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Statement

by

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of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

at the

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“Equal Opportunities in the Digital Economy”**

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Excellencies,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to be with you today and discuss how we may increase the contribution of women to economic growth and prosperity.

A 2016 survey by the World Bank¹ found that many countries exhibit legal differences for men and women including inequities in registering a business, travelling outside of a country, inheriting and owning land and other productive assets, and opening a bank account. Gender inequalities are still a global phenomenon; ninety per cent of the surveyed countries had at least one policy that differentiated men and women in terms of their treatment and rights. And we all know about the gender gap in education, especially in access to the STEM fields, and the differences in salaries and pensions, the glass ceiling, and women's lack of access to business development services and skills.

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), as one of five regional commissions of the United Nations, aims to promote pan-European economic integration. UNECE includes 56 member States in Europe, North America and Asia.

For over a decade, promoting women's economic participation, including through entrepreneurship activities, has been a key priority in UNECE work. Entrepreneurship development has proven to be an effective, relevant and strategic approach for women's economic empowerment in our region and beyond.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development reconfirms the role of women in building the foundation of a sustainable and inclusive society and acknowledges their driving power to accelerate progress in many areas, specifically in economic growth, entrepreneurship and innovation (SDG 8 and SDG 9).

To become agents of change, and transform existing business models into new ones, women entrepreneurs must be able to access and use resources that are

¹ World Bank: Doing Business 2017: <http://www.doingbusiness.org/en/reports/global-reports/doing-business-2017>

critical for strategic decision-making. In UNECE, we are committed to helping our member States achieve the SDGs, and of course SDG 5, including working towards creating such an enabling environment for women entrepreneurship development. We aim to address gender issues in all areas of our mandate. This can take many different form, for example: collection of gender-disaggregated empirical evidence and statistical data; it can reflect gender aspects in legal and business environments, or it can debate how to involve women entrepreneurs in public private partnerships. As one example of how we are mainstreaming gender into our work, last year we published a “White Paper on Women in Trade Facilitation”², which you can find online. It takes an academic approach to identify the challenges women face in international trade and trade facilitation, and scans the literature for concrete measures to help rectify these. Moreover, this year we launched a Declaration for Gender Responsive Standards and Standards Development. It calls on all standards bodies, whatever their business model and operations modality, to mainstream gender in the standards they develop and the development process itself. It already has about 60 signatories, including the International Organization for Standardization and dozens of national standardization bodies.

At UNECE we consider it vital to train women in entrepreneurial skills, and provide knowledge on how to successfully set up, manage and grow their own businesses, network, use new information and communication technologies, etc. UNECE has collaborated with the Golda Meir Mount Carmel International Training Center and Israel’s Agency for International Development Cooperation since 2006, providing biannual training workshops for professional women from Eastern Europe, South Caucasus and Central Asia. These workshops cover support systems for women entrepreneurs and information and communication technologies. Women entrepreneurs from government institutions and SME support agencies, NGOs dealing with small business support and development, women’s business associations and academia from the CIS continue to receive training, share experience, discuss new business models and develop joint projects.

In a few months, on 29 and 30 October, UNECE will convene a Regional Review Meeting where our member States will review progress in the implementation

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http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/cefact/cf_plenary/2018_plenary/ECE_TRADE_C_CEFAC2018_10E.pdf

of the Beijing Platform for Action, Beijing+25, identify national and regional challenges and share good experience in achieving gender equality and women's empowerment. The discussions will include how and where in the economy women have achieved strong results as well as what actions need to be taken to tackle gender inequalities.

I would like to assure you that UNECE will continue to implement the strong mandate of the international community to promote equal opportunities for women in all areas of our work. Our endeavours will remain focused on providing a gender lens in economic policies.

And we look forward to expanding our partnership with many of you.

Thank you for your attention.
