



THE EU AND THE WORLD: NEW CHALLENGES AND TRENDS

27 IDEAS FROM THE ERASMUS GENERATION

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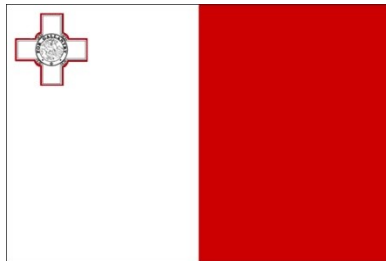
Gender equality in the EU

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Background information

The equality between men and women in the EU has always been of importance and it is considered to be one of the EU's founding values. It first emerged in 1957 when the idea of equal pay for equal work became part of the treaty of Rome.

Inequality in the EU in certain member states still exists however, throughout the years the EU has made progress. The progress made is mainly due to:

- Legislation for equal treatment
- The mainstreaming of gender issues (incorporation of gender perspective into other policy areas")
- Measures taken specifically to encourage the advancement of women.

As a result of these measures, there have been some encouraging trends across the EU, trends like an increased number of women that are forming part of the labour market, as well as the progress that women have made in securing a better education for themselves. Nowadays the number of women that opt for tertiary education in Europe has increased. However, even though there has been improvement, there is still a lot that needs to be addressed. It is still true that a gender gap continues to exist, and this is shown very clearly in the fact that the majority of women are still employed in the lower paid sectors, while also continuing to be under-represented in decision making positions.

As a result of all this the Commission has developed a strategy for equality between men and women for the period 2010 to 2015. It has a comprehensive framework that commits the Commission to promote gender equality. This strategy supports the gender equality dimension present within the Europe 2020 strategy and at the same time it highlights the contribution that gender equality would give to economic growth and sustainable development.

EU legislation on gender equality and work does not only include equal pay, but also the equal treatment of men and women in employment, vocational training, promotions, working conditions and pensions.

Equality is an entrenched principle of EU law. There have been various policies along the years which favour equality and prohibit discrimination between the sexes, especially in the work-force. However, it is quite difficult to enforce it, since it is not just action to improve laws and policies which need to

take place but also changes in the mentality of people. A change in the average person's life style needs to be brought about in Malta. As an example, the Marriage Bar, which forced women to stop working in the public sector as soon as they get married, was only removed in 1980 in Malta.

Equality between the sexes has to be part of the recovery from the on-going recession among EU Member States. The unemployment crises, where men were the first to be affected now sees women being affected much more. At this age of austerity women who work low-paid jobs are mostly affected. Economic equality is not only about income but also about taxation. This is due to the fact that it affects how much money people take home with them.

The EU is maintaining that every Member State has to ensure that gender mainstreaming is implemented. Gender mainstreaming is not equality but it is a means of how to achieve equality. It is also a matter of how we can enhance our performance and the competitiveness of our country.

Integration between EU Member States regarding achieving gender equality is happening thanks to various analytical tools. These include gender impact assessments, equality indicators, monitoring performance as well as gender disaggregated statistics. Across the EU, economic recovery is being fostered. Member States are trying to achieve more goals and generate more jobs.

Gender equality in Malta

Compared to the rest of the EU member states, Malta still lags behind when it comes to gender equality, especially in the work place. The latest EU statistics show that of the board members of European business, on average only 12% are women. However, in Malta that percentage falls to 3%. Malta with a gender gap of 37.1% has the highest rate in the entire EU. This is particularly evident in the political sector, where in Malta female participation is less than 10%.

Even if we take into consideration the labour market as a whole, not just the political sector, Malta still has the lowest female participation rate in the EU. At the moment female participation in the labour market in Malta is around 40%, which is still far from achieving the 60% Lisbon target. To try and improve Malta's performance in this area, the National Commission for Promotion of Equality (NCPE) has been entrusted with two EU projects, projects that deal directly with local development and gender equality. A project which is partly funded by the European Social Fund is the Equal project. This project focuses on promoting equal opportunities through empowerment. This scheme has a specific aim to reach out to an inactive segment of the population, particularly an inactive segment of women, and persuade them to join the labour force and hopefully remain a part of it. It also aims to encourage those females that work in the informal economy, to start making part of the formal economy, thus, contributing to the long term benefits that this would achieve.

Another project currently going on in Malta is Taking Gender Equality to the Local Communities. This project aims to make society look at gender roles at a local level, and then encourage a re-evaluation of what is performed by men, and what is done by women. Hence, this develops a culture of stronger equality and equal opportunities for everyone. Through this project awareness on gender equality will spread and it will also provide the necessary tools for people to discuss openly the roles of men and women in public as well as private life. To achieve this all institutions that work at a local level, such as local councils, will need to be part of it and work together so as to stimulate a culture of equality between their citizens.

Although it is hard to pinpoint which project helped and encouraged women to join or re-join the labour market, fortunately the gap between the EU's employment rate of women and that of Malta is being brought down. According to the Eurostat the increase in female employment rate in EU member states between 2002 and 2010 was that of 3.8%, while in Malta the increase has been of 5.4%, as can be seen the table below:

Female Rate %	Employment	2002	2004	2008	2010
EU 27		54.4	55.5	58.9	58.2
Malta		33.9	32.7	37.4	39.3
Italy		42.0	45.2	47.2	46.1
Poland		46.2	46.2	52.4	53.0

A research carried out by the NCPE assessed the relevance of ‘Economic Independence’ to the Maltese female. Most women tend to work due to financial needs since one pay cheque is not enough for the basic needs of their families. In the research it was found that only ten per cent of those women who are currently employed claimed that they are the sole breadwinners. The research also established that merely 13% of women work for their personal well-being. This sheds light on the fact that most Maltese females still depend on their husband or partner for money. The reason behind this tends to be that mothers are still expected to take care of their children as well as doing all housework on their own. The central problem is to maintain balance between family and employment. The main solution is to have more policies aimed at involving fathers and encouraging them to undertake their fair share of domestic duties. Another policy consideration could be to have more media campaigns to challenge traditional gender roles and encourage fathers to make use of the Parental Leave availability.

What is needed for Gender Equality?

Proposals

In order for equality to be truly achieved between men and women in Malta, there are several things that would need to be done. For an effective equal Europe women would need to feel truly equal, even

at the workplace. Thus the first thing that would be needed would be to educate the people. This is important so that at the workplace male workmates learn to better accept that women are their equals and treat them like they treat other male colleagues. Unfortunately at the moment one might still find workplaces where a male manager might be reluctant to employ a woman because she might get pregnant or simply because they believe she might be a distraction for other colleagues. Therefore education would be the first step to achieve equality and eradicate this kind of mentality.

Another development that would make a significant difference would be to overcome the gender pay gap. This would encourage women to enter the workforce and stay in it, since they would not be discriminated on grounds of their sex. If a man and a woman have the same job they should have the same wage. It is in no way justified that a woman is paid for less for the same thing. This pay gap might deter women from entering the work force, since they might not be willing to do the same job but for less wage.

Also, we would like to suggest that in order to achieve equality between the sexes; the government should encourage fathers to take parental leave and not just women. This would persuade the couple to choose who goes on parental leave, thus if the mother has a better paying job, she would be able to keep it while the father could stay with the child. It would also be useful to extend pregnancy leave in such a manner that both the man and the woman would be entitled to it at a different time. For example first the wife takes pregnancy leave then when it's over the man takes pregnancy leave. This would enable the parents to keep working until the child goes to school. Another thing to encourage women to stay in the workforce would be to make sure that all work places offer children day-care centres. Therefore, if parents would not have a place where to leave their children and go to work, they could leave their child at the day-care centre at one of the parents' workplaces. This would also be convenient since if there is something wrong with the child the parent would be close by. It would also be useful since the centre would operate at the same hours that the parents work, therefore they take the child with them to work and drop the child off at the day-care centre and then take the child back home with them. Therefore, the woman could easily balance her family and work life together and thus she would be able to have both. Also this would include the fathers more in their children's childhood. If all these measures were taken seriously by both the EU as well as the national authorities, we believe there

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would be a rise in the number of women joining the workforce and thus more women would be equal in today's society as well as financially independent.

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