



**MEETING OF THE HIGH LEVEL GROUP ON GENDER MAINSTREAMING  
Bratislava, 8 - 9 September 2016**

**SUMMARY AND OPERATIONAL CONCLUSIONS**

A meeting of the High Level group (HLG) on gender mainstreaming was held on 8-9 September in Bratislava.

The discussion was fruitful and cooperative and was centred on the priorities of the Strategic engagement on gender equality 2016-2019. The discussion provided several inputs for future advancements in particular in the framework of the monitoring of gender equality in the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development and the use of the Commission's annual progress Report on equality between women and men in that respect. A discussion on the future policy measures to be presented in the mutual learning programme showed a positive evaluation by members of such a programme and provided an occasion to discuss ways to improve its effectiveness. EIGE representatives also attended the meeting and presented the report "Poverty, gender and intersecting inequalities in the EU" which was well received by the group and which will be presented at the Social Question Working party on 27/09. The report will be the basis for Council conclusions on women and poverty that should be adopted in December. The Commission also presented the main findings of the 2015 Report on equality between women and men.

**MAIN POINTS DISCUSSED**

The main points on the agenda were:

- the **coordination of present and future Presidencies' work** in the field of gender equality;
  - proposals and brainstorming on **monitoring gender equality within the UN 2030 agenda on sustainable development** and the possible use of the Commission's annual progress **Report on Equality between women and men** in that respect;
  - the economic independence of women and men, with particular emphasis on the Commission's initiative on **work-life balance** as well as the EU preparation for the 61<sup>st</sup> session of the UN **Commission on Status of Women dedicated** to Women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work;
  - the Commission's **2017 focused actions to fight violence against women**;
  - the presentation of the **EIGE report on Women and poverty**;
  - **EU Funding for gender equality**, including the **mutual learning programme on gender equality**.
- Mr. Branislav Ondrus, vice-minister of Labour, Social Affairs and the Family of the Slovak Republic, welcomed the HLG members and presented the **Presidency gender equality programme**.

The SK Presidency focuses its work on women and poverty with an emphasis on multiple

factors contributing to poverty, including migrant status. A report is being prepared by EIGE and will also have a section on Roma women. EIGE will present the report at the first meeting of the Social Question Working Party on 27/09. Council conclusions should be adopted by EPSCO in December. The SK Presidency also organises a conference on work-life balance co-financed by the Commission (REC Programme).

MT expressed its intention to continue the work on the Women on Boards directive with a view to adoption. The country will also organise an EU-Presidency conference on violence against women on 03/02 after the HLG meeting (1-2/02). EIGE is also preparing a note for MT on the upgrading of women's skills.

The Commission reminded participants about the particular situation after the UK referendum and the decision by the UK not to hold the EU Presidency, which means that EE will anticipate by one semester its Presidency. In that respect, EE informed members about the planned activities. There will be an HLG meeting in Tallin in September 2017. EE decided to make use of the work already initiated by the UK with the Commission and EIGE on gender segregation in the labour market and education while also adding linkages with the gender pay gap. EIGE will prepare a report on these issues and Council conclusions should be adopted in December in the framework of the EU follow-up of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA). The Commission also presented a slightly revised version of the *Vademecum* for Presidencies which contains the main principles to plan gender equality activities during the semester and highlights the importance of early dialogue between future Presidencies and the Commission to choose the focus of gender equality activities, including for the follow-up of the BPfA (second semester) and the research note (first semester), before starting the dialogue with EIGE.

- BE, as agreed by the members of Agenda 2030 HLG sub-group, during a meeting at the British Mission in New-York in March 2016, presented a non-paper on "**Gender and the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**", with a focus on the issue of sex-disaggregated indicators. In the current list of indicators foreseen to monitor the 2030 Agenda, only certain indicators (mostly from goal 1 on poverty, goal 3 on education and goal 8 on employment and work and obviously goal 5 on gender equality) explicitly mention disaggregation by sex. Several other indicators collected at the level of individuals are not disaggregated by sex. This is problematic not only in fundamental areas such as hunger and health, but also in areas such as access to energy, disaster management, urban planning, etc. where it is likely that less attention will be paid to gender equality without sex-disaggregated data. FR and DE provided additional information on ongoing negotiations at the Interagency and experts Group (IAEG-SDGs) on the indicators and stressed that negotiations were difficult and that a European common effort would be useful. SE added that support and sharing with other countries is needed to ensure a more comprehensive sex-disaggregation of data. NL pointed out that in some MS, there are discussions about the possibility for individuals not to declare their sex, which can have a consequence on sex-disaggregation of data.

The Commission reminded the monitoring mechanisms set up by the UN to review progress towards the 2030 agenda and proposed the following arrangements in the field of gender equality:

- to present the BPfA reports and indicators as the EU contribution in response to a UN thematic review as and when appropriate. For instance, the BPfA report on poverty, prepared under the SK presidency can contribute to the 2017 thematic review, which will be precisely dedicated to the eradication of poverty;
- to present the Annual Report on equality between women and men as a key EU contribution to the in-depth review of SDG5 in 2017 and every four years after that.

This solution avoids duplication of monitoring mechanisms, raises the profile of existing monitoring tools, such as the Annual report on equality between women and men, and ensures a link between BPfA and the 2030 Agenda. Members expressed their support to the approach proposed by the EC and in particular they welcomed the idea to present the

Annual report on equality between women and men, as an EU contribution to the in-depth review of SDG5 (FR, DK - provided that the report does not focus only on SDG 5, EL, HU, UK, SE, PL, SK, MT, LV, NL, FI). The SK Presidency is considering including the issue of the monitoring of the 2030 Agenda in the Council conclusions on women and poverty and hopes consensus can be found. UK also proposed to use CEDAW reviews for the monitoring. EL mentioned an OECD pilot report on progress on SDGs: only one third of targets have been achieved in OECD countries. FR also enquired about the role of EIGE.

Member States were asked whether they have defined national approaches (i.e. monitoring mechanisms) to the follow-up of SDG5 and gender mainstreaming of the 2030 Agenda. In that respect, DK is considering how to elaborate national action plan, but still face difficulties. MT is also still working on it. HU mentioned difficult timing for the monitoring, given the ongoing discussion on statistics. PL has sources for 50% of the indicators proposed. LV Statistical Institute faces some difficulties with a number of indicators. For instance, definitions are not always clear and some indicators are available only with ad-hoc surveys which are costly.

#### **OUTPUTS**

*There was a general agreement on the proposal to use the EIGE BPfA report for thematic reviews whenever possible and also to use the Commission Annual report on equality between women and men for the planned in-depth review on gender equality in 2017 and every four years after. The Commission will work internally and with the External Service to ensure follow-up to the latter proposal.*

*On the issue of sex-disaggregation of data and indicators, countries members of the UN Statistical Commission will liaise among each other to share information and build a stronger position.*

- On the priority theme of **women's economic independence and labour market participation**, the Commission reminded MS that Country Specific Recommendations related to female labour market participation and gender equality were addressed to 10 Member States (CZ, DE, EE, IE, IT, ES, AT, RO, SK, UK) and that it is now to the Member States to implement the CSRs through their national economic and budgetary policies. The Commission reminded the importance for gender equality departments to be involved in the process.

Information was also provided on the state of play of the new work-life balance initiative (legislative and non-legislative), focusing on its main aspects and on the on-going social partners consultation. Within this framework, the SK Presidency provided information on the EU-Presidency conference on work-life balance co-financed by the Commission (REC Programme) and the Norwegian government.

The preparation of the next Commission on the Status of Women (CSW61) which will focus on "Women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work" was also discussed under this agenda item. There was consensus that this is a very pertinent topic for the EU which has several good experiences to share and yet a lot still to learn. The Commission, along with the European Union External Action Service (EEAS) will prepare a EU position paper with the EU common position for the negotiations. The position paper will be discussed at the Working Party on Human Rights (COHOM) this fall (the HLG secretariat will keep members informed). In the discussion note prepared by the secretariat, Members had been asked to highlight two priority issues that the EU should reflect in the CSW61 session. The following discussion showed the interest of all delegations in next year's priority theme as well as the importance of streamlining messages and priorities. Three issues were recurrent in the interventions and emerged as important points for the EU to be reflected in the CSW session, either in the Agreed Conclusions or through a specific focus for EU side-events: work-life balance, the gender pay gap and women in decision making.

Regarding work-life balance: particular focus was put on involving men in taking equal care responsibilities (SE, DK, BG, DE, PL, FI, LU, BE, CZ) and the importance of childcare and also on the necessity to drive forward cultural changes and work with businesses (UK).

The gender pay gap and the related need to de-segregate the educational sector and the labour market (with specific mention of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, STEM) and the digital sectors for women and care and education sectors for men) were raised by several members (FR, DE, UK, SE, ES, FI, RO, LT, AT, LU).

The importance to promote women in decision making positions was also highlighted by several members (DK, BE, LU, UK, CZ).

The need to promote an economic empowerment of “quality” was also stressed (EL) with several members referring to the need to promote quality jobs, decrease precarious jobs and fight undeclared work in particular in domestic work (PL, PT, LT, FI, HU). EL also reminded HLG members that Council conclusions on women and the economy were adopted under the Greek Presidency and could serve as a basis to set down the EU guiding principles for the session.

The discussion also showed the importance of a good exchange and flow of information between experts and diplomats as well as the importance of knowing the position paper and respecting it in particular during the negotiations in NY. Some members (SE, NL) stressed the importance of not re-opening in NY what was previously agreed in the position paper or in other official EU documents.

Finally, the possibility to have EU-side events on work-life balance using the experience of the SK Presidency conference on the same issue will be explored, together with the possibility to have one of the issues discussed above as the focus of a side event.

#### **OUTPUTS**

*The HLG discussion on the CSW61 priorities will be taken into account when drafting the EU position paper for the session. HLG members will be alerted in advance when the position paper will be circulated and when it is planned to be discussed in COHOM. HLG members are invited to liaise with COHOM representatives.*

*The Secretariat will also check the feasibility to have presentations of the position papers both in the next HLG meeting in winter and also in NY by the EU delegation.*

- The Commission presented the main outlines of the **2017 focused actions to fight violence against women** in particular on the restricted call for proposal addressed to Member States to raise awareness on the issue and on the information meeting planned in Brussels. Several members supported this initiative and also the organisation of the information meeting organised in Brussels which is considered very helpful given the administrative burden that a call can represent. Some members will apply for grants: IT, MT (on cyber violence and harassment), FI, RO (which is also receiving a grant from Norway on this issue); some are considering applying: SE (in the context of a new national strategy on VAW which is in the pipeline with a strong focus on prevention also involving men in early age), FR, SK. Other countries already said that they will not apply either because they have a national campaign financed domestically (DK) or financed by the Norway grant (CZ) or because of the uncertain political situation (ES).

Members also reiterated the importance of having a EU survey on gender-based violence done by Eurostat and national statistical offices and the importance to continue to work in this direction.

The Commission also provided an overview of the ongoing negotiation of the Council of Europe convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic Violence (‘Istanbul Convention’). SE and FR stressed the importance for HLG members to stay mobilised and to keep contact with FREMP representatives, given the very difficult negotiations and to make sure that this important file can advance. FR also

stressed the importance for Equality ministerial departments of being represented at the Committee of the Parties to the Convention in Strasbourg and reminded that it proposed to the Commission, as early as 2014, to prepare a white paper to sum-up all texts on VAW. LV warned members that ADF international - a USA association of neo-conservative lawyers - is contacting some Member States to lobby them against signing the convention. NL asked to receive a legal analysis of the EU competence on this issue and reiterated the impossibility to take a position given the broader impact that a EU signature would imply. The Commission informed MS that the issue of EU competence is discussed in FREMP and that the proceedings are available to Member States.

#### **OUTPUTS**

*The Commission will continue to inform Member States about the 2017 focused actions. Synergies with already ongoing campaigns will be pursued.*

*The Commission will continue to inform members about the development of the preparatory work for the EU survey on gender-based violence.*

*HLG members could liaise with FREMP members to follow-up the negotiations on the EU accession to the Istanbul convention.*

- EIGE presented the report “**Poverty, gender and intersecting inequalities in the EU**” focusing on the methodology, the concept of poverty and the importance of a gender perspective. The report insists on the inter-connections between economic independence and poverty risk not only of women but also of men and households. The report presents a specific focus on migrants and proposes two new indicators linked to this issue. The report was well received by members. Several members welcomed the focus on intersectionality also stressing that it should be measured in the semester through adequate poverty indicators (BE, FR). The linkages between poverty risk and gender gaps in access to employment, its quality and intensity also due to the unbalanced division of family responsibilities between women and men was the leitmotif of the discussion. Quality of work in particular linked to part-time and the pension gap are key aspects determining the risk of poverty (SE, UK), as well as work intensity for women and work intensity for men at home (NL). The situation of people that are not able to access employment and the consequent necessity to promote public policies and services also need to be highlighted. To address the causes of gender gaps in employment and therefore in poverty it is important to guarantee a good supply of childcare (DE) and not only to provide incentives but also to individualise them, for instance earmarking parental leaves to men (SE). As for the proposed indicators that should be presented by the Presidency in the Conclusions, members were still in the process of checking them internally.

#### **OUTPUTS**

*Members were given one week to send their final comments to EIGE on the report and on the indicators. Comments will be integrated by EIGE. The report will be presented by EIGE to the SQWP on 27/09 and will be used by the Slovak Presidency as an element to draw conclusions to be adopted by the EPSCO Council in December.*

- Member States were briefed by the Commission on upcoming calls **under the Rights, Equality and Citizenship (REC) Programme**. A discussion on the current and future **Mutual learning programme** focused on future topics and on ways to improve the programme and to make it yet more participatory.

Members appreciated the stock-taking exercise done by the Commission in the discussion note and committed to be more pro-active in proposing topics and practices and hosting events. On the issue of participation, several members confirmed the importance of having experts from line ministers, while EL expressed the view that it is important that gender equality departments participate to the seminars and disseminate the results after to line ministers. FR stressed the distinction between peer reviews and exchange of good

practices, the first being linked to the European semester and an Open Method of Coordination (OMC). This linkage is lacking in the gender equality mutual learning programme given the absence of an OMC and this represents a weakness. The exclusive use of the English language might also represent a problem to find people in the national administration able to present good practices. As for the transferability, several possibilities were explored including to have seminars dedicated to directors (PT), to have a good level of expertise in the seminars and to find ways to disseminate the results of the seminars to politicians and translate them into national possibilities (BE). The issue of a lack of political continuity was also highlighted as representing an obstacle to transferability (EL). The possibility of having smaller formats and shorter meeting for some issues was also presented as a possible option (SE).

On topics, SK could propose in the future a seminar on violence against women with a focus on a new law and a new campaign and IT was also interested in tackling this issue. FR and SE stressed the importance to also tackle non-consensual issues among Member States and proposed to host a seminar on their experience with the law on prostitution and on accompanying rehabilitation measures. The programme could also serve as a platform to also tackle difficult issues such as gender budgeting and fiscal policies (FR), and in that respect, AT proposed to share their experience with gender budgeting in the planned dissemination seminar. The issue of online violence and abuse was also highlighted by UK with a proposal by EE to also add the positive side of the digital economy on gender equality (possible proposal in 2017). DE would be interested in future to see the feasibility of a seminar on equal pay.

#### **OUTPUTS**

*Exchanges will continue between the Commission and HLG members to fine-tune the proposals for the forthcoming seminars.*

At the end of the meeting, Ms. Salla Saastamoinen explained that there will be changes in the organigram in the Directorate General for Justice and consumers and that the Gender equality Unit will have not only policy aspects but also legal aspects which have been until now dealt with in a separate unit.

Ms. Daniela Bankier, head of the Gender equality Unit, announced that she will leave the Unit to take another position in the DG. She took this opportunity to thank all members for their active contribution to the work of the group. and to the development of EU gender equality policies as well as for sharing their expertise and experience throughout the years. She stressed the special nature of the HLG on gender mainstreaming, the quality of its work, its networking and exchanges and wished the group to continue to work with the same level of commitment also in the future.