signed by 27 EU Member States.

A **Union for Equality: Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025**, adopted by the Commission on 5 March 2020 in the form of an official Communication.

ⁱⁱ The **Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention)** which provides a coherent legal framework for combating violence against women and for addressing holistically the prevention of violence, the protection of victims and the prosecution of perpetrators.

The **UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)**, which seeks to ensure that all forms of discrimination against women are eliminated and that women recognise, enjoy and exercise their human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.

The **UN Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action for Equality, Development and Peace (BPfA)**, which defines 12 critical areas of concern providing an international framework for future priorities and actions in the context of gender equality policies.

The **Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)** and its last meeting in March 2020, which reviewed and appraised the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the 23rd special session of the General Assembly, and its contribution towards the full realisation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The **UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**, adopted in September 2015, which outlines a set of 17 universal and transformative goals, and envisages a world without legal, social or economic barriers. The Agenda firmly anchors gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls as a separate goal and also as a multidisciplinary issue.

The **Political Declaration of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development under the auspices of the UN General Assembly**, adopted on 25 September 2019, which reaffirms that gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls will make a crucial contribution to progress across all Sustainable Development Goals.

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July 2020

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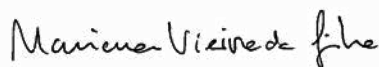


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