



25th Experts' Forum

Meeting summary

5 November 2020
Online

The 25th Experts' Forum meeting was dedicated to discuss EIGE's work on anti-gender narratives and strategies in the EU Member States. The 4th Management Board and Experts' Forum joint meeting in February 2020, highlighted the need to understand anti-gender equality narratives and strategies. To address this need, EIGE contracted independent experts **David Paternotte** and **Neil Datta** to develop a paper that identifies the most common narratives and strategies questioning the value of gender equality.

Due to the travel restrictions, caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the meeting was organised virtually.

Welcome to the 25th Experts' Forum meeting

Carlien Scheele, Chair of the Experts' Forum

The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed the participants and the observers, as well as two new members of the Experts' Forum from CZ and SE. The Chair asked the Experts' Forum members to disclose any possible conflict of interest. No conflict of interest was reported.

Furthermore, the Chair reviewed the action points from the 4th Joint meeting, highlighting:

- If the Institute needs any specific knowledge that the EF members cannot provide themselves, **members will be invited to suggest relevant experts** from their Member States to EIGE's meetings;
- EIGE will continue to involve the **EF members in quality assurance** in its projects. EIGE will keep approaching relevant members bilaterally, based on the competency mapping;

- The EF members have helped to organise country visits. This cooperation is highly valued by EIGE. The Institute will continue with its country visits after the pandemic;
- The Experts' Forum work will be strategic and address emerging topics, that are not necessarily reflected in EIGE's SPDs. Work will be organised through informal working groups.
- The EF would like to strengthen cooperation with the MB. As agreed during the 4th Management Board-Experts' Forum joint meeting, that could be done at a national level.

The Chair noted that, as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Institute has revised its working methods in 2020. Virtual meetings have replaced physical meetings and this new approach will have an impact on the Institute's work in the coming years, where EIGE will organise meetings either in virtual or hybrid format.

Looking at 2021: What expertise will EIGE need?

Maruša Gortnar, Head of Operations

Christian Veske, Stakeholder relations officer

Marusa Gortnar gave an overview of the main upcoming projects, where the Experts' Forum members' involvement would be highly valuable. EIGE will contact members bilaterally, to invite them to participate in quality assurance of EIGE's projects. The upcoming projects are:

- Socio-economic impacts of COVID-19. Initial results of this study will support the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the EU. EU wide online survey on impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on work-life balance and the final results of the study will feed into the Gender Equality Index 2022 thematic focus ;
- Artificial intelligence and new forms of work. The study is conducted to support the Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the EU. The overall objective of the study is to deepen the understanding of opportunities and challenges for gender equality in the changing labour markets, especially in relation to AI and platform work;
- Cyber violence against women and girls – in 2021 EIGE will map national data, policies and research on cyber violence. This will serve as a basis for developing new definitions of cyber violence against women and girls for statistical purposes;
- Intimate-partner violence (IPV) and femicide - in 2021 EIGE will publish country factsheets with data and information gathered on these two topics;
- EIGE will publish results of its ongoing study estimating the number of girls at risk of female genital mutilation in four additional MS: DK, ES, LU, AT. EIGE is using its 2018 methodology on estimating girls at risk of FGM. The aim of this work is to develop tailor made recommendations to strengthen the efforts to effectively estimate the risk and to eliminate FGM;
- In the area of Gender Mainstreaming (GM), EIGE will update the GM platform with a consolidated tool for Gender Budgeting (GB) in the EU funds. EIGE will add an eighth tool on tracking resource allocation for gender equality in the EU funds. This tracking

tool will be only finalised after the common provision regulation of the MFF is adopted;

- The second focus of the GM work will be on gender-responsive public procurement as a tool to achieve gender equality goals. The project will examine the level of institutionalisation of gender-responsive public procurement. EIGE will develop a tool kit for gender-responsive public procurement that will be included in the GM platform and test the toolkit with procurement officers of the EU Agencies;
- Finally, in cooperation with the WHO and the COM, EIGE will work on a thematic focus of health for the Gender Equality Index 2021, including the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic for gender equality.

Christian Veske gave an overview of the Institute's 2021 communications and stakeholder relations activities. Some of the key events are:

- Country visits – depending when, and if, travelling will become possible again, the Institute plans to organise country visits to Austria, Spain, Hungary and Poland;
- Gender Equality Index conference – the focus topic will be on health. The conference is planned to take place in October.

[Interactive discussion: Anti-gender narratives and strategies in the EU Member States](#)

Neil Datta and David Paternotte

Anti-gender narratives and initiatives are present in many Member States. In order to understand the situation better, the Institute contracted external experts, David Paternotte and Neil Datta to support EIGE's work in this area. In this interactive session, they provided the EF members with initial findings of their work. The slides are available in EuroGender Experts' Forum workspace.

The presentation led to follow-up discussions around:

- Definitions of sex, gender and gender equality in the EU, UN and Member States' legal frameworks;
- Istanbul Convention;
- Strategies to address anti-gender initiatives;
- Member States as the anti-gender actors;

Legal frameworks

On the legal frameworks and definitions, the Commission informed that they have, when responding to the anti-gender actors, used legal argumentation in their work. However, in the public domain, as the discussions are based on values, the legal arguments are not sufficient. In the case law of the European Court of Justice, gender is a frequently used term. Even if there is no definition of gender, one can find it in the recitals of important legislation, such as Victims' Rights Directive.

Istanbul Convention

Possible ratification of the Istanbul Convention was one of the main anti-gender initiatives' trigger in many Member States. However, as Contractors pointed out, the Convention text is not the cause. Rather, the Convention provides an opportunity that serves the agenda.

Strategies to address anti-gender initiatives

There are also some successful examples of mobilisation to neutralise anti-gender initiatives. In some Member States, civil society organisations were able to mobilise their efforts by understanding and seeing what was happening. They prepared their politicians, both the allies and other influential people in the ruling party, for what the arguments would be. This is the key to help counter the strategies. The analogy of a magic trick: when you explain a trick it is a lot less magical and effective.

Similarly, there are also examples of how things can go wrong. In some Member States, there was no tradition of anti-gender movements; they did not think it could happen in their country. However, then the mobilisation against the Istanbul Convention happened all of a sudden. Several weeks were lost due to underestimating the strength of the opposition, trying to downplay what was happening and figuring out what was happening and who was behind it.

Member States as anti-gender actors

Some Member States themselves have become anti-gender actors, by making it their official policy. For example, the Geneva Consensus Declaration - which comes from the US government and is one of the examples of a new parallel diplomatic initiative. It is a declaration mostly targeting the UN, sponsored by five countries: the USA, Brazil, Hungary, Indonesia and Uganda and signed by 27 countries, including Poland. The MS are also promoting their own alternative meetings on family rights, demography, and religious freedom.

According to Paternotte, another problem is that we focus too much on what is destroyed or attacked. We should understand what is constructed. The Hungarian case is a good example: the attack on gender studies is part of anti-gender campaigns, but it is also part of the attacks on academic freedom in the country. By shifting the perspective onto something else, you can actually see how gender has become the symbol of struggle against liberal democracy.

We still have limited knowledge about how to address this, but it is important to mobilise internally in countries where anti-gender initiatives are happening, as well as bring the topic to international agendas. There is no way of convincing people that the anti-gender actors are misguided. Rather, our efforts should be put into engaging with the targets of the anti-gender actors. Engage with the target audience: politicians in some cases, in some cases general public. It is worth considering the wording that we use and see if it resonates with

ordinary people - sometimes, using gender jargon or EU-speak, may not be accessible to people.

Parallel working groups: summary

The Experts' Forum meeting was split into two parallel working groups. Working group 1 discussed what has worked and what not, when addressing an anti-gender initiative. Working group 2 discussed what could be positive ways to advance gender equality in the context of anti-gender movements. These were the main points raised in the discussions:

- The EF members shared examples of anti-gender movements and strategies these actors use in their countries. These included time-wasting of public institutions and organisations and a strong family discourse.
- Anti-gender narratives were generally considered quite effective and there were only a few examples of counter narratives.
- Participants warned against getting involved in dialogue with anti-gender actors, as it could be counterproductive. It is more important to understand who they are as that will help to understand how to better deal with them.
- One possible way to address/counter anti-gender narratives is to find alliances between like-minded groups of people.

Closing

Carlien Scheele, Chair of the Experts' Forum

The Chair noted that EIGE would appreciate it if the Experts' Forum members would connect with the Management Board members from their Member States and report on the outcome of discussions in the next EF meeting.

She underlined that there is a need to map, analyse and shape strategies on how to move forward. EIGE will continue its work on anti-gender narratives with a follow-up paper on media messages.

Carlien Scheele proposed to form a small working group to discuss anti-gender narratives and initiatives. The EF members welcomed this proposal. EIGE shared information on the planned media monitoring exercise and interviews with the Journalist Thematic Network members.

The Experts' Forum members welcomed further information sharing on the topic. EIGE will report to the MB on the outcomes of the EF meeting.

