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More equal sharing of care would reduce workplace gender inequality

There is a direct link between the unequal division of un-paid care in households and gender inequality in the labour market, according to a study by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE).

EIGE (03.12.2020) - <https://bit.ly/33TjTRb> - Across the EU, the bulk of unpaid care work is done by women, with 92 % providing un-paid care several days a week – as opposed to 68 % of men. Employed women also do more than their fair share of unpaid care work. Across the EU, they spend 90 minutes more per day than employed men on unpaid care.

'The benefits of dividing care work more evenly are clear. Countries with a more equal sharing of unpaid care between women and men, tend to have higher employment rates for women and lower gender gaps in earnings,'" said Carlien Scheele, EIGE's Director.

Balancing the care gap

An unequal sharing of care limits women's job prospects and is a major reason behind the gender pay gap. One way to balance the uneven sharing of unpaid care work is through the use of childcare services. EIGE's research shows that childcare services lead to higher financial returns for women, compared to men. Women with children under 12 years using childcare services at least 14 hours a week are estimated to earn 4.8 % more on an hourly basis, compared to women who do not outsource childcare. The estimated difference for men is 2.6 %. Yet 14 % of households across the EU report unmet needs for childcare services. For half of them, it's because of the unaffordable cost.

Gender inequality in the paid care sector

The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of care for a well-functioning society and economy. Yet the assumption that caring is still women's work, even when paid, contributes to its undervaluation. Currently, women make up 37 million of the 49 million care workers in the EU. Many find themselves in low paid, temporary jobs, with little career prospects.

What needs to change?

For a fairer distribution of unpaid care, we need a dual approach that would support both an equal sharing of care at the family level and accessible, quality care services. First, we need changes at the household level, so that an equal sharing of care tasks between women and men becomes the norm. Second, it is important that people have access to affordable, professional care services that can help tackle the rising care needs expected in the EU as the population ages.

Background

The forthcoming report 'Gender inequalities in care and consequences for the labour market' is part of EIGE's work on monitoring the EU's progress towards its gender equality commitments under the Beijing Platform for Action. It was prepared at the request of the German Presidency of the Council of the European Union. The finalised report will be published on EIGE's website in January 2021.

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Europe's thermonuclear debate on privacy and child sexual abuse

Everyone from Ashton Kutcher to Australia's eSafety commissioner has weighed in.

By Nicholas Vinocur

POLITICO (20.11.2020) - <https://politi.co/39iu8BQ> - Should platforms like Facebook and Instagram be able to scan for evidence of child sexual abuse and grooming online?

That question is at the heart of an explosive debate in Europe about online privacy that has roped in everyone from actor-turned-tech investor Ashton Kutcher to the EU's top privacy regulator and observers as far afield as Australia.

On one side there is the EU's executive branch and its defenders, including Kutcher, who want such automatic scanning to continue. They argue that the scanning tools don't infringe upon privacy because the algorithms don't "understand" the content; such tools flag it for human review if it matches a digital ID for child pornography, or hits certain keywords.

On the other side, there are privacy activists, EU lawmakers and the bloc's top privacy regulator, who say that automatic scanning — particularly of text exchanges — is a major infringement of people's fundamental right to privacy: Even if its intent is limited, it still opens the door to abuse because the practice has no clear legal basis.

In a November 11 opinion, the European Data Protection Supervisor blasted a Commission proposal that would allow the scanning as contrary to EU privacy rules. And the Parliament's rapporteur on the draft law, Birgit Sippel, has voiced concern, saying Parliament is unlikely to meet a December 21 deadline to pass the derogation into law.

Now Ylva Johansson, the EU's home affairs commissioner who is behind the derogation initiative, is pushing back — with unexpected support from Kutcher, who co-founded an organization called Thorn in the U.S. to combat child sex trafficking and abuse. In an interview with POLITICO, she said the European Data Protection Supervisor (EDPS) Wojciech Wiewiórowski — who's in charge of policing EU institutions — had ignored children's well-being.

"What I'm criticizing is that the EDPS are only talking about the privacy of the users. But there is also the privacy of the children, the abused children who are the subject of illegal content ... The EDPS left that whole angle out," she said.

"I had expected the EDPS to help us with that. Instead, he [Wiewiórowski] acted a bit blind in one eye, not seeing there is a huge infringement of the fundamental rights of those children. You have to realize there is a balance to find, and not only to protect the rights of the users."

'Growing' problem

Johansson's comments come as the clock is ticking down on a deal within EU institutions. If lawmakers can't agree on Johansson's draft law, platforms will face new privacy rules without an exemption for child sexual abuse material — rendering the automatic scanning illegal.

But the Swedish commissioner argued that it was urgent to give them a chance to carry on the practice, which she says is already in use to detect copyright-infringing material.

According to the head of Europol, who spoke to POLITICO in March, there has been a substantial increase in examples of child exploitation online during the pandemic because kids are spending more time on their phones and computers during lockdown.

Johansson said that trend hasn't let up: "There are a lot of signs that child exploitation, especially online, is growing." She added that her office planned to propose permanent legislation to combat child sexual abuse online next year, but that in the meantime platforms needed a legal means to keep detecting the illegal content.

“That’s what I hope now: that Parliament will not follow the draft from the rapporteur [which watered down Johansson’s proposal] and rather opt for an opinion that is much closer to the [Commission’s] proposal,” she said.

With emotions running high on either side of the debate, the issue of automatic scanning has drawn attention far beyond the bloc.

Australia’s eSafety commissioner, tasked with protecting people online, has written to the Parliament’s civil liberties committee, which has the lead on the file, advocating for Johansson’s proposal. And Ashton Kutcher — who played bumbling teen heartthrob Michael Kelso in the U.S. sitcom “That ’70s Show,” and has since remade himself as a tech investor — has thrown himself into the mix, including by tweeting at EU lawmakers.

“Time is running out to ensure a proactive and voluntary online child abuse detection methods are preserved in the #EU,” he tweeted on Wednesday.

Kutcher’s star power has opened doors. Last week, he scored a videoconference with Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, and Johansson cited him as proof that the scanning issue was one of global importance.

Is this legal?

But the other camp bristles at the outside interventions and time pressure. Not only are defenders of the derogation oversimplifying the issue, they argue, but they run the risk of creating a precedent that will allow platforms to flag and remove all manner of content, some of it harmless, without any solid legal grounding.

Rather than opposing a clampdown on online child sexual abuse, they favor an approach they say would be more in line with the bloc’s privacy rulebook, the General Data Protection Regulation. Sippel, for instance, objects to the part of Johansson’s draft law that pertains to child grooming — i.e., text or audio communication — not the part that pertains to child pornography, which she wants more clearly defined.

The Commission “does not wish to take a stance on whether current voluntary practices to detect and report child sexual abuse material are in fact legal under EU law,” Sippel said in her draft report on Johansson’s proposal.

The Commission wants its proposal to be finalized by December 21, but some lawmakers dismissed the deadline as artificial, since scanning would not stop overnight without the derogation.

But David Lega, who heads a Parliament group on children’s rights, says a deal is not only necessary but possible within the time limit.

“I think it [the deadline] could be met and I hope that it will be,” he said. “There is time both procedurally and legally to do this now.”

The derogation is meant to apply until the European Commission presents a fully fledged piece of legislation on the fight against sexual abuse online next year.

Covid-19 wave of violence against women shows EU countries still lack proper safeguards

Lockdowns to contain the coronavirus led to spikes in domestic violence reports. In two new studies, the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) assesses the measures each EU country took to protect women during the pandemic and shows how governments can amplify the role of people witnessing violence.

EIGE (18.11.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3q7Xlpo> - "Women usually face the most danger from people they know. EIGE's research shows EU governments recognise this: every single country has introduced special measures to protect women from intimate partner violence during the pandemic. Yet persistent under-funding of shelters and domestic violence hotlines has resulted in sometimes patchy support," said Carlien Scheele, EIGE's Director in the lead up to the international day to eliminate violence against women.

National action plans

Ireland, Spain and Lithuania have launched national action plans to eradicate intimate partner violence during the pandemic. Spain has strengthened coordination among its health, police and justice services, as has Lithuania. Ireland has gone further by putting €160,000 on the table. With that money, the government has helped shelters and hotlines for victims adapt to new remote working conditions. Irish courts have prioritised domestic violence cases and expanded remote hearings. The police are checking up on women who have faced violence in the past.

Legislation

Several countries have adapted legislation to declare shelters and hotlines "essential services" to keep them accessible at all times. In Latvia, Estonia, Slovakia and France, legislation now obliges governments to provide women facing violence at home with alternative accommodation. Estonian courts have been empowered to issue temporary restraining orders against violent partners, protecting the victim from homelessness and pinning accountability on the abuser.

Awareness raising campaigns

Almost every EU country rolled out awareness raising campaigns to let victims know about the help available. Greece, Finland and Portugal addressed refugees and migrants, while other countries reached out to women from Roma communities, LGBTIQ+ women, or those with hearing impairments. Spain's campaign emphasised that domestic violence is a human rights violation -- not a private issue.

Awareness campaigns are important for witnesses, who can fail to intervene because they might not recognise intimate partner violence when they see it. Campaigns also provide clear guidance on how witnesses can help when they fear they will make the situation worse. Around 20–30 % of calls to domestic violence hotlines come from witnesses -- they ought to be reassured and guided through this daunting process. EIGE's research shows witnesses often want to help in ways aside from reporting to the police, for example by talking to the victim or helping them access support services. Guidance on such ways to help should also be part of campaigns.

Shelter and counselling staff

As EU countries re-enter lockdowns, governments can learn from the positive action taken during the first wave of the pandemic -- as well as the shortcomings. Shelter and counselling staff were overwhelmed with increased demand and heightened distress of victims; they felt unprepared to provide remote support and worried about victim confidentiality. There was not enough personal protective equipment to continue helping victims face-to-face.

Shaky support systems

In the majority of EU countries, the pandemic exposed overall shaky support systems for victims of gender-based violence. A lack of funding and shelter space resulted in women being put up in hotels and privately provided Airbnbs. While quick action is laudable, fire fighting measures delivered by the private sector should not be the solution to save lives. Although natural disasters and pandemics lead to surges in violence against women globally, no EU Member State had a disaster plan in place to deal with this.

Covid-19 has shone a harsh light on how unprepared societies often are to protect victims of intimate partner violence. Government must not turn a blind eye.

Online child sex abuse rises with COVID-19 lockdowns - Europol

Sexual abusers are trying to exploit children's growing exposure to the internet during the pandemic.

By Francesco Guarascio & Nick Macfie

Thomson Reuters Foundation (18.05.2020) - <https://tmsnrt.rs/2LIXRHq> - Online sex abuse of children in the European Union has increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, the head of EU law enforcement agency Europol said on Monday, warning that more cases could emerge when schools reopen as teachers' monitoring resumes.

Cybercrime has spiked during the epidemic with many people forced to work and shop online.

"What is most worrying is the increased online activity by those seeking child sexual abuse material," Europol director Catherine De Bolle told a hearing in the EU Parliament.

De Bolle, a former head of the Belgian police, said the rise in paedophile activities was reported by national law enforcement authorities from the 27 EU states who saw higher access to illegal websites and shut more online platforms for the exchange of child sex material.

She said that Europol investigators had also intercepted offenders claiming easier access to children in conversations on the dark web, a part of the internet which is accessible only with specific software or authorisation.

Sexual abusers are trying to exploit children's growing exposure to the web, as throughout lockdowns they turn to online lessons, sometimes through platforms that are not adequately secured, De Bolle said.

"We expect to have more and a better view on the situation when children will be able to go to school again and they will have the possibility to talk to teachers," De Bolle told lawmakers.

In many European countries, schools are still shut to contain the pandemic.

Hot lines for reporting abuse also received more calls as children were locked down, De Bolle said. In March, these alerts rose in Spain to a record level for that period of the year, a Europol report showed.

"Using the internet to sexually exploit children today is easier than ever," said ECPAT, a network of civil society organisations against the commercial sexual exploitation of children.

It said that it was now simpler for paedophiles to get in contact with children and to find like-minded offenders, "which also makes it easier to access, download, produce and share child sexual abuse material".

COVID-19: Stopping the rise in domestic violence during lockdown

Cases of domestic violence rose by a third in some EU countries following lockdown; member states should provide victims with flexible tools to report abuse; places in violence protection facilities and shelters must be increased; women will be hit much harder by the post-coronavirus economic crisis.

European Parliament (07.04.2020) - <https://bit.ly/3eiMcMx> - Women's Rights committee Chair, Evelyn Regner, urges the EU and member states to increase support to victims of domestic violence during the COVID-19 crisis.

Both globally and in some EU countries, it has been reported that cases of domestic violence rose by a third in the week after lockdown was put in place. Women in violent relationships are stuck at home and exposed to their abuser for longer periods of time. This makes it very difficult for them to call helplines, as the perpetrator is always around.

Reacting to this situation, Evelyn Regner (S&D, AT), Chair of the EP Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality, declared: "These days and the weeks ahead are especially dangerous for women. We are all facing major psychological challenges through isolation or quarantine, but women and sometimes children in unsafe homes are facing a particularly gruelling stress test. We, therefore, must now pay particular attention to this issue and expand our actions to stop violence against women."

"We won't leave Europe's women alone"

"I urge all EU member states to tackle this problem with determination and to communicate actively where and how those affected can get help. This must also include simple ways to contact and to alert the police, such as text messages or online chats, and the use of code words with doctors or pharmacists. In addition, more places in violence protection facilities and women's shelters must be made available. Wherever possible, the EU must support member states' measures financially and by helping them to communicate about these measures", she added.

"The COVID-19 pandemic starkly highlights gender inequality in all its shapes and forms. As OECD figures show, 70% of the health care workforce are women, a large part of unpaid care work is done by women and the upcoming economic crisis will hit women much harder. It is our job to sustainably strengthen the physical and mental health of

women and their economic independence, beyond the COVID-19 crisis. We will certainly not leave Europe's women alone", she concluded.

Coronavirus puts women in the frontline

EIGE (25.03.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2R0DBUz> - In Europe, we are all adjusting to new ways of living because of the effects of the coronavirus. We are learning what it means to self-quarantine, work from home, home-school children, lose a job or even a loved one. Each person's situation is different, but for sure, the coronavirus will reveal the different realities of women and men.

At the frontline of this coronavirus pandemic are the healthcare workers who are working around the clock and putting themselves at risk to care for patients. Most of the nurses and healthcare workers in the EU are women. Their workload is very demanding, often taking an emotional toll. Yet their profession is one of the most undervalued, and under-paid jobs in the EU.

Men's mortality rate is higher

Preliminary figures show that women and men are being infected by the coronavirus in about equal numbers, but the mortality rate is higher for men than for women [1]. The World Health Organization recommends to keep up healthy food and exercise habits to boost the immune system and avoid unhealthy ones such as smoking and consuming excessive alcohol. More men smoke than women and are therefore more likely to be at risk of developing a serious disease if infected with the virus.

Extra challenges for public transport users

Our Gender Equality Index findings show that women rely much more on public transportation than men. This puts women at greater risk of coming into contact with the virus, when they have to either get to work, visit a doctor or do the grocery shopping. This is especially the case with single parents, who are less likely to have a car due to financial reasons. 18 % of them say that public transport is the only method of transport available to them. In countries where restrictions on movement have tightened, public transport has been reduced or even shut down. This makes life more difficult for people who rely on these services and still need to get to work, visit a doctor or do the grocery shopping

Concern for severe job losses in women-dominated professions

The closure or near-closure of many businesses could have a severe effect on many women-dominated professions. Flight attendants, tour operators, sales assistants, hotel cleaners and hairdressers are often already in precarious jobs and will probably not be paid nor entitled to paid sick leave. These people are likely to have difficulty paying for basic necessities such as groceries, rent and bills in the coming days and months. EIGE's research shows that a quarter of women employees across the EU are in a precarious job. For migrants, the situation is even worse. Nearly one in three non-EU born women (35 %) and one in four men (24 %) work in precarious jobs.

Unpaid care work will increase

Even without a crisis, caring responsibilities usually fall heavily on women. Now with the closure of schools and workplaces, their unpaid workload is likely to further increase. If

older relatives get sick, they will also need looking after. The situation for single parents can be even more difficult, especially when options for informal childcare are unavailable.

Physical distancing is not an option for everyone

In the EU, nearly a quarter of households depend on informal care from relatives or friends. As physical distancing and confinement measures become the norm, it will become harder for family, friends and neighbours to provide or receive such care.

There are also many people in our society, for whom physical distancing is not an option. We have 61 million women and 47 million men with disabilities in the EU. Many of them depend on help from others to eat, dress or shower, which makes physical distancing almost impossible. Across the EU, most of the professional carers working with people with disabilities or older people are women (83 %).

Domestic abuse increases in times of crisis

These times of social isolation increase the risk of domestic abuse. Women in violent relationships are stuck at home and exposed to their abuser for longer periods of time. This makes it very difficult for them to call helplines as the perpetrator is always around. It can also be harder for women to leave their abuser once the crisis is over, due to the financial insecurity that might follow.

Neighbours or relatives can have an important role in contacting the police if they suspect that violence is occurring, especially when the victim is not able to call for help.

Where are women decision-makers?

While nurses are working non-stop behind the scenes in hospitals to look after patients, we mostly see men out in the public domain, making the news headlines. They are the ones who hold most of the positions of power in our society. In this crisis, it is usually men who are making all the important decisions, which affect the everyday lives of citizens. This imbalance of decision-making power means that women are left out from shaping the decisions that affect their own lives.

Policy measures must consider the different needs of women and men

The response from policymakers must consider the different experiences faced by women and men during a pandemic to ensure that everyone gets the help they most need. There is a big need for sex-disaggregated data to fully understand how women and men are affected by the virus. Not only for infection rates, but also the economic impacts, the distribution of care work and the extent of domestic violence. It is also time for leaders to recognise and give more value to the important work done by those who are in the frontlines of a health crisis, such as healthcare workers, home carers and domestic workers.

Women's rights: MEPs call for action to fight backlash against gender equality

MEPs set their priorities for the upcoming UN Commission on the Status of Women and call for the EU to take strong action against all measures undermining women's rights.

European Parliament News (13.02.2020) - <https://bit.ly/37Fx2w4> - Ahead of the 64th UN Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW64) in New York in March, Parliament spelled out its priorities on Thursday.

In a resolution adopted by 463 votes in favour, 108 against and 50 abstentions, MEPs deplore that many of the challenges identified by the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action 25 years ago are still relevant today.

They call on the Council to ensure a unified EU position and act to counter the backlash against gender equality and all measures undermining women's rights.

Setting out their priorities for the upcoming UNSW session in March, MEPs call for measures boosting women's economic and political empowerment:

- greater inclusion of women in the labour market;
- more support for female entrepreneurship;
- close the gender pay gap (16%) and pension gap (37%);
- favour domestic and care responsibilities being shared equally;
- promote education for girls and encourage greater participation in STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) careers;
- promote gender-balanced representation at all levels of decision-making, and
- unblock the "Women on Boards Directive" in the Council.

To step up protection of women, the EU should:

- urgently conclude the EU ratification of the Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women;
- allocate adequate resources to combat gender-based violence and protect victims, and
- protect and promote the rights of groups experiencing multiple and intersectional forms of discrimination, e.g. women with disabilities, women of colour, migrant women and LGBTIQ people.

The EU must act globally by:

- promoting and supporting the inclusion of a specific gender chapter in all future EU trade and investment agreements;
- condemning the US 'global gag' rule, which cuts US funding for international organisations if they provide or lobby for abortion services;
- significantly supporting funding for sexual and reproductive health and rights, and
- promoting greater participation of women in climate action, peacekeeping, peacebuilding and mediation processes.

Background

The Beijing Declaration was adopted by the UN at the end of the 4th World Conference on Women on 15 September 1995 to promulgate a set of principles on the equality of men and women. The Platform for Action called for strategic actions in areas such as economy, education, health, violence and decision-making.

MEP Assita Kanko: We are determined to put an end to Female Genital Mutilation

The European Parliament has approved a common resolution on a strategy to end the practice of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) around the world, tabled by six political groups.

ECR Group (12.02.2020) - <https://bit.ly/39KtgTQ> - Speaking after the vote, ECR MEP and vocal campaigner for ending FGM Assita Kanko, who had the initiative to table the resolution, said:

"The European Parliament has today proved that certain issues go beyond political games. There is general consensus that we need to eliminate FGM. No less than 200 million girls and women today have to live with the often terrible consequences of their genital mutilation.

"Female Genital Mutilation is not only an African issue, far from it. All girls and women must have the opportunity to choose their own future.

"Through practical training, cooperation, information sharing, international diplomacy, and crucially through showing zero tolerance, the EU should aim to solve this issue at all levels of society.

"It takes a lot of courage to break a taboo. There must be zero tolerance when it comes to the practice of Female Genital Mutilation. It is a crime against your body, your mind, and your physical autonomy."

As a young girl, Kanko herself became a victim of genital mutilation in her country of birth, Burkina Faso. She is also calling for support for survivors of this practice.

New study published: Gender-based asylum claims and non-refoulement: Articles 60 and 61 of the Istanbul Convention

Council of Europe (10.02.2020) - <https://bit.ly/2HzN6Fc> - A new publication is now available on [Gender-based asylum claims and non-refoulement: Articles 60 and 61 of the Istanbul Convention](#). This publication belongs to a series of in-depth analyses of articles of the Convention on preventing and combatting violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention).

The series includes analyses of Articles 11 (ensuring data collection and research on violence against women and domestic violence), 12 (preventing violence against women), 13 (raising awareness of violence against women), 16 (domestic and sexual violence perpetrator programmes) and 17 (encouraging the participation of the private sector and the media in the prevention of violence against women and domestic violence), and a collection of papers on Article 52 aimed at facilitating the implementation of articles of the Istanbul Convention.

Articles 60 and 61 of the Istanbul Convention concern gender-based asylum claims and non-refoulement, respectively. The purpose of this publication is to support the implementation of these articles by providing policy makers, border and immigration officials and practitioners with practical advice including definitions, information and examples of: gender-based violence that may be recognised as forms of persecution or

other serious harm, how to ensure that a gender-sensitive interpretation is given to each of the convention grounds, what are the requirements of gender-sensitive reception procedures and gender-sensitive practice and procedure in respect of refugee status determination, and applications for other forms of international protection. It discusses the additional protection of the non-refoulement principle and concludes with a checklist which summarises the requirements of the provisions affecting asylum-seeking and refugee women in Articles 60 and 61 of the Istanbul Convention.

The checklist should help in designing and implementing measures in law, policy and practice to implement Articles 60 and 61.

Gender Equality Index 2019: Still far from the finish line

EIGE (15.10.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2oItDfG> - The EU continues its snail's pace when it comes to gender equality progress. The latest Gender Equality Index from the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) shows that the EU's score for gender equality is up just one point to 67.4, since the 2017 edition. Sweden continues to top the EU scoreboard, with 83.6 points, followed by Denmark with 77.5. Greece and Hungary have the most ground to make up, with both scoring less than 52. The biggest improver is Portugal, with an increase of 3.9 points, followed closely by Estonia with 3.1 points.

"We are moving in the right direction but we are still far from the finish line. Our Index, which sets a benchmark for gender equality in the EU, shows that almost half of all Member States fall below the 60 point mark. As the new EU Parliament and Commission shape and renew EU priorities for the next strategic framework, it is crucial that gender equality gathers speed," said Virginija Langbakk, Director of the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE).

The lowest scoring domain is power, which looks at equality in decision-making. Yet, it is the area with the biggest progress. This has been mainly driven by the rise of women on company boards, although in just a few Member States. France is the only one to have at least 40 % of each gender on the boards of publicly listed companies.

"Gender inequality is holding Europe back from reaching its full potential. I am proud of what we have achieved, however now our actions need to make a difference on the ground. Our Work-Life Balance Directive adopted this year will be a game-changer for women and men across Europe. The rules will support more equal sharing of caring responsibilities, which will allow women to stay on the labour market and take on challenging roles or management positions," said Věra Jourová, European Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality.

Focus on work-life balance

Work-life balance and its connection to gender equality is a special focus of this year's Index. Parental leave is one of the important policy measures to support parents who balance caring duties with work but it is not available to all. In the EU, 28 % of women and 20 % of men are ineligible for parental leave.

Access to affordable and good quality childcare services is important for work-life balance, but it is not only children who need looking after. Ageing and disability rates are rising in the EU, which pushes up demand for long-term care services for older people and people with disabilities. Women of pre-retirement age do the bulk of informal long-term caring in the EU. The difference is remarkable in the 50-64 age group: 21 % of

women and 11 % of men care for older people and/or people with disabilities at least several days a week.

As part of the work-life balance analysis, the Index also examined whether women and men have the same opportunities to work flexibly, to attend training courses, to use transport and commute. An important pillar of work-life balance is flexible working arrangements. EIGE's work-life balance scoreboard presents the different options people have to balance their work and personal life. It shows whether these options are equally available to women and men and it gives new ideas for monitoring the European Pillar of Social Rights and its Work-Life Balance Initiative.

The [Gender Equality Index 2019](#) is out today.

The Gender Equality Index is a tool to measure the progress of gender equality in the EU, developed by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE). The Index has six core domains - work, money, knowledge, time, power and health - and two additional domains: violence against women and intersecting inequalities. It gives more visibility to areas that need improvement and ultimately supports policy makers to design more effective gender equality measures.

The Index also shows the diverse realities that different groups of women and men face. It examines how factors such as disability, age, level of education, country of birth and family type, intersect with gender to create different pathways in people's lives. For the first time, the Index highlights the situation of LGBTQI+ people and Roma and Muslim women in areas where statistics are available.

The neoliberal fuel to the anti-gender movement

If progressives want to fight the movement against so-called 'gender ideology', they need to break with neoliberalism.

By Elena Zacharenko

International Politics & Society (30.09.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2og4J6n> - The number of newly elected Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) who oppose women's reproductive rights, gender equality, sexuality education, same sex marriage and the Council of Europe Convention on Violence Against Women (Istanbul Convention) stands at around 30 per cent. This European Parliament term has therefore seen a doubling of the number of MEPs who claim to fight these issues as compared to the last one, where I estimated around 15 per cent of parliamentarians fell into this category in a study for Finnish MEP Heidi Hautala.

Issues as diverse as women's reproductive health and rights, LGBTI rights, sexuality education and preventing gender-based violence are collectively termed by their opponents as being part of a larger agenda of 'gender ideology'. The use of this ambiguous term has given opponents of women's and other minority rights the ability to combine several diverging topics under one umbrella and present them as an integral package, allegedly being imposed on 'traditional families' by an all-powerful feminist and LGBTI lobby.

Many progressives are baffled by the rise of this phenomenon and often resort to the backlash or backsliding discourse to explain it, suggesting it is mere conservative opposition to the inevitable march towards greater gender equality and LGBTI rights.

However, this argument has limited explanatory power, as it ignores the complexities of the right-wing narratives and presents their voters as individually responsible for their rise.

To fully understand what is fuelling this trend, progressives must ask themselves a question that is much more self-reflective: what is the problem with the political, social and economic system in which opposition to these issues is able to capture the imaginations not only of supporters of extreme-right parties but also some of the voters traditionally belonging to the political centre?

As has already been argued, opposition to 'gender ideology' allows not only for the divergent causes mentioned above to be brought together under one umbrella, but to also bring together disparate actors, from centre-right to far-right and libertarian parties, as well as various religious movements and conservative grassroots organisations, for a common cause.

Indeed, the increase in opponents of 'gender ideology' in the European Parliament comes mainly from the strong performance by Matteo Salvini's Lega, Nigel Farage's Brexit party, Jarosław Kaczyński's Law and Justice, Viktor Orbán's Fidesz and Marine Le Pen's Rassemblement National – groups which have little in common in terms of their origins and programmes, aside from their opposition to these issues. While most of these parties belong primarily to the new far-right Identity and Democracy group or the conservative and Eurosceptic European Conservatives and Reformists, Fidesz and Bulgarian GERB are opponents of 'gender ideology' within the centre-right EPP, while Slovakian SMER and Romanian PSD represent this trend within the S&D group.

A healthy debate within the progressive movement

While they are not unaware of the divisions in the progressive movement, conservative actors choose to present the debate within the women's and LGBTI rights movements as homogenous and equally supported by the political mainstream. This allows them to create a false dichotomy between themselves as proponents 'traditional families' and the progressives as 'gender ideologues' for their own political gain. This picture however, misrepresents the progressive scene as one with a clear and unified agenda, rather than a heterogenous collection of movements, activists, NGOs, academics and public entities with distinct and often disparate opinions and calls. While many of the objectives of these movements are indeed aligned, significant disagreements continue to exist between parts of the feminist movement and the LGBTI movement, as exemplified by the ongoing debate on defining gender as a social construct prescribing roles for men and women and that of a felt sense of identity, or that on surrogacy.

Within feminism itself many divergent schools of thought clash, with liberal feminists opposed to radical feminists in the sex work vs. prostitution debate and Marxist and (neo)liberal feminists disagreeing on the origins and solutions to women's oppression as being systemic/socio-economic or individual/cultural in nature.

Opposition to 'gender ideology', including labour market optimisation efforts, has become a new and very potent form of anti-establishment organising and protesting the neoliberal order.

Regrettably, in view of the abovementioned rise of opposition to many of the progressive movement's causes, its reaction has been to attempt to silence these internal debates or present them as settled – to the detriment of their quality. It is often argued that the progressive movement cannot be seen to be internally squabbling in the face of the advance of the right, lest they become the 'useful idiots' furthering their opponents' cause. This results in self-censorship as movements do not want to appear to break the

joint front in the face of attacks, stifling healthy debate and creating taboo topics. However, this attitude is not conducive to coming up with either a better understanding of the arguments of the other side, or with appropriate society-wide debates leading to policy-level solutions.

As I wrote elsewhere, the EU's proposed gender equality measures are designed to optimise the bloc's economic outcomes and labour market performance and take little interest in promoting reproductive rights or social justice. This lack of the EU's normative influence is visible in the divergent and often weak approaches taken by EU member states' in their policies on reproductive rights. That's true not only for Poland and Malta but also Germany, where doctors have been prosecuted for providing information on abortion care, wherein describing the procedure has been labelled by anti-choice actors as 'advertising' it. The case has sparked debate on the 1933 law limiting the provision of information on abortion in Germany, which has since been relaxed, but not fully overturned.

Istanbul Convention as collateral damage

Furthermore, EU governments and their state institutions still lack commitment to combatting sexual and gender-based violence as well as domestic violence (see the horrific cases of sexual violence in Spain and Ireland which were initially dismissed by local courts). EU governments' approaches to the sex industry are also absolutely incoherent, ranging from the Nordic model which criminalises the purchase of sex in Sweden, to decriminalisation in Denmark and the legalisation in Germany and the Netherlands. The economic divisions between the countries of origin of prostituted women and those with a high sex industry demand, in addition to persisting gender inequalities in the EU, are laid bare though the legalisation model, which has been shown to increase demand and in turn promote both migration and trafficking of women from East Central Europe to the West of the EU.

The EU chooses not to engage on most of these issues, with the notable exception of combating violence against women. However, its efforts in this area are now being thwarted by its own member state governments, including those belonging to the moderate political centre: at the beginning of this year, both the Bulgarian (centre-right) and Slovakian (centre-left) government refused to ratify the Istanbul Convention – a text designed to increase state efforts to combat male violence against women and provide victims with better protection.

These decisions were taken in the face of popular protests against 'gender ideology' (and, in Bulgaria's case, a decision by the constitutional court which ruled the Convention unconstitutional). The protests hardly referred to the issue of violence against women but instead accused the Convention of being ideologically driven and denying the distinction between the male and female sexes – a claim that the definition of gender in the Convention ('social roles, behaviours, activities and characteristics that a particular society considers appropriate for women and men') clearly refutes.

These developments constituted an additional blow to the EU's already fraught attempts to ratify the Istanbul Convention as a bloc, which came under increased scrutiny from opponents of 'gender ideology' in the wake of a letter from over 300 (predominantly anti-choice) NGOs. They pointed out that the EU's own interpretation of the Istanbul Convention appears to define 'gender based violence' beyond the confines of the text (i.e. male violence against women), as 'violence that is directed against a person because of that person's gender, gender identity or gender expression'.

The disenchantment with neoliberal globalisation

Given the disagreements within and between the feminist and LGBTI movements and the EU's lack of interest or inability to engage on a number of key gender equality questions, why are these entities facing attacks from opponents of 'gender ideology', and how is this movement able to gather so much popular support? This appears to be a symptom of a disenchantment with centrist 'politics as usual' and the EU's all-pervasive neoliberal policies and its member state governments, as well as the values they are perceived to support.

Opposition to 'gender ideology', including labour market optimisation efforts, has become a new and very potent form of anti-establishment organising and protesting the neoliberal order. It perfectly exemplifies the rising dissatisfaction with liberal democracy and its pronounced discourse on human rights and the protection of minorities coupled with a lack of social and economic assurances for wide swathes of the population. Examples of this trend appear across the globe, from Brazil and the US, to Western European states like France and Spain.

Continuing to push forward neoliberal economic and employment policies while continuously eroding social provisions was what drove up support for opponents of equality measures in the first place.

In East-Central Europe, 'gender ideology' has become a means of expressing a rejection of the European East-West hierarchy and the failed promises of capitalist transformation. Indeed, despite assurances that austere economic policies and market liberalisation would allow the region to 'catch up' with the West, it continues to lag in economic development and standard of living when compared to 'old' EU member states. What was imported instead, often with a patronising attitude, were lessons on 'correct' attitudes and values. Voters reject the values of gender equality and LGBTI rights not, as is often argued, because of civilizational 'backwardness', but because of the strongly felt disingenuity of neoliberal decision-makers' concerns for rights, as long as these rights are not social or economic in nature.

The EU's focus on the labour market participation of women as an indicator of gender equality or 'emancipation' is a perfect example. This logic fits in with the EU's overall neoliberal model of governance, which, especially in times of demographic decline, requires both women's participation in the paid employment and their (unpaid) reproductive capacity and reproductive labour to continue operating. This message is primarily communicated in a value-laden or normative way: one of the main ways to achieve gender equality is ensuring women's equal participation in the labour market. The more a country's employment force structure diverges from this ideal, the more 'catching up' it has to do to reach the developed or enlightened club of 'old' member states – never mind that women's increased availability to take up paid employment in West European countries may be facilitated by the (often underpaid and unregulated) care work of East Central European women.

This workplace 'empowerment' model is completely at odds with many Polish women's experience of the neoliberal labour market since the transformation. Indeed, their work experience has been far from emancipatory – they were the ones who bore the brunt of the consequences of the de-regularisation of the labour market post-1989, working in low-pay, low-status service industry jobs.

What progressives need to do

Alongside a host of other measures targeting women and families with additional social protections, the Law and Justice (PiS) government has introduced its flagship 500+ programme, which guarantees an unconditional monthly cash transfer of €120 per each child from the second one, and from the first one for families in particular financial

difficulty. This has allowed some of them to escape the harsh conditions of the labour market and helps explain the party's popularity among women.

As I argued with Weronika Grzebalska, women's strong support both for PiS and its social programmes stems from these programmes meeting women's pragmatic interests in a society governed by neoliberal policies and allows to glean some insight into why the anti-'gender ideology' party continues to attract a significant voter base, gathering 45.4 per cent of the votes in the European election of May 2019.

If progressive political movements want to regain the electorate that is currently increasingly voting for parties espousing the war on 'gender ideology' (whether it be because of this position or despite of it), it must reflect on how much of this state of affairs is in fact due to the rejection of the neoliberal world order, rather than opposition to specific groups' rights. Continuing to push forward neoliberal economic and employment policies while continuously eroding social provisions was what drove up support for opponents of equality measures in the first place.

Moreover, voters feel a lack of recognition and representation if popular concerns are dismissed as 'backwards', hotly contested issues presented as settled and beyond debate and any critique of progressive positions coming from within the camp labelled as being the 'useful idiot' of the right. Any political programme that wants to reverse this trend must address these issues and introduce policies which coherently address socio-economic needs in the field of gender equality and support for minorities.

Women in foreign affairs and international security

Contours of a timely debate.

European Parliament (09.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2mqfQsB> - Summary: The debate on the participation and role of women in foreign affairs and international security is a timely and relevant one, and is being raised with increasing frequency at both national and international levels. In particular, there is growing attention to the imbalances in the representation of women in leadership and other key positions in the area of foreign and security policy, as well as to the growing body of evidence regarding the positive effect of including women in several key areas of foreign and security policy.

Among these issues, women's role in peacekeeping receives particular attention, as research has repeatedly shown that gender equality contributes to peace, and that peace negotiations involving women have a better chance of being sustainable and effective. Gender-equal societies enjoy better health, stronger economic growth and higher security. The United Nations and the EU have put pronounced emphasis on the issue in the past two decades. UN Security Council Resolution 1325 established the women, peace and security (WPS) agenda in 2000. Since then, more WPS-related resolutions have been adopted, widening the scope and breadth of gendered peace and security. These resolutions have been instrumental in changing the philosophy and rhetoric focused on conflict and gender equality, thereby challenging the international community to do more. Several initiatives are also being implemented at EU level, including through the 2018 EU Strategic Approach to WPS. However, critics posit that a lot remains to be done, as women continue to be under-represented in the field of foreign and security policy across the world.

For the full Briefing, click [here](#).

The European Commission's second anti-trafficking report: A call to end the culture of impunity

By Brianna Hertford, *Human Rights Without Frontiers*

HRWF (18.09.2019) – On the 12th of September 2019, Dr Myria Vassiliadou, the EU Anti Trafficking Coordinator, presented the EU Commission's second report on trafficking to the FEMM and LIBE committees at the European Parliament.

Dr Vassiliadou's core message was clear: in order to truly make progress on the EU's goal to stop trafficking, we need to end the current culture of impunity. This is especially true for sex trafficking, which the report found to be the most common type.

Sex trafficking is immensely lucrative and only exists because there is a demand for it. These are the true drivers of this issue, not the individuals who are trafficked or their vulnerabilities. An effective prevention strategy must target the "buyers and users and profitters," says Dr Vassiliadou. If we do not address the business model of trafficking, we will never be able to fully stop traffickers from preying on people.

Dr Vassiliadou discussed individual cases of trafficking and general trends in the data, gaps in current policies and implementation, and ongoing initiatives to combat the issue. She presented recommendations addressing the root of the problem such as: criminalising the *knowing* use of 'services' of victims of trafficking; implementing the 2011 [EU anti-trafficking directive](#) in judicial and criminal systems to ensure enforcement; and targeting the "chain of actors" involved in this severe crime. To be clear, this new approach would only criminalise perpetrators who knowingly engage in services with a victim of trafficking, and would not criminalise the victims of trafficking themselves.

The legal framework to eradicate trafficking exists, but the issues lie in the coordination and implementation of it at international, national and local levels. It is imperative that a comprehensive strategy is developed to combat trafficking across all sectors. Another key finding was that there is a lack of resources to properly support individuals who have been trafficked, and so an increase in funding for civil society is recommended.

A final challenge that Dr Vassiliadou raised in this session was the "general fatigue" of policymakers when discussing sex trafficking and exploitation. Although policymakers are indeed addressing a very complex and distressful topic, it is critical to prioritise this grave human rights issue and combat the identified culture of impunity. As Dr Vassiliadou reiterated, "it is only when we stop the money and the exploiters that we stop the trafficking."

The second report from the European Commission, titled [Second report on the progress made in the fight against trafficking in human beings \(2018\) as required under Article 20 of Directive 2011/36/EU on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims](#), was published on the 3rd of December 2018. More information on this topic and the recommendations of the EU Commission can be found [there](#).

New anti-trafficking research calls for political action to implement gender mainstreaming at EU hotspots

By Brianna Hertford, *Human Rights Without Frontiers*

HRWF (25.07.2019) – Earlier this month, the European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS) published the report: [Detecting and protecting victims of trafficking in hotspots: Ex-Post Evaluation](#). This research focuses on the gendered dynamics of human trafficking and provides recommendations to strengthen the protection of vulnerable individuals at the external borders of the European Union (EU).

The majority of individuals worldwide who are trafficked are women and girls. Migrants, asylum seekers and refugees have been identified by the European Parliament as particularly vulnerable to exploitation and trafficking. As such, the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality requested the EPRS to conduct research on the nine hotspots in Italy and Greece. These hotspots were established in 2015 as a temporary system for processing asylum claims. This report evaluates the identification process of victims of trafficking, the subsequent protections they are provided, and the overall preventative measures taken to reduce the risk of exploitation and trafficking at hotspots.

The EU has taken a strong stance on trafficking as a violation of individuals' basic human rights. There has been much progress in both Greece and Italy in the past two years towards addressing this issue. However, there are still many barriers to identifying and protecting victims of trafficking, as well as preventing exploitation and trafficking once migrants arrive in the EU.

For example, the report noted that in Greece, nationals from certain countries are assumed to be "economic migrants" instead of in need of international protection. Consequently, their asylum requests are systematically rushed so as to return them to Turkey under the EU-Turkey agreement as quickly as possible. Expediting the evaluation of asylum applications greatly reduces the ability to screen for vulnerability.

An agreement between Italy and Libya has resulted in less asylum seekers reaching Italian shores since 2017, which has had a beneficial impact on living conditions at Italian hotspots. However, due to the well-documented abuses of human rights occurring in Libya, it is a controversial arrangement. This report notes that 'cooperation with Libya has shifted many of the issues related to trafficking from the European shores to Libya.'

This evaluation details the capacity of European agencies and systems in place to assist states at the EU's external border. It discusses challenges in the "hotspot approach" and in creating a cohesive reform of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) that both the European Parliament and Commission would agree to. The EPRS recommends concrete measures that would provide a gender-sensitive approach 'such as more female staff in hotspots, prevention of gender-based violence, better gender mainstreaming in practices' and calls for political action to increase the protection and support provided to victims of trafficking at the borders of the EU.

Source:

European Parliamentary Research Service

[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/ReqData/etudes/STUD/2019/631757/EPRS_STU\(2019\)631757_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/ReqData/etudes/STUD/2019/631757/EPRS_STU(2019)631757_EN.pdf)

African women set to benefit from \$250 million European Union Empowerment Initiative

By Amaka Obioji

Nairametrics.com (19.07.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2ZjxQDD> - The European Union (EU) has set aside \$250 million for the empowerment of African women. This was revealed by Laolu Olawumi, EU's Programme Manager to Nigeria, at the UN and EU spotlight initiative workshop held in Abuja. This initiative, according to reports, is in line with the organization's 2030 Agenda in Africa.

About the EU-UN Spotlight Initiative: According to Olawunmi, the EU-UN joint Spotlight Initiative is a global initiative focused on eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls.

"Spotlight Initiative is a global initiative that has attracted \$500 million and several countries have been selected across some continents in the world, to benefit from the grant.

"A total of about \$250 million has been set aside for countries in Africa and Nigeria is one of the countries that have been selected. In Nigeria, additional envelop has been earmarked, which would be soon confirmed."

An official of the UN Women, Patience Ekeoba, also disclosed the number of countries that are set to benefit from the fund. She stated that the fund would be allocated to some African countries that include Nigeria, Liberia, Niger, Malawi, Mozambique, Mali, Zimbabwe, and Uganda.

Ekeoba added that the overall vision of the Initiative is to achieve a *Nigeria, where all women and girls are free from violence and harmful practices.*

The focus of the organization: According to Mr. Kwasi Amankwaah, Head of UN Resident Coordinator's Office, the EU-UN Joint Initiative was launched in 2017, to focus on eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls.

He urged residents of the participating countries to participate in order to assist in eradicating violence and harmful practices that are related to sexual and reproductive health, as well as the rights of women in the society.

Ursula Von Der Leyen and Christine Lagarde win top EU jobs after marathon talks

By Bryony Jones, Milena Veselinovic and Luke McGee

CNN (03.07.2019) - <https://cnn.it/2ROdU93> - Europe's leaders have agreed to give two of the top four European Union jobs to women, but only after a marathon set of talks that exposed the continent's simmering divisions.

German defense minister Ursula Von Der Leyen emerged as nominee for president of the European Commission, and International Monetary Fund managing director Christine

Lagarde, who is French, was put forward for the presidency of the European Central Bank.

Von Der Leyen's role must be confirmed by a vote in the European Parliament. If elected, she would be the first woman to lead the European Commission. Lagarde will be the first woman to head the bloc's central bank.

Outgoing European Council president Donald Tusk called the appointments "a perfect gender balance."

The deal was a classic European result, after days of backroom horse-trading that was bitter even by Brussels standards.

The choice of Von Der Leyen, seen as a hawkish conservative, was designed to placate Hungary's hardline leader Victor Orban. His cohort of like-minded Eastern European leaders had joined with Italy to block the original frontrunner for the role, Dutch socialist Frans Timmermans, at the last minute.

That maneuver had infuriated France and Germany. Lagarde's unexpected appointment was designed to keep French President Emmanuel Macron on side.

The compromise may yet fall apart when it comes up against a fractious European Parliament. Elections in May injected the body with a new intake of assorted populists and trouble-makers. The parliament's socialist group was said to be infuriated by the candidacy of Von Der Leyen as president of the European Commission, the bloc's executive body.

As part of the deal, Belgian Prime Minister Charles Michel was also elected president of the European Council, to replace Tusk. Spanish foreign minister Josep Borrell Fontelles will be high representative for foreign affairs and security policy.

The appointments followed a tense series of negotiations. A summit broke up on Monday, after all-night talks failed to reach an agreement.

Tusk appeared relieved that a deal had been done. "We have chosen two women and two men for the four key positions -- a perfect gender balance," he said. "I am really happy about it, after all Europe is a woman," he added, in a reference to Greek mythology. Lagarde said she would temporarily relinquish her duties as managing director of the IMF during the nomination period.

Europe's missing women leaders

The Continent is ripe for upheaval.

By Corinna Horst

Politico EU (15.04.2019) - <https://politi.co/2VMfpWz> - The European Union has a woman problem. The bloc has never had a female president of the European Commission or European Council. And just two presidents of the European Parliament have been women — Simone Veil, who served from 1979 to 1982, and Nicole Fontaine, from 1999 to 2001. Today, only a little over a third of the institution's members are women.

The upcoming European Parliament election is an opportunity to change that. As political parties ready for an election whose outcome will shape European policymaking for the next five years, we should be looking across the Atlantic for inspiration on how to galvanize voters and vault more women into office.

The U.S. midterm elections in November saw the highest turnout in a century, with more than half of eligible voters casting ballots. The new U.S. Congress includes a record number of women and first-time congressional representatives; it's also one of the most diverse when it comes to race, ethnicity and sexual orientation.

The factors that led to this mass turnout and diverse group — which is largely considered to be a backlash against U.S. President Donald Trump's divisive brand of politics — exist in Europe too.

The political climate across the bloc is increasingly polarized. Euroskeptics and populists are projected to make steep gains in the May election, and there are increasingly deep fissures between member states and Brussels when it comes to the rule of law and the future of the European project.

The Continent, in other words, is ripe for upheaval.

To be sure, a more diverse European Parliament would disrupt the status quo. The institution has long been governed by the same powerful groups, and is set in its ways. Many are afraid that opening the door too wide would, for example, welcome in people set to undermine pro-European policies.

And of course, women are not necessarily better leaders — consider the controversial legacy of Margaret Thatcher in the U.K., or the anti-immigrant rhetoric of France's Marine Le Pen and German far-right leader Alice Weidel.

Research does show, however, that having more women in political parties makes for a more inclusive and balanced policymaking process. Female leaders tend to be consensus-builders who listen, focus on getting results and work across political aisles.

The U.S. Congress bipartisan women's caucus was among the most productive in the past years. And it was a group of female lawmakers in the U.S. Congress who, in 2013, started a bipartisan group whose negotiating framework formed the centerpiece to get the federal government to reopen after a government shutdown.

Just as in the private sector, a Parliament that more accurately reflects its constituents will yield better results. If we want people to believe in the European project's democratic potential and undo a trend of declining turnout among European voters, our election ballots need to reflect the European population more accurately — and that includes helping more women take up seats.

This is in political parties' own interest. By offering lists that are more diverse, they can connect to a broader range of voters and develop a better feel for the needs of their constituents.

They'll also have a greater reach when it comes to developing policies that address the needs of the electorates. Successful policies are the result of healthy debate and multiple points of view; homogenous groups have major blind spots.

Changing the status quo will also hinge on European women being willing to step up.

In the U.S., women were galvanized by Hillary Clinton's loss and the implications of a presidency they saw as undermining crucial freedoms. They realized they had to take action to make sure their voices were heard on the issues that affect their lives most deeply — not only health care and reproductive rights, but also immigration, security and economics.

In Europe, too, women need to be more vocal about what is important to them. There is plenty to worry about: the uncertainty around Brexit; the rise of anti-European, right-wing populism; the unresolved issue of how to tackle migration or reforming the eurozone.

Concerns over these issues have already compelled women to run in the European election — Tina de Meeûs from the Liberal Democrats in Germany, Airis Meier from Estonia's Reform Party and Valérie Glatigny from Belgium's Reformist Movement are all good examples of women MEPs who want to make a difference.

To shift the tone of the debate and the way we tackle major issues in Europe, we need more women to follow in their footsteps.

The takeaways are simple: Parties, put more women on the ballot; women, make your voices heard.