

„Equal Care & Equal Pay: It is high times to close the gaps!“

UN Women Germany hosted the international conference "Equal Care & Equal Pay in cooperation with Friedrich Ebert Foundation and the International Labor Organization, : It is high times to close the gaps" on September 7, 2022.

Here you can find the [German](#) as well as the [English](#) recording of the event.

International and national experts as well as the participants intensively dealt with the connection of Equal Care, Equal Pay and HeForShe on site and in the livestream. In three workshops, the resulting demands were discussed.

"Equal Pay and Equal Care are two sides of the same coin: Closing the wage gap is inconceivable without closing the care gap and vice versa. In the conference, we highlight how we can achieve equality together and in solidarity, and formulate clear demands to politicians," **Elke Ferner**, President of UN Women Germany, summarized in her welcome address. "We need to hurry up even more in Germany. We are in fourth to last place in Europe." She said it is unacceptable that the pay gap leads to other gender gaps, including a gap in lifetime earnings and pensions.

Julia Bläsius, Head of Consulting, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, described how crises exacerbate structural problems: The pandemic led to a retraditionalization, so that women took on an even larger share of care work than they already did. 60% of women said they were overworked in the last two years, especially single parents. "There needs to be change with men and there needs to be structural change" she stressed.

Ferner and Bläsius highlighted the successes of the Nordic countries in this regard, e.g., Iceland is ranked #1 in the [WEF Gender Gap Report](#) for the 13th year in a row. We wanted to learn from them - what works well for them, what pitfalls can we avoid?

[HeForShe Germany Catalysts](#) (German link) and presenters for the day, **Vincent-Immanuel Herr** and **Martin Speer**, turned the spotlight on men's participation in Equal Care. "Care work is also a man's job. It also means taking a step back in your own career. It won't work without that," Speer noted. Herr emphasized, "A fair distribution of care work is best achieved when partners jointly plan how it can be done. These honest conversations are the basis for fair coexistence and also elevate the relationships to a higher level."

Men should take a good look at themselves and engage in conversation with other men, Herr and Speer said. It is important to get active. They introduced the [HeForShe movement](#) (German link), which highlights that it is a matter of fairness for all genders to get the same opportunities, but that men also [benefit](#) (German link) from more equality. Today, they said, we would consider the individual and the structural levels.

German Chancellor **Olaf Scholz** and the President of Iceland **Guðni Th. Jóhannesson** addressed the audience in a video message. "The current situation of gender equality in the world is outrageous - and simply unacceptable. Our goal is to achieve full gender equality in Germany before the end of this decade," Scholz encouraged viewers. Jóhannesson spoke about the measures that contribute to Iceland's exemplary successes in terms of equality. "New laws and regulations are an important step for gender equality, but it is equally important to change the mindset. In Iceland, we emphasize the active participation of boys and men in both the discussion and the introduction of the measures." He stressed the importance of UN Women's HeForShe program, of which he was a champion.

Joining us digitally, **Chidi King** from the International Labor Organization explained that we can only close the gender care gap if we stop undervaluing care work and attributing it mainly to women instead of seeing it as a social responsibility and public good. Among other things, it is important to allow fathers to take parental leave. She presented the intersectional work and study situation of the ILO and the work of [EPIC](#), among others. "Closing care gaps is essential to support working families, advance gender equality and facilitate fair life and work transitions." said King.

Valentina Patrini from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development described the current situation of the gender pay gap and causes such as horizontal and vertical labor market segregation and the so-called motherhood penalty. "Governments have implemented a range of policies, over decades, to address the many factors driving the gender wage gap. But we still have not yet achieved pay equity. We need a comprehensive approach to achieve gender equality – in education, in paid and unpaid work, and in society as a whole."

In the panel discussion on international solutions and approaches, **Anita Bhatia**, Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Executive Director of UN Women; **Dr. Bärbel Kofler**, Parliamentary State Secretary at the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development; and **Therese Svanström**, President of the Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees (TCO), discussed approaches. Bhatia thanked the German government for the priority given to gender equality in its G7 presidency and the BMZ for the [Care Economy Conference](#), from which the [Toolkit on paid and unpaid care work: From 3Rs to 5Rs](#) had emerged. She also referred to the EU Commission's brand new [European Care Strategy](#). "In the aftermath of COVID-19 pandemic, we have the unparalleled opportunity to transform the care economy by investing in quality, affordable, and accessible care services and infrastructure and implementing policies that recognize, reduce, and redistribute women's and girls' unpaid care and domestic work, and represent and reward paid care workers." Bhatia expressed. She reported on the work of the [Global Alliance for Care](#), which emerged as part of the [Generation Equality Forum](#) (German link), GEF. Dr. Kofler also emphasized the importance of both processes, adding that the GEF is the largest multi-stakeholder forum for [SDG 5](#) (German link) - Germany is co-lead of the Action Coalition on [Economic Justice and Rights](#) (German link). She elaborated on the importance of networks and international multi-sectoral cooperation, a point emphasized by all speakers. "Transforming care work is an important pillar of our feminist development policy.", so Dr. Kofler. Patriarchal structures have to be changed intersectionally and the access of all actors has to be achieved, e.g. in the field of health care systems, workers' rights, land rights or financial resources, she said. Svanström emphasized the priorities of the Nordic trade unions regarding equal lifetime earnings: First, a more balanced distribution of parental leave and parenthood in general, as this is one of the breaks in working life. Second: "Equal possibilities for full-time work are crucial to close the gender gap as are access to childcare, equal parental leave and a well-designed income-tax system", whereby, on the one hand, it is a matter of financial compensation, but also urgently a matter of social norms.

Afterwards, these topics were discussed in more detail in the workshops.

In *the workshop on Equal Care*, **Mari Huupponen**, Public Health Scientist with the Swedish Union of Municipal Employees, gave an input: "Care work is qualified, paid work. Good quality care contributes to equality and helps build strong economies. Child care and elder care should not only be affordable and accessible public services, but provided by well paid, qualified professionals with decent working conditions." Moderator **Sascha Verlan**, author and initiator of Equal Care Day, emphasized the serious consequences of the gender care gap: "The hierarchy between paid and unpaid, often invisible work, creates an unequal distribution of power, co-determination, and co-creation of the world."

Underestimated economic consequences follow: The gender-care gap becomes the pay gap and, ultimately, the pension gap.

In *the workshop on Equal Pay*, **Henrike von Platen**, CEO and founder of the Fair Pay Innovation Lab, commented: "Most companies know that without a fair pay strategy the future will be hard. As far as fair pay is concerned, many companies are therefore much further ahead than politicians, even without legal compulsion. Embarrassing for politics, gratifying for business!". **Stella Samúelsdóttir**, Executive Director of UN Women Iceland, emphasized how important the HeForShe movement and cooperation with all sectors is: "We can't talk about gender equality until men take an equal part in care work and women receive equal pay for equal work. This includes female-dominated professions being identified as just as valuable as male-dominated professions. If we are to reach these goals, men must commit to the cause and take on their fair share of care work, governments need to change laws, and the private sector needs to both advocate for change and be willing to change."

The *workshop HeForShe- Men and Care Work* was moderated by **Nora Teuma**, Executive Board UN Women Germany, **Fikri Anil Altıntaş**, HeForShe Germany Catalyst gave an input on Caring Masculinities: "Care biographies must not be an exception for men! There is a need to expand existing initiatives for a stereotype-free and caresensitive career orientation as well as sensitization of the advertising industry - against gender marketing," said Altıntaş. Teuma spoke of the responsibility that politicians and employers bear in this regard: "Care work, regardless of who is responsible for it, must be valued more highly in society. Politicians and employers are called upon to create the conditions to distribute it fairly."

Potential demands were discussed in the individual workshops and a vote was taken on which three demands were the most important and should be presented and discussed later on the panel:

Overarching (inter-)national demands:

- Partnership-based parental leave, especially around childbirth, and care leave for family caregivers, each with wage replacement rates and the right to return to work; if applicable, extension of non-transferable care months.
- Close-to-home relief programs for family caregivers and all-day programs for children at least up to the age of 14, as well as measures such as the introduction of household checks based on the Belgian model.
- Measures which motivate men to think about carework and mental load and take on their fair share of care work and corresponding measures targeting employers

Workshop 1 Equal Care

Demands (inter-)national

- we need care mainstreaming in all political fields and arenas.
- a revaluation of care professions through performance-related remuneration (Comparable Worth Index) and stronger collective bargaining agreements, especially in the nursing sector, as well as reliable staffing planning.

National

- the legislator implement the "Familienarbeitszeit" (family working hours) and Equal Care Law with an equal time share of parental leave (7+7 month with wage subsidy up to 80%)

Workshop 2 Equal Pay

Demands (inter-)national

- the introduction and further development of laws on equal pay with mandatory review and effective penalty mechanisms

(for Germany, e.g. further development of the Pay Transparency Act or the EU Transparency Directive into a Pay Equality Act or Directive, with mandatory regulations on pay structure assessments and work evaluation, collective regulatory mechanisms for pay equality through class action rights for associations as well as the suspension of exclusion periods)

- the financial upgrading of so-called women's professions

National

- the abolition of tax disadvantages for spouses, e.g. consistent alignment of tax and social legislation with the partnership model instead of the single breadwinner model.

Workshop 3 Men and Carework- HeForShe

Demands (inter-)national

- financial incentives for equal sharing of care work.
- family-friendly working conditions instead of a culture of permanent on-the-job presence and rigid working hours
- the revaluation of unpaid work by including the value added by unpaid care work in the GDP.

After a coffee break, the demands were presented by the moderators of the individual workshops. These were discussed by **Lisa Paus**, Federal Minister for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, **Prof. Jutta Allmendinger**, Chairwoman of the G7 Gender Equality Advisory Council, and **Elke Ferner**. Hanna Stellwag unfortunately had to cancel her participation at short notice and commented on the demands in a separate paper afterwards. You can find it [here](#).

Paus shared the frustration of the participants in the Equal Care workshop; she too sees that these demands have to be repeated time and again and yet not all of them can be found in the coalition agreement. A wage replacement benefit for family caregivers and two weeks of leave for fathers after childbirth, for example, are goals. The topic of a mandatory division of parental leave of seven months each was discussed controversially. Prof. Allmendinger emphasized that more men are needed in care professions, not least because this would also increase pay. The role of care work is immense: "Demography, pandemics, climate change cannot be managed without it. Nevertheless, there is a lack of recognition, a reorganization of family work and gainful employment, gender impact and gender budgeting of aid measures. And international solidarity. There is much to do, we will get there."

"Distributing gainful employment and care work equally is a prerequisite for reducing inequalities in society and closing the pay gap. That is why it is important that we actively work together for a gender-equal society and eliminate structural inequalities," Paus explained, [announcing further measures to combat the gender pay gap](#) (German link). At the same time, she mentioned that the coalition had not

yet succeeded in overcoming negative tax approaches such as spousal splitting and mini-jobs. Allmendinger stressed, among other things, that in addition to the pay gap, the volume must also be considered; a small pay gap could nevertheless lead to a lower lifetime and pension income. Samúelsdóttir pointed to Iceland's sanction mechanisms and encouraged Germany to introduce them as well. Von Platen mentioned the FPI study on the transferability of Iceland's legislation to other countries (you will find it [here](#)) - and that ideally companies should prove that they are paying fairly, not disadvantaged workers need to sue. Another demand from the workshop was for shorter full-time work of 30 hours as regular working hours.

The demands of the workshop on HeForShe - Men and Care Work were presented by Teuma. Paus agreed and replied that it is currently also particularly important to prevent a 42 hour work week and also to strengthen women in collective bargaining and relief packages. Advantages and disadvantages of the home office for reconciling of family and work were taken up by Paus and Allmendinger. Ferner pointed out different work cultures: in the Scandinavian countries it is normal to go home to the family after 4 or 5 o'clock. This would also have to become the norm in Germany. We need more men in management positions who set an example. Politicians, companies and trade unions need to work together to change patterns of permanent presence culture. Allmendinger stressed that certifications such as the „Audit Beruf und Familie“ (Work and Family Audit) should also have a hard indicator regarding the extent to which parental leave is made possible for fathers, among others. Altıntaş added that it was important to look at the orientation frameworks of young men and that, in addition to measures for gender-reflective career choices, it was also important, for example, to ban gender marketing in advertisement.

Elke Ferner took the opportunity that so many long-time companions were present to honor the long-time President and now Honorary President of UN Women Germany, Karin Nordmeyer, for her decades of service.

Violinist and concert curator Lea Brückner ushered in the subsequent reception, where experts from the podium and the audience continued to exchange ideas and to network.

Many thanks to the moderators and speakers for their valuable input and to all participants for their knowledgeable participation. Thanks to our partners from FES and ILO for the good and successful cooperation. Thanks to the photographer, the translators, technicians and all service staff.

Many thanks also to our volunteer supporters Aline Welsler, Isabel Reising, Julia Kechele, Lisa Fritsch, Sinah Sidonie Jakobeit and Manuela Grabosch for manning the HeForShe information booth. There you could find, for example, a sneak peek of our socks (watch this space!), [a print version of our HeForShe Journal](#) (German link – [link to English PDF](#)), and the opportunity for men to sign up for a Zoom Call with our HeForShe Germany Catalysts, should there be a need to talk or a desire to network. If you are interested in such a call, please reach out to [heforshe\(at\)unwomen.de](mailto:heforshe(at)unwomen.de).

More about UN Women Germany: <https://unwomen.de/>

German report with pictures: <https://unwomen.de/konferenz-2022/>

You can find all pictures [here](#). Credit: UN Women Deutschland/Maren Strehlau.