

# WOMEN'S DAY SPECIAL

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## Contents

EU seen as dragging its feet on gender equality.....	p.1	Part-time jobs, enabling women's 'double-shift'? .....	p.8
Gender equality: Let's get our house in order.....	p.2	Gender inequality persists in Europe.....	p.9
Germany debates bill to set gender quota on corporate boards.....	p.3	'There is an important role for women in finance', expert says.....	p.10
Gender equality comes with clear targets, says MEP .....	p.5	The Juncker Plan must not be a missed opportunity for gender equality.....	p.10
Activist: EU must dismantle the 'Pink Ghetto' .....	p.6		

## EU seen as dragging its feet on gender equality

On the eve of International Women's Day on Sunday (8 March), the EU is seen as dragging its feet on fulfilling its promise on gender equality.

Last week, Christine Lagarde, the Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund, has called gender equality a "moral imperative" that would also act to bring about a "more profitable global economy".

### The 'moral imperative'

Lagarde said that it is important to demonstrate to policymakers and politicians that equality in the workplace "actually makes economic sense," and that a level playing field can spark "more growth," as well as bring about a "more diverse society," that can be "much more profitable from the global economic point of view."

The EU has made equality between women and men one of its founding values in 1957. Since then anti-discrimination legislation has been adopted and subsequent strategies have been flashed out. Three years



ago, Viviane Reding, the then Commissioner in charge of Justice and fundamental rights even pushed for gender quotas on company boards, arguing it made perfect economic sense.

However, the legislation has been blocked for months in the European Council.

A report published last week by the European Women's Lobby shows that overwhelmingly, the most effective way to increase the representation of women in decision-making positions – and in this case, on company boards – is through binding legislation with regular monitoring, intermediary targets and strong sanctions.

"Europe as a whole is dragging its feet and making progress that is all too slow," said Joanna Maycock, EWL Secretary-General. "There is a growing frustration about the fact that we seem stuck in inequality," she added.

### Dangerous trend: the Pink Ghetto

"A lack of diversity has proven itself to be dangerous for our democracies, our societies and our economies. We need a paradigm shift and we need it fast. A new way of looking at things," she insisted.

Since the Commission proposed the law, cracks in the glass ceiling have started to show. More and more companies are competing to attract the best female talent. Since October 2010, the share of women on boards has risen by 7.6%. But that is not enough.

The Commission is expected to draft a new strategy reviewing priorities of the current gender equality strategy and evaluating progress made.

According to the gender NGOs, 2015 is a highly symbolic year for women's rights as

Continued on Page 2

### Continued from Page 1

it marks the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action, which underlined the need for measures to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making.

Věra Jourová, Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality, said in a recent op-ed that the EU has made progress on many aspects of gender equality but many inequalities remain.

In addition to the gender pay gap of 16% on average, women continue to work more unpaid hours than men at home. Women are also still overrepresented in lower paid sectors in the labour market, and under-represented in decision-making positions, she added.

"Austerity has made it worse, but it is part of a systemic problem that discriminates against women and creates a Pink Ghetto which is hard for women to escape," Maycock told EurActiv.

To give a clear signal to the Commission, the European Parliament is drafting its own-

initiative report on the post 2015 strategy for gender equality. Rapporteur Maria Noichl said in an interview with EurActiv that Brussels must adopt clear targets and effective monitoring mechanisms to tackle gender disparity.

The draft report urges the executive to consider the objectives of the future strategy as an aspect of the European Semester and to insert a gender perspective in the country-specific recommendations and the Annual Growth Survey.

### Italy worse than Nicaragua

It is unconceivable - activists say - that some European countries fare worse than some non-developed countries.

According to the most recent World Economic Forum Gender gap index, Italy, Europe's fourth largest economy, has a bigger gender gap than Nicaragua, Mozambique and Botswana.

The index reveals Nordic countries are the best places for women to live. Iceland,

for the sixth year running, topped the global chart, followed by Finland, Norway, Sweden and Denmark.

Economic powerhouse Germany came 12<sup>th</sup>, let down, like many countries, by women's participation in politics. Croatia, 55<sup>th</sup> in the 142-country index, was one of just six nations whose gender gaps have grown since 2005.

### Unblocking negotiations

One of Commissioner Jourová's tasks in 2015, and a personal priority, she said, is the unblocking of negotiations on the EU's anti-Discrimination directive.

"Discrimination has no place in our union," she said.

According to the report Fair Play: More Equal Laws Boost Female Labour Force Participation, published last week by the IMF, restrictions on women's rights are strongly associated with gender gaps in labour force participation, which can negatively impact a country's GDP.

## Gender equality: Let's get our house in order

Public administrations everywhere in Europe need to be more in tune with the people they serve and use the full potential of both men and women, writes Kristalina Georgieva in an exclusive op-ed for EurActiv.

*Kristalina Georgieva is Commission Vice-President for Budget and Human Resources. She is a Bulgarian national and a former Vice-President of the World Bank.*

Have you heard of European Equal Pay Day? It shows how long into the year



Kristalina Georgieva [Commission]

women work "for free", given that they still earn around 16% less on average than men. The last two years, it came on 28 February, almost at the time we mark International Women's Day. The European Commission is very active in highlighting this and many other problems that affect women, from violence in conflict zones, to a lack of female

representation on company boards.

At the same time, I am currently busy tackling an issue much closer to home; we lack proper gender balance in our own organisation.

Women actually outnumber men in

Continued on Page 3

**Continued from Page 2**

the European Commission as a whole, by 54.5% to 45.5%. The problem lies in how those jobs are distributed, in particular that only about 30% of our managers are female at the moment. That is why we have committed to get to at least 40% female management by the end of our mandate in 2019.

It stands to reason that every society, every organisation should use the full potential of both men and women. This is a question of fairness, as equal opportunities and equal recognition for all should be guaranteed. However, gender equality also makes economic sense. As the International Labour Organisation pointed out recently, there is a positive link between more female management and better business performance. No one can afford to miss out on talent.

This is also an issue of proper representation. Public administrations everywhere in Europe need to be more in tune with the people they serve, reflecting more the diverse, complex society we live in. A society where more than 50% of our fellow citizens are female, where women are leading, and are definitely doing their share.

The European Commission should be no exception in having more gender balance. We have a new Commission and a new

vision for Europe. To serve European citizens best, we need more than just good ideas. We need everybody working to the best of their ability, fully tapping into the potential of all our staff, men and women.

We have made progress. The European Commission has about 450 members of staff at so-called "senior management" level and about 1,200 at "middle management" level. Female senior management has increased from 22% to 27.5% since 2010. Female middle management has increased from 25% to 31.4% in the same time span. If you think about the fact that in 1995, women made up only 4% of senior managers at the Commission, we're in a far better position already.

So how are we going to take the next step to equality and achieve the 40% target?

First of all, we need to identify and develop talented female staff with potential, encourage them to apply for management posts and support them along the way. Like many other public administrations, the Commission needs a proper talent management policy for all, based on merit and allowing people to move on and up. We will put more emphasis on training, on coaching and in particular on mentoring schemes. Often, people need a little extra

push from a role model who can encourage and advise them. I know this from my own experience. Time and again in my own career I had to be pushed to take on management jobs.

Secondly, we need to make sure that we promote a more flexible and result-oriented working environment, including more flexible work patterns. The nature of our work and today's information technology mean that we can telework and follow flexible working hours. This allows a better work-life balance, while still getting the job done.

Thirdly, we need leadership and accountability at the top in the Commission to make sure we follow through on this policy, so that the next generation in management is more diverse than the one before.

The European Commission will continue to speak out for women's rights in Europe and around the world. We will continue to provide billions of euros of funding from the EU budget to support empowerment and sustainable development for women and girls. Achieving at least 40% female management in our own house is a step towards gender equality in the Commission. It will not make the problems that women still face go away. But it will underline that we are serious about solving them.

## Germany debates bill to set gender quota on corporate boards

A bill to introduce a quota for women in corporate leadership positions is up for approval in the Bundestag. Politicians, employees and unions are criticising the measure, saying it is full of gaps, even calling it unconstitutional.

A quota for women on supervisory boards is planned to be passed in Germany's Bundestag in early March. But just a few days before its expected approval, the bill is more controversial than ever - within the country's political parties and among business representatives, but also for worker's unions and legal experts.

Last Monday (23 February), additional criticism surfaced over the bill, which was drafted by Germany's Justice Minister Heiko Maas and Minister for Women Manuela Schwesig, after much debate over the details of the measure.

### Violation of the constitution

Meanwhile, numerous experts who submitted assessments of the bill in the Bundestag's committees a few days

ago, labelled the piece of legislation as unconstitutional in many areas, and at least partially incompatible with EU law.

If approved, the law would require all listed companies in Germany, in which the employees are fully entitled to representation on the supervisory board, to fill 30% of these seats with women by 2016.

If the quota is ignored, sanctions could be imposed on the companies in violation. If no qualified woman can be found, the bill indicates that the positions must remain unfilled.

This is precisely why many critics disagree with the details of the measure. Analyst Kay Windthorst, from the University of Bayreuth, called these

**Continued on Page 4**

### Continued from Page 3

sanctions plainly unconstitutional.

The sanction of the “empty chair”, if too few women are available for the selection of the supervisory board, is an “unacceptable erosion of ownership authority among shareholders in filling the seats of the shareholder bank”, Windthorst explained.

### Exceptions needed in certain areas

Around 100 large companies would be affected by the new quota. Moreover, about 3,500 companies that are listed or subject to employee co-determination would be required to set binding targets on how they intend to increase the number of women in leadership positions. But businesses in this category will not be subject to penalties.

Windthorst is calling for exceptions to the quota's application. In construction and heavy industries, it is simply unlikely that enough women can be found, he said.

Germany's Left Party and Greens, who would have liked to set a quota for women at 40%, have expressed similar concerns. Chairman of the Bundestag's Legal Affairs Committee and MP from the Green Party, Renate Künast, said she was glad the quota for women has finally arrived.

“For four years, many women in the Bundestag have fought [for this measure]. Now we will hopefully get a foot in the door soon,” Künast commented.

But at the same time she criticised that the quota only applies to supervisory boards, not the management boards for operational business.

Unions call for separate treatment for employees and shareholders

Deputy Chairwoman of the German Confederation of Trade Unions (DGB), Elke Hannack praised the effort behind the bill but indicated that improvements are needed.

“The bank of employees on the one side and the bank of shareholders on the other” must be “observed separately”, Hannack said at the end of January in a statement for the *Neue Osnabrücker Zeitung*.

She said the unions are concerned that the shareholder's representatives will shirk



*Germany's bill on a quota for women on supervisory boards: starting in 2016, the number of women on executive boards should increase to at least 30%. [Sam Churchill/Flickr]*

the responsibility to uphold the women's quota because most women on supervisory boards subject to co-determination are employee representatives.

### Significant additional cost for companies

Meanwhile, employers have concerns of a different nature. They warn that the economy will be burdened by numerous additional administrative complications if the quota is implemented.

Ingo Kramer, President of the German Employers Association, called for improvements and criticised the additional reporting requirements and complicated commitments as well as extensive selection procedures in the event that the quota is not met.

The Federation of German Industries (BDI) is also certain that the burdens will increase, calling for exceptions for small boards of up to three persons.

“It is absurd to force medium-sized companies with one- or two-person managing boards to implement the quota,” said Holger Lösch, a member of the BDI's executive board.

Industry and employer groups also pointed out Minister Maas's cost calculations for the private economy as

another weakness the bill presents.

Many critics are convinced that Maas estimates of the annual costs for the private economy (€257,000) are much too low. The calculations are “absurd”, said Stephan Harbarth, chairman of the centre-right alliance in the Legal Affairs Committee.

Harbarth said he is certain that many companies will have to invest tens-of-thousands of euros.

### Businesses seeking to escape the quota

Heidelberg-based legal analyst Marc-Philippe Weller pointed out some of the possible effects of the additional financial and organisational burden on companies, in a position paper for the Bundestag.

He warned that companies may approach the “escape from the quota” by transforming into an entity with foreign legal status. This happened in Norway, for example, when such a quota was introduced, Weller said.

In Germany as well, Weller explained, the phenomenon is widely known as “escape from co-determination”, such as through transformation into a Public Limited Company (PLC), which is not regulated under German but under British corporate law.

# Gender equality comes with clear targets, says MEP

The European strategy on gender equality post-2015 requires clear targets and effective monitoring mechanisms to tackle discrimination in the labour market, education and decision-making positions, said Maria Noichl in an interview with EurActiv.

*She spoke to EurActiv's Editor-in-Chief Daniela Vincenti*

*German MEP Maria Noichl is a member of the S&D group and Rapporteur for the EU Strategy for equality between women and men post-2015*

**Gender equality is a founding value of the European Union, yet it is far from being a reality. You are preparing a draft report on The EU strategy post-2015 to influence the Commission's priorities. What barriers and how to overcome them in the coming years?**

Women in all their diversity are still facing discrimination in all areas of society. Various forms of violence against women, persistent discrimination in the labour market and an unequal share of decision-making positions as well as of care responsibilities are part of women's daily life in Europe. Stereotypes and gender roles, learned at a very young age and reproduced by the media do have a big influence on the choice we take in life. I tried to underline this situation through the structure and the holistic approach of the report. The main intention of the report is to call on the Commission to adopt a strategy for gender equality with clear targets and



MEP Maria Noichl [European Parliament]

effective monitoring mechanisms, as well as continuous evaluation in the mentioned areas. Because of the interconnection between the various forms of discrimination, we need to tackle all of these at the same time. And we need to do it now.

**The situation of women in the labour market has been a focus of the previous Commission, mainly through the proposal of setting quotas for women on boards. But that proposal is stuck in the Council. How do we resolve the deadlock?**

I was happy to hear that Commissioner Věra Jourová announced that she will do her utmost to solve the deadlock in the Council by talking to the governments of the Member States still being in opposition to it. Apparently, she already convinced one Member State by doing so.

I am confident that the flexibility clause (4b), included in the proposal during the last negotiations, will furthermore convince other countries to vote in favour of the directive. This clause gives countries which already have similar provisions in place the opportunity to pursue their efforts in their own way.

Germany, for example, is close to adopting its own quota law. I see this as a very positive signal from the national level: governments all over Europe are beginning to realise that quotas are a necessary tool to achieve the equal representation of

women, especially in the economic sphere. But quotas do not work without being legally binding and backed up by effective sanctions. There are more than enough qualified women in Europe to fill these positions. And I am confident that this quota will be adopted soon and help to finally use the full potential of our society.

**On average, women in the EU earn 16% less per hour than men. The result is lower pensions and risk of poverty. Are women trapped? How can they free themselves?**

Talking to different women in Europe, I see that a lot of them do not feel trapped but torn between their professional aspirations and the wish to have a family life. Reconciliation policies are therefore of utmost importance to make it possible for women to combine both.

European and national politicians need to elaborate flexible strategies, in close cooperation with women's rights organisations, in order to better share family and care responsibilities. This starts with the right to paternity and parental leave.

Moreover, we need good quality child and elderly care facilities with accessible hours, in order to facilitate reconciliation. This will also lead to the economic independence of women which should furthermore be encouraged as well by the

Continued on Page 6

Continued from Page 5

Member States through individual tax policies. Another step needs to start at a very early age: the elimination of stereotypes. Women and men should not feel obliged to follow a certain way. This would reduce the horizontal and vertical segregation in the labour market.

**We have a new EU executive. Do you see a new momentum moving gender equality forward?**

It is an encouraging sign to have for the first time a Commissioner being in charge of gender equality for all the women and men working on these issues in the European Union. During the first meetings with her we realised that gender equality seems to be a matter close to her heart.

Talking about the upcoming strategy on gender equality, she underlined the importance of concentrating on persisting gaps (like the gender pay or pension gap) as well as on the eradication of violence against women. I do especially appreciate her

commitment to the eradication of violence against women, as from my opinion the basis for the equal participation in society is a life free of violence. I do also appreciate her wish to work in close cooperation with the European Parliament.

I believe that this will be key to achieve real progress: not only in the elaboration of new strategies but also in the persuasion of the Member States, which sometimes can be a bit hesitant in the adoption and implementation of gender equality policies.

## Activist: EU must dismantle the 'Pink Ghetto'

The European Union is at a turning policy point: it must choose to lead the way towards a gender equal and sustainable future. Investing in women's rights and empowerment is the core commitment for a more sustainable, democratic and inclusive world to evolve, said Joanna Maycock in an interview with EurActiv.

*Joanna Maycock is Secretary General of the European Women's Lobby.*

*She spoke to EurActiv's Editor-in-Chief, Daniela Vincenti*

**In 60 years a lot has been done on gender equality, but we are not close to parity yet. What are priorities to accelerate equality in 2015?**

2015 is a very exciting time for gender equality and women's rights, and for the women's movement globally, and in Europe. Twenty years after the Beijing Platform for Action, a fundamental human rights instrument for women and girls was



EWL Secretary-General Joanna Maycock during a demonstration. [Plan EU]

adopted in 1995, the European Women's Lobby (EWL) has produced its assessment of the continuing discrimination of women and girls in Europe, as witnessed by EWL's 3000 member organisations.

Our report 'From Words to Action' gives the opportunity to learn from twenty years of campaigning. Much has been achieved, but much remains to be done. Despite the fact that equality between women and men is a core value of the EU, our report shows that women and girls still face inequality, violence, discrimination and insecurity. Women and girls can't wait 20 more years to enjoy their full human rights.

Many of your readers probably think that equality between women and men has already been achieved in Europe – or at the very least is well on its way. The reality is that women still face persisting and serious

discrimination: Women are much more likely to be unemployed or to live in poverty due to low paid precarious jobs. The average pay gap in Europe is still 16%, with women having 40% less pension than men. 30% of women in Europe have experienced male violence. Just 19% of Board members of listed companies are women and only 27% of members of parliament. That means that 73% of members of parliament are men. Women continue to experience sexism, sexual harassment and astonishing levels of stereotyping which hinder their personal, professional and political lives in multiple ways.

The European Union, is at a turning policy point: it must choose to lead the way towards a gender equal and sustainable

Continued on Page 7

**Continued from Page 6**

future. Investing in women's rights and empowerment is the core commitment for a more sustainable, democratic and inclusive world to evolve.

Women's rights are facing a stronger backlash than ever. Ultra-conservative and religious groups are systematically calling gender equality into question, by attacking women's sexual and reproductive rights, sexuality education, women's access to employment and decision-making.

At the same time, a new generation of young feminists is mobilising widely, dynamically tackling new and old forms of violations of their rights. They are angry and completely fed up with this systemic inequality. Feminist economists are challenging the unsustainable and unjust economic system we live in, by proposing new ways of measuring wellbeing and protecting our planet and the next generations.

**Do you see new momentum with the new Commission?**

It is a disgrace that there continues to be a heavy overrepresentation of men within the European Commission. With just 9 women out of 28 Commissioners, there is actually a lower proportion of women in this commission than in the last one. We do welcome the fact that there is finally a Commissioner with the explicit responsibility for Gender Equality. We have established a fruitful and open dialogue with Commissioner Věra Jourová.

There could be a milestone, momentum for more ambitious EU action.

**From where you stand, do you think the new Commission will come up with new proposals to move forward gender equality?**

In 2015, the EU will adopt its new Strategy on gender equality and women's rights. This should be the EU-wide framework for the realisation of women's rights in the EU. With the 2014 European elections, we saw more MEPs in the

European Parliament directly threatening EU policies to promote gender equality and women's rights. For the EWL, the Strategy should thus deliver a strong political message that equality between women and men is a core priority for the European Union. It must set ambitious goals to accelerate the progress towards equality between women and men, to ensure that women and girls in the EU do not have to wait another 20 years to realise the commitments made by the EU in Beijing 20 years ago.

We urge all the Commissioners to support Commissioner Jourová in her mission to mainstream gender all areas of work and push forward the Women on Boards Directive, the proposed Maternity Leave Directive, and the Anti-Discrimination Directive. We would also like to see the European Commission take leadership on establishing a coordinated, holistic strategy to combat all forms of violence against women.

**On average, women in the EU earn 16% less per hour than men. The result is lower pensions and risk of poverty. Is there any way to solve this decades-long injustice?**

Women are much more likely to live in poverty and more likely to be unemployed across all age groups. Austerity has been a disaster for everyone, and especially for women. Austerity measures that are implemented all over Europe: cutting social security systems, and reducing public services – all affect women doubly as they are over-represented both as employees in the public sector and as the beneficiaries of public services. Austerity has made it worse, but it is part of a systemic problem that discriminates against women and creates a Pink Ghetto which is hard for women to escape.

Around half the 16% Gender Pay Gap is the so called non-explainable factor and is purely discrimination based on gender.

The gender pay gap, in combination with lower participation of women in the labour market and women being overrepresented in part time, low-paid and precarious jobs, as well as the fact that women are far more likely

to take time out of the paid labour market to care for family members all contribute to the unacceptably high gender pension gap of 39%. This means that women's pensions are on average almost 40% less than men. What is striking is also that this gender pension gap is not decreasing.

**EWL has been closely monitoring member states progress on women on boards. Do you see an evolution, in specific countries? Is there any significant trend happening?**

From our recent report on women on boards, an evolution can definitely be seen; there are little cracks in the glass ceiling, with faster progress occurring in countries which have introduced binding quotas with strong sanctions, intermediary targets, and regular monitoring. Examples of good practice are Italy and France, and, outside of the EU, Norway and Iceland. However it is time to speed up the progress and therefore we need to look at the fundamental causes of this inequality.

There is a growing frustration about that fact that we seem stuck in inequality. For the European Women's Lobby, it is more than a business-issue, it is an issue of human rights, of good governance, of democracy. As we have seen from the crisis in the financial sector which has led to widespread recession and inequality, the macho culture and old boys' clubs making poor decisions in corporate board rooms are dangerous for our democracies and economies. We need a paradigm shift and we need it fast: a new way of looking at things – innovation, complex problem solving, There is a need for feminist leadership: and there is especially a need to get serious about tackling sexism in the workplace and in the media.

We need the EU directive "Improving the gender balance in company boardrooms," which is certainly a step in the right direction. Ideally though we would like to see a much stronger Directive with hard quotas, tough sanctions, and the inclusion of small and medium companies. We would also like to see binding EU action to increase the number of women CEOs.

## Part-time jobs, enabling women's 'double-shift'?

Many women in the EU who try to juggle both work and family life choose a part-time job. But these positions can have a negative impact on their health and widen the pay gap between men and women.



Women earn on average 16% less than men in the EU (Alex/Flickr)

At EU level, the female employment rate stood at 62.6% in 2013 and almost a third (31.8%) of them were working part-time, according to new data published on Thursday (5 March) by Eurostat, the EU's statistical office.

At the same time, the employment rate for men was 74.2%, but less than 10% of them (8.1%) were in part-time employment.

Eurostat also highlighted that the gender pay gap in 2013 stood at 16.4% in the EU, ranging from less than 5% in Slovenia to more than 20% in Estonia, Austria, the Czech Republic and Germany.

Liliana Cunha from Porto University has carried out a survey among female bus drivers in Portugal. She said female bus drivers often worked part-time and were rarely found in senior positions at bus companies.

These two components meant that the women often got the least favourable timetables which made it more difficult for them to organise their life. They would know late in advance whether they would have to show up for work in the morning or in the evening as well as which bus line they would have.

"Many women highlighted that it was impossible to reconcile the timetables with their family life and this is a factor which up until now has been mostly neglected. Dialogue between men and women brings an added value. It has highlighted the need to adjust time tables for the better for all," Cunha said. She was speaking at a

conference on Women's Health and Work organised by the European Trade Union Institute (ETUI) in Brussels on Thursday (5 March).

Dominique Cau-Bareille from Lyon University said that while 24% of secondary-school teachers in France work part-time, 90% of them are women. She said these women often had other part-time jobs and were therefore looking for part-time teaching jobs.

But having a part-time job at a school can be problematic. Often the part-time school teachers would need to do a lot of extra hours of training due to increasing demands for a higher level of teaching from the Ministry of Education, while cuts in the budgets would mean that they would have to take on this additional workload unpaid.

"Many of these women realise, especially after they have children, that they cannot commit to these kinds of activities of extra work. Therefore, tensions between them and the headmaster often increase. The women become tired and ill and it affects their teaching. There will also be tensions with colleagues who have to take on more of the work which the part-time worker cannot do," Cau-Bareille said.

### No part-time for Eastern Europeans

Siyka Kovacheva from the University of Plovdiv noted that there are still big differences when it comes to women's working conditions between Western and Eastern Europe. While part-time jobs almost don't exist in any sector, the women are also expected to take care of the children and it's not unusual that the children live with their parents long into their 30s.

Štěpánka Lehmann from the Research Institute for Labour and Social Affairs in the Czech Republic mentioned that women are often less flexible than men when it comes to their working time and that they often work the same number of hours every day and the same number of days every week. Women often have a lower chance of determine their working schedule, but there are considerable differences across Europe, with the most significant difference in Central and Eastern Europe. Here, men are considerably more flexible than women even though men also in these countries have less influence over their working hours.

"In Central and Eastern Europe, and to some extent in Mediterranean countries, women usually can't choose in any way their working schedules which are exclusively set by their companies. On the other hand, if we look at Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Denmark and Norway, the possibility to choose working hours is much better," Lehmann said.

As a consequence, women in Central and Eastern European countries, more than elsewhere in Europe, said their work had a negative effect on their health, the researcher noted.

# Gender inequality persists in Europe

The glass ceiling has not disappeared. There are still too few women in leadership positions, writes Věra Jourová.

*Věra Jourová is the European Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality.*

I want to seize the occasion of International Women's Day (8 March) to celebrate progress towards greater gender equality in recent decades. I believe that Europe is a "good address" for women, but we need to work hard to keep it that way and make it even better. Ending gender inequality should be our goal in the years to come: no woman in Europe should ever have to doubt that she has the same chances as a man.

My aim in this area is not to make everybody the same, but to make sure that men and women have the same choices in life and the same rights and freedoms.

## Gender equality, a core value of European societies

Nine in ten Europeans see gender equality as a core value for a fairer society. Two thirds of Europeans believe that gender inequalities in their country are less widespread now than a decade ago.

We can take pride in the progress Europe has achieved over several decades. Social patterns have evolved. Women now are strongly present on the labour market and have become financially independent.

I am glad to see that men wish to be more active participants in activities long considered for "women only". Young fathers are now happy to benefit from parental leave, something most of their fathers would never even have thought about.



But inequalities persist. Around three in five Europeans think that inequalities between men and women continue to be widespread in their country. I agree with my fellow European citizens: gender equality is no done deal, there is still work to do to guarantee that women have the same opportunities or recognition as men.

## Closing the remaining gaps and fighting violence against women

Women should be equal participants in all aspects of society, including in leading positions either in businesses or the public sector.

Women's employment rate currently stands at 62.5% against 74.3% for men. Young women still find it harder than young men to enter the labour market. Yet, the European economy needs all the potential and talent women have to offer – this talent should not be wasted.

Moreover, women are still paid on average 16% less than men for the same job. They are more likely than men to take up part-time jobs or interrupt their careers altogether to care for children or a sick parent. This inequality is also carried on to women's pensions, which are on average 39% lower than men's.

The glass ceiling has not disappeared: there are still too few women in leadership positions. Today they account for an average 20.2% of the members of board of directors in the largest companies, and only

3% become chief executive officer. Where progress has been made, it is concentrated in those few countries which have introduced legislative measures. National parliaments do not leave enough space for women with men still holding more than two thirds of the seats.

Finally, I wish to point to the most alarming phenomenon; violence against women. One in three women in the European Union experiences physical or sexual violence at some point in her life. This is an unacceptable situation.

## My commitment as gender equality Commissioner

As European Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality, equality between women and men is one of my key priorities.

I will in the coming months set out ways for women to secure further access to the labour market, and to top positions. The European Commission will also push for sufficient and high quality childcare, after school care, as well as support for women and men who care for other dependants. And we intend to press on forcefully with practical measures to eradicate violence against women.

We have to tackle the remaining challenges for gender equality to become a reality on the ground. I am committed to address these challenges and achieve tangible results.

## ‘There is an important role for women in finance’, expert says

Women are disproportionately more likely than men to answer “I do not know” to finance-related questions, said Academic director of the Global Financial Literacy Excellence Centre Annamaria Lusardi during the launch of EU Money Week in Brussels.



<http://eurac.tv/4wZ>

Speaking after International Women’s day on March 8, Lusardi emphasised the need to work on educating women on financial matters.

‘Women are an ideal target for financial education programmes’, Lusardi said. “There is a lot to be done on financial literacy among women”, she added.

## The Juncker Plan must not be a missed opportunity for gender equality

The exclusive focus of the Juncker Plan on physical infrastructure spending and investment in male-dominated industries will further undermine progress towards gender equality, write Giovanni Cozzi and Jerome De Henau.

*Giovanni Cozzi is Senior Economist at the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) and Jerome De Henau is Senior Lecturer at The Open University.*

The €315 billion Investment Plan for Europe proposed by European Commission President Juncker represents a good point of departure from the usual and exclusive focus on fiscal containment and public debt



[Flickr/Salvatore Barbera]

reduction. However, nothing is mentioned in this Plan on investment in social infrastructure, which is crucial to achieving gender equality and a more sustainable economy. The social infrastructure includes all the activities and services that meet the needs of an economy to maintain and reproduce its productive capacity – but also quality of life and well-being – through healthcare, education, childcare and long-term care.

### The impacts of austerity policies on women

First, cuts in government expenditure have led to a further deterioration of female-dominated public sector jobs and pay. Second, recruitment freezes or job cuts have also resulted in increased

Continued on Page 11

**Continued from Page 10**

working intensity for those remaining in employment, and women have been disproportionately affected by such changes. Third, cuts in care-related spending and support for care costs and family benefits have hit women in the labour market in particular. Many have reduced their work commitments or have left the labour market entirely as a result of such increases. Ultimately, as highlighted by the UK Women's Budget group, these cuts have reduced employment opportunities for women and have made it harder to combine earning a living and taking care of families.

In such an environment where women have been hardly hit by the economic crisis and its policy responses, we argue that Juncker's Investment Plan for Europe should also focus on investing in social infrastructure for ensuring a balanced and sustained economic recovery.

**Achieving a caring economy**

Investing in care services is not only essential. It is a more effective way of generating employment than simply investing in physical infrastructure. Indeed, the main characteristics of care and education services are that they are very labour-intensive, female-dominated, and rely little on import goods so that for a given amount of investment,

more jobs can be created locally than in physical infrastructure. Further, as many women are currently constrained by gender norms to provide unpaid care or to rely on informal economy care, more employment could be freed up by relieving them from such constraints, if quality care services are provided. More men would also be incentivised to provide more of these services (unpaid and paid).

Therefore, a long-term recovery that would not only be more gender-equitable but also more sustainable should focus its efforts on achieving a caring economy, where care for people as well as for the environment is the central objective. This means that any progressive investment plan for Europe should not only focus on investing in physical, and in particular green, infrastructure, but also on social infrastructure.

An important first step towards a more gender equitable approach would be to consider spending in health, care and education services, and in any other type of social infrastructure, as investment – and not just as current expenditure that adds to public deficits – as it builds and sustains the social and human capital of our economies in the long-run. As such, this type of investment, supported by public funds, should play a much more prominent role in any investment plan for Europe rather than being sidelined, as is currently the case in the Juncker Plan.



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