



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Permanent Council No. 1305 Vienna, 11 March 2021

EU Statement on the occasion of the International Women's Day

1. For over 100 years, 8 March, International Women's Day, is more than just a day. It is an occasion to reflect on the progress made in promoting women's and girls' rights and gender equality and an opportunity to call for change where it is still needed. Gender equality must be taken into account every day, not just on International Women's Day. This year's themes – *Choose to challenge* and *Women in leadership: Achieving an equal future in a COVID-19 world* remind us that we are, individually and collectively, responsible for addressing gender inequality and bias and for triggering the changes needed to create an inclusive world, not least in the context of the challenges that COVID-19 presents.
2. Gender equality is a core principle of the European Union, to which the EU and its Member States have been committed as a fundamental right since 1957. The EU has made significant progress over the last decades. This is the result of equality legislation, mainstreaming gender perspective into all other policies and specific measures for the advancement of women.
3. Despite this progress, there is still a long way to go. Even today, women face many gender-related structural barriers on their way. In the entire OSCE area, women and girls continue to be targets of discrimination, stereotyping and sexual and gender-based violence. The COVID-19 pandemic has negatively impacted these structural barriers and even undone some of the progress recently made. Its consequences have hit women and girls disproportionately hard. Women are potentially more at risk of infection because they make up the majority of healthcare workers, suffer more from long term socio-economic consequences and the increase in domestic violence during the pandemic is well documented. During lockdowns and with school and day care closures,

women took the lion's share of the unpaid care and domestic work, hence exacerbating gender inequalities. As the pandemic has widened the gender equality gap, it is crucial to integrate inclusive strategies in recovery plans and to adopt an intersectional approach to combating gender inequality at large. In this regard, the EU welcomes the adoption by the UN General Assembly, last November, of the Resolution "Women, Girls and COVID-19" that places women and girls at the centre of the response to the pandemic and the subsequent recovery.

4. The EU is striving to accelerate efforts towards gender equality in the many fields of its external action, as part of the implementation of our OSCE commitments and the UN Sustainable Development Goals, building on the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) and the outcomes of their review conferences. In this respect, we also note that the Istanbul Convention, defines a set of standards on combating all forms of violence against women and domestic violence.
5. We will continue to support, promote and protect women's and girls' rights and the empowerment of all women and girls, while tackling gender-based violence, including in fragile, conflict and emergency situations. In this context, we welcome the holding of the Generation Equality Forum, a global gathering co-hosted by France and Mexico and organized with UN Women, that will bring together governments, civil society and the private sector to set an agenda to achieve concrete and measurable results for women's and girls' rights over the next five years.
6. Gender equality is directly related to the OSCE's comprehensive concept of security and an inherent part of our common commitments. It is a matter of human rights, of democracy and justice. Empowering both women and men is key in tackling the security threats we face in the OSCE region and also drives economic growth and competitiveness.
7. Inclusive and diverse leadership is needed if we are to deal with these challenges. Supporting women's and girls' full, effective and meaningful participation in political and public life, at all levels of decision-making is crucial. Therefore, we welcome the role of the OSCE in supporting women's leadership in conflict-resolution and peacebuilding. The contribution of women mediators,

women organization and networks, impacts both the dynamics and the outcome of formal peace negotiations and informal peace initiatives. The OSCE toolkit on “Inclusion of Women and Effective Peace processes” provides valuable advice and practical steps on how to achieve more gender-responsive dialogue and mediation processes.

8. All OSCE participating States have committed to gender equality, as well as to advancing women's participation in political and public life in various Ministerial Council Decisions and in the 2004 OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality. We stress the importance of these commitments and call for their full implementation. We therefore commend the Swedish Chairpersonship for putting gender equality at the top of our agenda as a mainstreaming priority.
9. We also value the efforts by the Secretariat, autonomous institutions and field missions to improve the gender balance within our organization. The recently published Gender Parity Strategy Progress Report shows that our Organization is moving in the right direction, creating an enabling and inclusive work environment for all. Systematic gender mainstreaming in the monitoring and evaluation of all OSCE activities is essential. The continued support to participating States in implementing their OSCE commitments is also highly appreciated.
10. Gender equality is our common vision and mindset and we stand ready to work tirelessly, inside and outside the EU, to make it a reality.