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NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
Subject:	Draft Council Conclusions on Advancing Gender Equality in the AI-Driven Digital Decade: 6th horizontal review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action by the Member States and the EU institutions

Delegations will find attached a set of draft Council Conclusions on "Advancing Gender Equality in the AI-Driven Digital Decade: 6th horizontal review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action by the Member States and the EU institutions" prepared by the Presidency.

This document will be discussed by the Social Questions Working Party on 18 March 2025.

The report prepared by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) will be distributed in due course as an addendum to the present document (ST 6534/25 ADD 1).

Procedure

The Presidency hopes that an agreement on these Conclusions can be reached in two meetings. Delegations are therefore invited to make every effort to develop their positions in good time, with a view to holding a productive discussion at the meeting on 18 March.

**Draft Council Conclusions on Advancing Gender Equality in the AI-Driven Digital Decade:
6th horizontal review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action by the
Member States and the EU institutions**

ACKNOWLEDGING THAT

1. Gender equality and human rights are at the core of European values. Equality between women and men is a fundamental principle of the European Union, enshrined in the Treaties and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.
2. It is crucial to ensure equal opportunities for both women and men as well as the promotion and protection of, and respect for, the full enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, which are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated and are essential for the empowerment of women and girls. The full realisation of the United Nations' Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the vigorous implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) in the EU's internal and external policies are an integral part of this process and approach.
3. The UN Sustainable Development Goal (SGD) 5.B on gender equality underlines the need to "Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women".¹ The SDGs and the Beijing Platform for Action both aim to achieve a more sustainable and equitable society.
4. The year 2025 marks an important moment for gender equality and women's rights as the international community celebrates the 30th anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action as well as the 20th anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. Various strategic frameworks with relevance to gender equality are also expiring, including the Commission's Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, the EU Gender Action Plan (GAP III) and the EU Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (2019-2024), as well as the EU Anti-racism Action Plan 2020-2025 and the Commission's LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025.

¹ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs: Sustainable Development Goal 5.

ACKNOWLEDGING

5. The importance of continuing with a dual approach to gender equality, established as a major global strategy for the promotion of gender equality in the Beijing Platform for Action, combining the systematic integration of a gender perspective into all EU policies and activities (gender mainstreaming) with specific measures.
6. The crucial role of, and the importance of continued cooperation with, civil society organisations, including youth activists, women's organisations, and women human rights defenders, in promoting women's rights and gender equality in order to achieve the objectives of the Beijing Platform for Action.

ACKNOWLEDGING THAT

7. In the face of numerous existing and emerging challenges to socio-economic development of the EU, achieving gender equality is essential for building an inclusive and resilient society and a competitive economy.

RECALLING THAT

8. The EU has now introduced its first-ever comprehensive law aimed at fighting violence against women and domestic violence. Directive (EU) 2024/1385 criminalises certain forms of violence against women, both offline and online, and requires Member States to implement robust measures for prevention, to strengthen protection and support for victims, to facilitate their access to justice, and to ensure coordination and cooperation between authorities.
9. The EU's accession to the Istanbul Convention represents a decisive step forward in strengthening the legal framework for combatting violence against women and domestic violence within the Union. This further complements the EU's broader efforts to combat violence, to ensure gender equality and to protect women in vulnerable situations.
10. With Regulation (EU) 2024/1689 laying down harmonised rules on artificial intelligence (hereinafter 'AI Act'), the Union has adopted the first ever legal framework on AI, positioning itself as a global leader in this area. Meanwhile, the Council of Europe has recently developed a legally binding Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence to address the potential risks that AI poses to human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

11. The Digital Services Act (hereinafter ‘DSA’) aims to create a safer online environment for consumers and companies in the Union, with a set of rules designed, notably, to address illegal content and products, hate speech and disinformation. Meanwhile, the Audiovisual Media Services Directive has put in place mechanisms to protect children and tackle hate speech more effectively.
12. The European Declaration on Digital Rights and Principles for the Digital Decade puts people at the centre of the digital transformation and aims to promote principles for the digital transformation, in line with shared European values and law.

NOTING THAT

13. The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE)’s report ‘Beijing + 30: The horizontal Review of the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in the EU Member States’ which presents the main trends, current progress, and major challenges in the field of gender equality in the EU, stresses that advances in institutional mechanisms underpin progress in all other areas of the BPfA. Institutional mechanisms are thus vital for achieving gender equality.²
14. According to EIGE’s report, while the DSA and the AI Act are landmarks in the field of digital regulation, they fall short of addressing certain gender-specific concerns, including the negative impacts of social media on women and girls and specific challenges that women face when AI technology is deployed.
15. As the Commission has underlined in its Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, “Online violence targeting women has become pervasive with specific, vicious consequences. ... Bullying, harassment and abuse on social media have far-reaching effects on women's and girls’ daily lives.” According to EIGE’s report, online violence disproportionately affects women in positions of power, particularly young women and women belonging to groups that face discrimination. Women politicians and journalists experience higher levels of online harassment, which creates a chilling effect, discouraging women from entering or pursuing these occupations, and further limiting their representation.

² 6534/25 ADD 1.

16. In its report, EIGE highlights the fact that “significant gaps in the comprehensiveness of data and research hinder a complete understanding of challenges such as gender discrimination, bias and stigmatisation in the digital realm – especially from an intersectional perspective.” This lack of data hinders the development of efficient policy responses to the risks that young girls and women face online.
17. The Commission recognises in its Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 that “the role of young women in particular has been remarkable in leading the push for change” in climate change adaptation. EIGE’s report recognises this engagement while also underlining the troubling fact that the backlash against environmental initiatives “often aligns with the rise of authoritarian movements that embrace a blend of climate denial, racism and misogyny.”
18. Online platforms have emerged as critical arenas where both women’s rights campaigners and other groups work to advance their agendas. Content moderation algorithms often show biases, and the lack of transparency in the underlying decision-making process makes it difficult to identify and address discriminatory practices.
19. EIGE has previously noted that cyber violence “can be exacerbated when it is committed on the grounds of gender in combination with other factors, including age, ethnic or racial origin, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, religion or belief.”³

³ Combating Cyber Violence against Women and Girls, EIGE, 2022.

20. Artificial intelligence (AI) offers great opportunities, such as increasing productivity growth or bringing solutions to gender specific health conditions, but certain applications and uses may also cause harm and pose risks to individuals' fundamental rights and other public interests. The Commission's Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 warns that "While AI can bring solutions to many societal challenges, it risks intensifying gender inequalities. Algorithms and related machine-learning, if not transparent and robust enough, risk repeating, amplifying or contributing to gender biases that programmers may not be aware of or that are the result of specific data selection."⁴ AI systems trained on data containing gender stereotypes may produce outputs (text, images, videos) that reinforce and amplify those stereotypes, for example, by associating men and women with particular occupations and competencies, or by implying that men are more productive than women, or by placing women in caregiving roles. The under-representation in the AI sector of women and other groups exposed to discrimination, notably in the design and development of AI systems, further increases such risks.
21. The digital divide, including the gender digital divide, in the use of AI systems can also intensify discrimination and under-representation. Studies have shown the prevalence of gender bias and a combination of gender and racial bias in AI systems across different industries. Such biases can lead to lower quality of service for women and racial minorities as well as to inequalities in terms of resource allocation, the provision of information, and opportunities. AI can produce discriminatory outputs, such as bias against women in recruitment processes or loan screenings. On the other hand, when using clear, non-biased rules and accurate data, AI may in fact be less prone to bias than human decision-making.
22. The use of AI, specifically generative AI, can exacerbate the threats of cyber violence experienced by women and girls. Generative algorithms can automate the generation of offensive messages, and facilitate the scalability and sustainability of online harassment, such as the sharing of personal information known as doxxing, or the sharing of image-based sexual abuse.

⁴ 6678/20.

23. Generative AI can also create false images, videos or audio of a person, such as deepfakes including deepnudes, thus enabling the non-consensual sharing of manipulated material. Furthermore, virtual reality universes, whose design can mimic the physical world, can be misused as spaces for sexual abuse and violence. In such spaces generative AI may be exploited to manipulate or create virtual avatars for malicious purposes, particularly targeting women and girls, including through virtual rape.
24. At the same time, AI systems can also help detect and prevent gender-based cyber violence, for example, by detecting instances of such violence on online platforms.
25. This set of conclusions builds on previous work and political commitments voiced by the Council, the Commission and the European Parliament and relevant stakeholders in this area, including the documents listed in the Annex.

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION CALLS ON THE MEMBER STATES, in accordance with their competences and taking into account national circumstances and respecting the role and autonomy of the social partners, TO:

26. Continue to strengthen the effectiveness of governmental gender equality structures by placing them at the highest possible level in the government, and by providing them with a strong, clearly defined gender equality mandate and with adequate human and financial resources, and to ensure the effective implementation of and sufficient funding for national gender equality strategies, including both gender mainstreaming in all policy areas and specific measures.
27. Foster the effective functioning of cross-sectoral coordination in order to enhance gender mainstreaming, networking and cooperation.
28. Introduce awareness-raising campaigns on the rights and protections for citizens set out in the Directive on violence against women and domestic violence and the Directives on Standards for Equality Bodies (Directive (EU) 2024/1499 and Directive (EU) 2024/1500) as well as in AI Act and the DSA.

29. Ensure the timely implementation of the Directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence, including its provisions on cyberviolence such as deepfakes, as well as the Directive's comprehensive provisions on protection and support, including on specialist support services for victims of cyberviolence.
30. Empower Equality Bodies to identify risks to gender equality posed by AI and to assist victims of discrimination stemming from AI, including in court, within the framework of the recently adopted Directives establishing standards for Equality Bodies as well as in the context of possible powers for equality bodies under the AI Act and ensure that their resources are adequate.
31. Ensure that action plans against gender-based violence provided for in the Directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence, include targeted measures for tackling online and digital violence, such as technology-facilitated gender-based violence, including non-consensual intimate image sharing, deepfakes, cyberbullying, cyber-stalking, and online harassment.
32. Provide education and training opportunities to enable all girls and boys, women and men in their respective diverse situations and conditions, to gain or advance further in their education and training, including digital literacy so as to boost their future prospects and to ensure that all groups benefit from digital opportunities for career advancement.
33. Promote gender-sensitive life-long learning and training opportunities designed to improve digital skills and knowledge including with regard to the benefits and disadvantages of AI use, for women of all ages, including via apprenticeships, online training, mentorship or other routes that take into account, including from an intersectional perspective, the various disadvantages that they may face, such as the gender digital divide, caregiving duties, and limited internet access.
34. Take appropriate measures to protect all internet users, with a specific focus on young users, from harmful online content, including AI-generated content such as deepfakes, AI-generated child sexual abuse material or AI-powered doxxing or harassment.

35. Take steps to combat misogynistic attitudes and behaviour and to counter the growing divide between young women and men's views regarding gender equality and women's rights. This can include awareness-raising, including online, especially among the young, concerning healthy, non-violent and gender-equal relationships . Awareness-raising from a gender perspective is also needed on subjects such as well-being, conditions of success in work and private life, and mental health.
36. Involve national statistics agencies, academia and research centres as well as media and digital companies in measuring access to gender-sensitive digital learning programmes, monitoring women's employment in ICT, STEM and emerging digital fields, evaluation of AI biases in workforce management, tracking working conditions in the media and digital sectors and assessing stereotypical portrayals of women and men in the media, including in social media and video games.

CALLS ON THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION AND THE MEMBER STATES, in accordance with their respective competences and respecting the role and autonomy of the social partners, TO:

37. Strengthen measures to ensure the achievement of the objectives set out in the Beijing Platform of Action, as well as the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, by applying the dual approach to gender equality by pursuing specific gender equality policies and measures while also systematically integrating a gender mainstreaming perspective throughout policies (including digital policies), programmes and budgets, so as to detect and effectively reduce gender gaps in all domains.
38. When implementing relevant policies, including the provisions of the DSA and of the Directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence, adopt a unified approach to cyber violence by harmonising definitions and collecting comparable data.
39. Explore the full potential of the existing EU gender equality acquis to ensure equal treatment in the AI-driven digital decade, including in particular Directives 2004/113/EC (equal treatment of women and men in access to and supply of goods and services) and 2006/54/EC (equal treatment and opportunities for women and men in employment matters). The Member States could reinforce the implementation of these Directives, while the Commission could further explore how to maximise their potential to fight discrimination caused by AI systems in the area of employment and beyond.

40. Consider initiating further measures to act against online violence with the wider aim of effectively eliminating all forms of gender-based violence and discrimination, in particular multiple discrimination, including intersectional discrimination.
41. Encourage girls, boys, women and men to choose educational fields and occupations in accordance with their abilities and skills, so as to increase women's participation in STEM fields and men's share in occupations such as early childhood education and care. Address the structural factors that discourage women from pursuing careers in the ICT/AI sectors, including gender stereotypes and the lack of flexible working arrangements.
42. Encourage men and boys to engage fully, as agents and beneficiaries of change, with the aim of eliminating all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls in both the public and private spheres. With this in mind, address the root causes of gender inequality, such as unequal power relations, gender stereotypes and negative social norms, including by placing a renewed focus on critical media literacy and countering misinformation and disinformation.
43. Actively promote gender-sensitive research on the media, digital industries and the digital transformation, including through the collection, analysis and communication of data disaggregated by sex and, where appropriate, other relevant characteristics. Invest into interdisciplinary research on non-discriminatory algorithms and into strategies to safeguard equality in the use of algorithmic systems.
44. Reinforce systematic cooperation and strategic partnerships with the European and national social partners, civil society organisations, women's organisations and women's human rights defenders and academia when designing, implementing and evaluating digital policies.
45. Foster partnerships with businesses and business organisations in the digital field (notably AI), including the ICT industry, and media and social media companies, as well as in all other relevant sectors, including healthcare, education, engineering, finance and agriculture, with a view to systematically promoting gender equality from within in the context of digitalisation, notably AI.

46. Regularly follow up on all the Beijing Platform for Action indicators approved by the Council in order to systematically monitor progress, making full use of the expertise and outputs of EIGE and Eurostat. Strengthen the effective use of these indicators in EU and national gender equality policies and in all other relevant policy areas, and seek to make all relevant statistics widely available.

CALLS ON THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION TO:

47. Continue to support gender equality as a political priority throughout its current term (2024-2029) and ensure the follow-up and delivery of its current Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, including the facilitation of a framework for cooperation between internet platforms to protect women's safety online, possibly in the form of a DSA Code of Conduct, that would also address AI-generated gender-based cyber violence.
48. Adopt a Communication setting out a stand-alone high-level EU gender equality strategy for the period post-2025, including both specific measures and the integration of a gender perspective into EU policies and activities.
49. Pursue gender equality, with a high level of ambition, as a policy priority in all EU external relations and consider adopting a new EU Gender Action Plan in 2026.
50. Apply an intersectional approach in the future gender equality strategy and other future antidiscrimination strategies.
51. Systematically mainstream a gender perspective into all future EU policies and legislation, including in the domain of digital policies and especially in the upcoming AI Strategy and the STEM Education Strategic Plan, in order to address gender biases in algorithms, combat stereotypes and promote the equal representation and participation of women. Where online platforms are concerned, it is important that women and men are equally represented as content creators. It is also important to ensure gender balance in decision-making, including in the management of the companies that run online platforms and in companies that develop and deploy AI.

52. CONTINUE to monitor and support the correct transposition and application of the relevant requirements under the Audiovisual Media Services Directive, the DSA, the AI Act and the Directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence, so as to ensure the effective protection of minors, particularly girls, from illegal and harmful content available online.
53. Support the mainstreaming of gender equality in the implementation of the AI Act, including through its focus on fundamental rights, and ensure in this regard that upcoming implementing measures include a strong focus on gender equality and gender-based cyber violence. Relevant measures include Codes of Practice, guidelines for high-risk AI systems and related use cases, and the template questionnaire to be developed for the Fundamental Rights Impact Assessment (FRIA) under the AI Act.
54. Continue to leverage the implementation of the DSA to advance women and girls' safety online, including by exploring ways to further ensure that very large online platforms and very large online search engines take adequate and comprehensive mitigating measures to address the risks of gender-based violence.
55. Continue to support the EU network on the prevention of gender-based violence and domestic violence, including its work on emerging issues in the area of digital violence prevention, including AI-generated content, and the exchange of knowledge and good practice.
56. Continue to support local programmes and initiatives in Member States working on protecting and educating young girls and boys, women and men in all their diversity with regard to risks and opportunities in the digital world.
57. Continue to promote gender equality through the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme (CERV).

References

1. EU Legislation

Regulation (EU) 2022/2065 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 October 2022 on a Single Market For Digital Services and amending Directive 2000/31/EC (Digital Services Act).

Regulation (EU) 2024/1689 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 June 2024 laying down harmonised rules on artificial intelligence and amending Regulations (EC) No 300/2008, (EU) No 167/2013, (EU) No 168/2013, (EU) 2018/858, (EU) 2018/1139 and (EU) 2019/2144 and Directives 2014/90/EU, (EU) 2016/797, (EU) 2018/1808 and (EU) 2020/1828 (Artificial Intelligence Act)

Regulation (EU) 2022/2065 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 October 2022 on a Single Market For Digital Services and amending Directive 2000/31/EC (Digital Services Act) (Text with EEA relevance)

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.

Directive 2010/13/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 10 March 2010 on the coordination of certain provisions laid down by law, regulation or administrative action in Member States concerning the provision of audiovisual media services (Audiovisual Media Services Directive), amended by Directive (EU) 2018/1808 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 November 2018.

Directive (EU) 2024/1385 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 on combating violence against women and domestic violence.

Council Directive (EU) 2024/1499 of 7 May 2024 on standards for equality bodies in the field of equal treatment between persons irrespective of their racial or ethnic origin, equal treatment in matters of employment and occupation between persons irrespective of their religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation, equal treatment between women and men in matters of social security and in the access to and supply of goods and services, and amending Directives 2000/43/EC and 2004/113/EC.

Directive (EU) 2024/1500 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 on standards for equality bodies in the field of equal treatment and equal opportunities between women and men in matters of employment and occupation, and amending Directives 2006/54/EC and 2010/41/EU.

Decision (EU) 2022/2481 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 December 2022 establishing the Digital Decade Policy Programme 2030

2. Council

All Council conclusions adopted on the review of the Beijing Platform for Action other Council conclusions on gender equality and other subjects, including especially those cited below:

Council Conclusions of 10 December 2019 on Gender-Equal Economies in the EU: The Way Forward (14938/19)

Council Conclusions of 12 June 2023 on Mainstreaming a gender equality perspective in policies, programmes, and budgets (9684/23)

Council Conclusions of 7 May 2024 on Economic empowerment and financial independence of women as a pathway to substantive gender equality (doc. 8957/24)

Council conclusions of 2 December 2024 on strengthening women's and girls' mental health by promoting gender equality (16366/24)

Council Conclusions on the Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Gender Equality in the Labour Market (14750/21)

Council conclusions on digital empowerment to protect and enforce fundamental rights in the digital age (14309/23)

3. European Commission

A Union of Equality: Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025. 6678/20. (Commission reference: COM(2020) 152 final)

EU Gender Action Plan (GAP) III – An ambitious agenda for gender equality and women’s empowerment in EU external action. 13343/20. (Commission reference: JOIN(2020) 17 final)

A Union of equality : EU anti-racism action plan 2020-2025. 11522/20. (Commission reference: COM(2020) 565 final)

Union of Equality: LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025. 13081/20. (Commission reference: COM(2020) 698 final)

4. European Parliament

European Parliament Resolution on gender equality and empowering women in the digital age, 2015/2007(INI), C 66/44, 2018.

5. European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE)

[BPFA+30: The sixth horizontal review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in the EU Member States] 6534/25 ADD 1.

Combating Cyber Violence against Women and Girls, 2022

6. United Nations

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (UN agenda for gender equality and women’s empowerment) The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence Against Women (CEDAW)

7. Council of Europe

Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (“Istanbul Convention”) (CETS No. 210)

Council of Europe Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence (CETS No. 225)
