



TRIO PRESIDENCY DECLARATION ON GENDER EQUALITY

Spain, Belgium and Hungary, the Member States holding the Presidency of the Council of the European Union during the 18-month period from July 2023 to December 2024, hereby present this Joint Declaration on Gender Equality.

Gender equality is a fundamental human right and a fundamental principle of the European Union enshrined in the European Union Treaties and the Charter of Fundamental Rights. 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.

We, as a European society, are living in difficult times. No crisis is gender neutral, and women's lives are particularly affected by the current challenges. The economic and social outcomes of the Covid-19 pandemic, the effects of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, and the impact of climate change all have strong and multidimensional effects on the lives of European citizens, especially women and girls. These effects are not gender neutral and tend to be linked to pre-existing structural gender inequalities, gender norms and stereotypes, which are at the root of discrimination.

The current crisis has also severely impacted energy and food markets, directly affecting people's living conditions. Due to women's lower average income rates and other gender gaps, including the gender pay gap, the gender pension gap and the gender care gap, women find themselves at a greater risk of material deprivation and energy poverty compared with men. This also has a significant direct impact on women's and girls' health and well-being.

Gender-based violence is a serious violation of human rights and the cruellest and most blatant manifestation of gender inequality. The fight against all forms of gender-based violence, including trafficking, sexual violence, harmful practices against women and girls and cyber violence, must remain a top priority both inside and outside the EU.

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has led to an increase in different forms of gender-based violence. Most of the people fleeing Ukraine are women or children, who risk becoming targets for human trafficking. Other forms of gender-based violence that have been reported in this context include war rape, sexual violence and political violence against women. All forms of gender-based violence in conflict are utterly unacceptable and should always be investigated and prosecuted by the relevant authorities including by international instances without delay.

Digital technologies are rapidly transforming our society and the lives of citizens. As the digital transition unfolds, they play a critical role in facilitating the full and equal participation of women in the labour market and society. However, the digital revolution also poses the risk of perpetuating or even exacerbating existing patterns of gender inequality, for example, through historically biased input data and stereotypes embedded in artificial intelligence or due to unequal access to ITC for women and girls. Moreover, today's women and girls face the threat of new forms of gender-based cyber violence, including online sexual and sexist violence.

In order to move towards a sustainable and inclusive recovery, gender equality should be placed at the very centre of the ongoing transformation of European society.

Ensuring women's economic empowerment is crucial, not only for the sake of gender equality, but as a driver of economic growth. Decisive measures are needed to increase the participation of women in the labour market and decision-making positions and an integrated approach is required in order to close the gender pay gap and the gender pension gap. Wider attention should also be paid to the ways in which wealth, income and resources are distributed between women and men. Social, fiscal and economic policies can create financial incentives or disincentives for second earners and should be designed in such a way that they do not perpetuate structural gender inequalities.

In this context, effective work-life balance measures, and the successful organisation of informal care and care work are essential for the sustainability of our lives, as well as for social and economic development and wellbeing. However, informal care work has been and still is characterized by its invisibility, its undervaluation and its lack of social recognition. The care burden is unequally distributed between women and men throughout the life course, due to traditional gender patterns, roles and stereotypes. The care economy should be transformed so as to enable women's economic empowerment, expand decent working conditions and strengthen quality public care policies and systems.

Women's leadership is powerful vector for change. Therefore, the current crisis cannot and must not hinder progress in gender equality policies, but rather, should serve as an opportunity to further strengthen gender equality policies and the relevant European institutional mechanisms. Placing women and girls at the very centre of the European project is a way to ensure a fair, sustainable and gender-transformative recovery that effectively contributes to the closing of remaining gender gaps.

We – Spain, Belgium and Hungary – firmly commit ourselves to make gender equality in Europe a reality for all and, in particular, to:

- ✓ Work together to foster gender equality while taking into consideration the Commission's Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, call for a strong gender equality agenda and support other instruments and initiatives that reinforce the rights of victims of gender discrimination, including the proposed Directives on Standards for Equality Bodies.
- ✓ Prevent and combat all forms of gender-based violence, including economic violence, cyber violence and sexual violence, support, protect and provide reparation to the victims, and hold perpetrators accountable. In this context, we note that on 28 June 2023 the European Union deposited its instrument of approval to the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combatting Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence.
- ✓ Support EU efforts to combat trafficking in human beings, in particular the EU Strategy on Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings (2021-2025), which provides a comprehensive response to this problem, from prevention through protection of victims to prosecution and conviction of traffickers, and which also includes concrete measures to tackle the gender specific nature of this crime. Continue to promote EU support for survivors of sexual and gender-based conflict-related violence in Ukraine.
- ✓ Combat gender segregation in the labour market and education. To this end, attracting more women and girls to the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) sector, tackling gender stereotypes and addressing all forms of gender digital divide must be prioritized, not only in order to advance gender equality but as a prerequisite for economic growth, more jobs and a successful digital transition.
- ✓ Step up efforts to promote the economic empowerment of women and efforts to reduce the gender pay and pension gap and gender gaps in care, including by promoting a better understanding and a greater awareness of the need for the equal sharing of unpaid care work and domestic work between women and men and of the barriers and drivers of women's financial independence. Also focus on demographic transition and tackling challenges as well as promote intergenerational solidarity. In this regard, we recognise the importance of the Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council to strengthen the application of the principle of equal pay for equal work or work of equal value between men and women through pay transparency and enforcement mechanisms, as well as of the Council Recommendation on access to affordable high-quality long term care and the Council Recommendation on early childhood and care: the Barcelona Targets for 2030.
- ✓ Strengthen the dual approach to gender equality, combining gender mainstreaming and specific gender equality policies and measures in all areas, including in budgetary processes at national and EU level.
- ✓ To address the gender and other important dimensions of the green transition and efforts to integrate the gender dimension into European and national

climate change policies. We call for the gender-transformative implementation of the European Green Deal and just energy transition as a way to promote women's agency and their role in decision-making and leadership. In this regard, we recognise the importance of the Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on improving the gender balance among directors of companies listed on stock exchanges and related measures.