

## Closing the Gender Pay Gap

There is no country on earth where women are paid as much as men. The ITUC states that ‘despite decades of anti-discrimination legislation and changes in company rhetoric, women, whether they are in New York or Shanghai, find their pay cheque contains on average sixteen per cent less than male co-workers’. Though data for Africa and Asia are limited, it is clear the problem is most urgent on those continents. These are also the continents where many women work in the informal sector. The pay gap can especially be found in the female-dominated sectors such as health and education.

“Who remembers the first moment when you realized that you earned less money than your male colleague when, in fact, you were higher qualified than your male colleague, had more experience than your male colleague, and yet he still made more.” With this question the workshop on closing the gender pay gap was opened by **Kirsten van den Hul**. Many women in the room did remember that moment. And many of the problems related to the gender pay gap are still not solved. It is actually very persistence and globally we’re still looking at a **60% gender pay gap** or, measured in months, women work the first two months of the year for free. It was therefore our intention to look for solutions to overcome the problem.

**Sally Sami**, Egyptian Social Democratic Party (ESDP), believed that tackling the gender gap should consist of a holistic approach: “We should also involve other sectors to try to encourage women, not only the women-dominated sectors.” She took Egypt as an example, where the public sector is one of the biggest sectors to employ women. The government wants to encourage privatization and although that sounds like a good idea, it is exactly the private sector that is discriminating against women when it comes to employment.

**Agnes Jongerius**, Member of the European Parliament, Labour Party (PvdA), was asked how big of a problem the gender pay gap is in the European Union. Pretty big, Jongerius replied, it is a difficult issue because most of the time there is not a straightforward solution. Yet, the social democratic group in the European Parliament is campaigning to make a new commitment, not only for paid maternity leave and paid paternity leave, but also to work on plans in which we in two years’ time, every two years, close the gap with 2%. Transparency of wages is important, Jongerius stressed.

**Raimo Pärssinen**, Member of Parliament, Swedish Social Democratic Party (SAP), was asked whether Sweden is a gender heaven as many people seem to believe it to be. Pärssinen did not agree with this statement: “We have still many things to do: the wage gap is 14%, of which 5% is unexplainable.” But Sweden is going to legislate wage mapping every year. The key to solving the gender pay gap is, according to Pärssinen, to be found in the equal division for parental leave. Paid parental leave is currently twelve months and the parliament wants to propose that fathers will get three months.

**Dasa Silovic**, Chair, CEE Network for Gender Issues, was asked about the vulnerable position of women on the informal sector: what solutions are there to protect these women from exploitation? Silovic pointed out three areas where we must focus:

- 1) Law-enforcement and the enforcement of constitution;
- 2) Regulation of the informal sector;
- 3) Access to education and life-long training for people who are getting into the informal sector.

Hereafter, the audience was engaged to hear their thoughts on the matter. Party-leader of Uruguay, **Mónica Xavier**, stressed that “long-life learning is of great importance, it’s a matter of gender but also of generation working along these issues.” It will take a long time to reduce the gender pay gap, so Xavier remarked, but we have a very clear message as social democrats. **Elke Ferner**, Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), pointed out that an individual woman will not risk to stand up to her boss. So we have to look for collective solutions so women do not need to fight the battle alone. We also need to provide transparency, to show what the average salary is within a certain profession as a frame of reference for employees. **Francoise Toé**, Burkina Faso, pointed out it is also a problem of negotiation, women should be encouraged to ask for a higher wage.

Kirsten van den Hul concluded that the progressive movement has to put itself at the head of gender equality, be proactive. Our parties should speak on this issue openly, come openly into the public and political domain and have the courage not to sell ourselves short for our daily political concerns. Instead, we must put ourselves at the front of the movement for social justice, equal pay and equality.