



KINGDOM OF BELGIUM

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National statement delivered by

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Ministerial Roundtable "Mobilizing financing for gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls: Policies and strategies to end women's and girls' poverty"

CSW68

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Madame/Mister President,
Distinguished colleagues,

Both **poverty** and **gender inequality** are two forms of social injustice. Despite all efforts to achieve gender equality, **women and girls are still too often in an underprivileged position in our societies, and therefore at higher risk of poverty.**

To effectively address the gender poverty gap, we need to tackle **discrimination, negative social gender norms and gender stereotypes.**

Gender mechanisms are woven into our society.
They impact both women and men's living conditions and participation in society.
They pin mothers down to their care responsibilities.

This impacts their position on the labor market and inhibits women from reaching their full potential.

In order to end the gender poverty gap, **gender mainstreaming is a priority for Belgium and is mandatory at several decision-making levels.**

We have a federal law and action plan on gender mainstreaming in place in Belgium. This, next to political commitment and human and financial resources, ensures the concrete implementation of this strategy.

Dear colleagues,

We need to protect our girls against the impact of poverty.
I would like to speak briefly about period poverty in particular.
Period poverty or ignorance can have a long-lasting impact on the lives of our girls and women.

- **In Belgium the federal government took the first step in 2018 by reducing the VAT rate for menstrual products from 21% to 6%.**
- Many local governments in Flanders, Belgium lead by example by **providing free menstrual products in libraries, at schools, in sportclubs**. For example, my home town, the City of **Aarschot** launched a pilot project in March 2021, placing vending machines with free sanitary pads in the city's seven high schools.
- As the Flemish Minister for Equal Opportunities I have launched a **pilot project and offer menstrual products for free in publicly visited restrooms in the buildings of the Flemish Authority**.
- In a recent project call by the State Secretary for Gender Equality, **a project provided awareness-raising sessions where young people learned about menstruation, menstrual products and their conditions of use, the consequences of menstruation for menstruating women and the problem of menstrual poverty**.

To finish, I would like to thank all the people who have committed themselves to the fight for gender equality. I believe in a strong civil society to enhance the empowerment of women. These gender and/or women's organizations must therefore be structurally funded, and regularly consulted.

Thank you for your attention.