

**High level Conference of the Italian Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe „Work-life balance as a leverage for woman's empowerment and promoting gender equality“  
12 April 2022, Rome, Italy**

- Dear Mrr Della Vedova, Minister Bonetti, Ms Luciani, Commissioner Dalli, representatives of Gender Equality Commission of the Council of Europe, dear ministers and colleagues,
- First, I would like to extend warm greetings to Ms Levchenko and express our solidarity with Ukraine.
- Unfortunately, we are witnessing that vulnerable groups have become even more vulnerable during aggression, and that is why the topic we are discussing today is even more actual.
- We can all agree that gender equality, especially women's economic empowerment is a precondition for a truly thriving society and economy.
- Despite our efforts, we have not yet reached full equality, which is especially visible in the labour market, and there is no equality in relation to the private or family obligations.
- This has no justification in the 21st century when we talk about human rights, choices and opportunities, including in the access to and in the labour market.
- Our task should therefore be to ensure adequate women's access to work.
- Another aspect we have to guarantee is professional equality both for women and men throughout their careers.
- First, it is essential to understand and take into account, at all stages and by all stakeholders, how different policies and activities influence women and men, in all of their diversity.
- When integrating the perspective of gender equality, we should as well address demands posed by digitalisation, demographic changes, Covid - 19 crisis and emerging challenges, and further adapt.
- Today's exchange of thoughts is even more relevant if we consider the fact that achieving real equality is not possible without valuation and fair distribution of paid work and unpaid care work between women and men.

- Existence of gender stereotypes is additional reason for unequal opportunities in the labour market, especially for working mothers.
- There is no doubt we need every instrument to successfully tackle these challenges.
- I am glad I have opportunity to share with you information on the state of play and some of the policies and reforms in Croatia which support women's employment, work-life balance and gender equality.
- First and foremost, a coherent legal framework guaranteeing equal treatment is essential but even more important is its diligent implementation.
- While our Labour Code already ensures equality of women and men in all labour related issues, we are now working on its modernisation to consider all the new modalities of work and the changes driven by the labour market.
- In that process we are paying special attention to ensuring that these changes do not indirectly cause disadvantage for any gender or any group of workers.
- We are also finalizing the new National Plan for Gender Equality for the Period from 2021 to 2027. Its objectives are based on the national needs but also in many aspects reflect the Council of Europe's Gender Equality Strategy from 2018 to 2023.
- When we talk about labour market and policy response, our immediate actions, especially in the light of the Covid-19 crisis, were to preserve employment and jobs.
- Now our main goal is to create new and better jobs and invest in people.
- In that regard, and embracing the digital and green transitions, Croatia continues to make significant investments in reskilling and upskilling.
- We developed a flexible voucher-based training system which should provide efficient and fast response to the labour market needs based on skills mapping.
- Furthermore, we are working on new targeted Active labour market policies to foster transitions and job creation in sectors at the core of the twin transition.
- To be sustainable, resilient and competitive, we need, in addition to the skilled workforce, a satisfied workforce. And satisfied workforce is not possible without ensuring adequate work-life balance.
- This is important for all workers, both women and men, regardless of their family status or situation in life, but the fact is that women have more difficulties in striking that balance.

- Having in mind the demographic decline and ageing population, we have put our focus on measures that support women in their family obligations and care responsibilities, so they don't have to choose between having a family or working and they can do both if they wish to.
- As one of the ways that offer improvement, our legal framework for maternity and parental leave has in recent years been significantly improved, and in addition to the increase in benefits, parents' pensions have been increased by 2% for each child to compensate for the absence from the labour market due to maternity/parental leave.
- Also, more than 500 kindergartens were built and renovated, and 200 of them extended working hours to cater for parents with non-standard working hours.
- Another important aspect, especially of a successful digital transition, to which we strive for, is certainly addressing gender differences in the fields of STEM.
- As a signatory state to the *Declaration of commitment on Women in Digital*, we are undertaking measures to encourage the active role of women in the digital society and address the gender differences in the IT sector.
- Finally, what is our most important job, is awareness-raising and fighting stereotypes.
- In this context, our Ministry is a coordinator of the EU co-financed project "Re-create work and life for women and men", which aims to raise awareness among employers and encourage them to implement family-responsible policies to reconcile business and private life for their workers. We have very positive feedback, and we are now trying to include more and more employers.
- To conclude, I strongly believe that a good mix of policies can achieve positive effect, but it takes time to yield results.
- In our work, we shouldn't forget EU Work-life balance Directive, as one of the key documents that should be timely and correctly transposed and implemented in EU Member States.
- I am glad I had the opportunity to share with you some of Croatian examples of good practices and would like to thank the organizers and all of you for today's fruitful exchange.
- Thank you for your attention.