



PES ministerial declaration: Equal participation of women and men in the labour market

Adopted at the online PES meeting of Employment and Social Affairs Ministers, 13 October 2020

The Covid-19 crisis has highlighted how undervalued frontline and essential workers' contribution to society is. It has cruelly shown that for too many workers, going to work still means taking health and safety risks while facing difficult and unfair working conditions, low wages and precarious contracts. This is particularly true for women. In retail, which provided for the basic needs of the population during the epidemic, women make up as much as 82 percent of all employees. Three out of four healthcare workers, whom we applauded every evening, are women. This crisis has proven without doubt that women and their work are vital to the functioning of our societies. But while women are working hard for Europe, the labour market is not working for women.

As PES Employment and Social Affairs Ministers, we stand for equal pay for equal work and work of equal value, decent working conditions, health and safety at work, decent minimum wages, stable contracts and adequate social protection for all. The increased visibility of care and service professions during the pandemic is a momentum that we have to make use of to tackle the undervaluing of women's work and address gender stereotypes and discrimination, raise wages and improve the working conditions of women, particularly in those female-dominated sectors.

Yet, improving pay and working conditions generally will not be sufficient to reduce the employment and pay gaps between women and men. We are thus convinced of the need for specific targeted measures to address gender inequalities in the labour market and to empower women in all their diversity.

First, we need to ensure a fairer division of unpaid care work. Part of the inequality in the labour market starts at home, with women taking responsibility for the majority of unpaid care work. Persistent gender bias and traditional gender roles, especially during these times of crisis, assign many women to be the main carers for households, families and communities, and to take up the burden of additional work and the mental load that goes with it. The impact of reorganisations of work, such as teleworking, should also be considered.

- We are strongly committed to proceeding quickly with an ambitious implementation of the 2019 Work-Life Balance Directive, and to further developing care policies that foster parental, maternity and paternity as well as accessible and paid care leave schemes.



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Party of European Socialists

10-12 Rue Guimard

B-1040 Brussels

Belgium

- Quality care infrastructures, such as the affordable, accessible and high-quality child care facilities we call for in the Child Guarantee, as well as elderly care facilities are essential to allow women and men to combine work and life responsibilities. They will enable more women to take up and stay in paid employment.

Second, inequalities persist in the choice of careers. Empowering more women to enter curricula, train and develop the skills needed to pursue a career in STEM, ICT, engineering, the green and digital economy is essential for closing the gender pay gap and fostering innovation. Similarly, more men must be encouraged to take up care professions.

- Jobs do not have a gender. We commit to fight gender stereotypes in particular relating to professional orientation and work.
- We are convinced that gender mainstreaming must be a core component of the Digital Education Action Plan, the updated European Skills Agenda, Youth Guarantee, as well as vocational education and training systems in general, in order to tackle horizontal segregation, stereotyping and gender gaps in education and training.

When in work, gender inequality is still shockingly visible on the pay slip. The gender pay gap is currently at 15.7% and the pension gap at 30%, contributing to the feminisation of poverty. It is time to close the gender pay and pension gaps once and for all.

- We firmly believe in the principle of equal pay for equal work or work of equal value.
- We support the European Commission's plans to introduce a Pay Transparency Directive laying down binding pay transparency measures by the end of this year as a first step towards closing the pay gap and stress in this regard the importance of a full cooperation and involvement of the social partners

Finally, inequality remains to be tackled when it comes to economic decision-making. Beyond ensuring essential rights relating to fair working conditions, social protection and inclusion, the European Pillar of Social Rights also entails the principle of equal opportunities. We want women, especially those facing multiple forms of discrimination, to be represented on an equal footing with men in the world of work.

- We call for the unblocking of the Women on Boards Directive, so as to ensure that at least 40% of the members on both executive and non-executive company boards are women from different background and experiences.
- We strongly call for enhanced efforts to address discrimination, harassment and gender-based violence in the world of work, including through better funded and disaggregated data collection and especially the full ratification of the ILO convention 190 and the Istanbul Convention, to eradicate gender violence and harassment.

Together with the implementation of the EU Gender Equality Strategy carried forward by Commissioner for Equality Helena Dalli, those elements will contribute to a more equal participation of women and men in the labour market. We welcome the European Council's commitment to gender mainstream the Multiannual Financial Framework for 2021-27 as a significant step forward in this endeavour. We hope to see a similar ambition for the EU recovery plan to provide the EU Gender Equality Strategy with the means and targeted funding to achieve its objectives and tackle Covid-19's impact on women in Europe.

- **Ana Mendes Godinho**, PES EPSCO Chair, Minister of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security, Portugal
- **Pierre Yves Dermagne**, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Economy and Employment, Belgium
- **Frank Vandenbroucke**, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Health and Social Affairs, Belgium
- **Jana Maláčová**, Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, Czech Republic
- **Peter Hummelgaard Thomsen**, Minister for Employment, Denmark
- **Tuula Haatainen**, Minister of Employment, Finland
- **Hubertus Heil**, Minister of Labour, Germany
- **Franziska Giffey**, Minister for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, Germany
- **Francesca Puglisi**, Deputy Minister of Labour, Italy
- **Romain Schneider**, Minister of Social Security, Luxembourg
- **Dan Kersch**, Minister of Labour, Employment and Social Economy, Luxembourg
- **Taina Bofferding**, Minister of the Interior, Minister of Equality between Women and Men, Luxembourg
- **Owen Bonnici**, Minister for Education & Employment, Malta
- **Eva Nordmark**, Minister for Employment, Sweden