



Predsednica Republike Slovenije

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**Speech of the President of the Republic of Slovenia
Nataša Pirc Musar
at the thematic debate on gender equity and equality
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Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak on gender equity and equality. At the outset, let me first stress the obvious:

Equal opportunities for women and girls, and gender equity as an end-result in all walks of life, are important. Not just for women, but for the entire society. Gender equality is not something that societies need to pay attention to because women need it. We all need it. But gender equality is only the first step. Equal opportunities may not be sufficient for women and girls to overcome several sources of their frequent marginalisation.

I am sure that the world has noticed how much Slovenia has changed in less than a year, and in which direction. In 2022, I was elected as the first-ever female President. The first-ever female President of the National Assembly was also elected in the same year. For the first time in the history of Slovenia, a woman has also assumed the position of State Attorney General. And we gained the first-ever female Minister of Foreign Affairs. Last but not least, following the parliamentary elections in April of last year, we now have the highest percentage of female MPs ever – 40%.

These are all important developments for future generations to see that women can occupy the most senior positions in my country. Still, we are far from achieving gender balance.

I would like to share with you my experience with an advocacy platform that I co-founded in 2021 with three other women. The platform is called Ona ve /She knows/. The platform allows female experts in any field to publicly share their expertise so that the media or organisers of public events are able to find suitably qualified female experts. The platform has been a success. More than 400 female experts have voluntarily signed up for our online platform. There is now really no excuse for the media or anyone else to not know a female expert in a given field. The initiative also has a role in promoting women experts as role models.

In addition, I am also pleased to share with you that Slovenia is working on a new Feminist Foreign Policy Strategy to ensure the full, equal, and meaningful involvement of women in decision-making processes related to peace, security, and climate change. That being said, I am fully aware that successes, challenges, and ways to address them are not unique to my country. In the international community, democratic governance is understood as embracing the idea that women's rights need to be fully respected and that human rights rules are clear – eliminating discrimination regarding gender and equality should be high on the agenda of every single state. Unfortunately, the actual trends on the ground often point to the opposite. Women continue to be exposed to hate speech, sexism, stereotyping, prejudices, and violence, and even legal obstacles in too many states, with girls having no access to education being just one of them.

Together we must counter attempts at backsliding on universally agreed rights and standards. We must keep fighting on behalf of all the women whose rights are being violated and their voices silenced, often in the most brutal form and beyond comprehension. The relentless activism of civil society and women's groups deserves our utmost respect and support. I am happy to report that in 2021 Slovenia, following the heavy involvement of civil society organisations, redefined its approach to sexual violence based on the principle "only yes means yes". This legislative change is only the first step, but it is an important step in the right direction.

In addressing these and other challenges, we should never lose sight of intersectionality. Not all women face the same challenges. In particular, we have to pay special attention to the situation of elderly women, who are often the most marginalised and hence particularly vulnerable. Women facing socio-economic inequalities, low income, and precarious forms of employment are particularly at risk of facing multiple, intersecting, and compounding obstacles in life. Democratic policymaking therefore should not be gender neutral, but it should also not be neutral in terms of addressing complex sources of marginalisation. The vulnerabilities of individuals are typically not a result of their own actions. They are the systemically produced consequences of marginalisation. Such unequal opportunities also prevent gender equity.

In conclusion, allow me to stress the following again. Gender equality and equity are needed not just to allow women and girls to enjoy equal opportunities and equal outcomes. They are needed for the benefit of our societies as such. We should not stop at equality. Gender equity is what we must aim for, taking into account the diverse situations of individual women. Accomplishing this goal will improve the cohesiveness of our societies, a quality that is so badly needed in these uncertain times.

To illustrate the difference between equity and equality: Equality is giving everyone the same pair of shoes. Equity is giving everyone a pair of shoes that fits.