

Plenary II: Women's Employment and Entrepreneurship and Social Protection

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Dear Ladies, dear colleagues,

On behalf of both of the German associations hosting the W20 summit next year, I would like to welcome everyone here today and offer you all best wishes from Germany.

Both the VdU (Association of German Women Entrepreneurs) as well as the National Council of German Women's Organizations attended and were heavily involved in the first W20 conference in Turkey in 2015. The same can be said for the continuation of the W20's dialog process here in Xi'an. As the National Council of German Women's Organizations cannot be here personally this year, I am happy to present their statement and key concerns.

Our organizations have heavily supported the aims of this outreach group right from the start. We want to play an active role in establishing this dialog network between representatives of female civil society to make it sustainable and strong.

As a business association which has been striving for better conditions for women in business and society for over 60 years, we wholeheartedly support all efforts to establish the W20 dialog process as a strong and international women's forum.

Economic empowerment for women in all its forms has always been our core concern. Since our foundation, we have fought for more managerial responsibility for women: More women in leadership positions, more women in STEM occupations, more female employment, and of course a better framework for all of this: Specifically, better childcare infrastructure, fewer financial disincentives.

Today, every third self-employed individual in Germany is female. This is a good start, but we are not satisfied yet! There are still more men than women taking the first step into self-employment and entrepreneurship. And it is exactly in those areas that offer big economic potential, and which are one of the most important topics of the W20 under the heading of digitalisation, that women can achieve so much more. Here, there is definitely still room for improvement in comparison with men.

According to all the figures, in Germany, women predominantly run smaller businesses. They are mainly active in the service industry and rarely in manufacture or bigger companies.

In management, too, women in Germany are still underrepresented. They are still not as prevalent in executive levels as we would like. The percentage of women on the supervisory boards of these companies lies at around 21 percent, and just 5 percent on the executive boards.

The National Council of German Women's Organizations represents a large majority of employed women. In the employment market and social politics sectors, special attention is given to securing women's independent livelihood. However, the current situation in the highly developed industrial nation of Germany means that we are still a long way off achieving this goal:

Women in our country have never been as well educated as they are today: They graduate with better school and academic qualifications but are still met with many obstacles on their lifelong career path: In 2015 the gender pay gap amounted to 20 percent – this means women earned on average 20 percent less than men – and received 60 percent less retirement pension.

We are not just dealing with a great injustice here, but we are also left dealing with a serious economic problem, too. Because women are still carrying out the lion's share of unpaid care work, receiving less taxable income, are left out of economic decision-making processes to a large extent and have restricted access to capital, both the national and global economy lose out on significant creative and productive potential.

The solutions are simple and profitable. The National Council of German Women's Organizations is therefore calling for the state to create a framework for the compatibility of family and career for everyone – women and men:

- A nationwide high quality childcare system accessible for all and orientated to the needs of mothers/fathers and families.
- A flexible working hours model with part-time and full-time phases with the goal of securing a living wage.
- An increase to a crisis-proof minimum wage in the low-wage sector
- Abolition of employment outside of social security obligations
- Equal pay
- Poverty-proof retirement pensions

In addition to this, society needs a change of mentality for a fairer distribution of care and gainful employment between the sexes.

The National Council of German Women's Organizations and the Association of German Women Entrepreneurs are in agreement that the following factors will strengthen economic equality for women:

- ✓ Encouraging gainful employment
- ✓ Expanding the scope of employment
- ✓ Harmonising occupational biographies from men and women

- ✓ Improving work-life-compatibility
- ✓ Providing opportunities for advancement
- ✓ Promoting STEM occupations
- ✓ More women in leadership positions
- ✓ More business women
- ✓ More capital participation from women
- ✓ Supplier Diversity Programs for women-owned business enterprises

As we are talking about appropriate measures and our experiences with the difficulties of their actual implementation, I would like to introduce the example of the women's quota in Germany.

After decades of intensive discussion among women, their associations and political parties, a law was passed stipulating a 30 percent quota for the supervisory boards of listed and codetermined companies. In Germany this affects around 100 stock corporations. These companies are also required to set their own targets to increase the percentage of women at their highest executive levels. This affects around 3,500 companies in Germany.

This is by no means unaccomplishable, but the journey has been long and difficult. Until recently, there was strong opposition from both economy and politics. As the only business association to do so, the VdU (Association of German Women Entrepreneurs) declared itself in favour of the introduction of a quota, and joined forces with five other women's associations and politicians from all German parties to create an initiative. Without the determined and unwavering support from this alliance, and from many other women – and men – the quota would surely have not been enforced.

Now it all depends on whether the quota works, and actually boosts the number of women in leadership roles. Through this fixed quota, an additional 200 women will enter the supervisory boards of large companies. Regarding the implementation of self-determined targets for more women at managerial level, as women from both the Association of German Women Entrepreneurs and National Council of German Women's Organizations, we will not give up our efforts, but continue to demand significant and continual progress.

Networking, continuity and publicity are decisive factors for the success in our efforts to achieve equal economic participation for women on an international level. This is why the W20 is an important forum, and this is why we should commit to working together to promote the W20.

Thank you very much!