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Still a long way to go until we reach gender equality in the EU

Report by Green MEP Ernest Urtasun

Europe is indisputably one of the world's leaders when it comes to women's rights and gender equality. However, the fact that Europe is still only halfway towards achieving gender equality is often overlooked. If no significant progress is made, it is estimated that it will take 70 years to achieve equal pay, 40 years until domestic work is equally shared between men and women, and 20 years to achieve equal representation in politics. Must we leave it to the next generation to make these goals a reality?

As a member of the European Parliament's Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality, I have had the opportunity this year to draft the annual report assessing the state of gender equality in the EU and the conclusion is clear: progress on gender equality is extremely slow. According to the [EIGE Gender Equality Index 2015](#), the EU has an overall score of only 52.9 out of 100, and in the last 10 years the score has only increased by 1.6 points in total.

EU needs a strategy to deliver gender equality

The lack of progress in this area demonstrates how, in recent years, the status and profile of gender equality has been marginalized as a political objective. In the EU, this slow progress is demonstrated by the fact that all new gender equality directives are currently blocked by either the European Council or the European Commission.

Some EU Member States have also seen a substantial increase in civic and political movements that come at the expense of equal rights for women and men, and even challenge the overall need for gender equality policies.

The data collected in the report also shows that economic crises and austerity policies have had a huge impact on women and on gender equality. Women have been the most affected by budget cuts to public services such as health, education, social services and social benefits. Austerity measures have contributed to an increase in the so-called feminisation of poverty, whereby cutbacks in public care and health services shift the responsibility for care away from society to individual households, where the burden falls predominantly on women.

Despite the fact that 97.8 million women were employed in Europe in 2015 - an increase of 3.5 million on 2010 figures - the reality is that 1.7 million of these new jobs are part time. In the EU, only 44.1 % of women work full-time, compared with 68.8 % of men, and for women this has consequences in terms of salary, pensions, unemployment benefits, etc. According to a [report by Eurofound](#), it is estimated that the gender employment gap is costing the EU around 370 billion euros per year, or 2.8 % of the EU's GDP.

The wage gap between men and women remains at 16.1 % and the pension gap is at an alarming 40 % and even higher in countries including Cyprus, the Netherlands, Germany and Austria. Worryingly, in half of the Member States the gender pension gap has increased, and in countries such as Malta, Spain, Belgium, Ireland, Greece, Italy and Austria between 11 % and 36 % of women have no access to a pension.

Gender equality must be a priority

We have recently seen a growth in mobilization around feminist causes. We have seen women marching on the streets of Poland against the prohibition of abortion, in Argentina the demonstrations against gender violence that paralysed the whole country, women's marches quickly organised in the United States against Trump, and the success of the international women's strike on 8 March. It will soon be 60 years since the principle of equality between men and women was first included in an EU treaty, the Treaty of Rome, but despite the progress made there is still a long way to go.

We continue to have many reasons to keep on fighting for equality. In the current political atmosphere in Europe, we need the EU's leaders to take a firm stance on gender equality and make it a priority, in order to demonstrate their commitment to the values upon which the EU was founded and to ensure that human dignity, democracy, equality, non-discrimination and equality between women and men prevail in the EU.

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