

Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) Conference
**"Women's Economic Empowerment:
Creating Equal Opportunities in the World of Work"**
Vilnius, 25-26 May 2017

Before starting my speech, I would like to remind everyone what the word "women" stand for. Women are our mothers, our sisters, our daughters and wives. I invite all of you to bare it in mind whenever you speak about women empowerment and gender discrimination.

Excellencies! Ministers! Ladies and Gentlemen!

Latvia has always stressed the importance of ensuring equal rights and equal opportunities for women and men in all spheres of life. The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Beijing Platform for Action as well as the European Union *acquis* are the core sources of our gender equality policy.

We have put a great deal of effort to create both **legal and institutional framework** for promoting and ensuring gender equality in practice. We have established the Gender Equality Committee which consists of all line ministries, social partners and non-governmental organisations. Additionally, there are experts in all ministries and the State Chancellery who have been entrusted with the responsibility of ensuring gender mainstreaming within the respective policy area.

One of Latvia's biggest challenges is **occupational gender segregation**. Women are over-represented in sectors associated with traditional gender roles, such as health, social care, humanities and teaching.

We believe that gender equality and women's full participation in the labour market and other socio-economic processes is a precondition for overall economic growth and wellbeing. Nevertheless, it can only be achieved if women are given the power to make and act on economic decisions at the same level as men, and only if the system and relevant structures welcome that. The role of women's organisations and collective initiative is essential in this regard.

It is extremely important to encourage children to choose their **education** and future profession according to their interests. In order to strengthen gender equality principles in the school curricula and to encourage interest in STEM¹ fields among girls and women, a number of measures will be implemented in the next five years.

We believe that it is highly important not only to provide an education which offers discussions about gender equality and fight against violence but also to create a safe environment for cooperation and exchange of ideas between girls and boys. School is a place where children learn to respect each other; they build relationship with their teachers, peers and other children. We see a great deal of work in encouraging girls and women to choose a career in research and to tackle stereotyping of women in post-graduate education and research.

Latvia has undertaken several initiatives over the past few years to promote gender equality in the **economic sphere**. For instance, Latvia has introduced awards for companies that show a commitment to gender equality principles via gender balance in management structure, transparency of wage policy as well as support to family and work reconciliation.

Family and work reconciliation has been on our national gender equality agenda for almost 15 years. We have focused on ensuring adequate maternity, paternity and parental leaves and related social benefits as well as high-quality and affordable child care services.

Employers' and general public attitude towards **young fathers** is an essential issue that needs to be addressed in this regard. It is crucial to encourage fathers to exercise their rights to paternity and parental leaves as well as to reconcile their work and family life in order to promote an equal share of family and household responsibilities and equal career opportunities.

Since the forms of employment are becoming more diverse, in 2015, the Ministry of Welfare launched a project on the provision of flexible child-minders service to workers with

¹ Science, technology, engineering, mathematics

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nonstandard work schedules. The main aim of the project is to introduce **flexible child care** arrangements and to find long-term models for further development of such services.

Dear colleagues!

In recent years, Latvia has intensified its efforts to eliminate **violence against women** and domestic violence. The legal framework has been improved to ensure a full protection against violence and female genital mutilation as well as access to justice. We have paid attention to the quality of state funded social rehabilitation services for adult victims and perpetrators of violence. Additionally, Latvia is working on improving access to information on available support services, for example, by launching a help line for victims of crime and their family members.

It is crucial that we all are committed to securing the rights and opportunities of women and girls in practice thus investing in the creation of an equal, equitable and progressive society.

Thank you!