

MAINSTREAMING THE GENDER DIMENSION IN THE EUROPE 2020 STRATEGY

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Abstract:

The purpose of this paper is to underline the importance of the gender dimension, which, unfortunately, was not specifically addressed in any of Europe 2020's seven flagship initiatives. In spite of the fact that European Union has specific priorities and objectives regarding gender equality, clearly emphasized in the Strategy for equality between women and men, the gender dimension was omitted from those five quantifiable targets, except as regards the employment rate. Hence, the paper aims to emphasize the link between the Commission's Strategy for equality between women and men (2010-2015), which is the best attempt to define a set of strategic objectives and indicators for gender-related issues, and the Europe 2020 Strategy, which puts forward a set of measures that will generate a smarter, more sustainable and more inclusive model across the European Union, by analyzing each of them, and to highlight that, in order to achieve the Europe 2020 targets, there is a sharp need for mainstreaming gender equality in the Europe 2020 Strategy.

Keywords: Europe 2020, gender, equality

Introduction

Gender equality is one of the European Union's founding principles, the principle of equal pay for equal work dating back to the beginnings of the European Community in 1957 when it became a provision of the Treaty of Rome (Article 119). This principle was successfully invoked in 1975 to defend Gabrielle Defrenne¹, an air hostess working for the Belgian national airline, who brought an action for compensation for the loss she had suffered in terms of salary, allowance on termination of service and pension as a result of the fact that air hostesses and male members of the air

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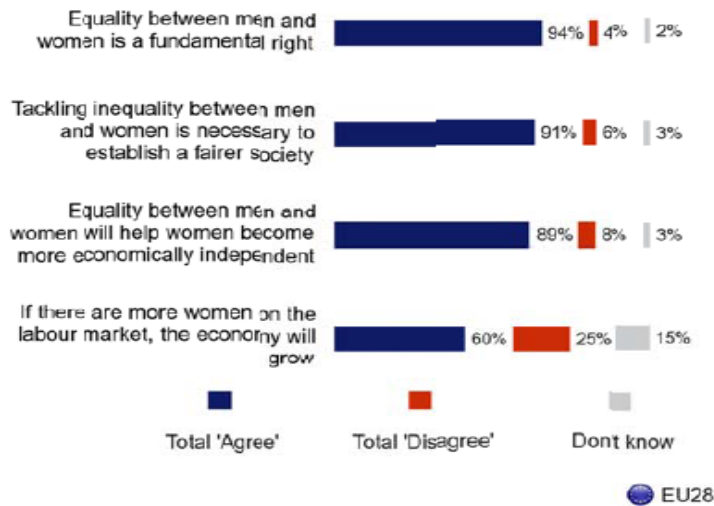
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¹ [<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:61975CJ0043&from=EN>], 8 August 2015.

crew performing identical duties did not receive equal pay. The rights stemming from this case were an unshakable legacy for women in the European Union and led to the adoption of the first European directives on gender equality.

Nowadays, surveys show that almost all Europeans (94%) agree that equality between women and men is a fundamental right, and around three in five Europeans (62%) think that inequalities between men and women are widespread in their own country. Most of the respondents (91%) agree that tackling inequality between men and women is necessary to establish a fairer society, while a similar proportion (89%) agree that equality between men and women will help women become more economically independent².

QB11. Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.



Source: Special Eurobarometer 428, *Gender equality*; fieldwork: 29 November to 9 December 2014 (Wave EB82.4), p. 30.

Despite of the importance of gender equality at EU level and among Europeans, the *Europe 2020 Strategy*, adopted by the European Council on 17 June 2010 and designed to deliver high levels of employment, high

² Special Eurobarometer 428, *Gender equality*; fieldwork: 29 November to 9 December 2014 (Wave EB82.4), p. 7.

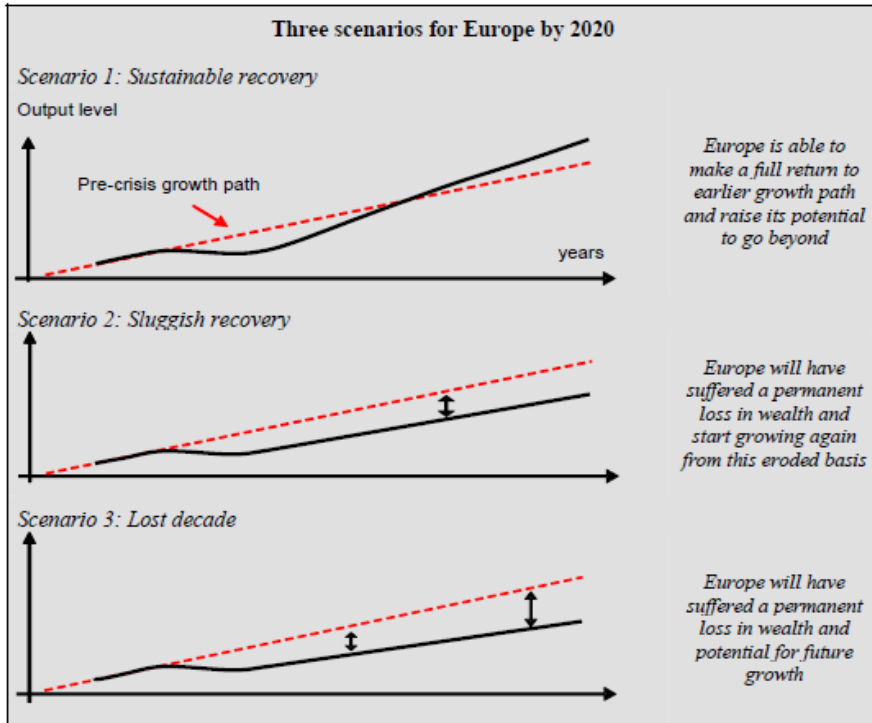
productivity and social cohesion, while reducing the impact on natural environment, omitted to refer to the gender dimension into the implementation of each of the seven flagship initiatives. Considering that there is a priority for this strategy to achieve its goals, mainstreaming the gender dimension into the implementation of its initiatives remains an important issue, the proper application of the *Europe 2020 Strategy* must be consistent with the *Strategy for equality between women and men*.

Europe 2020 Strategy: general remarks

Europe 2020 Strategy clearly defines where EU wants to be by 2020, including five headline targets in the areas of employment, research and development, climate change and energy, education, poverty and social exclusion. By 2020, “75% of the population aged 20-64 should be employed, 3% of the EU’s GDP should be invested in R&D, the ‘20/20/20’ climate/energy targets should be met (including an increase to 30% of emissions reduction if the conditions are right), the share of early school leavers should be under 10% and at least 40% of the younger generation should have a tertiary degree, and 20 million less people should be at risk of poverty”³. In order to catalyze progress under each priority theme, the Commission set up seven flagship initiatives, *Innovation Union*, *Youth on the move*, *A digital agenda for Europe*, *Resource efficient Europe*, *An industrial policy for the globalization era*, *An agenda for new skills and jobs*, and *European Platform against poverty*, initiatives that commit both the EU and the Member States.

There are three scenarios for Europe by 2020, described in the Strategy. In the first scenario, Europe is able to make a full return to earlier growth path, regain competitiveness and boost its productivity. In the second scenario, Europe will have suffered a permanent loss in wealth and a sluggish growth rate, while in the third one Europe will face a decline with high levels of unemployment and social distress.

³ European Commission, *Europe 2020. A European strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth*, COM(2010) 2020, Brussels, p. 3.



Source: European Commission, *Europe 2020. A European strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth*, COM(2010) 2020, Brussels, p. 7.

According to the Commission, in 2014, EU was on track to reach some of its headline targets for 2020 but has fallen behind with regards to others. While substantial progress was made in the area of education, climate and energy, the employment, R&D and poverty targets will remain challenging. For instance, besides the fact that, in the area of employment, the national targets are not sufficiently ambitious to cumulatively reach the EU 2020 target (the fulfillment of all national targets will bring the overall EU-28 employment rate up to 74% instead of 75% which is the Europe 2020 target), the employment trends reversed after 2008 as a result of the economic crisis. By 2013, the indicator had a deviation of 6.6% from the Europe 2020 target, registering only 68.4%. Also, the trends include “a growing gap between the best and the least well performing Member States

and a widening gap between regions inside and across Member States [...], growing inequalities in the distribution of wealth and of income”⁴.

To overcome these difficulties, specialists stressed the need to recognize the costs of non-equality and underlined the links between gender equality, economic growth, and employment. Gender equality should be seen as an investment because “gender equality means utilization of all human capital investments, access to a full range of skills and it returns on personal investment in human capital”⁵. Also, gender equality “can be seen as a tool for sustainable demographic development and states”, studies showing “a positive correlation between gender equality and economic growth”⁶.

In this context, an analysis of the *EU Strategy for equality between women and men* is required, in order to point out how it can reinforce the objectives established in the *Europe 2020 Strategy*.

EU Strategy for equality between women and men (2010-2015): objectives and key actions

EU Strategy for equality between women and men 2010-2015, adopted by the European Commission in September 2010, lays down the program of the Commission with five priority areas: equal economic independence for women and men; equal pay for work of equal value; equality in decision-making; dignity, integrity and an end to gender-based violence; and promoting gender equality beyond the EU. So, the strategy sets out priorities including equal economic independence, pay, labour market opportunities and access to decision-making positions, the need to promote women’s dignity and stop gender-based violence, addressing, in addition, horizontal issues as gender roles, the legislative framework and tools for promoting gender equality.

Equal economic independence is one priority area of EU’s strategy emerged from the belief that “getting more women on to the labour market helps counterbalance the effects of a shrinking working-age population,

⁴ European Commission, *Taking stock of the Europe 2020 Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth*, COM(2014) 130 final, Brussels, p. 21.

⁵ Swedish Presidency of the European Union, Division for Gender Equality, *Conference report “What does gender equality mean for economic growth and employment?”*, Strasbourg, 2009, p. 6.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

thereby reducing the strain on public finances and social protection systems, widening the human capital base and raising competitiveness”⁷, being also considered as a step forward in reaching the target established by Europe 2020 of 75% employment rate for women and men. In order to achieve the equal economic independence objective, the strategy included some key actions, namely the promotion of female entrepreneurship and self-employment, the assessment of remaining gaps in entitlement to family-related leave, the promotion of gender equality in all initiatives on immigration and integration of migrants etc. An overview of the outcome of these actions shows that, in 2014, the percentage of women in employment was 63.5%, being still 11.5% off the Europe 2020 target for total employment. Also, the employed women are still four times more likely to be working part-time than employed men, while the proportion of inactive young women remains double that of young men⁸. Specialists consider that “part-time work is associated both with problems of entry into the labour market – and thus with a form of disguised employment – but also with the involvement of men and women in other forms of activity ranging from education to caring”⁹.

The second priority included in the strategy, a principle enshrined in the EU Treaties, is the one of equal pay for equal work and work of equal value. It seems that the gender pay gap in the European Union, or the average difference between men’s and women’s hourly gross earnings across the economy as a whole, registered 16.4% (in 2012), varying from 30% in some countries (such as Estonia) to 9.7% (in Romania) and 2.5% (in Slovenia)¹⁰. In trying to figure out the causes of this phenomenon, the European Commission stated that, besides the question of equal pay for equal work, “there is a gap between women’s educational attainment and professional development, thus special attention should be paid to the

⁷ European Commission, *Strategy for equality between women and men 2010-2015*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2011, p. 12.

⁸ European Commission, *Report on equality between women and men 2014*, pp. 7-8.

⁹ Francesca Bettio, Jill Rubery, and Mark Smith, “Gender, flexibility, and new employment relations in the European Union”, in Mariagrazia Rossilli (ed.), *Gender Policies in the European Union*, New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2000, p. 138.

¹⁰ Eurostat, *Structure of Earnings Survey*.

transition between education and the labour market”, mentioning the segregation in the labour market as “women and men still tend to work in different sectors/jobs”¹¹. Women are over-represented in fields of study that are linked to traditional female roles, and in certain job sectors as health care, education, health, public administration, many of them working part-time or under atypical contracts which means that their jobs tend to be less well paid or to be seen as of lower value¹². Women remain under-represented in sectors such as engineering, science, mathematics, computing etc. Statistics show that “only 29 of every 1000 female graduates have a computing-related degree and only four go on to work directly in ICT”¹³. While women represent 59% of new graduates, 46% of PhD degree holders are women, 33% of researchers, 20% of highest academic staff and only 11% of heads of universities or assimilated institutions. Likewise, the women are “overrepresented in the teaching force but underrepresented in management positions, including in higher education”¹⁴, and “the most under-represented source of entrepreneurship, with only 30% of new start-ups in Europe established by women”¹⁵.

The Commission’s key actions in this field include the support in finding ways to improve transparency of pay, the support of equal pay initiatives at the workplace and the encouragement of women to enter non-traditional professions.

Equality in decision-making is an objective set out in the strategy, given the fact that women continue to be under-represented in decision-making positions, in national parliaments, in ministers, as board members of the companies or presidents of the board. In order to achieve this objective, the Commission will monitor the target for women in top level decision-making positions in research and the progress towards greater participation by women in committees, expert groups, in European Parliament elections etc.

¹¹ European Commission, *Strategy for equality...*, p. 16.

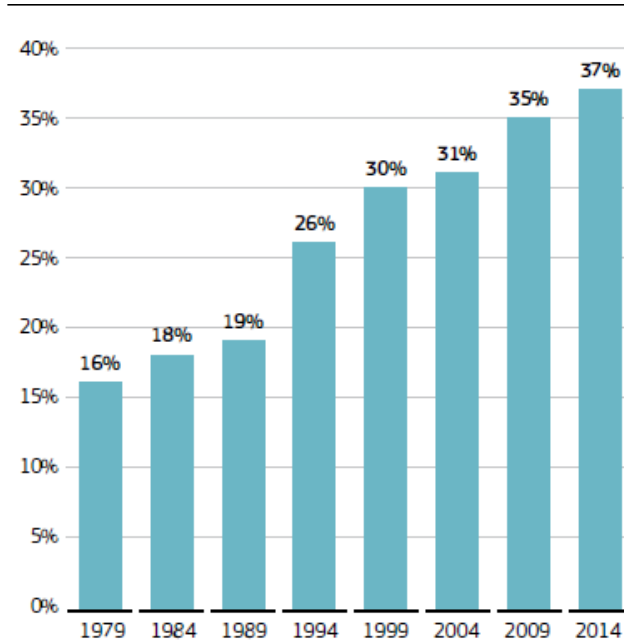
¹² See Ellie Scambor et al., “Men and gender equality: European insights”, in *Men and masculinities 2014*, Vol. 17(5), p. 556, DOI:10.1177/1097184X14558239, [<http://jmm.sagepub.com/content/17/5/552.refs>], 29 September 2015.

¹³ European Commission, *Report on equality...*, p. 13.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 14.

Representation of women in the European Parliament, 1979-2014



Source: European Commission, *Report on equality between women and men 2014*, p. 11.

The fourth objective of the strategy is dignity, integrity and an end to gender-based violence. Gender-based violence is “violence that is directed against a person because of his or her gender (including gender identity/expression) or that affects persons of a particular gender disproportionately; it can be physical, sexual, economic and/or psychological in nature and includes violence in close relationships”¹⁶.

Statistics show that “on average, every minute of every day in Europe, 7 women are victims of rape or other sexual assault, 25 are victims of physical violence and 74 are victims of sexual harassment”¹⁷, violence against women being listed as a major concern among Europeans. Thus, the Eurobarometer indicates that Europeans are most likely to say that “violence against women” (59%) is the gender inequality issue that should

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 23.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

be dealt with the most urgently, followed by “women being paid less than men for the same work” (53%)¹⁸. A very small minority, only 1% of Europeans, say that none of the nine* inequalities require urgent attention¹⁹.

The key actions of the Commission in this field would include, through other measures, the adoption of a specific strategy on combating violence against women supported by a wide campaign on this issue.

Gender equality in external actions is the last objective that makes a connection between EU’s efforts in this field and the spread of those efforts around the world. The Commission’s efforts are directed towards the encouragement of partner countries to promote gender equality in international fora, in candidate and potential candidate countries, in countries part of the European Neighborhood Policy and countries outside Europe through policy dialogue and assistance. Also, the Commission will monitor the implementation of the EU Plan of Action on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment in Development (2010-2015). The 2014 report on the Action Plan shows that “gender mainstreaming was enhanced in 20 different policy sectors”²⁰, but, however, progress remains slow and uneven in many areas.

The link between the Strategy on gender equality and EU 2020 Strategy

The analysis of the *Strategy on gender equality* and the *2014 Report* proves that gender equality is a major concern at EU level and at the member states level, materialized in the form of specific objectives and targets that need to be achieved in a timeline period.

Despite this fact, unfortunately, the *EU 2020 Strategy* does not include an explicit gender equality pillar. The flagship initiatives address little

¹⁸ Special Eurobarometer 428, *Gender equality...*, p. 11.

* The list of the inequalities mentioned in the survey includes: Facing prejudice because of preconceived ideas about the image and role of women and men; The unequal sharing of household tasks between men and women; The low number of women in positions of power in politics and businesses; Women being paid less than men for the same work; Women being more likely to be poor than men; Women receiving lower pensions than men; Violence against women; Tackling lower life expectancy amongst men; Higher dropout rate amongst boys in education.

¹⁹ Special Eurobarometer 428, *Gender equality...*, p. 73.

²⁰ European Commission, *Report on equality...*, p. 28.

attention to gender equality, this issue being only tackled among the EU 2020 policies regarding labour market and employment. These policies deal with two of the priorities set in the *Gender Equality Strategy*, the economic independence of women and the equal pay for equal work and work of equal value.

The economic independence of women is an objective assumed by the Commission in the *European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion*²¹, one of the seven initiatives of the *Europe 2020 Strategy*, being also the first priority set in the *Strategy on equality between women and men (2010-2015)*. Women's economic independence is considered an important issue, and it is mentioned in both strategies, being known that poverty and exclusion from the labour market go hand in hand, women being generally more at risk than men when talking about poverty, the gender divide being clearly visible here. So, the European Commission placed the fight against poverty at the heart of its economic, employment and social agenda – the *Europe 2020 Strategy*, setting as one of its targets that 20 million less people should be at risk of poverty. Therefore, the European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion initiative presents how different policies will contribute to this ambitious goal of reducing poverty and increasing inclusion, making a link between the *Europe 2020 Strategy* and the *Strategy on equality* by specifying that “gender equality policies, in line with the new Strategy on equality between women and men for 2010-2015, are needed to address the gender income gap that is visible in most age groups, and leads to higher rates of poverty in the female population, both in work and out of work”²².

The *EU Agenda for New Skills and Jobs*²³, another flagship initiative of the *Europe 2020 Strategy*, sets out as key priorities: better functioning labour markets, a more skilled workforce, better job quality and working conditions and stronger policies to promote job creation and demand for labour. Its aim is to present a set of concrete actions in order to improve flexibility and security in the labour market (flexicurity), to help people in

²¹ European Commission, *The European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion: A European framework for social and territorial cohesion*, COM(2010) 758 final, Brussels.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 10.

²³ European Commission, *An Agenda for new skills and jobs: A European contribution towards full employment*, COM(2010) 682 final, Strasbourg.

achieving the right skills for the jobs and to improve the quality of jobs and the working conditions. This initiative approaches the gender equality dimension through mentioning that the flexicurity policies should be adapted to the post-crisis context “in order to accelerate the pace of reform, to reduce labour market segmentation, support gender equality and make transitions pay”²⁴. Also, it emphasizes the need for internal flexibility (adjustment of work organization and working time) which will allow men and women to combine work and care commitments, “enhancing in particular the contribution of women to the formal economy and to growth, through paid work outside the home”²⁵.

The *Digital Agenda*, which proposes to better exploit the potential of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in order to foster innovation, economic growth and progress, mentions women as a specific target when it comes to increasing participation in technical and digital education and training, declaring that, given the number of women between the ages of 15-24, “it is necessary to improve the attractiveness of the ICT sector for professional use and in particularly for the production and design of technology”²⁶.

Youth on the move, the EU initiative to unleash the potential of young people, stresses the need for quality education and training, successful labour market integration and more mobility of young people, mentioning that young women are particularly at risk of failing into the segmentation trap “where many young workers experience a sequence of temporary jobs alternating with unemployment, with little chance of moving toward a more stable, open-ended contract and incomplete contributions to pension provisions”²⁷.

Finally, the Europe 2020 flagship initiative, *Innovation Union*²⁸, underlines that gender considerations should be fully taken into account in the strategies that Member States should have in place to train enough researchers to meet their national R&D targets and to promote attractive

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 2.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 5.

²⁶ European Commission, *A Digital Agenda for Europe*, COM(2010) 245 final, Brussels, p. 25.

²⁷ European Commission, *Youth on the Move*, COM(2010) 477 final, Brussels, p. 35.

²⁸ European Commission, *Europe 2020 Flagship Initiative. Innovation Union*, COM(2010) 546 final, Brussels, pp. 9-11.

employment conditions in public research institutions, one of its commitments making reference to gender balance in research careers.

Conclusions

Despite the European and national efforts to promote gender equality, gender inequalities in Europe still exist with: “women still paid on average around 16% less than men per hour of work across the entire economy; women continuing to be underrepresented in leadership positions, including decision-making functions in politics and in corporate boardrooms – with women holding only 27% of seats in national parliaments and governments, 18% of board seats, and 3% of CEO positions; violence against women remaining an issue, with an estimated 20-25% of women in Europe having been victims of physical violence at least once in their lives; persisting stereotypes of traditional gender roles meaning that women still carry a disproportionate share of the burden of housework and of caring for children, the elderly and other dependants”²⁹.

Even though the *Strategy for equality* “proclaims a close link to *Europe 2020*, in all aspects and flagship initiatives, especially with regard to designing and implementing the appropriate national measures”, one main concern remains the “consistency between implementation of the principles of the *Strategy for equality* and the main instruments of *Europe 2020*, especially the seven flagship initiatives and the guidelines, since these will be carried out at the EU level as well as in the Member States”³⁰. Such as, the *Agenda for New Skills and Jobs*, one of the seven flagship initiatives within *Europe 2020*, which focuses on modernizing labour markets and empowering people by developing their own skills³¹, will fail unless it will enforce equality between women and men and women’s economic independence, as delivered in the *Strategy for equality*. Same scenario for the *European Platform against poverty* which addresses the assertion of social and territorial cohesion such that “the benefits of growth and jobs are widely

²⁹ Special Eurobarometer 428, *Gender equality...*, p. 4.

³⁰ European Economic and Social Committee, *The gender dimension in the Europe 2020 Strategy*, SOC/471, Brussels, 2013, p. 6.

³¹ European Commission, *Europe 2020...*, p. 4.

shared and people experiencing poverty and social exclusion are enabled to live in dignity and take an active part in society”³².

Therefore, as European Economic and Social Committee opinioned, “it is essential to mainstream the gender dimension and insert specific measures into the objectives, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of policies developed under the umbrella of *Europe 2020*”³³.

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³² *Ibidem*.

³³ European Economic and Social Committee, *The gender dimension...*, p. 1.

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