

Europe needs to fulfil its gender equality commitments



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A new vision for a gender-equal Europe was announced today by Vera Jourova, Vice-President for Values and Transparency, and Helena Dalli, Commissioner for Equality, when they unveiled the EU's Gender Equality Strategy 2020 - 2025. Priorities include reducing economic inequalities, creating better work-life balance, combating violence against women, and making sure that important issues, such as climate change and digitalisation take gender equality concerns into account.

“Our leaders have been given a clear road map to make the changes that Europe needs” said Carlien Scheele, Director of the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE). “The strategy sends a strong message that gender equality is a cross-cutting issue in all policy areas. Leaders have a responsibility to ensure that it is always considered in decisions affecting the everyday lives of EU citizens.”

EIGE's review of the Beijing Platform for Action, published ahead of International Women's Day, reinforces the Commission's message. Europe has several gender equality challenges needing immediate attention.

One big challenge that needs tackling is the unequal sharing of unpaid housework and caring responsibilities. This is a major cause of the EU's 16 % gender pay gap. On average, women do an extra 13 hours of unpaid work each week, compared to men. This limits women's career opportunities and prevents them from entering positions of power. On company boards, decision-making positions mostly go to men, with women occupying less than a third of board seats (27.7 %) in large companies across the EU.

Another priority for the coming years is to combat violence against women. At home, in workplaces and on the streets, women continue to face harassment and violence. Cyber violence is a growing concern, with 20 % of young women having experienced sexual harassment online and four in ten women journalists having censored themselves after incidents of online abuse. EIGE recommends that the EU accedes to the Istanbul Convention, as a way of strengthening the legal framework to prevent violence against women and protect victims.

Gender equality concerns related to climate change have also made their way to the Commission's strategy. EIGE's research indicated several areas of concern. For example, the rising costs of energy can make life very difficult for people on low incomes, such as older women or single mothers. High energy bills can contribute to extra stress on physical and mental health, especially when it becomes unaffordable to use heating in winter or keep the lights switched on. When it comes to making important decisions about the environment, it is still mostly men who are taking them.

"The Beijing Platform for Action is 25 years old but countries are still a long way off from achieving women's empowerment. Europe needs to fulfil its gender equality commitments. By ensuring that gender equality concerns are included in every policy, including the process of policymaking itself, the EU and the Member States will be on track to fulfil their commitment to creating a more gender-equal society for all," said Carlien Scheele.

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Further reading

EIGE's review of the Beijing Platform for Action and 12 policy briefs →

Statistics for the 12 critical areas of the Beijing Platform for Action →

EIGE's Gender Mainstreaming Platform →

EIGE's report on the gender pay gap →

A Union of Equality: Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 →

European Commission's press statement →

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