

Panel 5 - High level panel: the way forward

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Key message: to sketch out some of the Commission's current priorities, such as work life balance and the fight against violence against women.

During my intervention I would like to present to you some of our current priorities in the field of gender equality, "our way forward" for more gender equality:

a. Work-life balance

The Commission's work programme for 2016 includes an initiative called "A new start for working parents (...) to better address the challenges of work-life balance faced by working parents and support the participation of women in the labour market" that would contribute to the Commission's priorities on jobs and growth.

Work-life balance is seen as a main driver of the employment rates of women, but to be effective in terms of both female employment and gender equality, we need to take men into account in a more adequate way.

Work-life balance is not a women's issue. Measures which help to reconcile work and family life, although they aim to support both parents, frequently and inadvertently reinforce the more traditional role of women as caregivers, so they perpetuate gender inequality. For example, as women are the main users of family-related leave arrangements, this weakens their position in the labour market as regards employability, pay or career development. Furthermore, women may experience discrimination from employers in recruitment and promotion decisions - even women who have no children due to the perception that they may, in future, have children.

Measures that do not encourage men's take-up are not effective to increase female employment: if women continue to provide the bulk of care responsibilities and unpaid work, this negatively affects their effective participation in the labour market.

A new start requires taking into account the underlying reason why women have lower employment rates and are not working so many hours in paid employment. Women work very hard, in fact they do more work than men, but much of it is not paid (and does not build any pension entitlements).

This would also be more in tune with our times and the fact that more men would like to take more care responsibilities in their families but face barriers for doing so.

We are engaging with all stakeholders, notably with the Parliament, the Social Partners and the general public through the different consultation procedures.

Without prejudice to the outcome of the social partners consultation, the Commission intends to propose a package of legislative and non-legislative measures and to comprehensively consider maternity, paternity, parental and carers' leave and flexible working arrangements as well as childcare and long-term care and tax-benefit disincentives in that context.

b. Combating the gender pay gap

The Commission is constantly monitoring the correct application of the EU legislation on equal pay in Member States and supports them and other stakeholders in the proper implementation of existing rules.

The Commission 2014 Recommendation on Pay Transparency promotes a more effective application of equal pay legislation through a toolbox of concrete measures. The Commission will draw up a Report on the Implementation of the Recommendation planned for adoption later this year. The report will provide a state of play of measures adopted by Member States as well as an assessment of the need for additional EU measures in this area, including whether a review of the Gender Equality Recast Directive 2006/54/EC could strengthen pay transparency, remove inequalities in occupational pension schemes or strengthen equality bodies.

The European Commission will mark European Equal Pay Day at the beginning of November. The exact date will be calculated based on the latest Eurostat figures: this is the day women symbolically stop earning for the rest of the year.

The work-life balance package will have an effect on the gender pay gap as well, as it addresses some of the drivers of the gender pay gap including the inequality in paid and unpaid work, and in career interruptions between women and men.

c. Violence against women

The European Commission is committed to combating violence against women and girls. To maximise our impact on the ground, we consistently focus on concrete actions in areas where we have a clear legal basis for action and where we can truly support Member States.

CoE Convention

In March 2016, ahead of International Women's Day, the Commission adopted two proposals for the signing and conclusion of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention) by the European Union. The proposals will now be discussed in the Working Party on Fundamental

Rights, Citizens Rights and Free Movement of Persons (FREMP). We encourage you to be in touch with your delegate in order to ensure that the position of gender equality ministries is conveyed in these discussions.

Data

We are continuing our work with Eurostat and the European Institute for Gender Equality to improve the availability and quality of data on gender-based violence, to be able to propose effective and evidence-based initiatives.

The European Commission intends to develop an EU-wide survey on the prevalence of gender-based violence within the European Statistical System. This means that Eurostat would develop and coordinate an EU wide survey on gender-based violence in cooperation with experts in Member States. National Statistical Institutes would then implement it with EU technical support and co-financing.

As Member States ratify the Istanbul Convention, they have to fulfil their obligations stemming from article 11 of the Istanbul Convention and develop surveys. The EU could usefully accompany and support these national efforts in a coordinated manner, to ensure comparability of the data.

Eurostat confirmed in its 2016 work programme that work on the development of the survey on gender-based violence will start in 2016.

The Working Group "Statistics on Crime and Criminal Justice", which comprises representatives of National Statistical Institutes, also welcomed and supported the idea of an EU-wide survey on gender-based violence in its last annual meeting in March 2016. The Working Group agreed to establish a Task-Force that will develop the common methodology and start its work in the second half of 2016.

FGM

We are continuing our work to combat female genital mutilation. In February, the Commission published an analysis of European court cases related to FGM, in an effort to identify what has allowed states to effectively prosecute. The report analyses how different legal systems have an impact on the prosecution of female genital mutilation. It discusses novel approaches for both prosecution and prevention, showing the added-value of concepts such as due diligence, neglect of care and error of prohibition. This study is available on our website.

We have started to reflect on how to use the experiences from the Communication towards the elimination of female genital mutilation, to combat other harmful practices such as forced and child marriage or so-called "honour" crimes. To this end, we have asked the Advisory Committee to prepare an opinion on the topic; the mandate will be presented later today.

Focused actions

Finally, the Commission will carry out focused actions on violence against women in 2017. The Commission will in particular lead awareness-raising activities in the Member States. In this context, we are exploring the feasibility of launching a restricted call for proposals to support Member States' awareness-raising activities on violence against women in 2016, as was done in 2013. This approach will allow Member States to tailor their efforts to the particularities of their national situation and needs, with support and guidance from the EU-level.

In addition, I am pleased to announce that in this context we will be running a Eurobarometer on gender-based violence, in order to better understand European citizens' attitudes towards the phenomenon. This will help contribute towards improving and strengthening the policy response to violence against women at the European and national levels.

d. Gender balance in decision-making

The proposal for a Directive on improving the gender balance among directors of companies listed on stock exchanges continues to be a priority for the European Commission as the experience proves that legislation is essential to achieve a step-change in gender balance on company boards across the EU.

I would like to recall that the most recent text of the proposed directive developed under LUX Presidency addresses the concerns of delegations and improves the legal clarity of the text. Let's make this clear: the proposal does not impose any quotas and is not a "one size fits all approach" for Member States and listed companies. It aims at progress by establishing a quantitative target and requiring that fair and transparent selection procedures are put in place for candidates for board positions.

I welcome the decision of the forthcoming Maltese Presidency to prioritize the file. The Commission also invites the incoming Slovak Presidency to advance with this file.

The Strategic engagement for gender equality 2016-2019 therefore reaffirms our support for an adoption of this proposal. In addition, it announces actions in the area of a) data collection and dissemination, b) gender balance in political and public decision-making, c) decision-making in research and d) the target of 40% women in the Commission's senior and middle management.

e. Migration

Europe's response has to preserve human dignity. We absolutely must ensure the rights of women and girls, and boys and men who are fleeing conflicts and wars. This is a test of our European values.

The Commission is committed to ensuring the gender perspective in the European Migration Agenda, across all its actions. This includes both short term measures, like the organisation of the hot spots and reception

centres, and longer term integration measures related to employment, social inclusion, or education.

Our annual report on equality between women and men shows that both male and female migrants are twice as likely to be unemployed as EU-born citizens, but migrant women have even fewer opportunities and resources. Basic inequalities are amplified by displacement, when women are more vulnerable and are exposed to risks of violence, exploitation and slavery.

To succeed, the actions of all relevant stakeholders, both at European and national level, should be mutually reinforcing. Only then can concerted efforts translate into more effective integration policies for women refugees.