



*Young Women's Guide  
to Equality between  
Women and Men  
in Europe*

*European Women's Lobby*

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Relationships between women and men, young women in education, employment, health, violence, the media, decision-making and European legislation on equality between women and men: these are the themes that young European women have chosen to analyse in this guide. The aim is to highlight where progress has been made towards equality between women and men in Europe and to identify how the European Union can contribute to further progress.

This guide was designed by young women for young women, as a resource for raising awareness, to support lobbying actions in the European Union and to facilitate debate in the Member States. The themes of this guide are by no means all encompassing; rather, they reflect a number of the key concerns of young women in the European Union.

For each theme, "The Facts" provides an overview of the situation of young women in Europe, "The Law" lists the main actions taken and European legislation on the subject and "Young Women's Ideas" outlines the specific recommendations of young women for ongoing progress between women and men on each theme. This final section incorporates the opinions of many different young women, although of course it does not reflect the complete range of all young women's opinions or the full diversity of women's lives.

The young women's ideas were brought together in meetings and by means of questionnaires distributed through the network of young women created as part of the project "Mobilising Young women for Equality".

This project, launched by the EWL in July 1999, aims to raise the awareness of young women in the European Union of opportunities that have been created in relation to equality between women and men as well as the many challenges that still exist. The objective is to encourage national and European policy-makers to take young women's concerns into consideration and to create a European network of young women.

The project is a model of good practice in the area of equality in Europe. It is one of the very few to have established a European network of young women, and it has already gone beyond "organised" young women and men, who were already aware of the problems, to reach young people who were not concerned about or involved in discussions on equality.

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# Introduction

*“When women’s Human Rights are violated and women’s participation in society is limited, it is humanity in its entirety which is brought into question and the social fabric which is destroyed. It is the responsibility of women and men to put an end to these destructive forces. Women’s Human Rights are the cornerstone of the private and civil values in a democratic society. The 3rd Millennium should see the development of a new contract between men and women as a promise of a more harmonious organisation of society for women and men and that is why the contribution of young women in this ongoing development is so vital.”*

**Denise Fuchs**, President of the European Women’s Lobby

## *What is Europe doing for women?*

Despite the considerable progress made since the last century, equality between women and men is far from being a reality. Some countries, like Afghanistan, where women are not allowed to leave their homes unless accompanied by a man, or go to school, are distinguished by their extremism, and women who break their laws may be punished with death. But many inequalities still exist in Europe and are particularly obvious when women begin to work and/or start a family. At the same time we all know that violence against women takes many forms (family violence, street violence, sexual harassment, etc.) and concerns all women all over the world regardless of age or social background.

### **The following are a few examples of discrimination against women:**

- Women continue to be responsible for 80% of the housework, even when they work outside the home<sup>1</sup>.
- When doing equal work, women earn only 76.9% of the gross hourly wage paid men (on average in the European Union)<sup>2</sup>.
- Only 24.1% of members of European governments are women<sup>3</sup>. Most policies are therefore drafted by men.
- It is estimated that one woman in five in Europe experiences some form of violence<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> The social situation in the EU 2000, published by Eurostat and the European Commission

<sup>2</sup> Eurostat- Structure of earning statistics, 1995.

<sup>3</sup> Equal Opportunities for Women and Men in the EU, annual report 1999, European Commission

<sup>4</sup> EWL study “Unveiling the hidden data on domestic violence against women”, 1999

The fight for real equality between women and men is clearly not over. The European Union is a useful framework for promoting equality: as the Union is a supranational entity, in areas where the Union has been given power by the Member States, European legislation takes precedence over national law. Consequently, the Union’s Member States must implement European legislation and modify their national laws where they contradict European law. European legislation on equality between women and men has progressed significantly since the creation of the Union in 1957 and is in some cases more advanced than that of the Member States.

The European Union’s strategy in the area of equality between women and men consists of combining specific actions that promote equality and “mainstreaming”, which involves making equality between women and men an objective of all European policies and programmes. Since the ratification of the Treaty of Amsterdam, whether dealing with youth policy, employment or health, the EU must take into account the need to achieve equality between the sexes.

This is not always the case at national level. It is therefore important that young women become familiar with the actions, programmes and legislation of the European Union in order to ensure that they benefit from the existing opportunities and to identify those areas where further actions are needed

This Guide provides an overview of what has been achieved in Europe for equality, and what still remains to be done. Most important of all it also represents young women’s contribution to the debate.

# Chapter 1 : Changing relationships between women and men

## Towards a new contract between the sexes

### **The facts**

#### *The double lives of women*

Thanks to the fight for women's rights, to their increasing participation in the job market, to women's right to vote, to the generalised use of contraception (which allows women to choose whether and when to have children), women have emerged from the strictly private, family sphere to which they were formerly restricted. Women have broken the implicit social contract that for more hundreds of years confined them to the home, to child rearing, to household tasks and to field work, while men worked outside the home.

But while women have won the right to be citizens and workers, the traditional division of tasks in the workplace and the home still applies, even within young couples.

Women cannot afford to be content with these achievements. They have careers, jobs, professional responsibilities, but continue to be in large part responsible for their children, household chores and care of dependants (whose needs are increasing as the population ages). Many women therefore, have to combine a full-time job with a full-time family life.

In addition to the technical problems involved in carrying this "double burden", such as the shortage of affordable child care and the need in many cases to work part-time, young women often express a real fear of not being up to either job. Whether they fear "sacrificing" their children to their careers or fear having to give up their careers to be "good mothers", women face heavy responsibilities and pressures that their partners do not.

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#### **A few statistics**

- In nine out of ten single-parent families, the parent is a woman<sup>5</sup>;
- Men who take parental leave are the exception: 7 men per 100 women in Denmark in 1995, 1 man per 100 women in France in 1992, and 2 women per 100 men in Germany in 1995<sup>6</sup>;
- Women perform 80% of household tasks (except in Nordic countries), they spend nearly twice as much time as men in child care (41 hours/week compared with 21)<sup>7</sup>;
- The employment rate of women with at least 1 child is 53% and of women without children is 68%<sup>8</sup>.





## *The new family*

One of the keys to the problem is the perception of the family. Family policy and legislation is often ill adapted to new types of families, including single parent families, separated families, and single sex couples raising children. Young women identify the *need to redefine the family and the couple, with a more flexible and more tolerant approach*. Young women also reflected on the need to involve young men in the definition of the future of equality. The debate will not be possible without them. They recognised that men are also subject to social pressure that limits their participation in this type of debate.

## *The law*

European legislation offers a number of solutions to help reconcile family and working life:

**Child care:** A recommendation by the Council of Ministers, the body representing the governments of the EU Member States, addresses the issue of child care and supports initiatives that help women as well as men combine professional activity and child care.

**Parental leave:** A directive provides for a minimum of three months of parental leave for men as well as women upon the birth or adoption of a child.

**Pregnant women:** A 1992 directive sets out a series of minimum requirements for improvements to safety and health in the workplace for pregnant women, those who have just given birth or are breastfeeding and provides for paid maternity leave as well as protection against being made redundant.

## *Young women's ideas*

Young women's priority is to establish a new contract between women and men to allow everyone to participate fully and completely, on an equal footing, in all areas. This will require:

- A new definition of the role of women and men in society.
- Encouragement for part-time work (by choice), paid parental leave shared between mother and father, the provision by the Member States of affordable, high-quality child care for children and assistance for dependent persons, and the reduction of working time to facilitate combining work and family.
- Assessment of the economic value of women's work in the home to make this "invisible" work visible.

5 "Single-parent families in the European Community", European Commission, 1992

6 Annual Report on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men in the EU 1995, European Commission

7 The social situation in the EU, Eurostat, 2000.

8 Eurostat 1998, Labour Force Survey

# Chapter 2: Young women and education



## A few statistics

- Only 45% of participants in education and vocational training are female.
- Only 4% of university chairs are occupied by women in Austria, compared to 10% in Italy, 12.8% in Finland and 13% in France\*;
- Women by far out-perform men at school and university, but they still have more difficulty finding a job; in the European Union, 21% of young women are unemployed as opposed to 18.2% of young men<sup>10</sup>.

## Equality is learned

### **The facts**

#### *Education, the driving force behind equality*

Education provides an opportunity to “learn” about equality between women and men. Non-sexist education makes it possible very early on to attack traditional stereotypes concerning the roles of women and men and to fight prejudice and discrimination. The young women in the network all agree that *appropriate education can correct many of the stereotypes that support the inequalities that women face*. Education and training is also the key to women’s access to the job market.

European girls and women nonetheless still encounter more obstacles than men do concerning access to education, recognition of their abilities in the education system (by teachers when they are pupils and by their hierarchy when they become teachers) and finding a job. Education, which should be the driving force behind equality of opportunity, often reproduces discrimination between women and men.

The problem is not only one of discrimination, but of a loss to European society as a whole, which is depriving itself of the intellectual potential of half its population especially at a time when Europe must prove its ability to compete on the world market.

## *A right refused to some young women*

Traditionally, for minority ethnic groups, education has represented a chance for integration, for choices and for social advancement, a tool for access to success based on merit. But in some communities, access to education for girls and young women is a real problem: education is not considered a high priority for girls, who are neither supported nor encouraged in the pursuit of their studies, if they are not prohibited outright from studying. Migrant or ethnic-minority parents of young girls are sometimes not well informed about the workings of the education systems. For these young girls, education is therefore not always a right.

## **The law**

The European Union has launched major European education programmes, all of which emphasise equality between women and men.

- Youth: the largest youth policy programme, encompassing youth exchanges and European voluntary services.
- Leonardo: this programme, dedicated to vocational training, provides opportunities for learning and career development in other countries.
- Socrates supports European cooperation in all areas related to education and has made equality between women and men a criterion for selection.

**For more information on these programmes, go to:**

[http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/dgs/education\\_culture/educ/index\\_en.html](http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/dgs/education_culture/educ/index_en.html)

## **Young women's ideas**

The young women propose specific ideas for making each link in the education chain contribute to equality between women and men:

- Raising the awareness not only of pupils, but also of teachers, school staff members and parents concerning male-female equality.
- Using non-sexist language in all educational materials (for example, "chair person" instead of "chairman") to attack the discrimination inherent in everyday language.
- Encouraging lifelong learning and facilitating the resumption of studies, particularly for young women who have had to interrupt them due to pregnancy.
- Training teachers and students in women's history and on the theme of equality between women and men.



9 Notes from the "Women and Science"

Conference of 28-29 April 1998, European Commission

10 The social situation in the EU 2000, Eurostat – European Commission

## Women are the first victims of flexibility

### *The facts*

#### *Double discrimination*

The gap separating men and women on the job market remains wide in all countries of the European Union: *women have a lower employment rate, are unemployed longer, are paid less and have less secure jobs.* Young women in particular pay the price of job market flexibility. They suffer double discrimination. First, for being young, in the difficult phase of transition between training and working life, in an age group that has, on average, twice the jobless rate of older workers, and at the mercy of employers who exploit them under the pretext of enabling them to acquire professional experience. Secondly they are discriminated against for being women and are more likely to be offered low-paying or low-status jobs. Some groups of young women such as migrant, disabled or lesbian women face even greater difficulties.

Women, by a large majority, continue to assume most family responsibilities and resign themselves to accepting part-time jobs that allow them to combine family and work responsibilities. Part-time work limits their potential for career advancement and above all reduces their rights to social security and pension benefits, further aggravating the vulnerability of their situation.

#### *Where are the women?*

An examination of the *breakdown between men and women in each sector of activity shows that discrimination is still very much in evidence* and that education and training policies specifically targeting young women are needed to restore a balance. Although young women are increasingly choosing typically “male” professions, they remain over-represented in traditionally “female” jobs, as secretaries and nurses, and under-represented in jobs with responsibility and the professions. Neither are women and men represented proportionally in sectors like the information and communication technologies, despite their rapid growth, where women generally occupy positions towards the bottom of the hierarchy. And *even in female-dominated sectors like health, women work as nurses, but a large majority of hospital directors and department heads are men.*

#### **A few figures**

- In the EU as a whole, women doing the same work as a man are paid only 76% of the gross hourly wage men earn<sup>11</sup>;
- The employment rate for women is 51.2%, compared to 70.8% for men<sup>12</sup>.
- 83% of part-time workers in the EU are women.

<sup>11</sup> Eurostat, 1999

<sup>12</sup> Eurostat, 1998

## **The law**

*European legislation concerning equality between women and men in employment is very comprehensive.* It covers areas as varied as equality of treatment within social security systems, equal pay, parental leave, application of equality of treatment in relation to access to employment, vocational training and promotion, as well as working conditions and the approximation of Member State laws on equality in many areas. Moreover, since 1997, a person subjected to sex discrimination in the workplace no longer has to prove in court that he or she was indeed the victim of such discrimination, which was generally difficult; it is rather up to person accused of discrimination to prove it did not take place.

## **Young women's ideas**

Young women's priorities include convincing the European Union's Member States to :

- Extend maternity leave (with better pay) and parental leave (shared with the father); increase the number of affordable childcare facilities, which will support parent's access to the job market.
- Improve the role of trade unions (which remain very male dominated) in favour of young women, in order to challenge invisible discrimination, that is, discrimination that mainly affects women but without targeting them directly and which is often considered gender neutral (such as discrimination against part-time or "flexible" workers, for example, keeping in mind that the great majority of them are women).
- Encourage the access and promotion of women to positions of responsibility by introducing temporary quotas for women in such jobs.
- Emphasise aid for the creation of enterprises by women for women, to counteract the lack of confidence assistance services show in women entrepreneurs and their lack of confidence in themselves.



## Women's bodies - forgotten by the health professionals

### *The facts*

European women live, on average, six years longer than European men (from 81.9 years in France to 77.8 in Denmark), but those extra years are often spent in bad health<sup>13</sup>. Women suffer from a number of chronic disorders, such as stress and depression, which are often not taken seriously by the medical profession or by researchers.

### *The tyranny of thinness*

*Young women sounded the alarm concerning the ravages of eating disorders, such as anorexia and bulimia, among young European women. Young women are particularly vulnerable to the tyranny of thinness and physical appearance as a result of stereotypes perpetuated by the media. However, there are very few sex-specific figures on eating habits, weight, physical activity and eating disorders. Only local surveys are conducted on these diseases, which give figures most likely much below the true incidence rates. It is estimated that 1% of girls in Europe suffer from anorexia and 4% from bulimia. This problem is one of the consequences of the distortion of the image of women in society and the media.*



### **A few statistics**

- 35% of women 15 and over claim to be unhappy with their weight. This is true of 42.1% of Greek women and 28.6% of Irish women<sup>14</sup>;
- Osteoporosis, which affects 1 woman over 50 in 3<sup>15</sup>, was officially recognised as a disease by the World Health Organisation (WHO) only in 1994;
- Women are twice as likely as men to suffer from depression<sup>16</sup>;

<sup>13</sup> Eurostat, 1997

<sup>14</sup> Eurobarometer, 1996.

<sup>15</sup> International osteoporosis Foundation.

<sup>16</sup> "The Health of Women in the European Community", European Commission, 1997.

## *The right to reproductive health for everyone*

*Young women reflected at length on reproductive and sexual health, an area where rights are far from assured even in the European Union.*

They support reproductive health services that are free and open to everyone, and general sex education tailored more to young women's real needs, in relation to sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies. Only the provision of comprehensive information and accessible contraception to both girls and boys will stem the alarming rise in the number of unplanned teen pregnancies.

## *Medical and pharmaceutical research turns its nose up at women*

Research and development priorities in health often seem to ignore women's specific needs. Women react differently to medical treatments than men; their bodies do not absorb medicines in the same way. *Most pharmaceutical trials are nonetheless conducted on men, even for diseases that occur more frequently in women. Moreover, violence towards women and the pressures they face every day (family responsibilities, financial difficulties, the distorted body image perpetuated by the media) influence their health, and medicine as well as research do not take these factors into account.*

## **The law**

Health care remains essentially the province of the Member States. The European Union has nonetheless introduced articles into the European Treaties concerning social protection, health and safety of workers (female and male) and the incorporation of public health concerns into all Community policies.

Moreover, the European Union has launched programmes to fight cancer, AIDS and drug addiction, along with a programme to promote health and a programme on health indicators.

### **For more information :**

[http://europa.eu.int/comm/health/index\\_en.html](http://europa.eu.int/comm/health/index_en.html)

## **Young women's ideas**

Young women stressed that :

- The right to sexual autonomy and identity for all young women, including disabled women, immigrants and lesbians, should be guaranteed.
- Open and free access to reproductive health services and gynaecological treatment should be provided.
- Young women in situations of poverty or exclusion should have access to free and high quality health care.
- Medical research and training for health professionals must take women's specific physical characteristics into account.
- Medical statistics should be broken down by sex to provide a clearer picture of the situation (for example, of smoking among women) and to draft appropriate public health policies.

## All women are equal in the face of male violence

### **The facts**

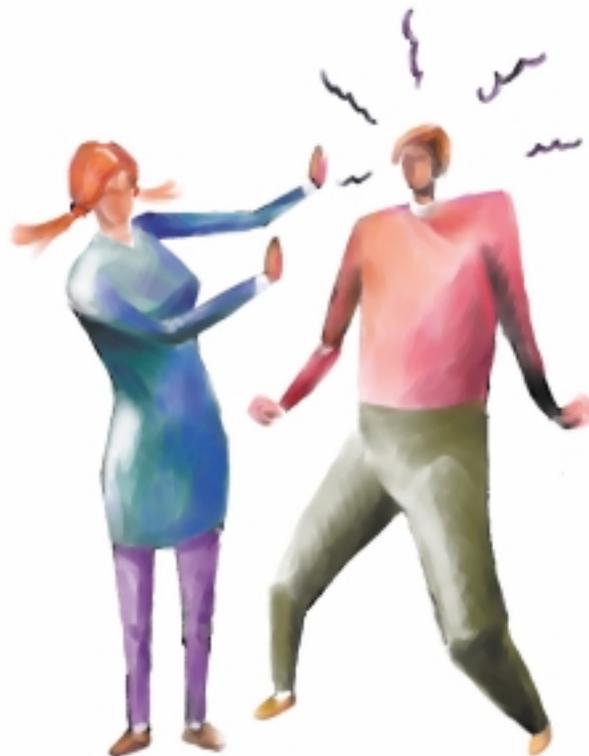
#### *Violence is omnipresent and takes many forms*

*Every woman experiences male violence at one time or another and to some degree, whether it is physical, sexual or psychological, committed within the family, or by the community or the State. Physical and sexual abuse of female children, marital rape, genital mutilation, incest and forced marriage are all forms of violence. Contrary to popular belief, violence against women is not linked to poverty or alcohol or drug use. Violence affects all social classes in all countries.*

Young women emphasise that *violence against women may under no circumstances be justified by cultural practices or religious traditions*: nothing can legitimate stoning, excision or repudiation, for example.

Disabled women and girls or women in positions of vulnerability (asylum seekers or immigrant women without an independent claim to social benefits, for example) are more likely to encounter violence and call for special attention.

The scope of the problem *reflects patriarchal societies in which stereotypes and discriminations are still firmly grounded*. Too often, men feel they have a right to use violence against their partners or children, as if the rules of the outside world did not apply within the home or the couple. Young women stressed the urgent need to *bring the debate on violence against women into the public domain*.



### **A few statistics**

Statistics on violence against women are and incomplete difficult to locate<sup>17</sup>. We nonetheless know that<sup>18</sup>:

- 98% of victims of domestic violence are women.
- One woman in five in Europe has suffered some form of violence at the hands of her partner.
- Domestic violence against women has a cost: a study carried out in the Netherlands estimated the cost of domestic violence at 332.6 millions Guilders per year (around 150 million euro)<sup>19</sup>.

## *The primary victims of trafficking in human beings*

Young women and girls are the primary victims of trafficking in human beings for the purpose of sexual exploitation, a particularly abominable form of violence that often combines physical and psychological violence. Recruited by traffickers into networks of sexual exploitation with false promises of work as waitresses or dancers, these young women, once they arrive in a foreign country, lose all their bearings. Threatened, abused, isolated and lacking legal papers, these women are extremely vulnerable. It is very difficult for them to escape this situation. The International Office for Migration estimates the number of women falling victim to human trafficking in the European Union at 500,000, including some 300,000 from the Balkans.

## **The law**

In many EU countries, it is easier to get help if your car has been damaged than if you have been abused. Family violence is still considered something that belongs to the private sphere and in which outsiders should not intervene.

The Member States have nonetheless taken some action: some countries have taken measures to remove men guilty of domestic violence from the marital home and sanction men who patronise prostitutes, or have set up telephone help lines for victims.

The European Commission has financed a European information campaign on violence against women (1999-2000). The Community's DAPHNE programme, aims to protect women and girls from violence. The Community's STOP programme, meanwhile, supports actions against trafficking in women.

**For more information on these programmes, see:**

[http://europa.eu.int/comm/justice\\_home/project/daphne/en/index.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/justice_home/project/daphne/en/index.htm)  
[http://europa.eu.int/comm/justice\\_home/project/stop\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/justice_home/project/stop_en.htm)

The *European Women's Lobby* (EWL) has created the first European Policy Action Centre on Violence Against Women with an Observatory on violence against women. The EWL also conducted a "Violence-Free Cities" campaign in 2000 in eight European cities to break the conspiracy of silence surrounding women victims of violence.

## **Young women's ideas**

For young women, the fight against violence against women requires increased awareness on everyone's part. They therefore call for:

- Public awareness campaigns to ensure that violence against women is no longer considered exclusively an aspect of private life.
- Specific training for police officers, judicial officials and all those who deal with violence in their day-to-day activities.
- Better laws to protect victims of male violence, for example, as concerns rape or removal of perpetrators of domestic violence from the marital home.
- Heavier sentences for sex crimes and traffickers in women.

<sup>17</sup> See the web site of the World Health Organisation :

[http://www.who.int/violence\\_injury\\_prevention/vaw/prevalence.htm#Table 1](http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/vaw/prevalence.htm#Table%201). Prevalence.

<sup>18</sup> Data from the EWL report "Unveiling the hidden data on domestic violence against women", 1999.

<sup>19</sup> Economic Costs of Domestic Violence Against Women, D. J. Korf, E. Mot, H. Meulenbeek, T. van den Brandt, Stichting Vrouwenopvang Nederland, 1997.

## The misuse of power

### *The facts*

#### *The dangers of clichés*

Equal opportunity policies cannot overlook the media. It is a valuable tool for supporting equality of opportunity between women and men.

However, *its power is often used against women: the media exploits the image of women as sex objects at every turn, thereby helping to reinforce damaging stereotypes.* Young women are concerned about the image of women presented by the media. They agree unanimously that *this partial, sexualised and often degraded image merely reflects the image that has become accepted by European societies and is an important element in maintaining discrimination against women.* They condemn the fact that, for example, some national television channels use top models to set off presenters and attract more viewers. Advertising bombards us with stereotyped images of women as dominating bullies, submissive door mats, or “beautiful but dumb” to sell products as varied as detergents, cars or perfume.

*Migrant women suffer in particular from the biased messages disseminated by the media.* The media helps to reinforce prejudices against them, by taking notice of them only in order to project racial or social stereotypes or illustrate reports on crime, poor education or social services. The public thus connects migrant women with situations of extreme marginalisation, making it even more difficult for these women to integrate.

#### *An underused potential*

The enormous potential of the media to promote women’s interests is largely underused. World-wide communication networks should enable women to gain access to new and nearly instantaneous forms of communication, to exchange information and use more rapid and more profitable methods of disseminating information. However, women do not make sufficient use of these opportunities. While many women pursue careers in communication, very few are in positions of responsibility.

*As consumers, young women have the power to change things,* to raise awareness within the media, but also on the part of the public, that they are full members of society who want to have their say and cannot be exploited indefinitely as sex objects.

#### **A few statistics**

- Men occupy 87% of key positions in the media industry<sup>20</sup>.
- Women represent 36% of production staff in the audiovisual media in Western Europe.
- Women represent only 29% of journalists/editors in written press in Western Europe<sup>21</sup>.

<sup>20</sup> Margaret Gallagher, *An Unfinished Story:*

*Gender in Media employment, Unesco 1995.*

<sup>21</sup> *Idem.*

## **The law**

An advisory committee for equal opportunity in the media was created with the support of the European Commission in 1990.

In 1984, the Council of Europe adopted a recommendation on equality between women and men in the media.

In 1987, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on the portrayal and position of women in the media.

## **Young women's ideas**

Young women's highest priority is to encourage the media to stop portraying women as inferior beings and exploiting them as sex objects, and to assume its role as the vector of a positive and realistic image of women. This will require:

- Monitoring of the media by independent bodies, such as, for example, ethics committees to monitor the use and impact of media on women.
- Sanctions for sexist discrimination in the media that are as severe as those for other types of discrimination (such as racial discrimination).
- Urging NGOs to enact campaigns against sexist advertising in the media, modelled after that of the *Chiennes de garde* (watch bitches) (<http://chiennesdegarde.org/english.html>), to combat insults against women politicians and sexist advertising.



# Chapter 7: Young women and decision-making



## A few statistics

- 26.8% of members of the European Parliament are women<sup>22</sup>;
- In 1999, a woman was appointed as a judge in the European Court of Justice for the first time since this institution was created in 1952!;
- Women's level of participation in government varies greatly from one country to another: in Sweden, they make up 50% of the government, compared to 10% in Portugal and 5% in Greece<sup>23</sup>;
- Fewer than 30% of European SMEs are headed by women<sup>24</sup>;
- In 1998, 28% of members of trade unions decision-making bodies in Europe were women<sup>25</sup>.

## The striking absence of women in decision-making posts

### *The facts*

#### *One man in two is a woman*

Women may make up the majority of the population in Europe, but this is not reflected in neither governments, nor parliaments, businesses nor any other major decision-making bodies. Women are under-represented in positions of power in politics, in public administration and particularly in the private sector.

*Until women obtain equality in decision-making, they will be deprived of the major part of their rights as citizens.* The right to vote is not enough. The right to participate at every level of decision-making is essential in order for women's contribution, perceptions, aspirations and needs as well as their particular strategies to address issues, are taken into account in decisions and policies that affect them directly in their daily lives, in a similar way that men's needs are catered for. This is not only a question of principle, but is a *fundamental pre-requisite to ensure that the women's perspectives on all issues are a central part of all decision-making process.*

<sup>22</sup> "Women in positions of political power", Statistics, European Commission, 1998.

<sup>23</sup> "Equal opportunities for women and men in the European Union", annual report, 1998.

<sup>24</sup> "Equal opportunities for women and men in the European Union", annual report, 1996.

<sup>25</sup> "The second sex of the European trade union movement", European Trade Union Confederation and Université catholique de Louvain, 1999.

## *Inequality to promote equality*

How can the deficit of women in decision-making positions be remedied? Young women are in favour of *positive action measures*, i.e., measures that aim to give preference to women over men. The goal is not to penalise men by creating a new type of long-term discrimination, but *to give women a "hand" to achieve a balance in gender representation*. These measures must therefore, be temporary and must be accompanied by other measures to facilitate women's participation. A system of quotas is one example of such measures. Quotas are currently used more or less in a systematic way in Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands.

Parity democracy, which consists in 50/50 representation of women and men in all decision-making bodies is a concept that is becoming more widely accepted. To achieve this, a number of different measures have been put in place, notably parity thresholds and positive action measures.

## **The law**

In 1996, the Council of Ministers, which is the political decision-making body that represents the Member States of the European Union, requested Member States to address the issue of the under-representation of women in decision-making bodies and to correct this all levels of responsibility within each country. In addition, the Treaty of Amsterdam adopted positive action measures in favour of the under-represented sex in employment

The concept of parity democracy stems from an acknowledgement by the Council of Europe that women and men cannot fully exercise their citizenship unless there is equal representation. Parity democracy was introduced for the first time in 2000 in France.

## **Young women's ideas**

To tackle and address the under-representation of women in decision-making, young women propose the following means of action :

- Call for a quota system within the leadership positions of political parties or set up quota systems, which enables equality of outcome, i.e. ensure that women are placed in prime positions on voting lists;
- Facilitate women's access to decision-making positions in the economic sphere by, for example, monitoring of the application, selection and promotion procedures and adopting a quota system, to implement equal opportunity policies in all areas of the job market;
- Improve women's access to networks traditionally dominated by men and develop networks specifically devoted to the issue of women in decision making to meet their personal and professional needs.

# Chapter 8 : European legislation on equality between women and men

## Europe as a role model for equality

### **The facts**

#### *Europe broadens the concept of equality*

The European Union is not merely a common market; its development is synonymous with a more "social" Union. Since the creation of the European Communities in 1957, legislation on equality between women and men has made extensive progress, which started out to guarantee equal pay between women and men and now extends to cover all forms of sexual discrimination in the workplace.

#### *Impact on daily life*

The scope of the Union's activities in all its areas of competence is so broad that they directly influence women's daily lives. Moreover, in the areas where Member States have given the EU the power to act, European laws take precedence over national legislation, and a national law that contravenes European law has to be changed. In other terms, if progress is made at European level, it must be incorporated at national level. As European legislation sometimes goes a step further than national legislation in equality of opportunity between women and men, it is essential for young women to be informed of the possibilities the European Union has to offer and to participate in programmes introduced by the Union.



### **The law**

#### *The Treaties*

##### ***Equal pay in the Treaty of Rome (1957)***

The first important piece of legislation relating to equality in the first Community legal texts was contained in Article 119 of the Treaty of Rome, which introduced the principle of equal pay for women and men for equal work. This principle was used extensively by the European Court of Justice to ensure equal opportunities between women and men in the labour market in general.

### ***Discrimination based on sex in the Treaty of Amsterdam***

In 1997, the principle of equality between women and men, extending beyond the issue of pay, was introduced for the first time into the European Treaties as a one of the basic objectives of the Community (Articles 2 and 3 of the Treaty of Amsterdam). Article 13 of the same Treaty, which is an article on discrimination, in general, also makes reference to discrimination on grounds of sex. This is one of the European Women's Lobby's great victories: the progress achieved in this instance was partly due to the lobbying efforts of many women across Europe.

### ***Reference to equal pay in the Treaty of Amsterdam***

Article 141 of the Treaty of Amsterdam contains a reference to equal pay for women and men for equal work or work of *equal value* and also introduces positive action measures.

### ***Directives***

Directives are "laws" adopted at European level, which must be transposed into national legislation in all of the Member States (a national law that contravenes a Directive must be changed).

The main Directives on gender equality are:

- Equal pay (1975)
- Equal treatment relating to employment, vocational training, promotion and general working conditions (1976)
- Social security systems (1978 and 1986)
- Equal treatment for self-employed workers and their spouses (1986)
- Pregnancy and motherhood (1992)
- Parental leave (1996)
- Burden of proof in cases of sex discrimination (1998).

### ***The European Charter of Fundamental Rights***

The European Charter of Fundamental Rights was proclaimed in December 2000, but its legal status is still uncertain. While reference is made to discrimination against women, overall its reference to a prohibition of discrimination against women is insufficient.

### ***International law***

The Member States of the European Union are also bound to commitments of international law passed by other institutions. These take precedence over national law, as well, such as:

***(The right to) the enjoyment of fundamental rights without discrimination*** (including sex discrimination) in the European Convention of Human Rights of 1953.

***(The right to) equal access for women and men and equal opportunity in politics and public life, education and employment*** in the UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) of 1981. UN conferences on women like the *Beijing Conference of 1995* also help to promote sexual equality around the world.

### ***Young women's ideas***

Young women have specific ideas for making full use of and developing European legislation on equality by:

- Taking advantage of the legislative opportunities provided in the Treaty of Amsterdam.
- Initiating campaigns to increase public awareness of equality between women and men.
- Creating youth councils composed of equal numbers of girls and boys to advise governments at local, national and European level.
- Informing young women about existing legislation and other awareness raising activities.

<http://youngwomen.womenlobby.org>



Rede Portuguesa de Jovens para  
a Igualdade de Oportunidades



## What is the European Women's Lobby?

The European Women's Lobby (EWL) is the largest coalition of non-governmental women's organisations in the European Union. Created in 1990, its objective is to defend women's interests at European level. The European Women's Lobby conducts campaigns aimed at raising decision-makers' awareness of discrimination against women and informing women about their rights and about European Union legislation and programmes in the area of equality.

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