



European Women's Lobby

Handout for participants at the EU Mutual Learning Programme

in Gender Equality Webinar: Promoting women in decision-making

14th September 2020

Founded in 1990, the European Women's Lobby (EWL) is the largest European umbrella network of women's associations representing a total of more than 2,000 organisations in the EU coming together to campaign for a Feminist Europe. The EWL has members in 26 EU Member States, three Candidate Countries (North Macedonia, Serbia, Turkey), the United Kingdom and Iceland, as well as 17 European-wide organisations representing the diversity of women and girls in Europe. Together with our members, we aim to influence the general public and European Institutions in support of women's human rights and equality between women and men.

The European Union still has not realised equality between women and men in all areas of decision-making. Parity has not been achieved in the European Parliament (39% of MEPs are women) nor in national parliaments¹, only 4 heads of State out of 27 are women² and we still have more men Commissioners than women. When looking at the situation globally, the results are not better as women only represent around 8% of all heads of State³ and 25% of all parliamentarians⁴. Beyond the political area, the situation does not really improve as we are still waiting for legislative measures like the Women on Board directive, which would help ensure more representation of women in terms of economic decision-making, and, an example relevant for the current situation, less than 30 percent of decision-makers on health care are women⁵.

The pandemic has certainly shined a strong light on the many inequalities women face every day - and also worsened them - including when it comes to the space women hold in decision-making, whether it be political or economic. We have observed from our members across Europe and others NGOs⁶ that very few women were involved in decision-making committees and groups in charge of responses to the Covid-19 pandemic, which can be explained by the fact that women made up the vast majority of the frontline workers and were relegated to even more unpaid care work during this period, making it impossible to be part of decision-making spaces⁷.

¹https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/EDN-20200308-1?fbclid=IwAR29rGI0ozzSlp3HR_AMLiYi2ETp9KwAdVBIVyVWrlEfqjAQPRK5hT283Ls

²<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/european-council/members/>

³<https://www.statista.com/statistics/1058345/countries-with-women-highest-position-executive-power-since-1960/>

⁴<https://data.ipu.org/women-averages?month=8&year=2020>

⁵ From a speech of the UN's Secretary General on August 31st 2020

⁶https://insights.careinternational.org.uk/media/k2/attachments/CARE_COVID-19-womens-leadership-report_June-2020.pdf

⁷<https://eige.europa.eu/covid-19-and-gender-equality/frontline-workers>



Without equal representation of women in decision-making, we are facing a serious democracy issue: policies and decisions are shaped mostly by male experiences and miss taking into account the lived experiences of more than half of the European population, which has serious consequences on their lives. This is why, at the EWL, we fight for parity democracy, i.e. we aim at acknowledging the equal dignity and value of men and women, making our political system more democratic and just, and renewing the social organisation in such a way that women and men equally share rights, responsibilities and power. We call for the equal representation of women and men in decision-making positions: both should take part in decisions affecting their lives. Our advocacy for parity democracy is not just about numbers, but also about improving the quality of policies.

We know that this under-representation of women is due to the persistence of structural inequalities between women and men (in terms of childcare, economic independence, freedom from violence...) and harmful stereotypes. Thus, it is only through gender mainstreaming and specific measures that we will achieve equality in decision-making. It is, in the end, a virtuous circle: by implementing these policies, more women will then be able to bring their experience to the table and contribute to implementing more beneficial policies for all. While doing this work, it is of course crucial to take on an intersectional approach, based on principles of non-discrimination, to ensure tailored responses to women with disabilities, older women, women of colour, migrant and asylum-seeking women and girls...

Of course, we cannot deny that there have been improvements: more women have been elected in the European Parliament (from 36% in 2014 to 39% in 2019), more politicians and institutions call for parity measures and we now have the first woman President of the European Commission and first Commissioner for Equality. Women's leadership is even being recognised in these times of crisis, with several studies showing that women-led countries have performed better in their response to the situation, with "systematically and significantly better outcomes"⁸. As we have campaigned and argued for decades to achieve parity democracy, we can only welcome those studies and applaud the strong leadership of those women. However, this progress is still too small and too slow.

The European Union and the Member States must step up to the situation and make strong commitments, listening to the expertise of women's rights' organisations working on this issue for decades. EWL has developed recommendations for both the European Union and Member States to achieve parity democracy⁹ and to address both the structural and contextual obstacles women face every day when trying to meaningfully participate in decision-making.

In the midst of the COVID-19 crisis, we call on the European Union and Member States to ensure that women are given the space to be heard and equally represented in decision-making processes (including political and economic) and women's civil society organisations are consulted when developing and implementing local, national and European responses and plans for systems' redesign and renewal. We need comprehensive measures that address all obstacles women face on their way

⁸<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/aug/18/female-led-countries-handled-coronavirus-better-study-jacinda-ardern-angela-merkel>

⁹<https://www.womenlobby.org/4-reasons-why-the-new-Gender-Equality-Strategy-2020-2025-is-key-in-responses-to?lang=en>; <https://www.womenlobby.org/Women-must-not-pay-the-price-for-COVID-19-Putting-equality-between-women-and-7953?lang=en>



to decision-making spaces. They must include gender mainstreaming, particularly in the delivery, monitoring and evaluation of gender responsive public services and emergency stimulus packages, and must be grounded in care and mutual protection of society and women's human rights.

While the above measures are necessary for a just and efficient immediate response to the current crisis, we need to work on a long-term basis to achieve concrete positive change. Therefore, we call on the European Union and the Member States to push for both legislative and non-legislative measures to ensure our political representatives actually reflect the diversity and richness of EU citizens. A first concrete and short-term solution the European Union and Member States must introduce is mandatory quotas. They should be introduced to ensure the equal representation of women in political decision-making at all levels, and also in relation with the Women on Board directive. They are a very efficient way to open the door to positions of leadership for women and a step towards the right direction. The European Union and Member States must also include women's rights' organisations in relevant decision-making processes, through consultation and ensure they have adequate funding and resources to bring the indispensable expertise and real life experiences of women. We also urge the European Union to continue to strive towards equality by tackling violence against women and girls - including online violence¹⁰, which disproportionately targets women in politics - and by implementing gender mainstreaming so as to ensure women have the same opportunities than men to access and participate in decision-making spaces. Finally, we call on them to be ambitious and innovative: we, for example, would encourage them to use the coming Future of Europe conference to bring the issue of women's representation in political decision-making to the table to once and for all work on this subject all together.



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¹⁰ <https://www.womenlobby.org/Launch-of-HerNetHerRights-Resource-Pack-Report?lang=en>