



**29th OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum**  
**“Promoting comprehensive security, stability and sustainable development in the OSCE area through women’s economic empowerment”**

**“Session I, theme 2: *Policy approaches to support women’s equal economic participation and opportunities*”**

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What is to you the most important role that governments should play to ensure women’s equal economic participation and opportunities?

- I would like to thank the **2021 OSCE Swedish Chair** (Ambassador Ulrika Funered) for the invitation and the opportunity to speak here today. It is a great pleasure for me to participate in this first preparatory meeting of the 29<sup>th</sup> OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum.
- I would also like to congratulate Ms. Teresa Ribeiro for her recent nomination as the fifth OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media. She is a prominent Portuguese female, whom I know personally, with a relevant political and international career.
- Answering your question directly: **education! Governments should design policies and legislation that promote education, upskilling and re-skilling over the life course of girls and women.** Women’s economic empowerment promotes economic growth.
- **This is particularly important in the digital area.** The aim for Governments should be to educate and equip women and girls with the necessary skills and confidence to succeed in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) career fields.
- We are living very challenging times, with an ongoing pandemic and, besides the essential health concern, having to overcome its economic and social impact.
- Economic policy is, and always must be, a policy also directed to women.
- My country - Portugal - is one of the countries that promotes opportunities and policies for female entrepreneurship.

- According to the **Small Business Act Fact Sheet 2019**, Portugal has shown considerable progress in this area in the indicator “Early-stage Entrepreneurial activity for female population”. I am happy for this!
- Women create jobs and ensure that Portugal remains an innovative and dynamic location for business and investment.
- Women work as (start-up) entrepreneurs, scientists, managers, and skilled experts.
- Nevertheless, **women are still clearly underrepresented in top positions**. Only 14 per cent of women occupy those positions. Of the listed companies, only 3 have women in charge. [Portugal is still below the European average] [*Gender Diversity Index 2020 (GDI)*].
- Also, it is still primarily men who work in management positions: women occupy only 30% of management positions in Portugal. It is only in the major public companies that female participation in management positions is above 40%.
- Furthermore, on average, they also receive a lower salary and set up fewer companies than men.
- However, without women’s contribution to Portugal’s economy, Portugal would not be certainly such attractive for business.
- In their role as entrepreneurs, women create new products and services and, as decision-makers, contribute to the future of our country.
- **In 2019, women represented more than half (52.8 per cent) of the total population and 49.4 per cent of the working population - and are highly skilled professionals: they account for around 59 per cent of university graduates and 53 per cent of doctoral students.**
- Also, I am glad to see that Portugal has a very high percentage of women in science courses.
- Government laboratories have mostly women, who occupy half of the research places in higher education institutions and outnumber male researchers in five of the seven major scientific areas.

- However, the wage gap also continues to be an everyday occurrence in Portuguese companies, with around 14 per cent of women, across all sectors, earning lower wages than men.
- Besides having binding legislation to promote equal pay, Portugal is now working on an **Action Plan on responsible business conduct** at national level to sensitize companies for the adoption of strategies that promote responsible, transparent, non-discriminatory working and recruitment conditions.
- At the level of the European Union, during the first semester of 2021, Portugal holds the rotating Presidency of the Council. The intention is to start the elaboration of an Action Plan for Responsible European Business Conduct.
- It is, therefore, time to focus more strongly than before on the diversity of the workforce, to increase the proportion of women on the boards of companies and to improve the reconciliation of work and family.
- In addition, public policies that facilitate the reconciliation of family life and the professional career continue to be lacking, often leading women to make tough choices and exclude good opportunities.
- **Nowadays, digital economy and technology sector are growing fastly. However, according to the Commission's 2020 Women in Digital (WiD) Scoreboard<sup>1</sup>, only 18% of Information and communications technology (ICT) specialists are women.**
- **Attracting more women to technological careers is an economic and social imperative.** For that, it is necessary to overcome the gender stereotypes that describe careers in ICT as a male domain and promote technological curiosity in girls, from basic education to university.
- It is this balance, between men and women, that national programs like INCoDe2030, EUSOUDIGITAL or Upskill have tried to guarantee, in order to ensure that no one is left behind in access to digital technologies.
- Digital skills are an essential component across the three Pillars (Resilience, Climate Transition and Digital Transition). **They are the backbone of Portugal's National Recovery and Resilience Plan.** Skills are also an essential part of the

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<sup>1</sup> Monitors women's participation in the digital economy and society. Is part of the Digital Economy and Society Index DESI

Portuguese **Action Plan for Digital Transition** that our Government has put forward in March 2020.

- **These are practical examples of the role that governments should play to ensure women’s equal economic participation and opportunities.**
- In this field, also the European Commission strives to encourage and empower women to play a more active role in the economy.
- To achieve these goals the **Commission's study “Women in the digital age”** (2018) has outlined actions as part of its strategy that will facilitate an increase in the participation of women in the digital sector. The actions will focus on three main areas: (i) challenging stereotypes; (ii) promoting digital skills and education; (iii) advocating for more women entrepreneurs.
- In 2019, 26 European Member States and Norway have signed a declaration to encourage women to play an active and prominent role in the digital and technology sectors. (Member States' Declaration of commitment on women in digital)
- Gender issue is transversal and must be present in all public policies. **It is a recommendation in the Recovery and Resilience Plan** in its important dimension of the digital transition and is part of the European Commission's recommendations for the different Member States.
- For this reason, the Portuguese Government has been committed to the development of structural public policies to combat inequalities between women and men, including on wages.
- **We highlight a law that came into force in February 2019, which creates, for the first time, mechanisms to implement the principle of equal pay for equal work and the prohibition of wage discrimination based on sex.**
- Equal treatment of both genders and the right to equal participation in all spheres of life are fundamental human rights.
- Gender mainstreaming is relevant to all aspects of policy-making. The objective is to take account of the characteristics, interests and moral concepts of both sexes when designing political strategies. Every political approach must be screened for the impact of planned or implemented policies with the aim of achieving equality of women and men.
- In this way, **the introduction of gender-impact budgets should allow the application of the gender perspective in public finances.**

- [It is intended that the evaluation of the gender impact on public policies and the introduction of changes in public budgets will make it possible to identify different impacts on women and men so that measures are taken to neutralize discriminatory effects].
- Despite the apparent neutrality of public budgets, it is sometimes difficult to identify the different impacts that their application can have on women and men.
- The Portuguese Government, within the framework of measures to support the economy, provides access to finance and support for the empowerment of women.
- The Portuguese Presidency, in the framework of **Europe's Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025**, will pay particular attention to binding measures on transparency and on the proposal for a Directive on improving the gender balance in company boards.
- We will promote reflection on the impact of COVID-19 on gender equality, particularly on labour market participation, income and the reconciliation of work and family life.
- Much remains to be done for greater participation of women in the economy and equal opportunities, but I believe we are on the right path.

Thank you.