



United States Mission to the OSCE

Closing Statement 29th OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum

First Preparatory Meeting “Promoting comprehensive security, stability and sustainable development in the OSCE area through women’s economic empowerment”

As delivered by Bahram Rajaei, Political Officer
(virtual) Vienna, February 16, 2021

Thank you, Mr. Moderator.

I would like to begin by thanking Ambassador Funered, Secretary General Schmid, the Swedish Chairpersonship, and the OCEEA for raising the issue of women’s economic empowerment to the top of the Second Committee’s priorities. I would also like to thank all of the moderators and speakers who shared their expertise with us during the past two days.

This first preparatory EEF meeting addressed specific issues related to the broader theme of women’s economic empowerment that are pervasive across the region and the world, and placed a spotlight on their significance for our collective security. We expect that what we learned this week will lead to and inform additional substantive dialogue among participating States. Based on the informative discussions here, we suggest the Swedish Chairpersonship and delegations to continue exploring two areas in particular.

First, the OSCE is overdue for an updated consensus decision on women’s economic empowerment, writ large. Since the 2011 Vilnius Declaration, much has changed in the world both in terms of progress made and progress that remains to be made. As we have heard from a number of speakers over the past two days, gains made so far in mitigating the lack of gender equity—whether through reductions in the wage gap, or greater numbers of women working in positions of political and economic influence and decision making—are offset by continuing deficits in the participation of women in sufficient numbers at the heart of economic and political decision making processes, inequities in access to education and financial and economic resources or specific professions, and the persistent, inhibiting exposure to violence and abuse. And even as women and girls from lower socio-economic strata are disproportionately marginalized across most societies, marginalization, vulnerability, and inequality are also more prominent in conflict zones and more pronounced in some sectors of the economy than others.

In light of this reality, a fresh assessment of what the OSCE can and should tangibly do in a focused manner is warranted. We heard just this morning about how Albania is addressing gaps in access to economic and financial resource in the case of expanding and correcting women’s access to immovable property and how the UK is addressing barriers to women entrepreneurs. These cases,

among the others we have heard from, illustrate the level of specificity and focus required to craft more effective public policy that can come to grips with the challenge.

Second, the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on women's economic empowerment is directly undermining, and will continue to undermine, our collective ability to recover from the greatest economic downturn since the Great Depression. This reality will continue to hinder resumed, sustainable growth in the years and decades ahead if left unaddressed. It is important to note that this is a dynamic set of problems. While much of the economic costs in the OSCE area have already been borne over the past year by women, they continue to accumulate disproportionately with no end in sight. All participating States are currently seeking ways to come to grips with this public policy challenge, and we need to incorporate these considerations into our national and collective responses to the pandemic.

Thank you, again, to the Swedish Chair-in-Office for its hard work and focus on this issue. We look forward to continuing this conversation with the goal of developing a consensus regarding tangible steps we can take to support women's economic empowerment, which is a central element of our collective prosperity and peace and stability in the OSCE area.

Thank you, Mr. Moderator.