



EU-LAC Foundation
Fundación EU-LAC

Equality Between Men and Women is a Precondition for Effective Democracy

*by Věra Jourová**

The EU has worked hard to advance gender equality over the past decades. In Europe, women secured their opportunities and benefits of education and participation in the labour market. Women's employment reached the highest level ever recorded. Women have made inroads into decision-making positions in many spheres of life.

Still today, however, we are far from the end of our struggle. In the EU, attitudes towards equality are evolving, but gender stereotypes and disparities persist. Women are more likely to have a higher education degree, but remain over-represented in fields of study that are linked to traditional female roles and they are under-represented in science, mathematics, IT or engineering. Young women are twice as likely as young men to be economically inactive. Women still generate a lower proportion of income on the labour market than men. They are paid on average 16% less than men for the same work. Gender-based violence is still widespread and can take many forms. Worldwide, women's fundamental rights continue to be violated and they face discrimination in access to education, work, social protection, inheritance, economic assets, productive resources and participation in decision-making and society at large.

The EU is determined to further advance gender equality. The European Commission is now focusing on several priorities and key actions for 2016-2019. We aim to increase equal economic independence of women and men. We are currently preparing EU-level measures to improve work-life balance for both women and men. I believe that parents should be supported in pursuing their careers and professional paths while taking care of their children and families. The package will include various types of leave for parents and its flexibility, access to childcare and long-term care and tax-benefit incentives, amongst others. It should help close the gender gap in employment and boost economic growth. The gender pay, earnings and pension gaps must be reduced in order to eradicate poverty among women. We promote equality between women and men in decision-making. We are combatting all forms of gender-based violence and protecting and supporting victims. I decided to dedicate the year 2017 to fighting against violence against women and I am calling all actors to join. Our efforts will include awareness-raising activities, as well as other targeted actions. Any form of gender-based violence must not be tolerated.



We are also committed to promote gender equality and women's rights across the world. The EU can exercise huge influence to encourage gender equality in its relations with non-EU countries through guidelines, exchange of best practices and awareness-raising. Specific actions include capacity building and support to women's organisations.

I also believe that gender equality should be included in the political and policy dialogue with Latin American and Caribbean countries. We need to promote good governance principles, such as the right to universal and equal access to basic public services, participation in democratic processes, consultation, transparency and accountability, justice and the rule of law.

This is what the EUROsociAL programme was set up for. The European Union's cooperation programme in Latin America supports changes in public policies that improve social cohesion through peer-to-peer learning and exchange of experiences between counterpart institutions in the two regions.

A recently launched programme will have a budget of €32 million for the period 2016-2021 to increase social inclusion, democratic governance and gender equality in Latin America. Despite advances in the area of social cohesion, Latin America is still the most unequal region in the world – also regarding access to basic public services.

The European Commission is committed to supporting efforts to ensure gender equality. Equitable access to public services for women and men is part of it. It is crucial that girls and women have full and equal access to education, employment, healthcare, justice and social security. These are, after all, basic human rights.

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This paper was prepared for the EU-LAC Foundation's Newsletter of September 2016 on the theme "Equitable access by women and men to public services". This article gives the views of the author, and not necessarily the position of the EU-LAC Foundation or its members.