

Dear guests, ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to welcome you at this ASEM conference on “Women’s economic empowerment” in Lithuania.

Today’s Conference aims to focus on legislation and policies, on such issues as equal opportunities for women and men in employment, work and family reconciliation, gender segregated studies which lead to further occupational segregation in the labour market.

I would like to stress women’s economic empowerment as an important measure towards gender equality and social and economic wellbeing. In order to achieve it, it is essential to implement legal and policy frameworks across women’s life cycle; support their access to skills and training in science, technology, engineering and mathematical education, digital literacy; strengthen leadership and decision-making.

Lithuanian legislation ensures *de jure* equal rights and equal opportunities for women and men in all spheres. National policies aim to promote equality in employment, to balance participation in decision-making and to promote gender mainstreaming to education, science, health, culture.

Lithuania has very high women’s employment rate. In 2016, employment rate of women aged 20-64 stood at 74.3 per cent, and of men - 76.2 per cent. However, gender pay gap was 15.6 for the year 2015, and continued to grow. The largest gap was in financial and insurance activities, at nearly 40 per cent.

Our reforms aim to make labour market more flexible, while increasing security through the unemployment insurance system, and improved social dialogue. In 2016, Lithuania adopted a comprehensive legislative package establishing new regulations in labour relations, social security provision and the pension system. More opportunities for flexible working time and pay transparency policy for the companies with more than 20 employees is expected to facilitate balance of work and family life and to disclose the size of the pay gap.

Women's economic empowerment can be increased by promoting equal sharing of care and household responsibilities. It is essential to ensure the availability of quality childcare and care services for dependents. In Lithuania, every fifth man takes parental leave which is being granted until the child is three years of age. Parents after child's birth can choose between two options of allowances: 100% of net earnings until the child is 1 years old, or 70% of net earnings until the child is 1 years old and 40% - for the 2nd child's year.

Dear participants of this Conference,

I would like to conclude by thanking the organizers and partners, and to wish all of you further constructive debates.

Thank you.