

# National Strategy For Gender Equality in the Slovak Republic

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**2014 - 2019**

Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic  
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## Introduction

On July 9 the Government of the Slovak republic adopted the evaluation of the implementation of the *National Action Plan for Gender Equality 2010-2013* by Resolution No. 335/2014 whereby creation of the national gender equality strategy and Action Plan for Gender Equality 2014-2019 were indicated.

Gender inequality is a rather complex subject, with implications and consequences reflecting in every area of the society. Despite the undeniably positive developments of the last decade, gender inequality remains evident and visible in many areas of private and public life in the Slovak republic. Important legislative amendments, specifically those adopted in the process of the country's accession to the European Union ("EU" or "Union"), contributed to a greater awareness among the public and professionals regarding direct and indirect forms of discrimination and disadvantage based on sex/gender which are primarily the result of persisting gender stereotypes in society. Though it is typically women who are more likely to become victims of these disadvantages, in some cases, gender stereotypes impact men equally.

Gender equality does not stand in contrast with the diversity of individual men and women, it is rather an alternative to current social hierarchy as this is particularly disadvantageous to women. The goal of gender equality is then to create respectful space for every woman and man so they are free to pursue their lives according to their wishes and abilities, without being limited by rigid gender stereotypes.

Elimination of gender inequalities requires a comprehensive approach, one that takes many aspects into account. Existing changes in legislation and policies facilitated the creation of necessary conditions for implementation of systematic measures at the institutional level. These are essential in achieving gender equality. The proposed National Strategy for Gender Equality in the Slovak Republic 2014 - 2019 (hereinafter the "strategy") then sets out objectives in the areas where the most striking inequalities in the social status of men and women as well as discrimination can be observed.

## Existing legislation and political commitments

Slovak republic is a state party to several binding international conventions such as the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW, 1979) and the *Optional Protocol to the Convention*<sup>1</sup> (1999), both ratified by the Slovak Republic.

The overall objective of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (hereinafter referred to as the “Convention” or “CEDAW”) is to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women<sup>2</sup>. The Convention thus outlines the obligations of states in terms of protection of women against discrimination. The principle of equality should be reflected in national constitutions and all relevant legislation. Article 5 specifically mandates the requirement of adopting necessary measures to modify social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women with the view of achieving the elimination of prejudices and practices which are based on the idea of inferiority or superiority of either of the sexes.

*The Optional Protocol to the Convention*<sup>3</sup>, in terms of implementation of the Convention, is considered to be the instrument of women's human rights guarantees, as it allows individuals and institutions to individually file a complaint for violation of their human rights. These complaints are submitted to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women which assesses them and further follows up with discussion if applicable.

The Convention is a part of **comprehensive international human rights framework** aimed at ensuring adequate implementation of human rights for all as well as elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. *The UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* contain explicit provisions guaranteeing equality of women and men in claiming the rights enshrined in these documents. In case of other international human rights conventions, for instance the

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<sup>1</sup> Regulation no. 62/1987.: Decree of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of 13 May 1987 on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

<sup>2</sup> General recommendation no. 28 about the basic obligations of state parties under Article 2 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women: Although the Convention only refers to discrimination on grounds of sex, the interpretation of Article 1 in conjunction with Article 2. f) and 5. a) implies that the Convention concerns gender-based discrimination against women .... Application of the Convention in case of gender-based discrimination is then clear from the definition of discrimination set out in Article 1.

<sup>3</sup> Adopted: 22 December 1999, ratified: 22 September 2000, published as no.343/2001 of the statutes

*International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination*, the references to the concept of non-discrimination on grounds of sex are rather implicit.

The conventions within the framework of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), namely the *ILO Convention on Equal Remuneration for Men and Women Workers for Work of Equal Value* (No. 100), the *ILO Convention concerning Discrimination in Respect of Employment and Occupation* (No. 111) are the organization's core conventions as they address major international labour standards, therefore considered a human rights instrument.<sup>4</sup> Regarding other ILO conventions, the *ILO Convention on equal opportunities and equal treatment for men and women workers: workers with family responsibilities* (no. 156) could also be highlighted as significant.

The *UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education*, the *UN Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women*, the *Vienna Declaration and Action Plan*, the *Cairo Action Plan*<sup>5</sup> and the *Beijing Platform for Action*<sup>6</sup> represent further relevant international provisions on gender equality and non-discrimination. The United Nations Development Fund<sup>7</sup> also introduced the *Gender Equality Strategy 2014-2017*. Similarly, the obligations of membership in regional human rights organizations, in particular the membership in the Council of Europe, include designating of the principle of non-discrimination, including the principle of non-discrimination between men and women. The *European Convention on Human Rights* or the *European Social Charter* (revised) are similarly important.

Equality between women and men is one of the core values of the **European Union** (hereinafter referred to as the "Union" or the "EU"). In accordance with the *Treaty on the Functioning of the EU*, the Union in all its actions aims to eliminate inequalities and promote equality between men and women. In terms of defining and implementing its policies and actions, the Union aims to combat discrimination, including discrimination on the grounds of sex. The Union recognizes the rights, freedoms and principles set out in the *Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union* which is a document of similar legal value. It establishes, inter alia, the principle of equality between men and women (Article 23) and the principle of non-discrimination (Article 21).<sup>8</sup> Eventually, the primary law stipulates the principle of equal pay for work of equal value for men and women.

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<sup>4</sup> See The International Labour Organization Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work.

<sup>5</sup> International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, 1994

<sup>6</sup> Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing 1995

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/womens-empowerment/gender-equality-strategy-2014-2017/>

<sup>8</sup> Article 157 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). The legal basis for the adoption of EU secondary legislation targeting the elimination of discrimination is also enshrined in Article 19 of the TFEU.

Discrimination on grounds of sex or gender is covered by separate, comprehensive **EU legislation**. The provisions relevant to this field at European level have a long history, dating back to the early days of the European Community. Currently, it is the secondary EU law that governs the implementation of the principle of equal treatment between men and women in matters of employment and occupation<sup>9</sup>, in access to goods and services<sup>10</sup> and business<sup>11</sup>. The provisions aimed at protection of social rights of pregnant workers and mothers<sup>12</sup>, as well as the adjustment in parental leave<sup>13</sup>, crucial in the context of reconciling work and family life, are equally important.

The Slovak Republic addresses gender equality in its domestic legislation rather effectively. Equality between men and women is enshrined in the Constitution of the Slovak Republic and further elaborated in the country's specific legislation. The Anti-Discrimination Act<sup>14</sup> is specifically relevant as it prohibits discrimination on the grounds of sex/gender, while compliance with the principle of equal treatment is not fulfilled merely by refraining from discriminatory practices, it equally emphasizes prevention of discrimination and the need for adoption of preventive measures. The latest amendment of the act extended the possibility of the adoption of affirmative action on the grounds of sex/gender for all public administration bodies and legal entities. Similarly, the prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of sex/gender and the obligation of equal pay for equal work or work of equal value for men and women is enshrined in the Labour Code<sup>15</sup>, as well as in other relevant legal acts.

The promotion of gender equality has been enshrined in strategic materials and documents, particularly the *National Strategy for Gender Equality for the years 2009-2013* and the respective *National Action Plan for Gender Equality for the years 2010-2013*. Specific attention is paid to addressing violence against women. Regarding the issue, third *National*

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<sup>9</sup> Directive 2006/54/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006 on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation (recast)

<sup>10</sup> Council Directive 2004/113/EC of 13 December 2004 implementing the principle of equal treatment between men and women in the access to and supply of goods and services (Gender directive)

<sup>11</sup> Directive 2010/41/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 July 2010 on the application of the principle of equal treatment between men and women engaged in an activity in a self-employed capacity and repealing Council Directive 86/613/EEC

<sup>12</sup> Council Directive 92/85/EEC of 19 October 1992 on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health at work of pregnant workers and workers who have recently given birth or are breastfeeding

<sup>13</sup> Council Directive 2010/18/EU of 8 March 2010 implementing the revised Framework Agreement on parental leave concluded by BUSINESSEUROPE, UEAPME, CEEP and ETUC and repealing Directive 96/34/EC

<sup>14</sup> The Act No. 365/2004 on equal treatment in certain areas and protection against discrimination and the amendment of certain acts, "The Anti-discrimination Act"

<sup>15</sup> The Act No. 311/2001 – The Labour Code, as amended

*Action Plan for the Prevention and Elimination of Violence against Women 2014-2019* has been adopted recently.

Equality between men and women occupied a prominent position in the preparation of the 2014-2020 EU Structural and investment funds ("ESIF") programming period. It is addressed as one of three horizontal principles that must be followed when implementing projects. It is the ex-ante conditionality that must be met so that the country could utilize ESIF.

Despite the abovementioned formal equality (equality de jure) and adoption of important strategic and conceptual documents, it must be noted that inequalities between women and men persist in almost all areas of private and public life. Although there is no doubt that some progress has been made and positive results have been achieved, the Slovak republic continues to be bottom placed in the charts of composite indicators for gender equality in the EU<sup>16</sup> and the OECD countries. The proposed strategy therefore targets precisely those areas where the Slovak republic, in comparison with other EU countries, repeatedly shows major gender disparities.

## **Basic theoretical frameworks and assumptions**

**Gender equality or equality between women and men** stands for equal social status of men and women in all spheres of public and private life; its objective is to ensure full integration of all women and men into society based on individual merit and abilities. On a broader scale, this translates into fair treatment of women and men and taking their specific needs and life situations into account.

In the past two decades important shift occurred in the global (and European in particular) approach to the issues of women's rights which further reflected in relevant terminology. While in the 70s and 80s the discourse of advancing women's rights (the concept of "*women in development*") prevailed, following the 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 and the adoption of the Platform for Action the emphasis was placed on gender mainstreaming and elimination of gender disparities in the social status of men and women. Such change in paradigm was significant as the public interest regarding gender equality policies was no longer concerned with mere consequences, instead the naming of the structural causes of inequalities between men and women came into the forefront. These causes stem primarily from different social and cultural roles and expectations imposed on men and women by the society when it comes to both public and private life. Gender

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<sup>16</sup> E.g. the EU Gender Equality Index, created by the European Institute for Gender Equality in 2013, where the SR is placed 4th from the end

mainstreaming further implies that public policies do not solely focus on women and their problems, in fact they aim to equally address the disadvantages encountered by men as a result of the same rigid gender stereotypes.

While some EU countries with higher level of gender equality rely on gender mainstreaming as an approach and a tool, in the context of the Slovak republic the so called *dual approach* is still relevant:

- **gender mainstreaming**, as the cross-sectional principle, implies that all policies and provisions should take possible gender differences into account and integrate measures for their compensation;
- **specific support** for women or men in the areas where obvious disparities between certain groups of women or men exist (under the Antidiscrimination act, also known as the *affirmative action*).

Achieving gender equality is not possible as long as restrictions exist in certain areas of application of human rights for women or men. The dual approach also serves as a basis for the operational objectives of this strategy and the associated tasks as outlined in the related national action plan.

## Definitions<sup>17</sup>

**Sex** is the biological characteristic of human beings as men and women, it can be distinguished on the basis of genitalia, chromosomal and hormonal apparatus and secondary sexual characteristics. A person's sex is innate, biologically given and largely immutable.<sup>18</sup>

**Gender** refers to a concept of differences between men and women that are socially determined and perceived as natural, historically mutable, covering wide variations both within cultures as well as between them.<sup>19</sup> **Gender equality (Gender equality + gender equity)** is synonymous to equality between men and women, emphasizing that the ultimate objective is the equality in the social status of men and women by eliminating existing inequalities. It calls for fair treatment of women and men. This can mean both equal treatment and treatment that is different yet equivalent in terms of rights, benefits, obligations and opportunities. It is based on the principle according to which all human beings have the right to freely develop their abilities and make choices without the

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<sup>17</sup> For more definitions visit [www.gender.gov.sk](http://www.gender.gov.sk)

<sup>18</sup> EU definitions for gender equality published in the framework of the EC document *100 words for equality* [http://www.eduhi.at/dl/100\\_words\\_for\\_equality.pdf](http://www.eduhi.at/dl/100_words_for_equality.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> *ibid*

limitations imposed by the gender roles. Different behaviour, aspirations and needs of women and men are recognized, evaluated and taken into account and supported equally and without discrimination.<sup>20</sup> Gender equality therefore does not seek to suppress the natural biological differences and diversity, instead it aims to eliminate the hierarchy in the values and in the status of men and women.

**Gender mainstreaming** - the systematic integration and consideration of the situation, priorities and needs of women and men in all policies as a way of promoting equality between men and women. The impact of the proposed policies and measures on the situation of women and men should be already assessed in the planning phase<sup>21</sup>. Gender mainstreaming consists of reorganizing, improvement, development and evaluation of all decision-making processes in all areas of policy and in work process of the organization. The aim of applying the principle of gender mainstreaming is to take the perspective of gender relations in all decision-making processes into account, and to use any decision-making process in favour of gender equality.<sup>22</sup>

**Gender stereotypes** are simplified stereotypes about the quintessence, the (in)abilities and the roles of men and women, enacted in everyday life. The negative gender stereotypes are those that maintain one sex (typically women) in a subordinate position to the other sex and hinder the full personal development of women and men. The text primarily refers to negative gender stereotypes and their elimination.

**Discrimination against Women:** The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women defines discrimination against women as "any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital basis, on the basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field".<sup>23</sup>

**Gender relations:** Are socially and culturally conditioned relations between women and men in the society, in the area of distribution of rights and responsibilities, resources and benefits, power and privilege; simultaneously, these are also the power relations that manifest in the family, work and social life.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> ibid

<sup>21</sup> COM(96) 67 final: Communication from the Commission "Incorporating equal opportunities for men and women into all Community policies and activities

<sup>22</sup> The Council of Europe: Gender Mainstreaming: Conceptual Framework, Methodology and Presentation of Good Practices, 1998

<sup>23</sup> Convention on Elimination of Discrimination of Women, UN, 1979

<sup>24</sup> Glossary of gender terminology. Aspekt. <http://glosat.aspekt.sk>



**Gender inequality** reflects the differences between women and men in all areas, in terms of their participation, access, rights, remuneration or benefits.

**Gender differences** are the differences between women and men in terms of their participation, means of access, rights, and results in any area of public and private sphere; e.g. the inequality between women and men in their access to power, resources, social benefits, education, health or others.<sup>25</sup>

**Gender division of labour** is historically and culturally shaped and acquired division between paid and unpaid work whereby the paid work in the public sphere is rendered chiefly male, while unpaid work in the sphere of households and families is performed by women who also take responsibility for it. Gender division of labour is associated with unequal distribution of resources (financial in particular) and power between women and men, hence further disadvantaging women.

**Sexism**, in a broader sense, refers (similarly as racism) to discrimination based on sex or gender. Today, it is primarily used to express attitudes and behaviour which are degrading and dishonouring to one sex (usually women), highlighting the prejudices and negative gender stereotypes, thereby reducing their dignity. Various displays of sexism tend to be present in commercials or media images where women are displayed as goods or in situations contributing to and further perpetuating the discriminatory and stereotypical attitudes and prejudices.

**Unpaid work or reproductive work** - unlike the paid/productive work - covers a wide range of activities outside the formal labour market, it is not financially rewarded and tends to be performed to meet specific needs. These services include domestic work, child and other dependent care, voluntary work, informal help in the family enterprise etc. A significant part of human needs is met precisely via the outcomes of unpaid work.

**Feminization of poverty** refers to a phenomenon, when due to various reasons certain groups of women (e.g. women in single-mother households, widows etc.) tend to be at greater risk of poverty or suffering from poverty, and thus draws attention to the gender dimension of poverty. In relation to the risk of poverty among elderly women, particularly in the retirement age, we are talking about "the feminisation of poverty in old age."

**Intergenerational reproduction of poverty:** women generally have access to fewer resources as opposed to men; this applies to time as a resource and to freedom of choice. Due to gender roles in the household, gender inequality turns out to be the causal factor in cases of chronic poverty of all household members as well as in the intergenerational

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<sup>25</sup> STIEGLER, B., 2002: How to apply gender perspective. Gender Mainstreaming, concepts, arguments and practical examples of the implementation of the EU Strategy. Economic and socio-political research and consulting centre Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Bonn, Slovak translation by: O.Pietruchová and J.Cviková, published by Aspect 2002, ISBN 80-85549-32-8

reproduction of poverty. The more women live in need, the more children and elderly people in their care are also endangered. Gender inequality and poverty should therefore be understood as a chain reaction, possibly a vicious circle.

## **Fundamentals of the strategy**

*The National Strategy for Gender Equality in the Slovak republic and the related Action Plan for Gender Equality 2014-2019* stem from the basic strategic documents of the European Union and the Council of Europe. These bind the member states to adopt positive measures aimed at reaching gender equality<sup>26</sup>. Both documents simultaneously reflect the recommendations made by relevant international monitoring bodies as well as the commitments made by the Slovak republic itself as a response to these recommendations. Last but not least, the documents incorporate the tasks introduced in the *Partnership Agreement with Slovakia on using EU Structural and Investment Funds for growth and jobs in 2014* and the highlighted importance of equality between men and women as a horizontal principle, as well as the ex ante conditionality for utilizing the ESIF. Eventually, the strategy reflects the recommendations of the Council of the European Union made for the national programme of reforms of the Slovak Republic addressing areas relevant to gender equality.

## **Strategy for Equality between Women and Men in the European Union**

*The Strategy for Equality between Women and Men in the European Union*<sup>27</sup> represents a roadmap document created by the European Commission for the subject of equality between women and men for the years 2010 - 2015. The document represents both a framework and a commitment to the promotion of equality between women and men in all policy areas. The emphasis is on the contribution of gender equality towards the economic growth and sustainable development and to the promotion of the gender equality perspective in the *Europe 2020* strategy. The strategy follows up on the *Roadmap for equality between women and men (2006 – 2010)* and the *European pact for gender equality*. It introduces measures in five priority areas (already mentioned in the *Women's Charter*) and the sixth area addressing cross-sectional issues. Each priority area outlines key measures aimed at reaching progress while detailed proposals are available in the

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<sup>26</sup> A comprehensive list of documents can be found on the website [www.gender.gov.sk](http://www.gender.gov.sk)

<sup>27</sup> <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:0491:FIN:SK:PDF>

accompanying working documents of the Commission bodies. The priority areas of the EU strategy are defined as follows:

- equal economic independence;
- equal pay for equal work and work of equal value;
- equality in decision-making;
- dignity, integrity and an end to gender based violence;
- gender equality in external actions;
- horizontal issues.

### **Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2014-2017**

The Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy<sup>28</sup> was drafted and adopted at the level of the Council of Europe, addressing the following strategic objectives:

- combating gender stereotypes and sexism;
- preventing and combating violence against women;
- guaranteeing equal access of women to justice;
- achieving balanced participation of women and men in political decision-making;
- achieving gender mainstreaming in all policies and measures.

### **Recommendations of international monitoring bodies**

In a line with the article 17 of CEDAW the compliance with the Convention is monitored by the Committee for elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (hereinafter the “Committee”). The Slovak republic submitted a baseline report in 1999, the 2., 3. and 4. Periodic review in 2006, and the 5. and 6. Periodic review in 2014.

Recommendations formulated in the *Concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women: Slovak Republic*<sup>29</sup> were already available at the time of submission of the strategy. The Committee recommends to:

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<sup>28</sup> <https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=2105977&Site=CM>

<sup>29</sup> CEDAW/C/SVK/CO/4 Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the forty-first session, 30. Jun - 18 July 2008

- integrate the resolutions of the Convention into all relevant strategies and legislation using a cross-sectional approach, to introduce educational programmes aimed at advancing women's rights and presenting the objectives of the Convention, and to adopt measures supportive of awareness raising in women regarding their rights;
- use affirmative action towards greater progress in reaching real equality for women, specifically in decision making;
- strengthen institutional support for women and develop policies and programmes aimed at reaching gender equality in a more complex and effective manner and within the human rights framework;
- implement programmes on elimination of gender stereotypes;
- adopt comprehensive and cross-sectional measures aimed at addressing all forms of violence against women, including trafficking in women
- strengthen the efforts aimed at elimination of the horizontal and vertical professional segregation and the pay gap, and to support reconciliation of the family and work life of women and mainstream sensitization programs for men in favour of their greater participation in family duties;
- establish clear rules for the use of the conscientious objection for the medical professions in the area of sexual and reproductive health and rights, while ensuring unrestricted access to healthcare for women;
- ensure accessibility of information and sexual education for the youth and monitor the health providers in their application of the informed consent before sterilization procedure;
- adopt legislative measures in favour of fair division of the spouses' property after divorce, with an aim to ensure adequate security for single mothers;
- strengthen the cooperation of women's non-governmental organizations and their active participation in drafting, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of gender equality policies and programmes.

Largely similar recommendations were made by the *Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*<sup>30</sup>. The committee stressed the need for a more effective prevention of sexual harassment and the importance of unrestricted access to sexual and reproductive health

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<sup>30</sup> This committee oversees the performance of duties of States Parties to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

services, specifically highlighting the financial point of view and the need for strengthening the sexual education with an emphasis on prevention.

In the framework of the Universal periodic evaluation (hereinafter referred as the “UPE”) the Slovak republic was repeatedly addressed with a recommendation to adopt affirmative action in favour of increasing the participation of women in decision making, decreasing the gender pay gap, and elimination and prevention of discrimination of Roma women and girls. The UPE clearly stated that the measures to be adopted in favour of elimination and prevention of violence against women, including their exploitation, need to be comprehensive, and special attention needs to be paid to vulnerable groups of women and girls. In the second round of the UPE recommendations in 2014 the Slovak republic was addressed by the Holy See with a recommendation nr. 110.: which stressed the need to continue ensuring the option for conscientious objection for healthcare providers.

## **Strategic areas and priorities**

Gender inequalities in the work process as well as in other areas are caused by a number of factors. Among the most prominent ones are the traditional division of gender roles, low awareness of one’s rights and gender based inequalities, the absence of affirmative action and, last but not the least, the absence of services for better work-life balance support. The following areas, priorities and operational goals reflect the most noticeable problems and gender differences. It is the aim of this document to address these areas and issues and propose effective solutions.

### **1. Economic independence and the labour market**

Economic independence is a necessary condition for the ability of women to have control over their own lives and make decisions freely; it is similarly important for the stability of a family.

When it comes to the work process, women are often faced with **horizontal and vertical segregation**. In fact, the fields of healthcare, social services and education tend to be dominated by women, over four-fifths of the workforce in these sectors consist of women and it is three-fifths for the public policy sector. The private sector with higher average salaries only employs 41 % of women, and the greatest differences can be found among entrepreneurs where the ratio for women and men is 1:3.

Gender based segregation closely relates to lower average salaries for women since the **gender pay gap remains pervasive**. Women are more likely to be a low income group as their hourly wages do not even reach two-thirds of the median hourly wage of the Slovak economy. Despite good education background (the percentage of women with degrees is higher than in the case of men) women do not earn comparable sums since education in “typically women’s fields” is seen as less valued. The gender pay gap in the Slovak republic has been above the EU – 27 average though, in 2013 amounting to 17,9%.

The support for better work-life balance has been limited and significant barriers and shortcomings can be detected in the area. The most utilized measure aimed at reaching work-life balance is the flexible working hours option; alternative measures are largely absent. The care for children and other family members in most cases remains the responsibility of women due to pervasive gender stereotypes. Only very few men opt for parental leave. Due to their greater participation in the labour market while still predominantly in charge of care work and household duties, women today are increasingly burdened by both duties. Many of them provide care for their elderly family members without necessary equipment and supporting services. Stereotypes and related expectations often result in limiting one of the parents (typically the father) in his ability to participate in the care for his children; the post-divorce situations then tend to be specifically strenuous as custody becomes an issue.

**Parenthood and family are considered to be the most important values**. Yet, despite the declared support to parents and the focus on increase in childbirths, parenthood tends to impact men and women differently when it comes to employment and remuneration. Mothers of small children who are returning to work or applying for jobs belong to the most vulnerable groups in the labour market. It can be stated that a family with children below the age of six will have a significantly lower employment rate of women, whereas it is the opposite for men. The employment rate of women between 25-49 with a child below 6 is lower than 40%. However in the case of men of the same age and in the same stage of parenthood, the employment rate tends to be over 83%. The pay gap then widens with each additional child. One of the persisting reasons of the structural problems is thus the fact that the transition of women into the labour market has not been sufficiently accompanied with the transition of men into unpaid work in the household.

**Unpaid work and parenting** are not viewed as equally important as the formal economy and employment. No remuneration for the care work for the family members tends to be the common cause of unequal opportunities for women and men in relation to their careers as it negatively impacts women's opportunities in further education, in professions with

higher income, in participation in social dialogue and in enjoying social benefits<sup>31</sup>. On the other hand, the so called "Care economy" at a certain level of professionalization allows for increase in employment of women in particular. .

Women and men experience **poverty and social exclusion** differently. Women are at greater risk of poverty especially when it comes to single parent households and elderly women. The differences in remuneration along with other disadvantages in relation to the labour market, the large number of women outside the economy, more frequent and lengthier career breaks and the burden of unpaid work tend to result in lower lifelong savings and pensions which put women at greater risk of poverty later in life, and the risk of **feminization of poverty in older age**.

In the case of **Roma women from marginalized communities** the geographic-ethnic differences intersect and are reinforced by rigid gender norms along with other disadvantaging factors. Hence the disparities are even greater in the Roma population.

*Objective:* **1. Strengthening women's economic independence through elimination of gender disparities in the labour market**

*Operational objectives:*

- 1.1 Reducing of the gender pay gap by consistent application of and compliance with existing legislation;
- 1.2 Elimination of the horizontal and vertical segregation in the labour market;
- 1.3 Creation of systemic conditions and measures to reconcile work, family and private life, and thus increase women's employment;
- 1.4 Strengthening of the principle of equality and non-discrimination in the field of labour and social policy, with particular emphasis on disadvantaged and vulnerable groups such as the Roma women, migrant women and women with disabilities;
- 1.5 Demonstrating the economic contribution and the value of the unpaid work done (mainly) by women in the household and their care for close relatives, and promoting its balanced division between women and men;

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<sup>31</sup> INTERNATIONAL LABOUR OFFICE (ILO,2009): „Gender equality at the heart of decent work.“ Geneva

## **2. Participation in decision-making in the public and economic life**

The requirement for facilitation of equal opportunities for all people in the sphere of work or social life and ambitions regardless of gender, belongs to one of the fundamental principles of a democratic society. However, women remain **underrepresented in top management and on boards** of companies as well as in central government bodies. Over the years, both men and women have become more interested in elected posts in government and in parliament, which is reflected in an increasing number of male and female candidates in all types of elections. Yet, the percentage of successful women's candidates is generally lower than men's and as a result, women's involvement in the public life is much lower.

The Slovak labour market is among the most vertically segregated labour markets in Europe, meaning that women, despite their increasing participation in leadership and management, remain working in lower positions as opposed to men. Although the level of education in case of women is similarly high, it does not seem to reflect in earning promotions, unlike in the case of men. Poor utilization of women's intellectual potential is not only a loss for the women themselves but for the entire society.

*Objective:* **2. Reducing gender inequalities in participation of women and men in decision-making positions**

*Operational objectives:*

- 2.1 Increasing the representation of women in decision-making positions in political life, including their motivation and opportunities to run for office and participate in decision-making;**
- 2.2 Promoting women's entrepreneurship by creating systematic measures, including the support for reconciliation of work and family life;**
- 2.3 Increasing the representation of women in economic decision-making positions.**

## **3. Education, science and research**

In the mid-90s of the 20th century, the EU authorities began to pay more attention to the issue of underrepresentation of women in science and research. The EU further developed the discourse within the scope of several documents and placed the issue in the context of the equal opportunities policy.



Several studies have shown that vertical and horizontal segregation persists in the field of science and research and similarly in academic institutions - both in Europe as well as in the domestic context. Horizontal segregation already manifests at the level of university studies when it comes to decisions regarding one's field of study. Such tendencies are most apparent in technically oriented degrees that are considered to be typically male areas. Significant vertical gender segregation also reflects in the management of scientific, research and academic institutions.

Available statistical data confirms the presence of gender disparities in academic careers, thus proving the existence of gender imbalances in terms of academic careers as well as in management and decision-making. The proportion of women and men at different stages of a typical academic career in a public university shows that the higher the degree, the lower the percentage of women. Having said that, it is apparent that the higher the level of academic ranking, the lower the women's representation. A metaphor of the "leaky pipeline" presents a rather accurate portrayal of the situation. This pattern also applies to the higher management positions predominantly occupied by men, the position of the principal having the lowest women's representation.

Equal opportunities for women and men and gender equality in the field of science and research have a fundamental influence on the development of scientific knowledge and scientific institutions, including institutions of higher education. Achieving gender equality and taking full advantage of the creative potential of women and men without limitations imposed by gender roles is the key to ensuring competitiveness in science and research. Moreover, it is an important prerequisite for the Slovak republic's integration into the European Research Area. Not to mention that the application of the principle of equal opportunities and gender equality contributes significantly to the quality of research and to the development and strengthening of scientific and technological innovations. Equal opportunities are associated with excellence - as well as with wider applicability of the results<sup>32</sup>.

Although current legislation, particularly the *Education Act*, declares gender equality as one of the values promoted at schools, systemic education on the essence of gender equality, human rights as well as abuse and gender based violence prevention is still overlooked. Many **stereotypical images and attitudes towards men and women** were identified in the education process and textbooks.

Significant steps have been made in terms of building the knowledge base and research on gender equality recently. These will further serve as building blocks for future measures. Based on the government resolution, starting with 2008, the *Summary Report on the State of Gender Equality in the Slovak Republic* is compiled annually. Surely an important positive

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<sup>32</sup> E.g. the paper of the European Commission Women and Science. Excellence and Ino

development is the publication of data on gender inequalities by the *Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic* and the related launching of its website with up-to-date statistical data on gender equality issues. The abovementioned accomplishments should be viewed as fundamentals for designing a systematic approach to understanding the mechanisms and displays of inequalities and discrimination in both public and private life.

<b>Objective: 3. Improving gender equality in education, science and research</b>
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*Operational objectives:*

- 3.1 Improving the level of knowledge in the field of women's human rights and gender equality by ensuring continuous and comprehensive education in the framework of lifelong learning;**
- 3.2 Eliminating negative gender stereotypes in education;**
- 3.3 Creating a suitable environment and effective mechanisms for the implementation of gender equality in the field of science, research and higher education;**
- 3.4 Enhancing the knowledge on existing forms of inequalities between women and men by strengthening the research in this area as well as up-to-date gender statistics.**

## 4. Dignity and bodily integrity

The term “**gender-based violence**” refers to any act of violence or threat of violence which is the result of power inequalities stemming from rigid gender roles. The term “violence against women” is often used in international documents as a synonym since women and girls are exposed to much greater risk of gender-based violence than men.<sup>33</sup> Violence against women is also understood as a violation of human rights and a form of discrimination against women. It includes acts of gender-based violence that result in, or are likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological as well as economic harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts as coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.<sup>34</sup> The pervasiveness of this form of violence was highlighted in a study by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights<sup>35</sup>, according to which every third woman in the European Union has been a victim of physical or sexual violence at least once in her life past the age of 15.

The Slovak republic has adopted specific *National Action Plan for the Prevention and Elimination of Violence against Women for the Years 2014-2019*, as the topic is considered to be of substantial importance for the country. As a result, the subject of violence against women is not addressed extensively within the scope of this strategy.

Even though the attitudes of the public and relevant institutions in reference to violence against women improved in the last decade, hidden conditions still exist and facilitate the tolerance of violence against women. These include **sexualised and often sexist images of women** presented in media and advertising, hence violating their dignity and human rights. The media continues to administer and reproduce the prejudices and negative stereotypes of a typical male and female. This situation naturally affects the young generation, which is more vulnerable to misinterpret the "ideal" male and female portrayal and trust the distorted and often harmful images. Discrimination in its various forms often exists covertly and it is therefore necessary to sensitize the public and draw attention to the varied discriminatory practices.

Women and men often face **gender-specific health risks** which should be addressed and dealt with within the field of medical research and healthcare. Services related to reproductive health fall within a specific category and must be understood in the modern

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<sup>33</sup> Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, 2011, available at <http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/convention-violence/convention/Convention%20210%20Slovak.pdf>

<sup>34</sup> Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, 2011, available at <http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/standardsetting/convention-violence/convention/Convention%20210%20Slovak.pdf>

<sup>35</sup> [http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra-2014-vaw-survey-factsheet\\_sk.pdf](http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra-2014-vaw-survey-factsheet_sk.pdf)

human rights framework. It allows for adjusting to the specific needs of women and men, hence facilitating a more effective healthcare provision. Such gendered approach also relates to the provision of specialized social services to pregnant women in need and to raising awareness about organizations that provide these services.

**Objective: 4. Strengthening the autonomy and bodily integrity of women by eliminating the degrading and violent displays of their bodies**

*Operational objectives:*

- 4.1 Safeguarding the dignity of women in terms of public images of their bodies by eliminating sexism in the media;**
- 4.2 Increasing public sensitivity to the inequalities between men and women;**
- 4.3 Strengthening the elimination of violence against women and their children and ensuring effective protection, assistance and support to women experiencing violence, all in accordance with the Istanbul Convention;<sup>36</sup>**
- 4.4 Suppressing and prosecuting the acts of sexual harassment and sexual violence against women and men;**
- 4.5 Strengthening the personal autonomy of women in the area of sexual and reproductive health and rights within the framework of the universal and non-discriminatory access to these services.**

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<sup>36</sup> The operational objective is elaborated in detail in the National Action Plan for the elimination and prevention of violence against women for the years 2014-2019.

## **5. Legal framework and institutional mechanisms as gender equality guarantees**

The existing institutional framework is based on the participatory and formal mechanism at the level of state administration.

Following the amendment to the *Competence Act*, in October 2012 the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak republic (hereinafter "MLSAF") was designated as the central state administration body for gender equality, equal opportunities and coordination of the state policy in the field. The *Department of Gender Equality and Equal Opportunities* (hereinafter "DGEEO") of the MLSAF represents the country in various international bodies and advisory committees. Alongside its standard tasks, the DGEEO carries out the role of coordinator for the horizontal priority equal opportunities in the structural funds.

The *Government Council for Human Rights, National Minorities and Gender Equality* (hereinafter referred to as "Government Council"), as a participatory body, was established in 2011. According to its bylaw, the Government Council acts as the permanent consulting, expert, and coordinating body to the Government in relation to the subject of equal treatment and the principle of equality, including gender equality. The Government Council further monitors the national implementation of international commitments of the Slovak Republic in the field of human rights, particularly the obligations arising from international conventions, including related optional protocols ratified by the Slovak Republic. The Committee for Gender Equality, as one of the specialized committees of the Government Council, was established as an expert advisory body of the Government. The secretariat of the committee is a joint secretariat of three specialized committees and is based at MLSAF; it provides expert supervision for the work of the DGEEO Committee.

<b><i>Objective: 5. Ensuring cross-sectional and participatory institutional mechanisms to promote gender equality</i></b>
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*Operational objectives:*

- 5.1 Strengthening institutional support and expertise in the field of gender equality at the level of public administration as well as at the level of National Council of the Slovak Republic;**
- 5.2 Enhancing the sustainability and independence of NGOs active in the field of gender equality and women's human rights;**
- 5.3 Improving enforcement of compliance with the principle of equal treatment under the Antidiscrimination Act as well as strengthening the tools for its effective enforcement.**

## **6. International cooperation and development aid**

Commitment to gender equality and the establishment of institutional mechanisms to support it is crucial at the level of the European Union and the Council of Europe as well as in other international organizations to which the Slovak republic is a state party or a member state, such as the UN, OSCE, OECD and NATO. Membership in these organizations is an invaluable opportunity for gaining new knowledge and examples of good practices. Once transferred into domestic practice, these will help the Slovak republic in setting effective policies for better elimination of gender disparities in the social status of men and women.

On the other hand, the Slovak republic as a donor of international development aid has the opportunity – and following the EU rules it is also a commitment - to promote gender equality and human rights in the supported projects and to transfer examples of positive domestic practices to neighbouring and developing countries. Such ambition can be supported through engagement in international activities and projects at the level of the European Union, the Council of Europe and other institutions.

The upcoming Presidency of the Slovak Republic in the EU Council in 2016 presents an important context for the implementation of the principle of equal treatment, including gender equality in legislative and other activities of the EU. It is also an opportunity for the country to participate in shaping and implementing EU policies in this area, not only as a member state but also as the Presidency of the Council of the EU, especially in the context of the implementation of the new EU strategy for gender equality. The current strategy for the years 2010-2015 is close to an end. In the context of the current debate on the review of the Europe 2020 strategy, with active involvement of the Slovak republic, the Slovak presidency will have an opportunity for introducing activities aimed at highlighting gender equality in the framework of the strategy.

<i>Objective:</i> <b>6. Gender mainstreaming in international cooperation</b>
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*Operational objectives:*

- 6.1 Ensuring effective cooperation in the field of gender equality at the level of the European Union, the Council of Europe and other organizations;**
- 6.2 In the framework of the Slovak Presidency in the Council of the European Union integrating the gender equality agenda as an essential part of public policies and using this opportunity to enhance gender equality in EU policies;**
- 6.3 Implementing gender mainstreaming in development aid**

## List of abbreviations

AA	The Antidiscrimination Act (The Act No. 365/2004 on equal treatment in certain areas and protection against discrimination and the amendment of certain acts, also known as The Anti-discrimination Act)
CEDAW	Convention on Elimination of Discrimination of Women Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
CE	Council of Europe
CLH	Centre for Legal Help
CTUSR	Confederation of the Trade Unions of Slovak Republic
DGEE0	Department of Gender Equality and Equal Opportunities
EIGE	European Institute for Gender Equality
EK	European Commission
ESF	European Social Fund
ESIF	European structural and investment funds
EU	European Union
GC	Government Council for Human Rights, National Minorities and Gender Equality
HPEMW	Horizontal principle equality between men and women
ILFR	Institute for Labour and Family Research
KMC	Coordination-methodical Centre for violence against women and domestic violence
LI	Labour Inspectorate
MC SR	Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic
MESRS SR	Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic
MJ SR	Ministry of Justice of the Slovak Republic
MLSAF	Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic
MFEA SR	Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic
NFM	Norwegian Financial Mechanism
MH SR	Ministry of Health of the Slovak Republic

MI SR	Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic
NLI	National Labour Inspectorate
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NP IGE	National Project Institute for Gender Equality
NPO	Non-profit organization
OP	Operational programme
OP ESI	Operational programme Employment and social inclusion
OP HR	Operational programme Human resources
OP RI	Operational programme Research and innovation
SB SR	State budget of the Slovak republic
SCSTI	Slovak Centre of Science and Technical Information
SK PRES	Presidency of the Slovak republic in the Council of the European Union (II. Half of 2016)
SNCHR	Slovak National Centre for Human Rights
SO SR	Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic
SR	Slovak republic
SRDA	Slovak Research and Development Agency
UN	United Nations
UPE	Universal periodic evaluation
PSRGDCS	Plenipotentiary of the Slovak Republic Government for the Development of Civil Society
PSRGRC	Plenipotentiary of the Slovak Republic Government for Roma Communities
LLOSAF	Local Labour Office, Social Affairs and Family
COLSAF	Central Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family
PDR	Public Defender of Rights
CGE	Committee for Gender Equality of the Government Council for Human Rights, National Minorities and Gender Equality
SGR	Self-governing region
LC	Labour code