

29th OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum

“PROMOTING COMPREHENSIVE SECURITY, STABILITY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE OSCE AREA THROUGH WOMEN’S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT”

1st Preparatory meeting, Vienna, 15-16 February 2021

Session II: Building women’s human capital

Intervention by Ms. Katri Viinikka, Ambassador for Gender Equality, Finland

Dear participants,

I would like to thank the Swedish chairpersonship and the OSCE Secretariat for organizing this very important meeting and inviting me to speak. Gender equality is one of the priorities of Finland’s foreign policy. As stated in the 2011 Vilnius Ministerial Council Decision 10/11 (Equal Opportunity for Women in the economic sphere), we firmly believe that women’s participation in the economic sphere contributes significantly towards economic recovery, sustainable growth and the creation of cohesive societies, and thus is essential to the security and stability of the OSCE region.

Finland is one of the co-leads of Technology and Innovation for Gender Equality Action Coalition in the so-called Generation Equality process. Generation Equality is a five-year multi-stakeholder campaign aimed at accelerating the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action and at addressing new and emerging challenges in gender equality. It is coordinated by UN Women and led by France and Mexico.

One of our priorities in this Action Coalition is to increase the number, participation and leadership of women and girls in STEM, both in education and at work. The goals will be formally adopted soon, after which we will start mobilizing support from Governments, international organizations and from private sector to achieving them.

Although Finland is one of the world’s most gender-equal societies, the separation of men and women into different fields of work begins early. Even when girls out-perform boys in mathematics and science, boys are more likely to continue studies and choose career paths in technological fields. In educational choices also one’s own confidence and self-image, as well as family, teachers, social relations, hobbies and media, play a role. In our conversation with girls and young women, they have emphasized the importance of role models.

There is a strong gender segregation also in the labour market in Finland. This is one of our biggest challenges in gender equality. For example, in 2019, only 22 per cent of

those working in technology companies were women. In leadership positions it was even less: among the listed companies only 7.5 per cent of CEOs were women. Technology is also a sector where employment opportunities are increasing more than in many other sectors. Covid -19 has accentuated the difference, because in the service sector, which tends to be female-dominated, a lot of jobs have been lost due to the pandemic.

To increase the number of women in the tech industry, it is important to ensure that women have equal employment and career opportunities. Women do not always remain in the sector, even if they have entered it. To address this, flexible arrangements to combine work and parenthood are essential. Both men and women must have the possibility of combining a career and a family life. Sharing the care is key.

Furthermore, culture at the work place must be inclusive and equal. Harassment and misconduct must be prevented and eliminated. Unfortunately, so-called 'bro culture' is still very common in some work places. Action must be taken to tackle harmful gender stereotypes that perpetrate gender inequalities. In this, the role of men and boys is crucial. Huge responsibility lies within the private sector.

We also need to keep in mind the diversity of women and girls, be it in education or labour market. Special attention must be paid to women and girls who are facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, such as women and girls with disabilities or those belonging to national minorities.

In conclusion: the digital gender gap must be bridged, but a lot of work remains to be done. We invite all Participating States and other stakeholders to step up efforts to ensure equal opportunities for both women and men in STEM education and at work, thus building the human capital of the whole society.

Thank you.