



G20 Conference on Women's Empowerment

Santa Margherita Ligure, August 26, 2021

Chair's Statement



The Italian Presidency of the G20 convened today, August 26 2021, in Santa Margherita Ligure, the first G20 conference on Women's Empowerment. The Conference was planned after years of international and national initiatives on gender equality, and at the peak of the 2021 Italian Presidency of the G20, during which the issue of women's empowerment has been addressed by the various G20 *workstreams*. The Conference brought together Ministers responsible for equal opportunities from G20 members and guest countries, representatives from Institutions, delegations from the most relevant international organizations as well as high-level representatives of official G20 engagement groups and social partners.

Building upon previous efforts, the Conference succeeded in its original aim of bringing together diverse inputs to favour a systemic, structured, and crosscutting approach to the issue of women's empowerment within the international context of the G20. Fundamental inputs coming from the work carried on in 2021 under the G20 Italian Presidency by Ministerial meetings, by Women20 and G20 Empower, by ad hoc working groups set up within Civil20 and Business20 were considered, along with major studies and analyses provided by the ILO and OECD.

The choice to organize such an event for the first time arises from the awareness of the need to develop a coordinated response between G20 countries to the global challenge of promoting female roles in society and women's empowerment also in the light of the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, the ongoing crisis and its socio-economic effects have disproportionately affected women, especially with reference to those economic sectors (such as catering, hospitality, services) often characterized by a high rate of informality and in which women are over-represented. This condition appears even more serious in developing countries, already affected by a high level of job and educational precariousness, by a scarce dissemination of social protection tools and by a lack of adequate systems capable of effectively protecting rights, especially concerning women, girls and children. Moreover, across the world women represent the majority of health workers, the sector that was hit more than others by the response to the emergency of the pandemic. It is equally important to mention how the pandemic has further emphasized the existence of inequalities in health systems, underlining the necessity to increasingly approach medicine with a gender lens. Lastly, violence against women and girls has increased. It is a proper emergency and thus requires adequate responses.

The Italian Presidency of the G20 has focused its efforts on promoting an inclusive and sustainable economic recovery in line with the Sustainable Development Goals defined in the UN 2030 Agenda and with the purpose of gathering opportunities for positive change. To reach this goal, female talent needs to be fully employed on a global scale, promoting policies to foster full and equal participation of women in our society and economy. Therefore, the education of girls, the promotion of female leadership, the overcoming of gender stereotypes and the strengthening of adequate social and educational structures remain fundamental factors.

This is needed so that it will ultimately be possible to bring about a change of pace that will guarantee the full contribution of women to the advancement of human rights and to the global development.

Participants gathered to discuss strategies to successfully achieve women's empowerment at global level across sectors, with a particular focus on two outstanding thematic strains:

- STEM, digital and financial literacy and environment and sustainability;
- Labour and economic empowerment and work-life balance.

The diversity of contributions brought to the Conference allowed to define an integrated social, working, cultural and economic vision.



Call for the protection of women in Afghanistan

At the meeting on the condition of women in Afghanistan it was considered what happened in that country since august 2021 with the institutional crisis that followed, and that presents serious threats to the civil population, and in particular to the safety, development and the role of women. In recent days, there has been a rapid deterioration in the conditions of the Afghan population, whose personal safety and security now requires a strengthened commitment from the entire international community and G20 members. In particular, women and girls are at serious risk of being subjected to renewed violence and violation of their human rights and fundamental freedoms, in a difficult conflict situation and a major humanitarian emergency in which gender dignity and rights are clearly in danger. It is important that the steps forward obtained for women rights over the years are upheld and recognized to Afghan society. The risks of forced mobility of women and girls, lack of access to essential services, with specific reference to health care and education, and violence and abuses, including children and early and forced marriages testify to the importance of acting decisively and in a coordinated and effective manner to ensure the protection of the most vulnerable. Now more than ever, women and girls urgently need the support and the action of the G20 to ensure that their rights are guaranteed, to prosecute offenders responsible for violations, to prevent further actions against women.

STEM, digital and financial literacy and environment and sustainability

Participants acknowledged that several factors still undermine women's empowerment and fuel the persistence of stereotypes that affect the full affirmation and autonomy of women in our society. Recognizing and countering these barriers remains a key target for G20 countries.

Participants acknowledged the persistence of a gender digital gap (both in terms of access to digital platforms and development of new skills, such as financial literacy) and a low participation of women in STEM disciplines. The need to address the barriers for women and girls in STEM industries starts with promoting STEM education for girls in early education through into secondary school. Then, followed by providing clear pathways to adolescent girls as they move into further education or training for employment. There was a common agreement on the need to strengthen and develop dedicated measures to ensure that women can fully exploit emerging job opportunities through digital transformation processes. Furthermore, it was discussed about the role of UNESCO in sustaining women and girls' education and supporting women journalist.

Financial literacy plays a pivotal role in guaranteeing the economic independence of women and in promoting female entrepreneurship initiatives, also thanks to the simplification of access to credit. STEM disciplines are also a prerequisite for seizing the new opportunities generated by the acceleration of the digital and green transition that the pandemic has brought about. However, a gender difference remains both in the number of STEM graduates and in employment and participation in STEM sectors, which are characterized by high productivity and better job prospects. In promoting a greater participation of women in these educational paths and their inclusion in related sectors of the labour market, it is essential removing all gender stereotypes that still persist.

The inclusion of women and girls in STEM disciplines is also functional to the promotion of a gender perspective in the development of the technologies necessary for energy transition, environmental preservation and the fight against climate change. It will be necessary to increase the inclusion of women in leadership position and in the decision-making processes of policies related to the environment and sustainability, also in consideration of the different effects that environmental factors and climate change have on the female population. Likewise, equal opportunities should be guaranteed in the energy sector, also recognizing the essential role of access to energy in development processes.



Labour and economic empowerment and work-life balance

Women continue to face significant barriers to their full participation in the work sphere, having to endure more insecure and low paid working conditions, without access to adequate social protection. Women's economic empowerment requires removing remaining barriers to being a mother and professional worker, guaranteeing the opportunity of balancing both options for those who wish to. The participants of the Conference agreed on the need to further strengthen efforts and policy actions aimed at closing gender gaps in the labour market and in particular the pay inequality, to remove all obstacles that actually impede women's access to leadership roles and to support female entrepreneurship.

The spread of smart working, brought about by the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, has the potential to support the improvement of a better work-life balance and to increase productivity at work. However, unregulated use of agile work raises several critical issues in terms of physical and mental health and well-being, safety (including the risk of domestic violence), working hours and equal treatment and opportunities among who works remotely and those who carry out their work at the office. It is therefore essential to encourage measures and policies aimed at preventing remote work from exacerbating an additional segmentation of the labour market to the detriment of women, leading to new forms of inequality. Moreover, participants agreed that it is crucial to foster instruments able to favour an equitable distribution of unpaid care and domestic work between men and women and a broad application of parental leave.

Indeed, the labour and economic empowerment of women are strongly intertwined with the achievement of an adequate and satisfactory work-life balance. Gender parity still needs a new equilibrium between paid work and family responsibilities, as well as of an adequate network of education, social and care services. Women's empowerment requires the overcoming of the obliged choice between being mother or professional worker, guaranteeing the opportunity of balancing both options.

Based on these considerations, participants newly highlighted the significance of the adoption of the Roadmap Towards and Beyond the Brisbane Target by the 2021 Labour Ministers.

Future perspectives

Participants have convened that the achievement of full gender parity needs a global agenda, addressing all the different aspects of women's lives with systemic and cross-cutting policies. Such a global transformative agenda requires a high degree of multilateral coordination, that should be promoted by appropriate institutional arrangements, effective both at a national and international level.

Participants believe that a concrete and structured approach to women's empowerment needs monitoring and evaluation tools based on indicators. The Brisbane Roadmap, adopted under the Italian Presidency, represents a first important example. In this regard, it was discussed the opportunity to broaden (beyond Brisbane) and strengthen the monitoring and evaluating tools with the support of OECD and ILO. Likewise, front-row actors such as G20 engagement groups and social partners represent precious players for discussion.

Participants fully support G20 Empower's activities for the future and promote initiatives to work on gender equality by collaborating with the private sector.

Participants acknowledged the urgency of promoting women's empowerment throughout an integrated and shared strategy that includes all sectors of civil society, institutions, the world of culture and work.

Participants convened on the importance to give continuity to a specific ministerial meeting dedicated to women's empowerment in the G20 framework. This Conference represents the first important step of this path.