



The EU Mutual Learning Programme in Gender Equality


Equal Pay

Iceland, 27-28 May 2019

Summary Report



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Introduction

The mutual learning seminar, held in Reykjavik on 27-28 May 2019, focused on equal pay. The Icelandic legislation on Equal Pay Certification, which came into force in January 2018, was examined in detail, including how the legislation was developed, its main provisions and good practice examples of its implementation over the 18 month period since the law came into effect. With reference to the [EU Recommendation on pay transparency](#) (2014/124/EU) and the [EU's Strategic Engagement for Gender Equality 2016-2019](#), the seminar was particularly relevant in light of the persistent gender pay gap¹ in all Member States, which remains at around 16 per cent across the EU and has not shifted over recent years. The seminar was well attended with government representatives and independent experts from Iceland and 14 EU countries: Austria, Belgium, Czechia, Estonia, France, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Slovakia, Spain and Sweden. Representatives of the European Commission and the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) also participated.

1. The good practice of the host country

1.1 Legislation introducing mandatory equal pay certification

The government of Iceland has committed to a target of eradicating the gender pay gap by 2022, which would make it the first country in the world to achieve equal pay for men and women. Amendments to the 2008 Gender Equality Act (art. 19) that came into force in January 2018 introduce a mandatory requirement for public and private companies and institutions with 25 or more employees to obtain an equal pay certification by accredited external auditors. The certification is based on the Equal Pay Standard (IST 85:2012), an Icelandic management standard designed to assess a company's pay policies and wage-setting processes to ensure equal pay for work of equal value across the company. The new law places a duty on employers to ensure that there is no gender-based discrimination in wage-setting and thus reverses the responsibility so it is no longer the employee who needs to prove wage discrimination. The aim is to adopt mandatory equal pay certification in a phased manner over a four-year period until 2022. Subsequently, companies will be required to renew their certification every three years. The certification has the additional benefit that it can unmask discrimination based on other grounds, such as ethnicity and migration status, and make the whole process more transparent.

1.1.1 Iceland's strong tradition of promoting gender equality

The new legislation builds on a strong tradition of the promotion of gender equality. Iceland has topped the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index for the last ten years. 79 per cent of women are active in the labour market and there is universal access to child care and strong parental leave provisions with a high uptake of non-transferable paid paternal leave. Around 90 per cent of children aged 1-5 years are in day care and municipalities cover 85 per cent of the costs. Since

¹ For the purposes of this report, the gender pay gap refers to the unadjusted gender pay gap measured as the difference between average gross hourly earnings of male paid employees and of female paid employees as a percentage of the average gross hourly earnings of male paid employees. [Statistical data on the gender pay gap](#) are taken from the Eurostat website unless indicated otherwise.

2010, there have been mandatory gender quotas for public committees and company boards in place. However, despite these measures, gender-based job segregation remains a challenge and the gender pay gap stands at 15.3 per cent.

1.1.2 Earlier legislation and the equal pay standard

The first legislation on equal pay for equal work dates back over 50 years and was introduced in 1961. The 2008 Gender Equality Act stipulated that women and men shall be paid equal wages and enjoy equal terms of employment for the same jobs or jobs of equal value, but the provision only applied to the same employer, not across companies or the labour market as a whole. Following on from the Gender Equality Act, and with the agreement of the social partners, an Equal Pay Management System was developed and adopted in 2012 as Standard IST 85:2012.

The government launched a pilot project with 11 government agencies, two municipalities and seven private companies. The pilot project also developed the requirements for potential certification bodies and included special courses leading to an examination to achieve accreditation as a certifying agency. The government developed a website and toolkit about the Equal Pay Standard. As an optional management tool, before the introduction of the 2018 legislation, the Standard was used mainly by larger companies and uptake was not widespread. Hence the incoming Minister of Social Affairs took the decision in 2017 to introduce a mandatory certification system, arguing there would be insufficient progress unless it became a legal requirement.

1.2 The Equal Pay Certification in practice

Since January 2018, companies must adopt an equal pay policy, which they were required to do already according to the Gender Equality Law, carry out a wage analysis and apply for certification under the Equal Pay Standard. The certification requires formal written procedures so that all salary decisions are justified, through a job classification and ranking system, with each cluster of jobs of equal or same value given the same monetary value. The Standard includes key components and criteria but does not stipulate which job classification system to use and the criteria and weighting system can be adjusted to suit the company profile. For example, employees' individual qualities, factors applying to groups of employees, or performance-related criteria can be included. The Standard recommends that the scope of the pay analysis should be 12 months to capture all earnings and payments. The important issue is to ensure a uniform system to classify and compare all jobs within the company so that the auditor can certify it is impartial and non-discriminatory.

The certifying bodies must be accredited by the Icelandic or other EU accreditation offices and must take a specific course and exam for the Equal Pay Standard. When a company is certified, the Centre for Gender Equality confers the equal pay symbol.

The social partners are responsible for monitoring company compliance including that the certification is renewed every three years. The social partners may report cases of non-compliance to the Centre for Gender Equality which can in turn request that the company take corrective measures or impose a financial penalty calculated at a daily rate. The Minister of Social Affairs and Equality will carry out assessments of the results of the certification process every two years. The

certification will eventually apply to 1,180 employers covering a workforce of 147,000 or approximately 80 per cent of the total Icelandic workforce.

1.3 Benefits, challenges and future perspectives

It is still too early to assess the law's overall impact on the gender pay gap. However, a government survey of 76 certified companies, carried out in April 2019, produced some interesting results. Companies were generally positive, with 81 per cent stating they were content about implementing the standard. They considered certification increased the quality of human resource management and pay systems and highlighted pay inequalities based on gender and on other grounds, as well as the intersectional dimensions of discrimination. Companies were able to improve their job evaluation systems and correct salaries which were found to be undervalued. The whole process required the involvement of senior management and reinforced the priority given to equality within the company. Other benefits included increased employee satisfaction and a reduction in staff turnover. Implementation took between six months to two years, with more than two-thirds of respondents completing within 18 months. The average total cost of certification was estimated at ISK 3 million (or approximately €21,700) and does not seem to have been a major barrier, although the surveyed companies were generally the larger Icelandic companies and therefore not a representative cross-section in this regard.

Challenges have largely been a result of lack of experience. Initially, there were too few accredited certification bodies and accreditation for new agencies was a lengthy process. Also companies underestimated the time required to complete accreditation. Therefore it has been necessary to extend the initial period for first accreditation by 12 months. Some companies, particularly the smaller companies, have argued that the equal pay certification process is too complicated, time-consuming and expensive. An improved second edition of the Equal Pay Standard is being developed by the Iceland Standards Technical Committee, where social partners and other stakeholders are represented.

One limitation is that the system does not work across the labour market and therefore does not address occupational gender segregation, which is an important component of the gender pay gap. It may be possible to use the same system across State institutions, such as hospitals so in that case it will have a wider scope. In the future, though there are no plans yet, it potentially could be used as a tool on a sectoral or national level.

2. The situation in the other participating countries²

In *Austria*, there is still a high gender pay gap of 19.9%. In 2011, the government introduced compulsory publication of the minimum wage in all job postings to enhance pay transparency. From 2014, companies with more than 150 employees, which cover some 47 per cent of the total workforce, are required to draw up bi-annual income reports. The reports must include the number of staff and the

² More information on the single countries can be found in the comments papers prepared in the context of the seminar. The papers are available at https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/who-we-work-gender-equality/mutual-learning-programme-gender-equality_en

average or median income by gender in each category. The report is forwarded to the Works Council or in their absence made available to all employees. The government has a dedicated website with guidance and tools on preparing company reports and a web-based wage calculator to help employers and employees alike to calculate appropriate pay levels by qualification, occupation and other factors. Currently, there is also a European Social Fund project with the Ministry of Social Affairs that provides advice to interested companies on improving their human resource management and salary systems. Although income reports have made the gender pay gap more visible, further structured follow-up measures are required, including at sector-specific levels, with a focus on low pay, as well as comprehensive childcare services, improved working time policies, and support to young people to take up atypical careers.

In *Belgium*, the gender pay gap is 20.6 per cent, largely because of the high proportion of women in part-time employment. However, over time and for younger cohorts, the gender pay gap is decreasing. Collective bargaining plays a central role and there are strong social dialogue institutions. The national collective bargaining agreement recognises equal pay principles and there are a number of government agencies and advisory bodies to promote gender equality. Sector-wide agreements have helped reduce inequalities based on gender and other factors. In 2012, the wide-ranging gender pay gap law introduced further pay transparency measures, including bi-annual macro-economic reports on the gender pay gap by the Central Economic Council; screening of job classification systems to ensure they are gender neutral; bi-annual company reports on the payroll structure disaggregated by gender; and a provision for the appointment of a company gender mediator. However, there are no provisions for follow-up at Federal level and there are weak sanctions in cases of non-compliance. Trends towards decentralised wage bargaining and an increase in individual performance-related pay may undermine both collective bargaining and gender equality goals. New employment patterns such as teleworking are creating an increasingly fragmented labour market and bring new challenges. Further measures are needed to foster social dialogue; to increase female labour force participation; and to ensure disadvantaged groups, such as early school leavers and migrant workers, are not left behind.

In the Czech Republic, there are no statutory rules on pay transparency making it difficult to use existing legislation to bring individual cases of gender-based discrimination. The gender pay gap is relatively high at 22 per cent. The female workforce participation rate is high but the long parental leave of two years, almost exclusively taken by mothers, can impact negatively on women's careers. A recent study found that gender-based wage differences for the same work at the same workplace are as high as 11 per cent. There have been some recent initiatives to address equal pay, including a European Social Fund project with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs '22% to equality' which has sought to address low pay among women and strengthen the role of the Labour Inspectorate. Furthermore the Czech Ombudsperson issued recommendations in early 2019 to strengthen pay transparency. They include a prohibition on a duty of confidentiality on employees regarding salaries; and new requirements for employers to state salaries in job postings; to provide information on request to employees on average wages for the same job disaggregated by gender; and requirements for larger companies to publish gender pay gap reports. However, these recommendations have not yet been transposed into any draft law. If adopted, they would promote increased pay transparency which in turn could assist in filing more discrimination lawsuits. Generally, there is a need to strengthen the priority given to the issue among the social partners, combined with improvements in parental leave.

Estonia has the highest gender pay gap in the EU at 25.6 per cent despite women's relatively high full-time employment rates. There is marked gender-based job segregation and even within the same jobs, women are paid less than men. The government Gender Equality Programme 2019-2021 sets out some promotional measures, including encouragement to adopt transparent job evaluation and pay systems and measures to increase women's representation on boards in public institutions. Another initiative is the introduction of a new school subject, known as 'career' with the aim of reducing gender stereotypical career choices, and supporting girls and women to take up careers in the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector. Draft amendments to the Gender Equality Act concerning equal pay audits in the public sector have been discussed since 2011. As proposed, the Labour Inspectorate would be given the mandate to carry out a comparative analysis of pay data based on information submitted to the Tax and Customs Board and the employer would be required to publish the results on the company web page. If the Labour Inspectorate considered there were non-objective pay differentials, the employer would be required to develop a corrective action plan. The proposals also include the development of digital tools for self-assessment of the gender pay gap. If adopted, these proposals could contribute to a reduction in the gender pay gap but they need to be complemented with other measures to address occupational segregation and gender stereotypes more generally.

In *France*, although equal pay principles were enshrined in law over 40 years ago, the gender pay gap in 2017 was still 15.4 per cent. In September 2018, following discussions with the social partners, the government introduced new legislation concerning gender equality. Companies with more than 250 employees are required to measure their performance against a new gender equality index. The index is based on five indicators with a points system and if a company scores less than 75 points, it will need to establish corrective measures. The five indicators are: (i) the average pay of men and women including performance bonuses and benefits in kind; (ii) wage increases by gender; (iii) promotions by gender; (iv) equal treatment concerning wage increases when on maternity leave; (v) and the number of women on management boards. Companies were required to publish the results by March 2019 and have three years in which to take corrective measures. If by March 2022 the score is still not satisfactory, companies are liable to a financial penalty of up to 1 per cent of their wage bill. For companies with a workforce between 50 and 250 employees, there is a simpler procedure. An enhanced role for the Labour Inspectorate is envisaged and the Ministry plans to convene annual meetings with the social partners to review progress.

In *Germany*, the gender pay gap is currently 21 per cent and there is a marked difference between East Germany where it is 8 per cent and West Germany where it is 23 per cent. While there is no overall national gender equality plan or strategy, the government publishes regular reports on gender equality and recently introduced a new gender care gap index, measuring how much time women relative to men spend on unpaid work in the home. The Pay Transparency Act came into force in July 2017. Included within the new act are provisions so that employees in companies with more than 200 employees have a non-binding individual right to wage comparison information when there is a comparable group of six employees or more; and companies with more than 500 employees are encouraged to set up a monitoring process and publish regular equal pay reports. However, the act does not contain any legal sanctions if a pay gap is identified and the company reports do not have to be made public. Furthermore, the law only applies to the larger companies, so therefore around 67 per cent of all employees are excluded. The law

is to be evaluated every four years and the first report is due in July 2019. Various surveys indicate that only a minority of companies have taken action to review pay structures or increase pay transparency. While it is not clear how far the new law will contribute to reducing the pay gap it has initiated a broader public and political debate on the issue. Further action is required to address structural barriers such as improved childcare facilities, measures to address occupational segregation as well as the introduction of gender-neutral job classification systems.

In *Italy*, the gender pay gap is around 18 per cent. The 2006 National Code of Equal Opportunities recognises equal pay principles and requires companies with over 100 employees to draw up biannual reports on employment conditions disaggregated by gender, which are submitted to union representatives and the government. However, this covers only a small section of the workforce. There are also regulations and a decree to promote equal access to public and private sector boards of directors. Government equality departments and advisory bodies design and monitor policies to promote equal opportunities although in recent years their effectiveness has diminished as a result of limited resources. Other measures are also required, such as action to address women's low pay, better family-friendly policies, including greater access to subsidised childcare and paid parental leave, as well as education and cultural initiatives to address gender stereotyping. Certification of company gender equality policies including on pay is a consideration but would require sufficient funding for existing equal opportunities machinery to ensure effective monitoring.

In *Latvia*, the legislative framework for gender equality was introduced after 2001, including most recently a Plan for Stimulating Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men (2018 -2020) and employment guidelines (2015-2020) with a focus on tackling gender segregation in the labour market. The labour law recognises equal pay principles. Employees have the right to bring cases of pay discrimination and the Labour Inspectorate and Ombud are responsible for monitoring equal treatment. After 2008, the gender pay gap began to increase and it is only since 2017 that it has started to narrow again and is currently at 15.7 per cent. The highest gender pay gap is in the finance, insurance and ICT sectors. The public debate on the gender pay gap is growing and some private companies now have good practices. The tripartite cooperation council sub-committee on labour affairs awards an annual company prize for gender equality and there are regular discussions on the gender pay gap among the social partners. More targeted actions are required and gender equality also needs to be integrated into business and economic development plans. Good practices could be disseminated among employers, particularly the larger companies and sectors with the highest gender pay gaps. There is also a need to address gender stereotypes in career choices, for example by encouraging more women to enter ICT professions.

Luxembourg has one of the lowest gender pay gaps in the EU at 5.5 per cent. In contrast to many other EU countries, a majority of women work in the better-paid sectors although they are under-represented in senior positions. The main provisions of the Labour Code, last updated in 2016, include equality in employment as well as quantitative targets for women on company boards. The Ministry of Gender Equality has a broad mandate. It has developed the *Logib-Lux* software programme for wage analysis and recommends its use for companies with more than 50 employees. The most recent government programme (2018-2023) has a focus on work/life balance and measures to strengthen the Labour Inspectorate. Additionally, the Ministry has a company 'Action +' award programme. There is also a corporate social responsibility certification process, which includes a section on

'paying responsibly'. The PwC, a private audit company, offers an Equal Pay certification, which in some circles is preferred on the grounds of greater international recognition and prestige. While mandatory certification might be a next step or at least some further incentives for certification, it would require additional time for social dialogue. Luxembourg has a strong tripartite social dialogue tradition. There is an existing requirement to negotiate gender equality, although it could usefully be broadened to become more results-oriented. Further action is also needed so that women are given the same opportunities to reach senior management positions.

In *Malta*, although legislation on equal pay has been in place since 1976, a strong patriarchal culture means progress is slow. The pay gap in 2018 was 12.2 per cent and is increasing. In recent years, the number of women in employment has risen sharply and the employment participation rate is now 60.8 per cent. The gender pay gap is highest in professions where women have tertiary level education and in the private sector. Recent governments have introduced some family friendly policies and there have also been incentives for women to work through reforms to social insurance systems. However, women are still disproportionately represented in the lower paid jobs, particularly poignant as since 1996, there have been more female than male graduates at the University of Malta. An EU funded project with the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality, which commenced in 2018, will help overcome the lack of research on the topic. The Commission also has a company award scheme and by 2018 there were 91 entities awarded the 'Equality Mark'. In March 2019, the Ministry for European Affairs and Equality launched a consultation paper on gender mainstreaming with a view to developing a future strategy and action plan. Any future legislation on pay transparency would need to take into account the characteristics of Malta's labour market, since over 90 per cent of companies are micro-enterprises employing less than 10 people. Legislation would need to be accompanied by further measures to support equal opportunities for women and the sharing of family responsibilities.

In the *Netherlands*, the gender pay gap is 15.2 per cent and is decreasing but very slowly. There is a statutory prohibition against wage discrimination and the Equal Treatment Act also stipulates there should be sound job evaluation systems. However, equal pay is viewed as a civil matter, and the Labour Inspectorate only ensures compliance with minimum wage legislation. It is therefore up to an individual to make a complaint but claims are very technical and costly and few cases are filed. In March 2019, a draft law, modelled on the Icelandic law, was submitted to the legislature, which would reverse the burden of proof. It stipulates that employers with 50 employees or more would have to apply for a certificate to show they are applying an equal pay standard. Further the employer would need to provide annual pay reports with a plan for corrective measures if needed. The Labour Inspectorate would have a monitoring role and employees the right to request pay information. However, it is not clear that the proposal will be adopted. The trade unions have included equal pay on their collective bargaining agenda although only a few employers have agreed to take concrete measures. While job classification systems are generally considered gender neutral, anomalies arise because of their incorrect application and the granting of additional benefits. Further progress can be made if the proposed law is adopted or other measures are taken to promote greater pay transparency. Also further discussion is needed about tackling the gender pay gap among the large number of self-employed workers.

In *Slovakia*, the gender pay gap in 2017 was 19.8 per cent and since 2010, it has declined by one percentage point annually. The marked gender-based occupational

and sectoral segregation and long parental leave entitlements and lack of childcare facilities are among the contributing factors. Equal pay principles are included in the 2004 Anti-Discrimination Act and in the Labour Code. However, there are few pay discrimination cases taken to court. The National Strategy and Action Plan for Gender Equality (2014-2019) give priority to reducing the gender pay gap. The annual Equal Pay Day helps create awareness about the issue. The Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family organises an annual company equality award and issues regular comprehensive reports on progress towards achieving gender equality. In 2018, a new law was adopted which requires employers to publish information about the salary in job postings. This measure will make it harder for employers to discriminate against women. Other measures recently introduced may also reduce the gender pay gap, including an accelerated growth of minimum wages as women are disproportionately represented in the lower paid jobs.

In *Spain*, the gender pay gap now stands at 14 per cent. After decreasing for a number of years, it has stagnated over the last five years. There is long-standing legislation on equal pay but implementation has been inconsistent. A new wide-ranging draft Strategic Plan for Equal Opportunities (2019-22) is likely to be adopted soon. Royal Decree Law 6/2019 directly addresses the gender pay gap. It extends existing requirements for companies with 250 employees to conduct wage audits and establish equality plans to companies with 50 employees. It requires that all employers keep a record of average salaries by gender and job category and provides for an employee right to consult the record. Sanctions for non-compliance are foreseen. There have also been substantial improvements to parental leave, including non-transferable paternity leave. The government Women's Institute for Equal Opportunities has recently developed tools for companies to measure the gender pay gap and conduct gender-neutral job evaluation. The Institute offers grants to smaller companies planning to increase pay transparency and take corrective measures to reduce the gender pay gap. Mandatory requirements on companies to increase pay transparency and adopt equality plans, reinforced by the threat of sanctions, are considered crucial elements in the strategy to close the gender pay gap.

In *Sweden*, the Discrimination Act requires that companies with more than ten employees should carry out annual pay surveys in association with employees and under the supervision of the Equality Ombud. However, at the moment, not all companies comply with the law and sanctions for non-compliance are relatively weak. A number of studies on the pay reports have been conducted, including by the Equality Ombud and the trade unions. However, the impact of pay surveys is inconclusive. There is no noticeable difference in the pace at which the gender pay gap declined regardless of whether the pay surveys were conducted every three years, which was the case previously, or on an annual basis. The gender pay gap in 2017 was 11.3 per cent. Other measures are needed across sectors and at the national level as well, so as to address the under-valuation of female-dominated occupations, particularly in the private sector. The Swedish trade union confederation, LO, has sought to close the gender wage gap between female- and male-dominated occupations through collective bargaining by negotiating higher increases for female-dominated groups. However, gains have subsequently been overtaken by market-driven wage drift in male-dominated groups. The LO has committed to doing more to achieve gender equal wages.

3. Key issues discussed during the seminar

There was an in-depth discussion on how other countries are addressing the gender pay gap from a structural perspective and the extent to which the Icelandic certification model could be transferable. Despite long-standing legislation enshrining equal pay principles in all EU countries, the slow pace of change and in some cases a widening of the pay gap in recent years as women become more educated, has led to a new generation of equal pay strategies and actions being adopted in some countries. The shift in the burden of proof from an individual employee to prove discrimination to the duty of an employer to prove the pay system is fair was considered a strategic and significant advance. The relative merits and feasibility of introducing mandatory or voluntary certification systems were discussed. Another issue raised was whether the certification scheme should best be based on a management standard, or a government equality index. It was also noted that provisions whereby only larger companies were required to provide reports exclude broad sections of the labour force, in particular women who are often clustered in smaller enterprises.

There were different approaches as to whether non-compliance with reporting requirements should be subject to financial penalties or whether a motivational strategy, based on equality awards or other schemes, created greater buy-in. In some countries, the corporate culture has been changing and equal pay certification is viewed positively. It was agreed that it was important to work with companies, to develop a clear business case for equal pay, focusing on the potential productivity gains as well as the social responsibility and human rights issues.

Another potential strategy which was discussed was how to link the right to bid for public procurement contracts to the adoption of a company equality plan or equal pay awards or certifications.

It was noted that the Icelandic certification scheme and other pay transparency schemes were company-based and therefore did not address gender-based occupational segregation across companies and sectors. In the Icelandic case, strategies to allow groups of public sector employers, such as hospitals, to use the same certification system are envisaged as a first step to address this limitation. However, in the long run, additional measures would be required to tackle the under-valuing of jobs generally at sectoral and national level. Furthermore, at the Nordic Parliament, a recommendation to consider a joint equal pay certification system had been adopted.

Many participants noted that following the 2014 EU Recommendation on pay transparency, their countries had taken steps to achieve greater pay transparency. Some countries had recently introduced legislation whereby all job postings needed to state the minimum wage or the salary band, which was considered an additional useful measure to increase pay transparency. New web-based wage calculators, which can be used by employers and employees, are also being introduced in a number of countries.

In some countries, there was a strong tradition of social dialogue and trade unions are giving priority to gender equality issues, including equal pay and working hours, in their bargaining agendas. However, in other countries, it was noted that trade unions were generally male-dominated and not necessarily pro-equal pay, and they often lacked the necessary expertise to address equal pay. For that reason,

measures to train negotiators were recommended. The increasing fragmentation of the labour market and the dispersed nature of female-dominated sectors also meant that women were less represented in unions in some countries and therefore trade unions were less significant actors in terms of the gender pay gap. Another concern was how to tackle the gender pay gap within the growing self-employed sector.

There were also discussions on how to strengthen monitoring mechanisms and effective follow-up on company pay or income reports, which in some cases was a weak point in the strategy. Reports can be so highly aggregated that it is difficult to determine where discrimination may occur. In a few countries, new legislation or draft proposals under discussion require that the reports showing average wages by job type and gender be shared with the Works Council, if in existence, or shared with employees in other ways. Provisions for an individual employee to request information were also included. There were also considerable differences as to the role of the Labour Inspectorate in monitoring cases of pay discrimination. In some countries, as far as wage setting is concerned, the Labour Inspectorate is limited to ensuring minimum wages are respected, whereas elsewhere its authority to address gender equality in the workplace has recently been strengthened or there have been proposals to do so. Participants noted the importance of training the inspectorate on equality issues as well.

The difficulties and obstacles facing women litigating pay discrimination were examined, in particular the technical complexities of identifying a comparator, the cost and the time, and the potential negative consequences for an individual's career. In countries where class action is allowed, these difficulties are mitigated to some extent.

Strategies to attract women to higher paid careers, in particular in the STEM³ and ICT sectors were reviewed, on the grounds that even if pay systems become less discriminatory, they will not benefit women if they remain in lower paid jobs. In some countries, there were school-based government initiatives designed to broaden career choices for girls, or elsewhere, business-led initiatives to attract women into the ICT sector driven in part by demographic trends and emerging workforce shortages in the sector. Participants also referred to schemes to ensure greater representation of women on management boards in both the public and private sectors.

Another issue raised was the lack of knowledge about the gender pay gap and equal pay legislation. In some cases, government equality bodies offering free counselling services to companies on equal pay issues have proved very popular. Awareness-raising events, such as Equal Pay Days, play an important role, together with training programmes, web-based information tools and other campaigns on social media.

Finally, it was noted that strategies were also needed to address the earnings gap between men and women over the life course, leading to a substantial gap in pension entitlements. Inadequate pensions were of increasing concern to social welfare institutions and should be factored into any discussion on the costs of gender equality. On the other hand, in countries where there had been progress in addressing the gender pay gap, it was clear that effective measures to address the gender-based division of paid and unpaid work were also in place. Comprehensive social policies, including good quality, universal and affordable child care facilities

³ Science, Technology, Engineering, Math and Medicine (STEM) sector.

and elderly care, and parental leave entitlements, including non-transferable paternal leave to encourage men to share in child care, were considered essential for successful outcomes.

Despite progress, women are still being forced into situations of choosing between careers or having families and as the Icelandic hosts noted, gender equality cannot mean that women must take on more responsibilities. Populist movements are stressing the traditional role of women as part of a backlash against gender equality. In response, there is a need to address the hegemonic or toxic masculinity behind the backlash with a strong emphasis on social policies to strengthen family friendly measures.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

Participants agreed that the Icelandic Equal Pay Certification was remarkable, not only because of the new law itself but because it was the outcome of a consensus from the social partners to give priority to achieving equal pay.

Certification systems which reversed the burden of proof are part of a new generation of comprehensive and systematic strategies to address the persistent gender pay gap. During the discussion, some key recommendations were identified:

- To accompany new laws on certification or requirements for company pay reporting and transparency with a clear communications strategy, guidance for companies and advisory services, including web-based tools and wage calculators.
- Embed equal pay initiatives within a wider holistic approach, addressing vertical and horizontal job segregation as well as reconciliation of work and private/family life.
- Carry out pilot projects with key public and private companies to build understanding of the new measures and buy-in from stakeholders.
- Foster private sector initiatives to develop the business case for equal pay.
- Review the potential to use public procurement as a means to promote commitments to gender equality by contractors.
- Carry out training programmes for certification bodies, the social partners, including trade union negotiators, and the Labour Inspectorate on the full-range of equal pay issues, including job classification and pay analysis.
- Consider measures to strengthen the mandate and to allocate further resources to Labour Inspectorates.
- Carry out further research, possibly in cooperation with EIGE, on the institutional structures for the promotion of pay transparency and their impact on the gender pay gap.
- Build greater public awareness about the gender pay gap, through awareness-raising events, such as Equal Pay Days and other actions, and share information through on-line platforms and social media.